

How To Use Ebay's "Pre-Approved Buyer" Function

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For sellers who constantly have to put up with bid snipers, non-paying bidders and other anti-social, timewasting buyers, eBay's "pre-approved buyer" feature is a godsend.

Pre-approving buyers lets you choose in advance who you're going to allow to bid: not by banning people you don't want, but by explicitly allowing people you do want. Anyone who is not on the pre-approved list will have to email you and ask you to let them bid.

While that might sound great, it's only really a good idea to do it on very, very high value items. After all, half the point of eBay is that it's such an open marketplace - if you're going to restrict bidding to a few people, why not just email them to offer the item?

Most buyers will be very upset if they come across an item that they need to be pre-approved to bid in. They almost certainly won't have heard of the rule before, and they'll think this "new feature" (it must be new if they've never heard of it, right?) is absolutely terrible. The one time I required pre-approval for an item, someone actually wrote to eBay to complain about the auction's format - as if eBay had nothing to do with letting me list that way! The chances are that almost no-one will ever email you asking to be included in the auction - they'll go somewhere else instead.

Of course, it'd be better if you could just require that bidders have a minimum feedback level, but then that might overly restrict the choices of new buyers, and make them less likely to buy anything to begin with. There's a delicate balance at play between trust and openness, and pre-approval tends to violate it. If one of your regular buyers wants to bid on your item only to find out they weren't pre-approved, the chances are they'll be more than a little offended at your lack of trust.

The only situations in which you might find an advantage in pre-approving bidders are if your auctions get consistently disrupted. Jokers sometimes bid millions because they think it's funny, or people bid high and then don't pay as a protest against whatever you're selling - this is a pain to deal with. Requiring approval makes sense on very high-ticket items simply because it shows the buyer is serious about wanting to buy.

Before you can restrict an item to pre-approved buyers, you have to list it and get an item number. You can then set up pre-approved bidding on this page:

<http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?PreApproveBidders>. From there on, it's a simple process - just type the usernames of the people whose bids you want to accept, and then keep checking your email.

Remember, though, that you don't need to restrict your auction to pre-approved bidders to keep people you don't like from bidding on your auctions. You can simply cancel these buyers' bids when they appear, and then use eBay's "block bidder" function to ban them from bidding on any of your auctions again. Edit your block list here:

<http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?bidderblocklogin>.

In the next email, we'll take a look at whether your eBay design is as effective as it could be.

