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How to Find What You Want to Buy

With millions of items for sale every day, the eBay marketplace is a shopper's paradise—and a shopper's nightmare. That's because with so many items for sale, it's increasingly difficult to find that exact item you're looking for. It's like searching for a needle in a haystack; you know it's there, but you have no idea where to look.

One of the first tricks to becoming a successful bidder is learning where to look. That's what this chapter is all about—helping you master eBay's various search functions.

By the way, this chapter is unique in that most of the tricks don't come from other users, they come from me. That's because I am, in all modesty, somewhat of a search guru, so you might as well get your tricks from the horse's mouth, so to speak. I guarantee that if you use the tricks in this chapter, you'll stand a much better chance of finding the merchandise you want to buy!

Using eBay's Search Feature

eBay offers two ways of finding merchandise for sale. You can browse through the product categories, or you can search for specific items. Guess which method provides the best results?

Trick #45: **Search, Don't Browse**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Here's something all eBay Masters realize, sooner or later. Searching for an item is quicker than browsing for it. Searching is pretty much a one-click operation; browsing requires you to click through subcategory after subcategory after subcategory, and even then you still end up with dozens of pages of merchandise to sift through. So if you know what you're looking for, don't go through the time-consuming hassle of clicking and loading and clicking and loading to access a particular item category—use the search function instead.

Trick #46: **Use the Search Page, Not the Search Box**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Most users do their searching directly from eBay's home page, using the search box at the top of the page. That's okay for many searches (especially if you use some of the search operators I discuss later in this chapter), but I prefer to use the more powerful Search page.

You access the Search page, shown in Figure 3.1, by clicking the Advanced Search link under the search box. This page, unlike the simple search box, lets you search by several criteria: You can search by listing title, by specific words in the listing, by item number, by location, by seller, or by bidder. You can even choose to search *completed* auctions—which is a great way to get a handle on final selling prices for various types of items. And you can expand the number of search options available by clicking the Advanced Search link at the bottom of the basic Search page; these options let you create even more powerful searches.

FIGURE 3.1

Perform more precise searches from eBay's Search page.

Trick #47: **Search the Full Description**

abc-books

stores.ebay.com/ABC-Books-by-Ann

www.abcbooksbyann.com

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star

When you use the Search page, you have lots of options available that you don't have from the home-page search box. One of my favorite options lets you search the complete auction description. eBay's default search only looks in the listing titles; when you expand your search to include the full item description, you can find a lot more items that match your query.

All you have to do is go to the Search page, enter your query, and select the Search Title and Description option. Click the Search button and you'll see many more results than you would otherwise.

Trick #48: **Search by Price Range**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

If you're on a budget, you might want to limit your search to items within a certain price range. To perform a price-limited search, you need to use the Advanced Search page, shown in Figure 3.2. Open this page by clicking the Advanced Search link on the main search page.

FIGURE 3.2

Use the Advanced Search to search by price range.

From the Advanced Search page, enter your query then enter the minimum and/or maximum prices you're willing to pay into the Items Priced boxes. This will return a list of auctions that not only match your query but also fall within your specified price range.

Trick #49: **Search for Items Near Your Home**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

One of my favorite features of the Advanced Search page is the ability to search for items within a certain distance of your home ZIP code, which is great if you're

shopping for large, hard-to-ship items. Open the Advanced Search page, scroll down to the Items Near Me section (shown in Figure 3.3), enter your ZIP code, and select a distance (in miles) from the Within list. Conduct your search, and only those items offered within your specified geographic range will be listed .



Items near me

☐ Items within 200 miles of

ZIP or Postal Code 46032 or Select a popular city...

Currency

Any currency

FIGURE 3.3

Use the Advanced Search page to find items in or near a specific ZIP code.

Trick #50: Use the eBay Toolbar to Search

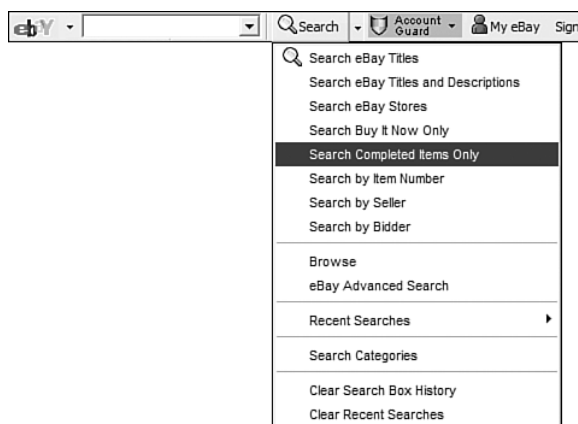
trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

If you have the eBay Toolbar installed in your browser (see Trick #22), you don't have to go to the eBay site to do your searching. Instead, you can search directly from the toolbar.

To perform a basic search, just enter your query into the toolbar's empty search box, then click the Search button. To perform a more advanced search, click the down arrow to the right of the Search eBay button to display the list of search and browse options shown in Figure 3.4. You can search by title, by description, by item number, and so on, or you can click a category heading to browse all the listings in that product category. It's a great way to access eBay without always going through the home page!

**FIGURE 3.4**

Perform a variety of searches from the eBay Toolbar.

Fine-Tuning Your Search

Whether you use the home-page search box, the dedicated Search page, or the search function on the eBay Toolbar, a successful search involves more than just entering a keyword or two. To make sure you find exactly what you're looking for—no more, no less—you need to fine-tune your query, using a variety of available tools.

Trick #51: **Conduct a More Specific Search**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Many users, when searching for an item, enter a single search word—and then are buried under an overwhelming number of matching results. That's because some of the most popular categories on eBay list thousands of items on any given day.

The first step to fine-tuning your results is to use more than one keyword to describe what you're looking for—that is, to conduct a more specific search. For example, if you do a search on `nba`, you'll be overwhelmed by the results. Narrow your search to a more specific product category (to `nba jerseys` or `nba tickets`), and you'll better describe the specific item you're looking for and get more targeted results.

Be cautious, however, of making your query *too* precise. You need to pick a series of keywords that are specific but not overly restrictive. Get too specific in your query, and you'll end up excluding some auctions you might be interested in.

For example, it's easy enough to see that simply entering the word `model` is too general a query; you'll get thousands of results, most of which you won't care about. A more precise query would describe the type of model you're interested in, such as `star wars death star model`. Good so far, but if your search gets even more precise—searching for an `old star wars death star model partially assembled without instructions not painted`, to make a case—you probably won't return *any* matching results. The query is simply too specific; nothing fits all the parameters. So if your search generates few if any results, take some of the parameters out of your query to broaden your search.

Trick #52: **Narrow Your Search Results**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

There's another way to narrow your search results—and it just so happens to be the method that eBay is officially pushing. eBay recommends you perform a general search, and then use the options along the left side of the page to narrow the results list.

If you enter a really broad search parameter—`books`, for example—the search results page displays a list of matching categories, in addition to a list of matching auctions, as shown in Figure 3.5. Your next step is to click the category in which you're interested.

Depending on the size of the category you select, you may next see another list of subcategories, or you may be taken directly to search results within a category or subcategory. However you get there, you'll eventually land on a page that includes a list of Matching Categories and Search Options in the left column. As you can see in Figure 3.6, the Matching Categories are just that, subcategories related to your main search. The Search Options, shown in Figure 3.7, let you fine-tune the results by listing only those items that you can buy with PayPal, that have a Buy It Now option, that are gift items, that are completed auctions, that are priced within a specified range, that are listed as multiple-item lots, that start or end today (or within the next five hours), or that offer fast shipping. Select the options that matter to you, then click the Search button again. This will generate a new, shorter, more targeted list of matching auctions.

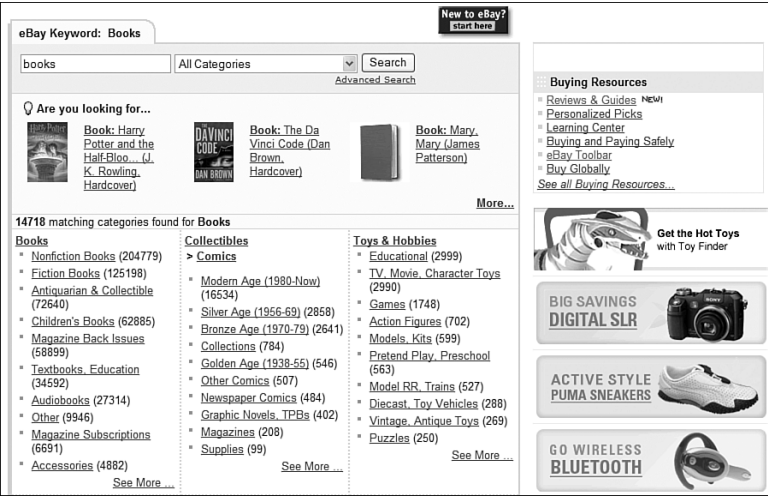


FIGURE 3.5
Some general searches require you to pick a more specific category.



FIGURE 3.6
Use Matching Categories to narrow your search results to a specific product category.

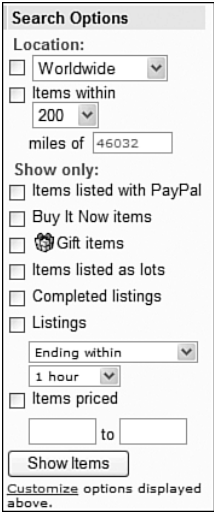


FIGURE 3.7
Fine-tune your search results with eBay's Search Options.

Trick #53: Search for an Exact Phrase**artchick48**stores.ebay.com/Lee-Smith-Artwww.leesmithart.com

Member since 2001, Feedback: Turquoise star

When you enter two or more keywords in your query, eBay automatically assumes that you want to search for items that match all the words—but in no particular order. (This is the equivalent of putting the Boolean AND between the words.) So if you enter `abraham lincoln`, eBay will search for items that include both the words “abraham” and “lincoln”—which might include guys named Abraham who drive a Lincoln. That is, the two words don’t have to be right next to each other, and they don’t have to be in that order.

If you want to search for an exact phrase, put quotation marks around the words in your query. So in our example, to search for items about the former president, you’d enter “`abraham lincoln`”. You won’t get any results about cars!

Trick #54: Don’t Use AND, OR, or NOT**trapperjohn2000**

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Some experienced searchers like to use Boolean operators in their queries; this is a connecting word (AND, OR, NOT, and so on) that some search engines let you use to construct complex queries. Well, forget your ANDs and NOTs; eBay doesn’t permit the use of Boolean operators in its search function. In fact, if you enter Boolean operators in your query, eBay will treat them as keywords—and search for them!

So you should only search for the words “and,” “or,” and “not” if they’re actually part of an exact title that you’re looking for. In other words, it’s okay to search for `batman and robin` if you’re looking for DVDs of the movie *Batman and Robin*. If you’re looking for other items that include both Batman and Robin, drop the “and” from the search and enter this query instead: `batman robin`.

Trick #55: Search for One Word or Another Word**trapperjohn2000**stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

If eBay won't let you use Boolean operators, then how do you create a complex search query? Fortunately, eBay has some alternate operators you can use to duplicate some Boolean functions.

First up is an operator that performs the OR function—that is, lets you search for auctions that include one word or another, as opposed to including both the words. To perform an OR search on eBay, enclose both the words within parentheses, separated by a comma, with no space after the comma. So to search for items that are either red or green (but not necessary both), enter the query (red,green). (Again, note that there's no space after the comma.)

Oh, and don't assume you can only use this trick with two keywords. You can link as many keywords as you want in this fashion, just keep adding commas and keywords, like this: (red,green,blue,purple,yellow).

Trick #56: **Exclude a Word from Your Search Results**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

What if you want to search for all items within a particular category except those that match a particular parameter? In this instance, you want to use eBay's operator that excludes words from the search results—that is, lists all auctions except those that include a specific word. This operator is the simple minus sign (-), which you put in front of any word you want excluded from your results.

For example, if you want to search for all Scooby Doo-related items except Pez dispensers, put a minus sign in front of the word "pez," like this: scooby -pez.

Trick #57: **Use Wildcards**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Like many other search engines, eBay lets you use the wildcard character (*) to indicate one or more unknown letters at the end of a search keyword. Wildcards are great for when you're not sure of a word's spelling; the wildcard character replaces the letters in question in your query. For example, if you're not sure whether it's Barbie or Barby, enter barb* and your results will include both spellings.

Wildcards are also good for finding all variations on a keyword; just truncate the main word and add the wildcard character. For example, if you want Superman, Supergirl, and Superdog, enter `super*` to find all “super” words.

This is also a good way to search for items produced in a given decade. Many sellers put the date of manufacture or release in the title, as in **1966 Aurora Model Kit**. If you want to search for all kits manufactured in the 1960s, just drop the last digit of the date and insert the wildcard character instead, like this: `196*`. This will return all items listed from 1960 to 1969.

Trick #58: **Use the Singular, Not the Plural**

trapperjohn2000

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

eBay actually does a little bit of wildcard searching on its own. In particular, it automatically searches for the plural form of any word you enter—assuming you enter the singular, of course. So to search for both singular and multiple items, truncate the main word to the singular form. For example, if you search for bears, your results won’t include any auctions for a single bear. Instead, search for bear, and you’ll get both singles and multiples in your results.

Trick #59: **Spell Out the Numbers**

New Trick

abc-books

stores.ebay.com/ABC-Books-by-Ann

www.abcbooksbyann.com

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star

When dealing with a number in an auction title, some sellers enter the numeral, others spell out the number. So you might find a particular DVD listed as either *12 Angry Men* or *Twelve Angry Men*. That’s why, when you’re searching, it pays to search for both the numeral and the word—just in case.

Searching for Bargains

Okay, now you've learned lots of different ways to fine-tune your search results. But how do you use these tools to hunt down the best bargains on the eBay site? Read on to learn some bargain-hunting tricks, all using the basic search function.

Trick #60: **Search for Misspellings**

berties_house_of_horrors

stores.ebay.com/Berties-Emporium

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star

This is one of the best tricks in the entire book, a surefire way to find bargains that others have overlooked. It's a simple method, really, that takes advantage of other users' mistakes.

You see, some eBay sellers aren't great spellers—or are just prone to typing errors. Either they don't know how to spell a particular word, or they hit the wrong key by mistake. In either case, the result is an auction title with a misspelled word—a Dell personal *commuter*, an Apple *ipud*, or clothing by Tommy *Hilfigger*.

The problem for these sellers—and the opportunity for you—is that when buyers search for an item (using the correct spelling), listings with misspellings don't appear in the search results. If potential bidders can't find the listings, they can't bid on them, leaving these misspelled listings with few if any bidders. If you can locate a misspelled listing, you can often snap up a real deal without competition from other bidders.

The key, of course, is figuring out how an item might be misspelled. Let's say you're looking for a bargain on a toaster. Instead of searching for *toaster*, you might search for *toster*, *toastter*, *toastor*, and *toester*. Give it a try—you'll be surprised what you find!

And here's a trick within a trick. You can include multiple misspellings in your search by using the "or" technique from Trick #55. In this example, you could enter the following query: (toaster,toaster,toastor,toester).

Even better, try the Fat Fingers website (www.fatfingers.com). Fat Fingers lets you enter a proper keyword, and then generates the common misspellings and uses them to conduct a more comprehensive eBay search. It's a neat little timesaver!

Trick #61: Vary Your Vocabulary—and Your Spelling**trapperjohn2000**

stores.ebay.com/Molehill-Group-Store

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

Misspelling aside, don't assume that everyone spells a given word the same way—or uses the same terminology. (A soda is a pop is a “coke,” depending on what part of the country you're from.) Also, don't forget about synonyms. What you call pink, someone else might call mauve or salmon. What's big to you might be large to someone else. Think of all the ways the item you're looking for can be described, and include as many of the words as possible in an “or” query. To use our soda pop example, you'd enter the following query: (soda,pop,coke).

Trick #62: “Birddog” Other Bidders**lludwig**

stores.ebay.com/LLudwig-Books

PowerSeller

Member since 1998, Feedback: Green star

The term “birddogging” refers to the act of following the auctions of another eBay bidder. Find a user that always gets great merchandise, then birddog his or her other auction activity. Chances are you'll find something you like, and then you can get in on the bidding, too. As eBay member **lludwig** says:

People who bid on one great item often have very good taste, and bid on others.

To birddog another member, you first have to find him, which is as easy as looking at the high bidder in a particular auction. Once you have a member identified, it's time to do the actual birddogging, using eBay's search function. Go to the Search page and click the Items by Bidder link. When the Items by Bidder page appears (shown in Figure 3.8), enter the bidder's user ID and click the Search button. (For the most possible results, you should also select the Even if Not the High Bidder option.) The results page lists all the other auctions your subject is bidding on, which amounts to your own personal shopping list. Bid away!

FIGURE 3.8

Use the Search by Bidder function to bird dog other users.

Trick #63: **Search for Last-Minute Bargains**

trapperjohn2000

Member since 1998, Feedback: Purple star

When you search the eBay listings, be sure to display the results with auctions ending today listed first. Scan the list for soon-to-end items with no bids or few bids, and pick off some bargains that have slipped others' attention.

Trick #64: **Save Your Searches**

abc-books

stores.ebay.com/ABC-Books-by-Ann

www.abcbooksbyann.com

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star



On the topic of repeating your searches, here's a trick that lets you save your favorite searches and repeat them with a click of the mouse.

eBay actually makes it quite easy to save even the most complex search queries, if you know what to click. All search results pages include an Add to Favorites link at the top right of the page. Click this link, and you'll see an Add to My Favorite Searches page. Check the Create a New Search option, give the search a name, and

click the Save Search button. This search is now saved and listed on the All Favorites page of My eBay.

To repeat this search, go to My eBay and click through to the All Favorites page, as shown in Figure 3.9. Your favorite searches are listed there; just click a search to execute the search.

All Favorites

My Favorite Searches (7 searches; 4 emails) [Add new Search](#)  

Show: [All](#) | [Searches](#) (7) | [Want It Now Searches](#) (0)

<input type="checkbox"/> Name of Search ▾	Search Criteria	Email Settings	Action
<input type="checkbox"/> batman (model,kit)	batman (model,kit) Sort: Ending First	272 days left (Last sent Nov-28-05)	Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> captain america (model,kit)	captain america (model,kit) Sort: Ending First		Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> dick tracy (model,kit)	dick tracy (model,kit) Sort: Ending First	92 days left (Last sent Nov-28-05)	Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> hulk (model,kit)	hulk (model,kit) Sort: Ending First		Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> oddjob (model,kit)	oddjob (model,kit) Sort: Ending First	92 days left (Last sent Nov-28-05)	Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> spider-man (model,kit)	spider-man (model,kit) Sort: Ending First		Edit Preferences ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> superman (model,kit)	superman (model,kit) Sort: Ending First	272 days left (Last sent Nov-28-05)	Edit Preferences ▾

Delete

Search items will be emailed to: @molehillgroup.com

FIGURE 3.9

Repeat any saved search from the All Favorites page of My eBay.

Trick #65: **Get Notification of New Items That Match Your Search**

abc-books

stores.ebay.com/ABC-Books-by-Ann

www.abcbooksbyann.com

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star

Here's an even better way to find out about new items that you're interested in. eBay can automatically notify you when new items that match your saved search come up for auction.

There are two ways to turn on email search notification. First, when you save your search, as described in Trick #64, you can click the **Email me daily** option. Second, you can navigate to the All Favorites page in My eBay and click the Edit Preferences link next to the search you want to be notified of. When the Edit

Favorite Search Preferences page appears, as shown in Figure 3.10, select the **Email Me Daily...** option, then pull down the list and select a duration. (Your options are for the notification service to last anywhere from 7 days to 12 months.)

Edit Favorite Search Preferences

Search Criteria
Items matching 'hulk (model,kit)'
Sort: Ending First

Search Name
hulk (model,kit)
30 characters maximum

Save Options
☒ Email me daily whenever there are new items for the following period: 6 months
Email notifications are a convenient way to see new listings you're interested in. [Learn more.](#)

FIGURE 3.10
Configuring eBay to send you search notification emails.

When you've activated this notification service, eBay will send you an email (one a day) when new items that match your search criteria come up for auction. The email contains links for each new item in your search (see Figure 3.11); click a link to open your web browser and display the matching item .

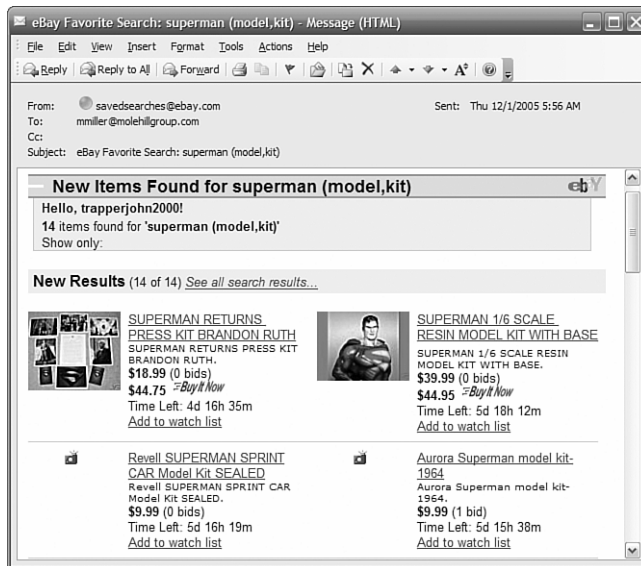


FIGURE 3.11
eBay sends you a daily email listing new items that match your search criteria.

Trick #66: Expand Your Search to eBay Stores**abc-books**

stores.ebay.com/ABC-Books-by-Ann

www.abcbooksbyann.com

PowerSeller

Member since 1999, Feedback: Red star

If you can't find an item for auction on eBay proper, you can opt to search items listed for sale in eBay Stores. You can sometimes find items for sale in eBay Stores that you can't find in eBay's normal auctions. All you have to do is go to the Search page and click the Items in Stores link, then conduct your search from there.

You can also expand a normal search to include eBay Stores items. Just scroll to the bottom of any search results page until you see the box labeled Get More Results in Other eBay Areas (shown in Figure 3.12). Click the See Additional Buy It Now Items link and you'll see a list of matching items from eBay Stores sellers.

Get more results in other eBay areas

- [See additional Buy It Now items](#) from eBay Store sellers. [Learn more.](#)
- [See all items](#) including those available from non-English speaking countries/regions.

FIGURE 3.12

Expand your search to eBay Store sellers.

Trick #67: Search for Items with Want It Now**New Trick****selling4-u**

stores.ebay.com/Selling-4-U-Consignment-Store

www.selling4-u.com

PowerSeller

Member since 2002, Feedback: Purple star

If you can't find what you're looking for anywhere on eBay, now there's a way to put your requests in front of compatible sellers. eBay's Want It Now feature lets you create a "wish list" of items you want to buy, even if they're not currently listed on eBay. Sellers will see your request and notify you if they have similar items for sale. You can then make a purchase, if you want.

To use Want It Now, click the Want It Now link on the eBay home page. This takes you to the main Want It Now page, as shown in Figure 3.13. Click the Post to Want

It Now button, and you see the Want It Now: Create a Post page, shown in Figure 3.14. Enter a description of the item you're looking for, then click the Post to Want It Now button. Then sit back and wait for interested sellers to contact you!

FIGURE 3.13

eBay's Want It Now page.

Want It Now: Create a Post [Help](#)

Tell millions of sellers what you're looking for and get responses emailed to you. It's **free**. Learn more about [Want It Now](#).

I am searching for

Tip: Be specific. Think of words sellers might use to search for your post.
55 characters left.

Describe it in more detail

Tip: Be as detailed as possible; specify brand, condition, color, size, price range, etc. See [examples](#).
500 characters left.

Category
Select a category...

Choose the **best category** to help sellers find your item.
If you prefer, you may specify a category number instead.

Picture (optional)

Important posting tips

- If you're very specific in your Want It Now post, you'll be about twice as likely to find what you want. See [examples](#).
- Don't include any contact information in your post (phone number, etc.). eBay will automatically email you if a seller responds.
- Don't list items you are selling. Want It Now is only for buyers seeking eBay items.
- View [Want It Now policies](#).

FIGURE 3.14

Entering your Want It Now request.