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What to Buy at Thrift Stores  
to Resell on eBay

As an eBay Power Seller since 2003, I have sold over 14,000 items. I have experimented with many, many, different products along the way. Most of my inventory comes from garage sales, thrift stores, and consignment stores. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your efforts. There is a strategy for getting the most out of your garage sale shopping efforts. Here are a few tips to help you maximize your efforts, and minimize your time investment.

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Secrets of Thrift Store Shopping
Many eBay sellers, including many of you listening, find your inventory at thrift stores. And some of you have contacted me after reading saying that before starting eBay, you had never been in a thrift store and don’t really know how to shop there. It can be overwhelming and confusing, especially if you shop in very large thrift stores. Thrift store shopping requires a lot of looking and rummaging, which can be tiring and time-consuming. And thrifting is not for everyone – the stores are often dirty, smell bad, or are in less desirable parts of town. You have to enjoy the thrill of the hunt for thrifting to work for you. So, if you’re new to thrifting, here are a few pointers to help you make the most of a visit to a thrift store.

**Pick the best time to go.** Thrifting requires energy and concentration. Plan to go when you are at your mental and physical best. My best time is in the morning when the store first opens.

**Be nice to the employees.** The people, who work in thrift stores are, as you can imagine, not usually paid very well. They may not be paid at all, as many thrift stores provide vocational training or rehabilitation services to people on some form of state aid. So be nice to them, just because it’s the right thing to do. If you visit a particular thrift shop, you may even find that making yourself known and building relationships with the employees pays off with more than just good karma — if you have particular interests or needs, employees will often pull aside things that might interest you, or hold them behind the counter until you can get to the bank to pull out money.

**Make the rounds.** Thrift stores tend to cluster together in areas with high traffic and low rent. Plan your trip to visit as many shops in the area as you have the time and energy to hit in one day. Different charities that operate the thrift stores and each tend to appeal to a different kind of donor. Therefore, each store will have different kinds of stock so keep that in mind when you are making your rounds. Some thrift stores concentrate on furniture while others are mostly clothes.

**Learn the sales and specials.** Many thrift stores run different kinds of specials, often offering discounts of 50%, 75%, or even more off their regular daily prices. In my area, one store has 50% off everything on the last Wednesday of the month; another has 50% off everything on Mondays, and one Saturday a month. My Goodwill stores have Senior Citizen day on Tuesdays and anyone 55 or over gets
25% off everything. Ask what’s on sale when you walk in. And if you find stores that offer a discount for seniors, see if you can find a neighbor, friend, or relative to go with you to help you get that discount. Also, find out if the thrift stores put ads in newspapers or community publications. I go to one thrift store that puts ads in a free paper, but it isn’t delivered, you have to pick one up at the grocery store. I never even knew about this until I saw all these other shoppers with coupons and asked where they were getting them. The coupon is for 50% off the entire purchase, with a $200 limit – so it is an incredible deal! Don’t be shy and ask the manager about coupons especially if you are new to the store, or the store has just opened in your area. Sign up for a mailing list if the store offers one.

Educate yourself on the charity running the thrift store. Some thrift stores are run for profit, so this doesn’t apply to them; for the rest, knowing who sponsors the store might provide valuable insight into what you’ll find there — or incentive to visit or NOT visit specific stores. Contrary to popular belief, most thrift stores do not exist to provide cheap items for low income people — they exist to raise money to support their organization’s missions. Here’s what a few of the major thrift store operators support:

1. **Goodwill Industries**: Provides vocational rehabilitation for the disabled.
2. **Salvation Army**: Offers shelter, food, job training, and spiritual guidance to the poor.

Many thrift stores are also run by churches and veterans’ groups; their goals are usually pretty clear. Some of the best thrift stores that I visit, other than the Goodwill, are run by churches in affluent neighborhoods. Just don’t be greedy when you go in there. They don’t really like the idea of eBayers raiding their stores to sell the donated items for profit. Some will even have signs to that effect. Just be casual about it and limit what you buy and respect that their church is trying to help the disadvantaged in the surrounding community.

Learn the layout of the store. Have you noticed that the different thrift stores arrange everything differently? In my area, Goodwill arranges all the clothing by gender, then by color. America’s Thrift arranges all the clothing by gender then by size. This can be good or bad depending on how you are shopping. For example, I never buy solid color RED clothing for women. It just doesn’t sell. So, at Goodwill I
can just skip the “red” sections in all the clothing categories. I can get thru the store pretty fast because I know what colors sell the best and I can concentrate on those. Then, at America’s Thrift, where everything is arranged by size, I can concentrate on the sections with the best selling sizes, say for example, women’s pants size 8-14. I try to find shortcuts where ever I can. Some stores have one shoe section with all the shoes together, others have the children’s shoes by the children’s clothing. Some have all the bedding in one linen section, others have baby and crib items in a baby section. So, learning the store layout will save you some time finding what you are looking for.

Know what you are shopping for and avoid impulse buying for yourself. This is a warning: don’t get carried away. Remember that you are shopping for items to sell for profit. Now I am not saying to NEVER buy anything for yourself. I was training a client on thrift store shopping and she spent the whole 2 hours getting distracted by all the things she wanted to buy for herself. She couldn’t separate shopping for her store from shopping for herself. If I need new clothes for myself or my kids, I go ahead and do my eBay shopping first, pay for those items, and take them out to the car. Then I go back into the store and shop for personal items. Sort of like separating business and pleasure. It just works better for me that way. I may pick out some things that I want to try on while I am doing the eBay shopping – but for some reason paying for the eBay store items and putting them in the car helps me separate my personal time from my business time in the store.

Also, remember that you don’t have to buy every single thing in the store that might sell on eBay. After almost 5 years selling on eBay, I have learned that it is never a matter of IF something will sell, but for how much. You want to concentrate on items that will sell for a high price and fairly quickly. The thrift store isn’t going anywhere, in fact, they seem to be multiplying. So remember that when you are out shopping. Try to only buy enough to work on for a few days, and then go back for more.

Learn the return policy, if there is one. The return policies are all different. Write them down somewhere. Some will take returns for store credit only, but within a certain timeframe. Some don’t take returns at all. Familiarize yourself with the return policy so you will know what your options are if you get home with something and discover it is damaged or you change your mind about selling it.
Don’t be afraid to leave empty-handed. Thrifting isn’t like other shopping, where you go in with a list of what you want, get it, and go. Thrifting is a scavenger hunt, where you can hope and dream about the Ultimate Bargain but have to expect not to find it. Half the fun is in the thrill of the hunt – not knowing what you will find each time. Thrifting is obviously not the most efficient or productive way to shop, so think of it as a time investment in your business.

Learn to shop by texture. Run your hand across the sweaters and avoid the cheap cottony kind, or the super thin acrylic ones. You want to feel thick wool, luxurious cashmere, and quality fabrics. With skirts and pants, you want wool, gabardine, or silk. I avoid most cotton pants and skirts because by the time those items have made it to the thrift store they have been washed so many times, most of them look like a used tissue. You can tell a lot about the quality of an item by feeling it – so you don’t have to look at every single item on the rack. Use your sense of touch.

Avoid certain colors of clothing. You’re going to save yourself some headaches with this tip. I avoid anything white, cream, off white, light khaki. I don’t care if it is NWT, I always find a stain, ink pen mark, dirt, or grease on it when I get home. I think the TS have trick lighting or something. I have had this happen so many times. It stands to reason that if an item of clothing has traveled from a store, to a person’s home, and to a TS, that is has picked up some dirt or other material. White and cream colored items show this dirt and it isn’t worth my time to clean it. So, I just skip that color family all together.

Look for classic styles. Learn to focus on items that are always in style and never go out of date. My favorites – Cashmere sweaters, wool blazers, black dress pants for women, black career skirts, dark colored men’s pants, blue jeans. Trendy can be a good seller, but I tend to err on the conservative side and stay with classic. I think about what would be in the LL Bean catalog – those are true classic styles that stand the test of time.

Examine the item closely. Are all the buttons present? Are all the seams intact? Look for stains, holes, or imperfections. Does it look true to size? Check shoes on the bottom for cracks in the soles. Also check the inside of the heels of shoes to see if holes have been worn from the foot rubbing the back of the shoe. Turn lined items inside out to inspect the linings. Turn shirts inside out to inspect the underarms and
the inside of the collar. Look for a content tag – if you don’t know what a garment is made of, you can’t tell your customer. If the item has a small defect, decide if it is worth your time to repair it or pay to have it repaired. Check zippers to make sure they work. Look in the pockets for tags – many times the item is unworn.

And a note on cashmere: even if you are 100% sure that an item is cashmere – don’t try to sell it without the content tag. If the previous owner has cut the label off, you don’t want to get into an argument with a potential customer about the content. Just pass it by. You will avoid a potential problem.

**What to Buy to Resell**

This is the question everyone wants answered. Below are items found at thrift stores that I have had good experiences with in the past. Remember, eBay is constantly evolving and trends will change. Continue to do your own research to stay in touch with the latest “hot” items on eBay. You can check the eBay Pulse for hot selling items. Click on the link to read more about the items that interest you.

**Clothing**

**Cashmere items**

**Bloch tap shoes** (girls and womens)

**Carly Patterson Gymnastic Leotards**

**Dale of Norway Sweaters**

**Dansko Clogs**

**Jamie Sadock Tennis and Golf Apparel**

**Men’s Blazers and Sport Coats**

**Rothschild Wool Coats**
Ralph Lauren Clothing

Children’s Clothing

Janie and Jack Clothing

Gymboree Clothing

Mini-Boden Clothing

Household

Hull Little Red Riding Cookie Jar

Hull Barefoot Boy Cookie Jar

Oreck Vacuum Cleaners

Vintage Character Bed Sheets

Office Items

Vintage Apple Computers (IIc models)

Vintage Calculators

Vintage Phones

Vintage Polaroid Cameras
**Kitchen Items**

- Anchor Hocking Fire King Items
- Calphalon cookware
- Vintage Griswold cast iron skillets
- Vintage Pyrex items
- Vintage Wilton cake decorating books

**Health and Beauty**

- Remington Tight Curls Hot Rollers – used for “pageant hair,” very good seller
- Other Vintage hot rollers

**Collectibles**

- American Girl doll clothes
- Fenton Glass
- Little Professor Calculator – Texas Instruments
- Mrs. Beasley Doll
- Snoopy Items
- Vintage Burger King Mugs
Vintage Dunkin Donuts Mugs

Vintage Fire King Mugs

Vintage Hello Kitty Items

Vintage Smurf Items

Vintage Strawberry Shortcake Items

Vintage Vinyl Records

Books

Collectible Magazines

Top 10 Out of Print Books

Vintage Beatrix Potter Books

Vintage Little Black Sambo Book

Vintage Richard Scarry Books

Vintage Time Life Books

Other

Anna Hindmarch “I’m Not a Plastic Bag” (look for these in retail stores, great to resell)

For more information on what to sell on eBay, how to market your eBay store, and how to make money selling on eBay, see my other eBooks in my store including:

- Items to Buy at Garage Sales to Resell on eBay for Profit
• The Stay-at-Home Moms Guide to Successful eBay Selling

• How to Make Money Selling Used Clothing on eBay

• How to Make Money Selling Gently Used Shoes on eBay

Please come join my free eBay discussion forum. We have several hundred eBay sellers sharing information, helping each other, and networking.

Check out my FREE eBay resource library, hosted through Yahoo Groups.

You may also want to subscribe to my eBay blogs:

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eBay Selling Coach

eBay Coach YouTube Video Blog

Happy Selling!

Suzanne Wells

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