

# Notes on using the spreadsheet

13 October 2009; revised 26 December 2009

Some of the pre-defined sorts are compound sorts to ensure that, where appropriate, the bidding information stays in the same order as appears on the auction primary Bid History page. The header cell(s) are colour highlighted to indicate on which principal field(s) the data is currently sorted.

**Sort Sellers x Auction:** Groups each seller's auctions chronologically with bidding information laid out as on the eBay Bid History page.

**Sort Bidders x Seller:** Groups bidders alphabetically against each seller. It is this sort that will expose the measure of a particular bidder's activity with a particular seller and whether or not he has won any auctions (if so, the alias is yellow backgrounded in the "WinBidder" column).

The "Seller" column is formatted bold face by default, and I enter new data as such. Then, using this sort I can check to see if any of the new (bold) records contain any bidders that have already appeared on other auctions by that seller; as I check off these new records I un-bold the seller's ID, and flag any bidders (I use an asterisk) that do have bid(s) on more than one auction from the seller.

No conclusion can be drawn from a single auction, and the inclusion of a seller in the list for the first time is by no means meant to be a criticism of that seller.

**Sort Bidders:** Groups all bidders alphabetically to enable you to see if a "flagged" bidder is bidding on any other sellers' auctions, and whether or not he wins any of those other auctions or is possibly only bidding elsewhere for the purpose of diluting the proportion of his own-auction activity. (I flag any appearances on other sellers' auctions with a double asterisk "\*\*".) This sort is not a perfect sort as these cells are sorted alphabetically and therefore the bidders' feedback values may not appear in correct "numerical" order. And, unfortunately, with eBay's devious masking of the bidding aliases there is no simple way of knowing if two identical aliases with identical feedback are indeed the same bidder: you must compare the individual Bid History Details pages to make that evaluation, and it may be that I get a little confused when trying to do this task, and that undoubtedly is eBay's intention—to obscure.

**Sort Description x Seller:** This sort will give you some chance of detecting if a previously "sold" unique item, in which you may have been interested, has been relisted by the same seller (assuming the seller uses the same description).

**Sort Buyer IDs x Seller:** Where feedback information is recorded, this sort will expose habitual "buyers" whose purchases may be the result of unsuccessful shill bidding or desperation marketing.

## Other Notes

When adding data to the spreadsheet, the "WinBidder" field for the record containing the "StartPrice" needs to be left blank to facilitate the sort putting that record in the correct order, otherwise, where a bidder makes a bid equal to the starting price, the record containing the "StartPrice" may appear out of alphabetical order.

If the winning bidder and the underbidder have equal value bids then there is no way to ensure that the winning bidder will appear above the underbidder as the sort is alphabetical and there is no simple way to identify which of the identical bids is the winning bidder in the "Bidders" column.

As the spreadsheet is required to be editable and sortable, it cannot be "locked" and so you should be careful not to alter the "formatting" of any cell(s) as this may affect the integrity of the sorting. Also, a superfluous word space on the end of a text string will affect its sorting.

## In summary

Some of the asterisk-flagged bidders here listed may well be genuine bidders who are simply interested in multiple items from that one seller. Where their bids are habitually at the lower "no intent to win" end of the scale, it's also possible that they may even be other sellers' shills diluting their own-auction bidding percentage.

The analysis would be even more revealing if the bidder's number of "Bids on this item" was also included adjacent to each Bidder, but that entails too much additional work. Even programmatically it can be problematical as the eBay system will allow only measured access to its API.

The shame of it all is that today there is more fun to be had poking a stick at the unscrupulous eBay managing executives than can be had trying to buy (or sell) anything on eBay.