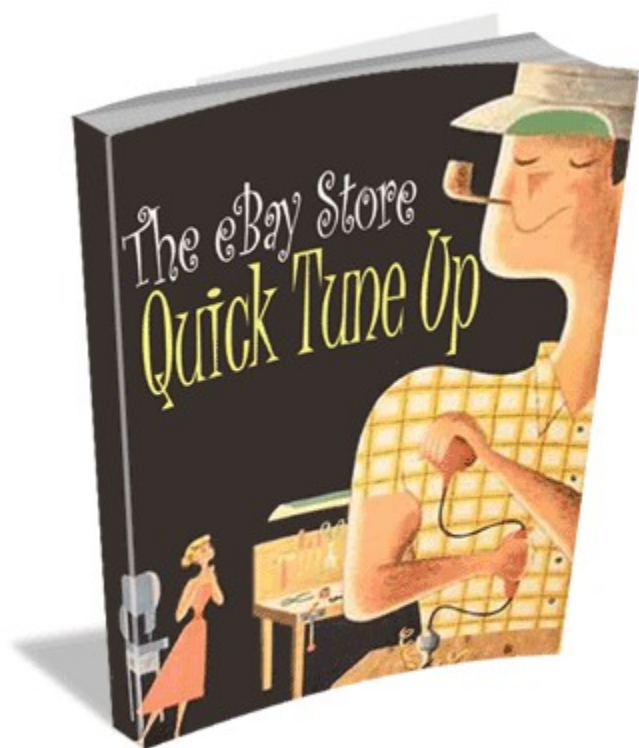


The eBay Store Quick Tune Up

by Terry Heath



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Published by:

Terry Heath
2206 186th Avenue KPN
Lakebay, Wa. 98349 USA

WorkAtHomeMomsAndDads.com

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The eBay Store Quick Tune Up

According to eBay, sellers with eBay stores see an average of 25% increases in their total sales within three months of opening a store. The eBay store platform has many built-in features which can help any seller establish an online presence. Also, there are outside tools an eBay store owner can put to work for them.

While this may be true, 99% of all the eBay stores in existence are one or two steps away from reaching their full potential as profit-making centers.

Would you like to be part of the 1% who does?

The eBay Store Quick Tune Up was written to walk you through the few extra steps that can make your eBay store truly successful.

But what I am about to propose may ask you to change your views a little.

I'll get you started by asking one question. Pay attention to how you honestly would answer.

Here's the question:

“Do you sell things on eBay or do you sell things online?”

Would both views mean the same thing? I don't happen to think so. It's not just a matter of word choice or semantics; it tells how you truly view your business.

If you're like most eBay sellers, you probably would say, “I sell things on eBay” or “I have an eBay business.”

That's fine, but I want to explore what could happen if you were to change your answer to, “I sell things online.” It's a small change in semantics, but I believe it makes a world of difference.

You've probably heard eBay is one of the most visited Internet destinations in the world, where millions of people buy and sell every year. It's true, there is no denying that. But did you notice I called it an “Internet destination” and not a website? Most people would call eBay a website.

I would like you to entertain the idea that eBay is an Internet destination made up of thousands of smaller websites. If you sell items on eBay, you own one of the smaller websites. If you operate an eBay store, you own several of the smaller websites.

Each and every individual page on eBay could be considered an independent website, and each and every individual page on eBay could be promoted as such.

If you go to a shopping mall you recognize that it is made up of several smaller shops. Most likely the mall does its own advertising and promotion. But each of the smaller shops, at least the most successful ones, does their own advertising and promotion as well.

If you think of eBay as the larger shopping mall, probably the largest in the entire world, and your own individual listings as a smaller shop making up the mall, you'll start to understand that you are primarily an online seller. The fact that you are selling on eBay is just a side note.

Now there is a problem with this whole mini-site view. The little website where you're selling your item (also called a "listing") is short lived; usually lasting only one week since that's when most listings expire. So if you were to promote your little website, you'd have to change your promotions every time one of your listings expires. Not only that, but you've probably got several of these little websites going at one time. You may even have hundreds of these websites, and it would take too much time to promote each of these individually.

This is why an eBay store is the optimum setup for many eBay sellers. Don't forget each smaller website can and should be promoted (and linked to) individually, but when you make them part of an eBay store you start to capitalize on the power of leverage. All your mini websites can now work together under one umbrella.

But since you own the store, that umbrella is still something you have control over.

Thinking of your eBay store as an independent website allows you to tap into traditional web promotion tools like search engine optimization, article marketing, blogging and other traffic generation techniques.

You and your website could be anywhere, but eBay is where you have chosen to plant

yourself for right now. A day may come when you decide to branch out on your own and leave eBay behind. If you have already built the techniques I'm going to show you into your operation, you'll be that much more prepared to operate a stand alone online store.

So let's get on with our eBay store quick tune up and take a look at your eBay store's relationship with the search engines.

"But my online store is on eBay," you might say. "I get tons of traffic from eBay, so I don't have to worry about search engines."

It's true you can ignore your eBay store's relationship with search engines and you might do fine on eBay. But what might happen if you didn't ignore them? Search engines can bring you more customers, and for free. What if someone looking for widgets just like yours doesn't happen to think of looking on eBay? Wouldn't you like this customer to find your eBay store when they search Google, Yahoo or MSN?

There are basically two kinds of traffic which can come to your website, targeted and untargeted. Untargeted traffic just stumbles across your site, and has no prior interest in what you have to offer. Targeted traffic is looking for you, or someone like you, who sells exactly what you have to sell.

I don't think I have to tell you which kind of traffic is better.

The traffic which comes from search engines is targeted traffic, and if you don't go after it you're doing yourself a great disservice.

Your eBay store might have catchy graphic designs and could be stocked with wonderful products, but without targeted traffic from search engines your potential customers are only going to find your store through direct links you've established or from eBay's own traffic. Sure that might be fine, but wouldn't you like to do better?

Not only that, but it is expensive to attract the traffic within eBay. You have to use eBay's listing options like bold headings, featured auctions, and the like. Each of these options takes a chunk out of your profits.

Traffic from the search engines is free.

So how do we make friends with and influence the search engines? Well, to answer that let's take a look at how the search engines operate.

Someone visits a search engine like Google, Yahoo or MSN and types a few words into a search box, words describing the thing they are looking for (we call these "keywords"). The search engine then takes the keywords a visitor entered and delivers a list of websites it has already indexed and decided will have information related to those particular keywords.

That's why the traffic from search engines is targeted; they have searched for something and been sent to your site to find it.

So our task as website owners is to get the search engines to index our sites under the right keywords. We want to be at the top of the list when someone searches for keywords directly related to what we're selling.

This is where most eBay stores flunk out. They are not optimized to the right keywords, and the search engines don't deliver these sites in the SERP (search engine results pages).

The search engines are only bots, so we can't blame them. They take a look at your website and try to figure what it's about, but it really has to be spelled out for them. Since the bots can't decipher photos and graphic images, everything has to be spelled out for them with words.

We spell it out for the search engines simply by plastering the right keywords in the right places on our store. The search engines look in places like titles, headers and links, then decide what our site is about based on the keywords we've placed there.

So let's get started building a list of relevant keywords to use in our titles, headers and links, so we can optimize our store for the best search engine performance.

You can probably make a good first guess about which keywords would describe your eBay store. If you sell porcelain dolls, of course "porcelain dolls" could be a descriptive keyword phrase for your site.

But can you guess which keywords are actually going to be searched for at the search engines? When people look for an ebook through Google, what words do they really

use?

Here's a tool which suggests keywords and tells you how many searches they received in the last month. All you do is put in one keyword, and it will give you a list of related keywords. These will be actual keyword phrases used in searches on Yahoo.com.

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

So when I put the phrase “porcelain dolls” in this keyword tool, here are the keywords this tool suggests (the actual list was longer, I chopped it off a bit):

Searches done in March 2007	
Count	Search Term
4810	porcelain doll
2487	collectible porcelain doll
581	antique porcelain doll
225	porcelain baby doll
197	porcelain doll mold
187	indian porcelain doll
168	porcelain doll head
166	porcelain doll collection
164	porcelain doll making
160	porcelain doll part
138	black porcelain doll
136	wholesale porcelain doll
130	porcelain bride doll

This list indicates it might be a good idea to use the keyword phrases “collectible porcelain doll”, “antique porcelain doll” and several others. I’ll use these terms to start a list of possible keywords.

But what if “porcelain dolls” isn’t the best keyword phrase to get suggestions from? Let’s say my porcelain dolls are all by the designer Lee Middleton (I looked that one up!). So I’ll also look for suggestions related to the keyword phrase “Lee Middleton”.

Searches done in March 2007	
Count	Search Term
499	lee middleton doll
217	lee middleton
44	lee middleton collectible doll
40	lee middleton accessory
40	lee middleton doll clothes
36	lee middleton clothes
35	lee middleton doll for sale
33	lee middleton doll factory
31	lee middleton dealer
26	lee middleton doll clothing

In this case, I see the keywords “lee middleton doll”, “lee middleton” and “lee middleton collectible doll” should be part of my list.

Using this technique I can collect as many possible keywords as I want, and do it on any topic I choose. I can even click on any of the suggested keywords and get a sub list.

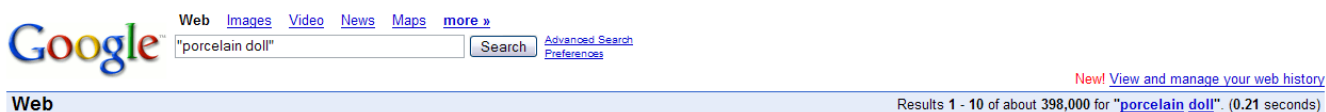
Now here’s the tricky part. Even though the keyword suggestion tool will tell you the terms with the most searches, you won’t necessarily want to use the keyword phrases which have had the most searches. The most-searched keywords are likely to have the highest number of websites competing for traffic.

Wouldn't you rather be king of a small hill than a commoner buried under a large mountain? We want to use keywords which get searches, but that are not over served.

So let’s take our potential keyword phrases to Google.com and do a little more digging.

Enter a keyword phrase in the search box at Google, but enclose the phrase in quotation marks. For an example, I’m going to search “porcelain doll”.

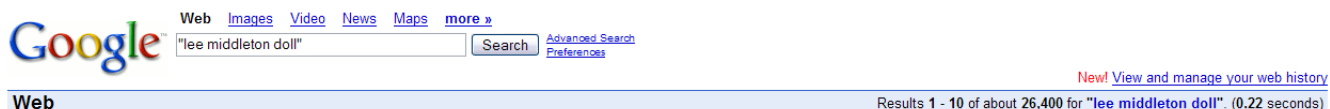
Here’s what happens:



By enclosing the phrase in quotation marks, I only get results using those exact keywords in the same exact order. Without quotation marks I'll get results for each of the individual words too, and that information isn't going to help me.

In this case there are about 398,000 pages returned in the search results. This means there would be 398,000 pages competing for traffic if I were to target the keyword phrase "porcelain doll".

That's a bit too much competition for me, so I perform a search for "lee middleton doll" and there is less competition, around 26,400 pages. I would like to find keywords with 1,000 to 10,000 competitors, and maybe up to 30,000 if I really have popular products to sell. So the keywords "lee middleton doll" do have a lot of competition, but could still work well for my eBay store if the dolls are very popular.



To build a good list of keywords, you'll have to do some research. For our example, I jumped back and forth between the keyword suggestion tool and the Google search results.

Once you find keywords which actually have received searches, check Google to see how many competitors that keyword has. Repeat this procedure until you've built a list with several good keyword phrases.

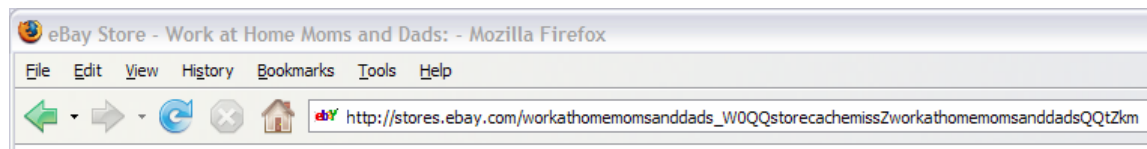
We'll use this list as we work through the eBay store quick tune up. Please don't cheat yourself by skipping this step; if you really want the best results from your quick tune up, it is essential that you build a good list of keywords.

And the first place we'll put your list to work is on your eBay store's name.

Many of the stores on eBay have names similar to those you'll find hung on shops downtown or at the mall. But are these catchy names really doing much to help with sales? Let's take a minute to consider how we can jazz up an eBay store name so it pulls in customers.

If you bring up an eBay store, notice what the title in your browser says. The name of the particular store is listed right after "eBay Store". Did you know page titles are one of

the most common ways sites are indexed by search engines?



If I want my store's homepage to be favorably indexed at the search engines, shouldn't I want the title of my page to contain relevant keywords?

In another search for keyword phrases related to home business ideas, I found the phrase "work at home moms and dads". It turns out to be a phrase with a decent number of searches and without too much competition (somewhere around 17,000 pages). I'll use it to build an imaginary eBay store for home business ideas.

eBay gives you 35 spaces for your store name, so what if you fill that space with a keyword phrase from your list? Since I already know these keywords are being searched, and there isn't too much competition, I have a good chance my store name will actually draw some traffic from the search engines.

Time to Get Some Money Back from eBay

Now before we go any further, let's take a look at the long URL eBay assigns to your store. A new eBay store I've built to coincide with the report you're reading has the formidable URL <http://stores.ebay.com/Work-at-Home-Moms-and-Dads>.

Wouldn't a short, easy to remember link be more effective? Hold onto that thought, there's more. Wouldn't you like to get paid for making a shorter and easier to remember web address for your eBay store?

eBay collects what it calls a final value fee from every item sold on the site. This fee is on top of the listing fee, and is based on a percentage of the item's final price. You might think of this as eBay's commission (Yes, I know they've already collected a listing fee, but this is eBay we're talking about; we won't even get started on the fees they collect on top of everything else through their PayPal service!). But what eBay doesn't promote much is the fact that they'll credit back to you 75% of this final value fee if a store inventory item is sold through a special link.

If you place a link to your store anywhere off eBay, and the link includes a special extension, any purchases made through that link will qualify for the final value fee refund. eBay calls this a store Referral Credit. You can link to your store's main page, your About

Me page, your internal search page, a store category page within your store, a search results page within your store based on keywords you've set, or a custom landing page you have created within your store.

To get paid you must add a referral code to the end of the URL (?refid=store or &refid=store, depending on which part of your store you direct buyers to).

But when you include the referral code, your web address is even longer! So here's what I recommend:

- Purchase a short domain at your favorite registrar (I like www.godaddy.com).
- Forward this new domain from the registrar to your actual store address with the referral code extension or make an .html redirect page if you're code savvy.

You can set any domain to forward to any web address. This is accomplished in the control panel of the domain registration service you select. Since every domain registrar will have different steps for setting up a redirect, the directions are beyond the scope of this report. Refer to your registrar's website for instructions.

In my example, I'll register the domain www.workathomemomsanddads.com and forward it to <http://stores.ebay.com/Work-at-Home-Moms-and-Dads/?refid=store>. I'm using a redirect page so I can track things better. Now each time someone uses my new domain, they'll be redirected to this longer web address and I'll be eligible to receive a store referral credit from their purchases.

You can use this short new domain to create links in emails, on web pages, blogs, in forum signatures or anywhere else. It's short and easy to remember.

Please note that it can take a couple days for your new domain to actually start working. Don't panic if you test it and it doesn't work right away. Give it a few days to spread across the Internet and you should be fine.

As a side note, I always check for discount coupons before I register any new domain. You can do a search online for domain coupons, or use the site I use at <http://www.dncoupons.com/>. If you find a coupon code, just enter it during the check out process when you register your domain.

As you might expect, optimizing your eBay store for search engines doesn't stop at just picking the right name. Do you know what comes directly after the store's name in the browser's page title? As you may have guessed, the category you've listed your item in is next. So categories are the next important element in optimizing an eBay store for search engine placement.

If you think it's important to use a descriptive title for your eBay listing (and it is), in some ways your store title and the name of the category within your eBay store is just as, or more important. A listing title helps you within eBay (it's how customers find you with eBay's internal search engine and is also what makes people interested in clicking on your listing), but your store name and the names of your categories are important outside of eBay.

Choose descriptive names for your categories, packed with keyword phrases from the list you've compiled. eBay provides 30 spaces to name your categories. How many descriptive keywords can you pack into those 30 spaces?

An often overlooked area we'll cover in your eBay store quick tune up is your store description. Once again, you have an opportunity to utilize those keyword phrases you researched. In this case you have 300 spaces to fill with keywords.

Note that some of the store themes don't include a store description. If you want this feature to work for you, you'll have to select a theme that uses the description.

This isn't time to get all whimsical and esoteric. A poetical description of your store will do little if anything for your search engine placement. What we want here are straightforward keywords.

Include brand names if you sell them and will always have these in stock. If you list brand names but do not keep them available, not only will you frustrate your customers but your search engine placement will decline as well.

With a little creativity, you might be surprised how many keywords and keyword phrases you can include in the 300 spaces allowed for your store description.

There are still two more places the search engines will look when they index your eBay store. They will check out the links you use within your site, and of course they will check out the titles of your auctions or listings.

Internal links are the downfall of many otherwise conscientious SEO worker bees. You can take great care in selecting the keywords used in your page titles, and then ruin things by having the familiar links to "home", "index" and "more". Even the famous "view more items in my store" link isn't going to do you much good.

How many of your customers are going to search Google for the term “home”? Is anyone going to search for “view my store”? Absolutely not, so you shouldn't be using those keywords in your links.

What if you were to put links in your listings that say “More Lee Middleton Porcelain Dolls”? Isn't that more descriptive than “home” or “view my store”? And won't the search engines have a better idea how to index the page at the other end of that link?

Be just as careful when you're creating custom pages for your store. Never give a page a name which doesn't contain keywords or a keyword phrase from your list. If you make pages like “bargain-priced-porcelain-dolls.html” then the search engines will know how to correctly index those pages.

If you do a search for “index” on Google right now, you'll be served up nearly two billion results! A search for “home” returns almost four billion pages. Stay away from using those words in your links, and stay away like your online life depends on it.

One last area for our eBay store quick tune up is the actual titles you use for your listings. Do you think I'm going to tell you to consult your list of keywords and keyword phrases again? You bet I am.

Remember I asked you to think of each individual listing as an independent website? Well what do you think Google will index your individual listing under if not the title? Silly question, of course Google will index according to your listing title.

Not only that, but keywords are important within eBay's own search engine. If people use a particular keyword phrase on Google, Yahoo or MSN, aren't they likely to use the same search terms within eBay?

Forget all the tricks you've heard about using capital letters, bold faced print, symbols and the like to attract attention to your listings.

Do you really want customers who have searched for the word “free”? Google returns almost two billion listings for that keyword anyway, so that's too much competition even if you do want to target those customers.

Use your keywords and keyword phrases in the titles of your auctions, and in the links

you place within your listings, and watch what Google can do for you over time.

So now you've done all the tune up work, but how are you supposed to know if all your search engine optimization and keyword placement work is paying off? What if you're totally on the wrong track, how will you find out?

Fortunately, there are tools to make the process of tracking everything easy. All you have to do is place a little code into the html of your listings, and you can find out all sorts of information. With this sort of information in your hands you can make intelligent adjustments to the keywords you use in your store name, categories, and even in your auction titles.

One tracking tool I've used for eBay auctions is at www.sellathon.com.

SELLATHON'S ViewTracker³
The 2nd Generation Auction Counter
PATENT PENDING

The Ultimate eBay™ Counter!

eBay® Sellers... Take this short quiz:

1. How do most eBay® visitors find your auctions?
2. What search terms are used?
3. What time (and day of the week) do they most often buy?
4. How much time do they spend looking at your items?

eBay also has its own internal tracking system for stores. You can find out more at <http://pages.ebay.com/help/specialtiesites/traffic-reporting-basics.html>.

Tracking is one little step you don't want to leave out. The information you gain by tracking can truly make or break your online business.

So there you have it, your eBay store is all tuned up and ready to go. It will take time for the search engines to find you and index your new keywords, but in time you'll start to see traffic coming from the search engines (remember, you'll be tracking all this, right?).

Each time you get a visitor from Google, MSN or Yahoo, you'll be getting a visitor who may not have otherwise found you on eBay.

So issues like "SEO" and "backlinks" may not be the most exciting part of running an eBay store. These issues aren't the least bit glamorous and they have nothing to do with customer service. However, they could be the most important elements of building traffic to your store, increasing your sales and building your profits.

If these techniques are ignored, your customers won't know the difference. But if these techniques are ignored, you will have fewer customers to worry about anyway so it may not matter.

Isn't it expensive enough to run an eBay store to make this little extra effort worthwhile?

I truly hope this tune up guide has been helpful to you and helps you build your eBay business. If it has, be sure to stop by my blog (www.terryheath.com) sometime and leave a comment or two. Until then, good luck to you and your eBay store.

Best Wishes,

Terry Heath

 TERRYHeath.com

About the Author:

Terry Heath lives on the scenic Key Peninsula in the Puget Sound region of Washington State. He writes about home business topics, and as an Education Specialist Trained by eBay trains others to make money on the popular auction site.

"The eBay Store Quick Tune Up" is the first in a series of reports designed to give your online activities a boost. Be sure to keep your eyes open for more entries in the Quick Tune Up series by subscribing to the [Work at Home Moms and Dads Newsletter](#).