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eBay in a Snap

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When discussing the impact of the Internet, it is hard to avoid the subject of eBay. The on-line auction house has become an economic and cultural juggernaut.[1] It is used to locate otherwise difficult to find goods, as a site for collectors, as the primarily economic location for many businesses, and browsing it has become a sort of recreational pastime for many.

I, myself, am a relative latecomer to eBay. I have browsed it occasionally, but always found the registration procedures daunting. And previous experience with identity theft and an awareness of many other electronically enabled criminal activities gave me pause. Then, this past June, dire necessity forced me through eBay’s portals.

Among my many other sins, I am the owner of a 1992 turbocharged Ford Thunderbird—bright red, of course. As a sound investment, or even as basic transportation, owning it has been roughly equivalent to giving Nigerian gangsters my checkbook, credit card, and all personal identification and telling them to have fun. After more than a year of constant breakdowns my long suffering wife finally thought our financial misery was over when the master brake cylinder (ABS) went West and the local Ford garage, where the car has a brass plate with its name on it — “Elvis Loves Ya”— in one of its bays, sadly informed me that no new, old, rebuilt or even counterfeit such parts were available.

Enter eBay. Soon I was dealing with a seller in east L.A., “El Vato.” My wife assumed that our finances were still safe as the chances of somebody with this name coming through with an actual working part were slim to none. However, El Vato talked me through the intricacies of opening a Paypal account (one means of making secure electronic payments on the WWW) and introduced me to the mysteries of eBay. Elvis was soon back on the road, albeit temporarily. The Ford mechanics, strangers to eBay, were amazed.
But soon my e-mail began to fill up with a wide variety of eBay and Paypal-related phishing scams. [2] It seemed very likely that my transactions with eBay and Paypal had exposed me to still another class of criminal activities. I also learned that, given my naiveté, I was perhaps lucky in getting exactly what I wanted on my first outing in eBay.

Accordingly, I began to thumb through books that would make me a better eBay user, and that I might recommend to the readers of Interface. There are, of course, hundreds of such works—Amazon.com lists 224 related titles—and it is not easy to choose between them.

I finally chose Preston Gralla’s eBay in a Snap. I was initially draw to it because it appears in the “SAMS Teach Yourself” series, which I have found to be consistently useful within a classroom context. The series editors take a great deal of care to strike a balance between user friendliness and true depth. Works in this series will usually provide the novice to any of the many areas they cover a solid start. Gralla’s book is no exception.

Moreover, Gralla himself has written more than two dozen titles and produces several Internet-shopping related columns as well. I found him a useful, entertaining, and informative guide to the intricacies of eBay.

Gralla takes the reader through the entire range of activities on eBay, with an emphasis upon self-protection, as well as upon getting the best price whether buying or selling. Had I read eBay in a Snap before first using eBay, I would have utilized its services with a great deal more sophistication and confidence, and would not have had to depend on the good character of El Vato, to whom this review is dedicated.

[1] For example, a search on the term “eBay” turns up 181 million references. By comparison, George Bush, clearly the most important single human being in the world, gets 15 million.

[2] In Phishing scams WWW users are lured to false pages where they are encouraged to reveal passwords, bank account and credit card numbers. This information is then often used in various identity theft scams.

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4 THOUGHTS ON “EBAY IN A SNAP”

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