

Give Your International Sales Some Thought

A lot of sellers limit their sales by shipping only within the US. Maybe they had their share of bad experiences with international sellers and I know I have. After more than 20,000 transactions, I found almost 30% were shipped internationally. Along the way, there were more than a few unpleasant transactions. Here are a few tips we learned to protect sellers and improve the eBay experience.

When dealing with international PayPal payments, understand the difference between verified accounts and confirmed addresses. You will only be protected on international shipments if you ship to the confirmed PayPal address. Verified really doesn't matter. Therein lies the PayPal problem: most countries have severe restrictions on confirming addresses. PayPal uses the buyer's credit card billing address as confirmation. This is not too difficult for most English language countries but nearly impossible for members of the EU and all Asian countries. Even if you state in your auction shipping only to confirmed addresses, you'll still get buyers arguing that verified is the same thing. Remember, confirmed shipping to confirmed addresses.

There are a few countries that really have a fraud rate that warrants a blanket embargo: Belarus, Bulgaria, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Ghana, Ibadan, Ivory Coast, Lithuania, Macedonia, Nauru, Nigeria, Oshogbo, Osun, Oyo State, Romania, Russia, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. The few successful transactions you might have won't make up for the time wasted and auctions voided by fraud. Nothing personal here, just business.

A few other countries need a little consideration. Our sales to Singapore and Indonesia resulted in payments with fraudulent credit cards almost every time. The Nigerian forged money order scam bears mentioning. A high ticket auction is won and the seller receives a money order for far more than the auction price. Of course, the buyers are using a US address at first but ask the seller to deposit the check and send the overpayment back to them in Lagos, Nigeria. The counterfeit checks are so good that they won't be returned to your account for weeks after you have sent the money away. The latest variation is to use remailing services in Florida.

There are a few other countries in which fraud is not a problem but shipping is a great concern. Italy, for example, does not allow leather products through customs. Such items will simply disappear without notice to sender or receiver. Spain has quirky customs regulations as well as an unbelievably slow postal service.

All those warnings shouldn't scare sellers away from international sales. They are little things to be aware of before the auction. As stated in the first paragraph, approximately 30% of our sales are international. This is a significant income but not the only or most important reason. The purpose of the auction is to get the highest price for the seller. The major dynamic driving this process is the number of bidders. Even if the international bidders aren't the winners in your auction, they do drive the interest and prices higher.

Carefully tended international sales and shipping can be a major addition to a growing online business. Remember the trail to more and better international sales. Your next international bidder will have far more incentive to bid with you if your last international sale left great feedback. You can always turn good feedback to great with nicely worded reply to feedback you receive such as, "Another fantastic international buyer! Thanks."