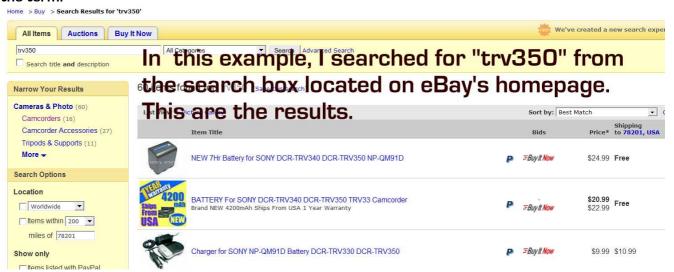# Empirical Study #1: eBay's "Best Match"
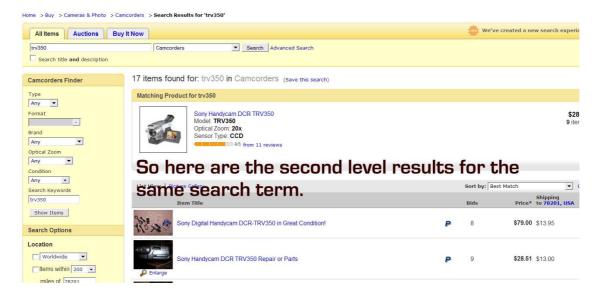
By DJ, a.k.a. "The eBay Pirate"

Hypothesis: eBay's search engine is flawed. "Best Match" makes it harder to find items they way a random, non-technical bidder typically searches for items on eBay.

Methodology: Take two keywords from a title of a particular listing and analyze how difficult it is to find the listing that those keywords came from the given "Best Match" results. Various combinations of title keywords will be searched for, but the search is limited to two words, because most users only use two words when searching for an item.

We are going to be searching for key terms in the listings title. In the screen capture below I entered a search term "trv350" and received the following result. This will be called a "top" level search, as this searched all categories on eBay for the term.

I want to analyze the results from second level searches. In the following screen capture, I clicked on the category "camcorders". I'm making the assumption that someone looking for a camcorder would be wise enough to search in the "camcorder" category.

So we go down to this second level and view the results. This is the page that we are going to analyze. I want to know if our target listings are viewable and if they are viewable, how far down they are.

If possible I'd like a screen capture of at least some results, but that's optional. Screen capture is the print-screen key on the keyboard, and that image can be pasted in Paint, or directly into a Word document. If you do not have Microsoft Word available, Openoffice is a free alternative available at OpenOffice.org. The preferred method of returning results is via spreadsheet in Excel 4.0 format or later. Text results in a table, for example, in a Word document, are also acceptable.

I'm looking for volunteers who can perform 15 searches twice per day for 10 days. It is important not to miss any searches if possible. Data will be aggregated so a missed time will not invalidate results, but the fewer missed searches, the better. The more volunteers the better as well. Even if a volunteer is only able to perform a few searches, the data is still relevant and should be recorded and reported.

The reason I am looking to spread this around the Internet, is because eBay uses Geo-Coding, and I want to the experiment to simulate real world searches, that is, random searches from random locations.

10 items will be auction-style listings.

5 items will be fixed-price listings.

The beginning and ending times are unimportant for this study at this time. Items will be selected when a sufficient number of volunteers are found.

Here is the information I need on each search term, in an example grid. Remember to indicate AM or PM.

Are you	Time / Date of	Found? Y/N	Page found on	How many

signed in?	Search		(1st, 2nd, etc?)	listings down from top?

This is an admittedly small sample size, however, I postulate that these results will hold true for any item due to the randomness of the individual events. The experiment will be re-run at a later date and the results compared.

Once I have a suitable number of volunteers, I will send the volunteers a randomly selected sample of eBay listing numbers and search terms taken from the listings.

Volunteers will be asked to follow these procedures for each listing.

Go to eBay.com homepage.
Click on the Search Box
Enter their first assigned search terms.
Record the requested information (time, if found, location from top, etc)
Return to eBay homepage and repeat for remaining search terms.

A volunteer will be able to confirm that they have located the target listing by verifying the item number. It's important that volunteers not simply enter a listing number, as doing so will always direct them to that listing. Also, you do not need to be signed into eBay to conduct the search. I will leave that choice up to you, but please record if you are signed in or not.

Results may then be submitted via email to the eBay Pirate for analysis and publication via YouTube and in PDF format on GoGetYourCash.com. The raw data may also become available.

As always, your contact information will be held in confidence. In fact, you may create a separate email account to correspond with me if you wish. I hope you can be a part of this study, and if it receives some support, I will conduct future studies and share the results.

To signup, simply email me at the email below. I will respond with the target listings and instructions when a suitable number of volunteers are available.

Financial contributions are also gladly accepted :>)!

Sincerely,

DJ, The eBay Pirate
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