

**2nd Edition**

# eBay HACKS™

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



O'REILLY®

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HACK  
#87

## Sell and Ship Internationally

Make shipping to customers in other countries go more smoothly with these tools and tips.

*Nothing so liberalizes a man and expands the kindly instincts that nature put in him as travel and contact with many kinds of people.*

—Mark Twain, 1867

With some practice, your international shipments will be nearly as easy as domestic ones [Hack #86]. But it takes a little experience to know how to accept payments from customers in other countries, how to ship to other countries, and how to avoid fraud from deadbeats in other countries. Fortunately, the payoff is substantial: expanding your business to include bidders all around the world, while not without its risks, will make trading on eBay more interesting, more challenging, and more profitable.

### Accepting International Payments

When you send payment instructions [Hack #84] to your customers in other countries, there are a few considerations you'll need to make in addition to anything you already do for your local customers.

First, always keep the language barrier in mind. If your bidder's native language is different from yours, keep your sentences short and avoid slang. Bidders in other countries expect you to write in your own language, but they will usually not have perfect command of it. If you find that the bidder is having a hard time understanding you, you can always try including a translation of your instructions [Hack #37]. Just make sure it's placed alongside your original text in the email, so the bidder gets the complete picture.

Second, be patient. International transactions take longer, partly because of the delays caused by time zone differences and language barriers, and partly because sending payments internationally can be difficult and time-consuming.

Finally, be extremely clear about the types of payments you can accept and the types you cannot. Here are some considerations when accepting payments from other countries:

**PayPal.** Buyers in nearly 50 countries around the world have access to PayPal, but payments from those members aren't necessarily covered by PayPal's Seller Protection policy [Hack #85].

**Credit cards.** The incidence of fraud [Hack #69] among credit card payments made by non-U.S. bidders is unfortunately much higher than payments originating in the United States. For this reason, you may wish to impose a limit, either on the amount you'll accept [Hack #85] or on the minimum feedback rating of customers from whom you'll take a credit

card. If you contact your **merchant account** [Hack #96] provider, they'll probably tell you the same thing.

**Electronic transfers.** Depending on where you live, electronic bank account transfers may be common or unheard of. Sellers in the United States, for instance, largely use PayPal for this purpose, while sellers in Germany frequently initiate electronic transfers directly from their banks. The problem is that international electronic transfers, while safe, are quite expensive, particularly for the buyer. But an electronic transfer may be your best bet if you don't want to accept payments via postal mail, next, and PayPal or credit cards are unavailable. One of the biggest advantages is that your customers can specify the amount to send in your native currency, so you won't have to worry about getting shortchanged as a result of fluctuating exchange rates. Contact your bank for details.

**Payments by mail.** Any payment received by postal mail is subject to the terms imposed by your bank. Before you instruct an international bidder to mail you a **money order** [Hack #85], for instance, make sure your bank will accept payment, and try to determine if any additional fees will be incurred. In most cases, however, you can cash an international *postal* money order at your local post office branch. Alternatively, you can use **BidPay** [Hack #33], and let the buyer handle all the fees.

Although eBay does a fair job in converting currencies right on the auction page, the conversion rates they use are not necessarily the same as those used by your or your customer's bank. To give your customers a more accurate estimate of how much they'll need to send you in their own native currency, contact your bank to get the latest exchange rates, or use the Oanda Currency Converter at [www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic) for a quick estimate.

## Shipping to Other Countries

In many ways, shipping internationally is no different from shipping domestically. It just usually costs a lot more, takes a lot longer, and requires a bunch of cumbersome forms.

Most couriers offer a different assortment of shipping options for international shipments, all of which are explained on your courier's web site. Regardless of the courier or shipping option you choose, though, you'll need to include the appropriate customs forms.

Here's what sellers in the U.S. must do to send packages to other countries:

**United States Postal Service (USPS).** Include customs form 2976 with all uninsured international packages, or form 2976-A (inside a 2976-E envelope) if you're insuring your package. You can get these forms at

your local post office branch. Go to [ircalc.usps.gov](http://ircalc.usps.gov) for exclusions and restrictions.

**FedEx and UPS.** International shipments with these couriers require a commercial invoice, a generic form in which you'll describe the individual contents of the package and specify the value and country of origin. Then, depending on the destination country, you'll need to include three to five copies along with the original. Place all forms in a single clear pouch, the same kind as is used for shipping airbills. You can download a blank commercial invoice form in Adobe Acrobat format from [ups.com](http://ups.com) or [fedex.com](http://fedex.com) in their respective international documents sections.

It's important to understand that somewhat different forms and procedures may be required for different countries. If you've never shipped to a particular country before, make sure to contact the courier and ascertain any restrictions or additional requirements that may apply your package. For example, according to UPS, packages shipped to Mexico may not contain any products made in China. And according to FedEx, packages to Canada require one original and five copies of the commercial invoice, packages to Puerto Rico require only three copies, and some other countries require only originals (no copies). In other words, there's no hard and fast formula that applies in all situations.

Different countries also have restrictions as to the types of items you're permitted to ship into their borders. For instance, according to the United States Postal Service web site, shipments to Italy cannot contain artificial flowers and fruits (or accessories for them), bonnets, caps, or hats of any kind, clocks or supplies for clocks, coral mounted in any way, footwear of any kind, handkerchiefs, human remains, live bees, playing cards of any kind, radioactive materials, ribbons for typewriters, scarves, shawls, or toys not made wholly of wood.

## Denied Parties

If you really want to be on the safe side, you might also consider researching so-called "denied parties." For example, FedEx offers the Denied Party Screening tool, which searches for your customer's name among governmental lists of countries, individuals, companies, and other organizations that have had economic and trade sanctions imposed against them. You can try this out by going to [https://gtm.fedex.com/cgi-bin/gtm\\_dps.cgi](https://gtm.fedex.com/cgi-bin/gtm_dps.cgi).

## Expectation Management

When shipping internationally, take a moment to prepare your customers for any delays (expected or otherwise) that the package might encounter before it arrives. For example, the United States Postal Service web site ([www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)) estimates that a one-pound package sent from the U.S. to the United Kingdom via airmail parcel post will take anywhere from 4 to 10 days. In practice, however, it may take two or three times as long, given the delays imposed by customs and other unforeseen circumstances.

For this reason, a delivery that takes two weeks might be seen in two different lights, depending on what you've told the customer. If the customer expects the package in 10 days, then she'll be disappointed, and you may be thanked with negative feedback for shipping too slowly. But if you say it will take a month, the recipient will be pleasantly surprised when it gets there in half the time. See “[Master Expectation Management](#)” [[Hack #50](#)] for other ways to engineer your customers' satisfaction while you're building your listings.