

# eBay HACKS

*100 Industrial-Strength Tips & Tools*



O'REILLY®

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HACK  
#69

## Selling and Shipping Internationally

A few extra tools and tips to make shipping to customers in other countries go more smoothly.

*“Nothing so liberalizes a man and expands the kindly instincts that nature put in him as travel and contact with many kinds of people.” – Mark Twain, 1867*

With some practice, your international shipments will be nearly as easy as domestic ones. But it takes a little experience to know how to accept payments from customers in other countries, how to ship to other countries, and how to avoid fraud from deadbeats in other countries. Fortunately, the payoff is substantial: expanding your business to include bidders all around the world, while not without its risks, will make trading on eBay more interesting, more challenging, and more profitable.

### Accepting International Payments

When you send payment instructions to customers in other countries, there are a few considerations you’ll need to make in addition to those outlined in “Sending Payment Instructions” [Hack #66].

First, always keep the language barrier in mind. If your bidder’s native language is different from yours, keep your sentences short and avoid slang. Bidders in other countries expect you to write in your own language, but they will usually not have perfect command of it. If you find that the bidder is having a hard time understanding you, you can always try including a translation of your instructions, as described in “International Transactions Made Easier” [Hack #30]. Just make sure it’s placed alongside your original text in the email, so the bidder gets the complete picture.

Second, be patient. International transactions take longer, partly because of the delays caused by time zone differences and language barriers, and partly because sending payments internationally can be difficult and time consuming.

Finally, be extremely clear about the types of payments you can accept and the types you cannot. Here are some considerations when accepting payments from other countries:

**PayPal.** Buyers in nearly 50 countries around the world have access to PayPal, but only those in United States can confirm their addresses. This means that if you accept a payment from a non-U.S. customer, it won’t be covered by PayPal’s Seller Protection policy, explained in “Protect Yourself While Accepting Payments” [Hack #67].

**Credit cards.** The incidence of fraud among credit card payments made by non-U.S. bidders is unfortunately much higher than payments originating from the United States. For this reason, you may wish to impose a limit, either on the amount you'll accept or on the minimum feedback rating of customers from whom you'll take a credit card. If you contact your merchant account provider, they'll probably tell you the same thing; see “Streamlining Checkout and Payment” [Hack #75] for details.

**Payments by mail.** Any payment received by postal mail is subject to the terms imposed by your bank. Before you instruct an international bidder to mail you a money order, for instance, make sure your bank will accept payment, and try to determine if any additional fees will be incurred. In most cases, an international *postal* money order will be accepted without additional fees. But probably the best way is to use BidPay, introduced in “Send Payment Quickly and Safely” [Hack #29], which allows a buyer in one country to send a payment in the seller's native currency.

Although eBay does a fair job in converting currencies right on the auction page, the conversion rates they use are not necessarily the same as those used by the buyer's or seller's bank. To give your customers a more accurate estimate of how much they'll need to send you in their own native currency, contact your bank to get the latest exchange rates. Or use the Oanda Currency Converter at [www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic) for a quick estimate.

## Shipping to Other Countries

In many ways, shipping internationally is no different from shipping domestically. It just usually costs a lot more and takes a lot longer.

Most couriers offer a different assortment of shipping options for international shipments, all of which are explained on your courier's web site. Regardless of the courier or shipping option you choose, though, you'll need to include the appropriate customs forms:

**United States Postal Service (USPS).** Include customs form 2976 with all uninsured international packages, or form 2976-A (inside a 2976-E envelope) if you're insuring your package. You can get these forms at your local post office branch. Go to [ircalc.usps.gov](http://ircalc.usps.gov) for exclusions and restrictions.

**FedEx and UPS.** International shipments with these couriers require a commercial invoice, a generic form where you'll describe the individual contents of the package and specify their value and country of origin. Then, depending on the destination country, you'll need to include

three to five copies along with the original. Place all forms in a single clear pouch, the same kind as is used for shipping labels. You can download a blank commercial invoice form in Adobe Acrobat format from *ups.com* or *fedex.com* in their respective “international documents” sections.

It’s important to understand that somewhat different forms and procedures may be required for different countries. If you’ve never shipped to a particular country before, make sure to contact the courier and ascertain any restrictions or additional requirements that may apply your package. For example, according to UPS, no packages shipped to Mexico may contain any products made in China. And according to FedEx, packages to Canada require one original and five copies of the commercial invoice, packages to Puerto Rico require only three copies, while some other countries require only originals (no copies). In other words, there’s no hard-and-fast formula that applies in all situations.

## Denied Parties

If you really want to be on the safe side, you might also consider researching so-called “denied parties.” For example, FedEx offers the Denied Party Screening tool, which searches for your customer’s name among governmental lists of countries, individuals, companies, and other organizations that have had economic and trade sanctions imposed against them. You can try this out by going to [https://gtm.fedex.com/cgi-bin/gtm\\_dps.cgi](https://gtm.fedex.com/cgi-bin/gtm_dps.cgi).

## Expectation Management

When shipping internationally, take a moment to prepare your customers for any delays (expected or otherwise) that the package might encounter before it arrives. For example, the United States Postal Service web site ([www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)) estimates that a one-pound package sent from the U.S. to the United Kingdom via airmail parcel post will take anywhere from 4 to 10 days. In practice, however, it may take two or three times as long, given the delays imposed by customs and other unforeseen circumstances.

For this reason, a delivery that takes two weeks might be seen in two different lights, depending on what you’ve told the customer. If the customer expects the package in 10 days, then she’ll be disappointed, and you may be thanked with negative feedback for shipping too slowly. But if you say it will take a month, the recipient will be pleasantly surprised when it gets there in half the time. See “Expectation Management” [Hack #39] for more information.