

10 Steps to Photos That Sell

A PROFESSIONAL LOOKING PHOTOGRAPH IS **THE** CRUCIAL ELEMENT FOR crafting consistently successful auction listings. The listing photograph has to take the place of all the buyer's hands-on experience in the Bricks and Mortar world. Online shoppers cannot hold the item up to the light, or turn it over to check the manufacturer's stamp, or flip it to see the backside. Your listing's description will, no doubt, convey most of that information, but casual browsers don't always pause to read the descriptions. You may write the most accurate or the most lyrical item description on eBay—but it will be the listing photograph that makes bidders first pay attention.

So how do you create attention grabbing auction photos? The Easy Auction Photography Method will help you transform your pictures from so-so snapshots into Photos That Sell. And you can do it all on a tight budget.

Here are Ten Tips that will help you Shoot for Success:

1. **Use A Digital Camera**
2. **Watch The Background**
3. **Climb A Ladder**
4. **Fill The Viewfinder**
5. **Use Diffused Light**
6. **Stabilize Your Camera On A Tripod**
7. **Stuff Clothes With Newspapers**
8. **Take Lots Of Photos**
9. **Learn Some Simple Photo Editing Software Commands**
10. **Manage Your Time**



Let's look at these tips one at a time.

Following the simple guidelines outlined below will help you produce outstanding product photographs. If you want more detailed information about improving your Internet Product Photography skills, please check out the book my book, *Easy Auction Photography*. You can find it online at <http://www.ezauctionphotos.com>

1. Use A Digital Camera



if you don't plan on selling a variety of items, you *can* use a film camera for your eBay listings. However, you'll just be adding extra time and tedium to creating your listings. Why? With film, you can't see the results right away. Digital cameras have an LCD screen that gives instant feedback about the shot. If you need to re-shoot—you'll know that immediately, while the item is still lit and

the background is set-up. In addition, with film, you can waste valuable time running back and forth to the film processor. A digital picture requires only a short stroll to your desk. Lastly, the cost of process and printing the film and/or converting the images into digital format will add up quickly.

Buying a digital camera is the wiser course – and, eventually, the less expensive one.

What should you look for when purchasing a digital camera?

- A Brand Name
- 3 Megapixels or More
- Macro Focus (or Close-Up Lens)
- The Ability To Turn The Flash Off

While they may be tempting, you do not need an 8 to 12 megapixel monster for internet photography. Those multi-mega-mega pixel cameras are designed for photographers who want to print and enlarge their photos. On eBay, buyers only see images on computer monitors. Even the best monitor's resolution is less than that of a decent snapshot. And it's important to keep your images small enough to load quickly. So a less expensive, 3 or 4 megapixel camera will get the job done.

But that doesn't mean any old, cheap-o camera will do!

Choose a camera with the ability to focus close up - as close as a few inches from the item you are photographing. This close-up feature is called **Macro Focus**. Avoid cameras with a fixed focus that will not allow you to get right on top of your item. A fixed focus camera generally will not allow you to get closer than three feet from your subject - not nearly close enough for small collectibles. A postage stamp will look very small shot from three feet away!

And lastly, be sure your camera is not so automatic that you can't turn the built in flash off. Under normal circumstances, you should not use the camera's flash to light your subject. In product photography, items will look best under either soft, diffused light or natural light.



2. Isolate the Background

K eep your shot simple and plan ahead! Having a busy background ruins a good photograph.

Try using a backdrop. A simple, white piece of flexible poster board can isolate your item from its surroundings. Remember to keep the backdrop a solid color - no patterns. You are trying to keep the buyers eyes focused on the item.

3. Climb A Ladder

S ometimes we can't control the background and the item we need to photograph is too large or heavy to move, or we are simply unable to move it for one reason or another. In those cases, it is time to move the camera instead.

Climbing up a ladder is an old photographer's trick. Move your camera; alter the angle; shoot down on the item. This new perspective can change the whole look of the background and isolate the item you are photographing.

When photographing any large flat items such as paintings or artwork is a problem - try the ladder trick and shoot from above.



4. Fill The Viewfinder



G et right on top of your subject. Auction buyers are interested only in the item they are bidding on. They don't want or need to see a lot of empty space surrounding a tiny view of the product. The closer you get to the item, the greater the amount of detail that is visible to your bidders.

Focus in as tightly as you can, using a macro focus lens if necessary. Before you upload the picture to eBay, you may even want to crop it, to bring the merchandise front and center.

While good photo composition will always be important, artful arrangements are not your first consideration. Successful eBay photographs *sell products*.



5. Use Diffused Lighting

Using the on-camera flash can wash out detail or create reflection spots on the item you are shooting. A flash can also create deep, distracting shadows.

To avoid these problems, use soft, diffused light.

How can you diffuse light? Clouds act as natural diffusers. Try shooting outside on an overcast day. The light is soft and allows the detail and color of the item to show clearly.

If you can't wait for an overcast day, you can create the same effect in your studio by using an eTent (also known as a softbox or light tent).

An eTent is made from a translucent material, such as white nylon. One face is detachable, so that the photographer can view the entire item. This detachable side also usually has a small slit so that, if it is re-attached, just the camera lens can be poked inside the tent, allowing for tight close-ups on small objects. Lights, positioned outside the tent, are pointed towards the object being photographed. Once you place the item inside the tent, the light coming through the material is diffused and softened. This is a Must Have Tool for softening shadows and taming glare.

Many photographers also use umbrellas designed to bounce or diffuse the light before it reaches the subject. Photo umbrellas were formerly a high ticket item beyond the reach of most amateur photographers. Look around eBay—you might be surprised how affordable photo equipment has become.

If you don't have—or don't want—a set of reflective umbrellas, that's OK, too. You can diffuse light by putting some sort of sheer material between the light source and the subject. That material can be anything from a clear plastic shower curtain to cheesecloth to translucent shrink wrap. Just be sure to **never** let the hot lights touch the diffusing material.

Diffused light is essential when you are photographing reflective surfaces like glass or polished metal or even certain fabrics like rayon or silk. If you sell many such products, an eTent or shoot through umbrella should be on the top of your "To Buy" list.



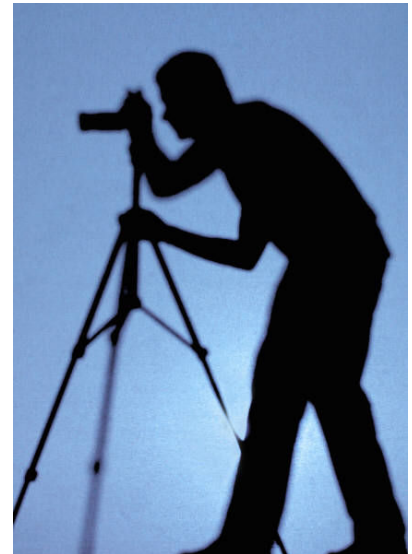
6. Use A Tripod

a tripod is both a useful and an important tool in product photography. Yet, tripods are often the last thing people reach for. If you have one, it's time to dust it off and put it into service, ASAP! If you don't own one, get one. They sell on eBay for as little as \$20.00.

Why is it so important to use this seemingly awkward tool? When you use natural or diffused light, as you frequently will, the light falling on the subject is less intense. Your camera's shutter must stay open longer for a proper exposure. When the shutter stays open for more than 1/60 of a second, any slight movement - even the movement of pressing on the shutter button - will cause the picture to blur. However, if your camera is on a tripod, the camera will remain stable and the photo will be in focus.

Small items that are shot in macro (or close-up) face a similar problem. The very slightest movement will be magnified and the photo will appear soft or out of focus. You might not be able to tell that it is soft just by looking at the LCD screen. Perhaps you will have already uploaded the picture to your computer before you notice the focus problem. At that point, you will have no alternative to go but back and start over.

Are you convinced of the tripod's importance yet? If not, here is one more reason for a tripod: if the camera is on a tripod, the photographer's hands are free to move the lights and adjust other elements in the photo before shooting. Having your hands free is a big help when setting up a still life or product photograph.



7. Stuff Clothing With Newspaper



Buyers prefer to see an item that is full, rather than flat. Clothing, boots, handbags, backpacks etc. lose their shape, becoming limp and floppy when they are just plopped down on a table and photographed.

To make your products look rounder and more true-to-life, stuff them with wadded up newspaper or tissue paper. Just be careful not to get newsprint on the garments.

8. Take Lots of Photographs

How many photographs does your listing need? The simple answer is: as many as it takes to show every detail a potential buyer needs to know. Connection speeds vary and buyers' patience isn't unlimited—so exactly how many *is* enough? How many are too many? Sadly, there is no simple formula to determine the correct number of photos.



The very minimum needed is one. Buyers need to see the item to feel comfortable buying it. A good, detailed photo is one way to build trust with bidders. They can't touch the product, so it's doubly important that they see a good picture of it.

Next buyers want to know specifics things about the item, such as condition, color, imperfections, etc. You can best answer these questions and document your article's condition through photographs.

Not every product will require the same sorts of photos. Collectibles like coins or stamps may have variations that make them especially valuable, for instance, and you'll want to concentrate on those details. Think about what questions you would ask if you were buying (rather than selling) your item, and let that be your guide.

Here's a general list of additional areas to photograph:

- Damage to the item - cracks, chips, repairs, rips, wear marks, flaws of any kind
- Signatures - On the bottom of most pottery or glass there is a manufacturer's stamp or signature. On hand made items or crafts, if there is a signature - photograph it. It doesn't matter if you can't read the signature clearly. Someone might recognize it and bid according.
- Labels and tags on clothing.
- Close-ups of the pattern.
- Certificate of Authenticity
- The backside—and the bottom and top, too, if possible.
- Any accessory (including software) that comes with the main item.
- The plug. This is especially important for vintage collectibles that require electricity. Many people want to see if the wires are frayed or if the plug is grounded.
- Before and after shots are important if you are selling a product that, when used, improves something. For instance, if you were selling rust remover, you might photograph a rusty, tarnished kettle and then show the same kettle cleaned up and gleaming after the rust remover was used.
- If you are selling vehicles, photograph the interior, exterior, engine and trunk.



9. Learn To Use Photo Editing Software

Learning a few simple commands that can fix up your photos will go a long way to improve the final image. I've never taken a photograph that couldn't benefit from a little touch-up. I am not talking about advanced photo techniques. I am referring to basic steps like cropping out the excess space or background around a subject to isolate it, or rotating the image so it is right side up.

One important command to master is "Resize." For eBay and similar sites, the image should be about 400 pixels on its longest side. This will insure that the image loads quickly in your buyer's browser, and it will fit the format specifications of eBay's picture service.

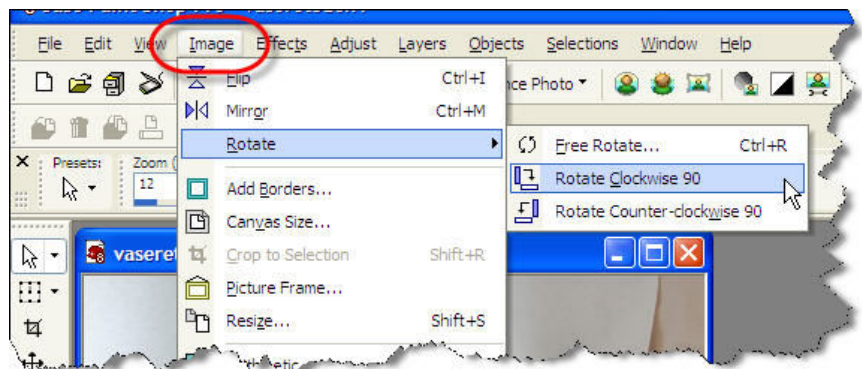
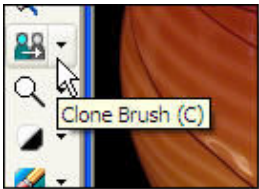
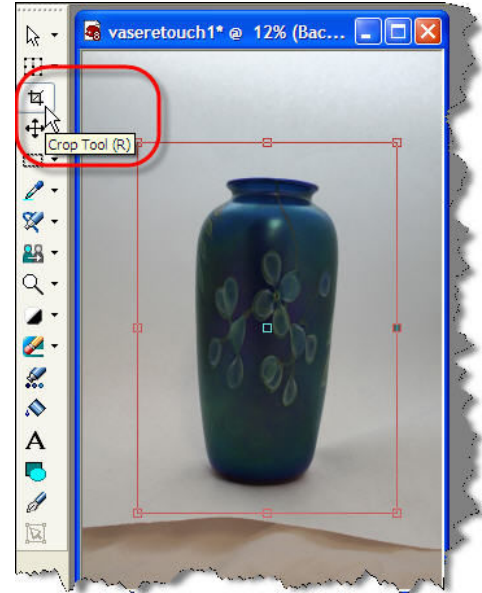
Photo editing software can also be invaluable when you are working with a less than perfect shot. Fixing up or retouching your photographs is perfectly acceptable as long as you are making the *picture* better. The goal is to give bidders a full and accurate representation of the item. It is never acceptable to retouch a photo in order to mis-

lead your customer about the product. Not only is it unethical—it is pointless. The buyer will discover any flaws the second she opens the package!

So why would you want to retouch a photograph?

Perhaps you simply can't go back and take the picture again, even though you've just notice your thumb in the corner of the frame. Or you may need to eliminate glare or reflections, straighten up a crooked picture, increase the brightness or decrease the contrast, or just use an automated "Optimize" routine. Photo editing can be as complicated or as simple as you want it to be.

If you do nothing else, at least learn to crop, rotate and resize images.



10. Manage Your Time



Photography can be a lot of fun. Many of us enjoy it as a hobby.

As eBay sellers, however, our goal is to get the shot and move on as quickly and efficiently as possible. Time is the one asset under our control. We cannot sell every item we list, nor make every buyer pay quickly. But we can be sure that the time spent photographing an item or retouching a photo is commensurate with the expected final value of the product.

If you find yourself struggling with a shot, step back, take a deep breath, and ask yourself, how much is your time worth? Then ask yourself how much of your time is this picture worth? Obviously, you are not going to spend half an hour setting up a shot and an additional fifteen minutes retouching the picture if you expect to make a \$10.00 profit.

What may not be quite so obvious is that you need not spend that sort of time even on a \$2,000.00 sale.

If you follow the tips in this article, you'll soon discover that all of your shots will not only look better, but they can be taken more quickly. A small investment in photo equipment can save you untold hours every week.

Just as you perform your other tasks in batches, so too can you photograph all your items with a single set up. For instance, if you construct a table top studio with a cardboard backdrop, use a few claps and a set of lights, you can photograph smaller items with rapid-fire speed. There will be no need to reset the lights or move the camera. Just place each object on the infinite background, focus, snap the picture, and move on.

An eTent or a set of lights and umbrellas makes it just as easy to shoot larger products. You may be surprised to learn just how much you can accomplish.

The key is to plan ahead. Know what you need to photograph, which tools you want to use, and how much time you want to spend.



i hope you've found these 10 Tips useful. I use them every day in my eBay photography, and I can honestly say that better photographs bring higher final value fees every time.

If you use these suggestions, you are sure to improve the quality of your eBay product photography. With over 1.3 million sellers worldwide, the competition is getting fierce – and having a top quality photographs is one way to turn browsers into buyers!

For more information, tips and techniques, including how to set up a photo studio on a shoe-string budget, check out my book, *Easy Auction Photography*. It is available as both a trade paperback and an eBook on CD online at

<http://www.ezauctionphotography.com/>

or through my eBay store, CloverCity-Sells

<http://stores.ebay.com/CloverCity-Sells>

Thanks for taking the time to read this eBook. If you enjoyed it, and would like to learn more, please check out the EZ Auction Photos blog for tips, tricks, and free photography webinars:

<http://ezauctionphotos.blogspot.com/>

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