

2nd Edition

eBay HACKS™

*Tips & Tools for Bidding, Buying,
and Selling*



O'REILLY®

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HACK
#56

Frame Your Listings

Use tables and carefully aligned images to place decorative frames around your auction descriptions.

A little extra decoration will give your customers that warm, fuzzy feeling they need to open their wallets and bid a little higher, or so the theory goes. At the very least, frames may help your auctions look more polished and inviting.



For a fee, eBay's Listing Designer upgrade [Hack #46] will do this for you. But using the predesigned templates everyone else uses is not exactly the best way to make your listings look unique. Instead, take a few minutes to design your own and save the fees for buying more stuff on eBay.

The Table

It all starts with a single table, which positions the frame across the top, bottom, and sides, holding your content snugly inside. While you're designing the table, turn on the border by placing `border=1` in the `<table>` tag so you can see more clearly what's going on.

```
<table style="width:100%" cellpadding=0 cellspacing=0 border=1>
<tr>
  <td width=25>top-left</td>
  <td>top-middle</td>
  <td width=25>top-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
  <td width=25>left side</td>
  <td>
```

Your content goes here...

```
<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>
</td>
  <td width=25>right side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
  <td width=25>bottom-left</td>
  <td width=25>bottom-middle</td>
  <td width=25>bottom-right</td>
</tr>
</table>
```

The resulting table shown in [Figure 4-13](#) is a placeholder for the eventual design. Note the `width=25` parameters in the left- and righthand columns, which can be changed to accommodate whatever images are eventually placed inside.

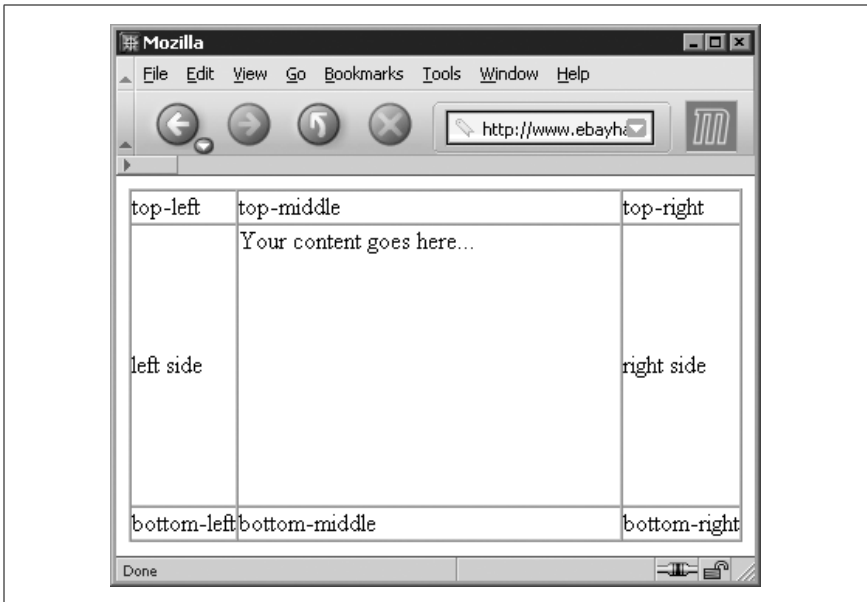


Figure 4-13. This simple table provides the structure for a decorative frame around an auction description



Early versions of Internet Explorer and Netscape are notorious for improperly resizing table cells and trying to automatically adjust the cell widths based solely on content. If your table doesn't appear to be responding to the `width=25` parameters as it should, try filling the center cell with lots of text, which should give it the "bulge" it needs to squeeze the sides into position.

The Images

In most cases, you'll need eight images (one for each corner, and one for each side), all [hosted on an off-site server](#) [Hack #76].

The corner images stay put, but since the width of the browser window and the height of your content cannot be taken for granted, the side images (top, bottom, left, and right) should be designed so that they are either stretchable or repeatable.

To make an image stretch to fill its container (in this case, a table cell), specify 100% for the width if it's a top or bottom piece, or for the height if it's a left- or righthand piece. For example, place this in the top-middle cell:

```
<td></td>
```

Since the image will be stretched, you'll want to do this only with images comprised of solid colors, and that won't look bad if distorted in one direction.



Make sure not to leave any spaces between the opening `<td>` tag and the `` tag or between the `` tag and the closing `</td>` tag; otherwise, those spaces will manifest themselves as gaps between the pictures.

On the other hand, you may want to have a single image repeat like wallpaper, which is accomplished by modifying the `<td>` tag and dumping the `` tag altogether, like this:

```
<td background="http://www.my.server/top_image.jpg">&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;</td>
```

Naturally, repeating images should be designed as such, with an edge that provides a smooth transition to the adjacent image. Note the use of the ` &` code (nonbreaking space) here to convince browsers that there's content to display; otherwise, the cell (and its background) might not show up at all.

Putting It Together

For the full effect, the theme of your decorative border should relate to the item being sold. When selling photographic equipment, for instance, a film-based theme, as in the example that follows, would be appropriate.

Uncut film makes an excellent border because it's comprised entirely of a very simple, repeating pattern, so the image need contain only a single frame, and the browser will do the rest. [Figure 4-14](#) shows a completed border with four film canister images and film extending down the sides of the auction, accommodating long and short descriptions with ease.

Here's the code for this frame:

```
<table style="width:100%" cellpadding=0 cellspacing=0 border=0>
<tr>
  <td width=60></td>
  <td></td>
  <td width=60></td>
</tr>
<tr>
  <td width=60 background="http://www.ebayhacks.com/pictures/film.gif"
    width=60&nbsp;&nbsp;&></td>
  <td>
```

Your content goes here...

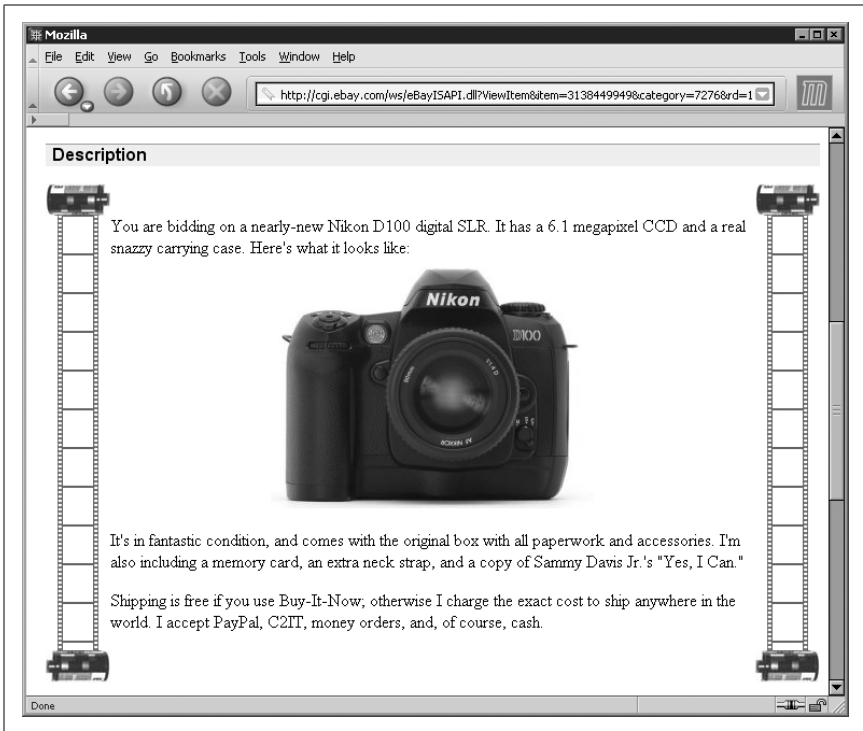


Figure 4-14. The completed frame with four film canister images and a single film frame repeated down both sides

```

<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>
</td>
<td width=60 background="http://www.ebayhacks.com/pictures/film.gif"
    width=60&nbsp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td width=60></td>
<td></td>
<td width=60></td>
</tr>
</table>

```

The canister images, `film_canister_top.jpg` and `film_canister_bottom.jpg`, are referenced by the `` tags in the corner cells, providing a weird *scroll* effect. You could also replace two of the canisters with jagged film edges for more realism, if that's the effect you're after.

The film strip, `film.gif`, appears as the background of the two side cells. The widths of the left and right columns are set at 60 pixels to match the width of the film canister images. To get the 38-pixel-wide film to line up, 11 pixels of whitespace was added to each side. Make sure to get all the dimensions right, or unsightly gaps or misalignments could ruin the effect.