

Shopify vs eBay: Which Is Better For Sellers?

At first glance, Shopify and eBay look like competitors: both let you sell products online, and sellers constantly ask which one is "better." But they are fundamentally different kinds of tools, and comparing them is less like choosing between two cars and more like choosing between renting a stall in a busy marketplace and building your own shop on a quiet street. eBay hands you an enormous, ready-made crowd of buyers but takes a sizable cut of every sale and never lets you truly own the customer. Shopify charges almost nothing per sale and gives you a store you fully control, but it sends you no customers at all, you have to bring them yourself.

This guide compares Shopify and eBay across the things that actually determine which is right for you: startup and ongoing costs, per-sale fees, where your audience comes from, and ultimately your profitability. You will find realistic worked examples showing how the same sale plays out very differently on each platform, and a clear framework for choosing, or, as many successful sellers do, using both. Everything reflects each platform's structure as of mid-2026; fees and pricing change, so verify current rates before deciding.

Key takeaways

- **eBay charges high per-sale fees (~13.6% plus a per-order fee) but gives you free traffic;** Shopify charges low fees (~2.9% + 30¢ processing, no commission) but gives you no traffic.
- **The fee gap is real but misleading:** Shopify's low fees are offset by the marketing cost of acquiring customers, often more than eBay's fee on a cold first sale.
- **eBay has near-zero fixed costs** (pay only when you sell); **Shopify has fixed monthly costs** (subscription, apps, domain) whether you sell or not.
- **The deepest difference is ownership:** on eBay you rent access to buyers you never keep; on Shopify you own the customer, the data, and the brand, which transforms long-term profitability through repeat sales.
- **Neither is universally "better."** eBay wins for starting out, one-off/used/niche items, and low volume; Shopify wins for building a brand, repeat customers, and scaling. Many sellers use both.

1. Platform Overview

The clearest way to understand these platforms is the distinction between **renting** and **owning**.

eBay is a marketplace, you rent space in it. When you list on eBay, you place your product inside a vast, established shopping destination that around 135 million active buyers already visit with intent to purchase. You do not have to attract those people; they are

already there, searching. In exchange, eBay takes a significant cut of every sale, controls the experience, and keeps the customer relationship, buyers think of themselves as eBay customers, not yours. It is low-commitment and instant: you can list an item in minutes and reach a national or global audience the same day, with no monthly cost and no marketing required.

Shopify is a store builder, you own what you make with it. Shopify gives you the software to build your own branded online store, your own domain, your own checkout, your own customer list. There is no marketplace crowd; the platform charges you very little per sale, but it sends you zero traffic. Every visitor must come from your own marketing: ads, social media, search, email. In return, you own everything: the brand, the customer data, the relationship, and the ability to sell to those customers again and again. It is higher-commitment, you pay monthly whether you sell or not, and you must build your own audience, but you are building a genuine business asset rather than renting access to someone else's.

That single contrast, rent an audience versus build your own, drives every other difference in this guide. eBay optimizes for instant access and low commitment at the cost of high fees and no ownership. Shopify optimizes for control, ownership, and low per-sale cost at the price of fixed overhead and the burden of finding your own customers. Neither is "better" in the abstract; they are suited to different sellers, products, and stages. The rest of this guide quantifies the trade-off.

At a glance

Dimension	eBay	Shopify
What it is	Marketplace (rent space)	Store builder (own your shop)
Traffic	Built-in (~135M buyers)	You drive it all
Per-sale fee	~13.6% + per-order fee	~2.9% + 30¢ (no commission)
Fixed cost	Near \$0	\$39+/month
Customer ownership	No (eBay's customers)	Yes (yours)
Branding control	Minimal	Total
Best for	One-off, used, niche; quick sales	Brands, repeat customers, scaling
Time to first sale	Fast (instant audience)	Slower (build traffic first)

Control, ownership, and platform risk

Beyond costs and traffic, there is a difference in *control and risk* that matters more than beginners expect. On eBay, you operate inside someone else's house and by their rules. eBay sets the policies, the look of your listings, the fee structure, and the dispute process, and it can change any of them, or suspend your account, with little recourse. Your store's fate is partly in eBay's hands, and because the customers are eBay's, a suspension can cut you off from your entire buyer base overnight. The upside is that eBay also handles the hard infrastructure (traffic, trust, payments, much of the dispute resolution) so you carry less operational burden.

On Shopify, you own the house. You control the branding, the rules, the checkout, the customer data, and no marketplace can suspend your storefront or change your fees out from under you (though you still must follow payment-processor and legal rules). That ownership is powerful: your store and customer list are durable assets you can grow, sell, or take elsewhere. The flip side is total responsibility, you handle traffic, trust-building, customer service, and problem-solving yourself, with no marketplace safety net. In short, eBay offers less control but less burden and platform risk you don't fully control; Shopify offers full control and ownership but places every responsibility, and every reward, on you.

2. Costs

The two platforms have opposite cost structures, and understanding this is the first step in choosing.

eBay: low fixed cost, pay as you sell. Opening an eBay account is free. You get a monthly allotment of free listings, and beyond the per-sale fees (covered next), there is no required monthly cost to sell. An optional eBay Store subscription (ranging from a few dollars to a few hundred per month) lowers your fees and adds tools once you sell in volume, but you do not need it to start. In practice, you can launch on eBay for **essentially \$0** and only pay when you actually make a sale. This makes eBay extraordinarily low-risk to start: no overhead, no commitment, no cost if you sell nothing.

Shopify: fixed monthly cost, regardless of sales. Shopify is a subscription business. To run a real storefront you will pay:

- **Subscription:** about \$39/month (Basic), up to \$105 (Grow), \$399 (Advanced), or \$2,300+ (Plus).
- **Domain:** roughly \$10-\$20/year for a custom web address.
- **Theme:** free options exist, or a one-time \$150-\$400 for a premium theme.
- **Apps:** from \$0 to \$50/month for a lean store, often \$50-\$200+ as you grow.

Crucially, **you pay these whether or not you sell anything.** A Shopify store costs you money every month from day one, which means it carries fixed overhead that eBay does

not.

Cost element	eBay	Shopify
Cost to open	Free	Subscription required (\$39+/mo)
Monthly fixed cost	\$0 (optional Store sub)	\$39-\$2,300+ plus apps
Domain	Included (eBay URL)	~\$10-\$20/year (custom)
Pay if you don't sell?	Nothing	Full monthly cost
Startup cost	Near \$0	~\$50-\$300+ to launch

The implication is clear: **eBay's costs are variable (you pay only when you sell), while Shopify's are fixed (you pay to keep the lights on).** For a beginner testing an idea or selling occasionally, eBay's zero-overhead model is far less risky. For a committed business with steady volume, Shopify's fixed cost is easily absorbed, and is the price of owning your store. But remember: this fixed-cost comparison is only part of the story, because Shopify's real spending is in marketing, which we will get to.

3. Fees

On per-sale fees, Shopify wins decisively, and it is not close.

eBay's fees are what you pay for access to its marketplace. For most categories, eBay charges a **final value fee of about 13.6%** of the total sale (including shipping), **plus a per-order fee** of \$0.30 (orders \$10 or less) or \$0.40 (orders over \$10). Payment processing is included. Some categories run higher (books and media ~15%, collectibles ~15%) or lower (a few like guitars ~6%). If you advertise with Promoted Listings, those fees stack on top. So eBay's take on a typical sale is roughly **14% or more.**

Shopify's fees are just payment processing, there is no marketplace commission, because there is no marketplace. With Shopify Payments, you pay about **2.9% + 30¢ per transaction on Basic** (dropping to 2.7%, 2.5%, and ~2.15% on higher plans). That is the entire per-sale fee. (Use a third-party gateway instead of Shopify Payments and Shopify adds a 0.5%-2% surcharge, which is why most stores use Shopify Payments.)

Worked fee comparison (\$50 sale):

- **eBay:** $13.6\% \times \$50 = \6.80 , plus \$0.40 = **\$7.20** (14.4% of the sale)
- **Shopify:** $2.9\% \times \$50 = \1.45 , plus \$0.30 = **\$1.75** (3.5% of the sale)

On fees alone, Shopify keeps **\$5.45 more** on that \$50 sale, every single time. Across hundreds of sales, that difference is enormous. If fees were the whole story, Shopify would

win in a landslide.

But fees are *not* the whole story, and this is the single most important thing to understand in this comparison. eBay's higher fee is not just a fee, it is the **price of the traffic** eBay sends you. Shopify's tiny fee reflects that it sends you **no traffic at all**. So comparing fees in isolation is like comparing the rent on two shops while ignoring that one comes with a constant stream of customers and the other sits on an empty street. To compare fairly, we have to bring in the cost of getting customers, which is the next section.

4. Traffic Sources

This is the heart of the comparison, because where your customers come from determines what your "cheap" or "expensive" platform actually costs.

eBay brings the traffic. eBay's roughly 135 million active buyers are already on the platform, searching for products with genuine intent to buy. When you list, you tap into that existing demand immediately, no ads, no audience-building, no marketing budget required. This is what your ~13.6% fee buys: instant access to a huge, motivated, ready-to-purchase audience. The trade-offs are that you compete directly with other sellers on the same search results page, you have limited control over branding, and, critically, **you do not own those customers**. They are eBay's. You generally cannot email them, retarget them, or build a direct relationship; each sale is largely a one-off, and to sell to that buyer again you typically pay eBay's fee all over again.

Shopify makes you build the traffic. Shopify provides the store but not a single visitor. You must drive all your own traffic through paid ads (Meta, Google, TikTok), search/SEO, social media, content, and email. The defining cost here is **customer acquisition cost (CAC)**, what you spend in marketing to get one customer, which across ecommerce commonly runs **\$45-\$175**, with ad spend frequently consuming 20-35% of revenue. That is the price of Shopify's low fees: you save on commission but pay to acquire every customer yourself.

But Shopify's traffic model has a decisive long-term advantage: **you own the customer**. Every buyer becomes part of your email list, your data, your audience. You can market to them again at almost no cost, build repeat purchases, and grow a brand people return to directly. Where eBay rents you a customer for one transaction, Shopify lets you acquire a customer once and sell to them repeatedly, which, as we will see, transforms the economics over time.

So the real comparison is not "13.6% vs 3%." It is:

- **eBay:** high per-sale fee, **free traffic**, no customer ownership, one-off sales.
- **Shopify:** low per-sale fee, **traffic you must pay for**, full customer ownership, repeatable sales.

eBay's fee is its traffic cost, bundled in. Shopify unbundles it: cheap platform, separate (and often larger) marketing cost. Which comes out ahead depends entirely on how efficiently you can acquire customers and how often they buy again, the subject of profitability.

5. Profitability

Now we put fees, traffic costs, and customer ownership together to see which platform actually makes you more money. The answer flips depending on the situation, which is why this comparison is so often misunderstood.

The single cold sale: eBay often wins

Consider selling a \$50 item with \$15 cost of goods and \$5 shipping.

On eBay (traffic is free, fee is high):

- $\$50 - \$7.20 \text{ fee} - \$15 \text{ COGS} - \$5 \text{ shipping} = \mathbf{\$22.80 \text{ profit}}$, with no marketing cost.

On Shopify, to a cold customer acquired through ads (low fee, but you paid to get them). Say acquiring this customer cost \$15 in ad spend:

- $\$50 - \$1.75 \text{ processing} - \$15 \text{ COGS} - \$5 \text{ shipping} - \$15 \text{ CAC} = \mathbf{\$13.25 \text{ profit}}$.

On this single cold sale, **eBay actually wins**, because the cost of acquiring a brand-new customer through ads (\$15) exceeds eBay's fee (\$7.20). This is the part beginners miss: Shopify's low fees do not automatically mean higher profit, because you have replaced the fee with a marketing cost that can be larger, especially for cold traffic that has never heard of you.

The repeat customer: Shopify wins decisively

Now consider what happens when that same customer buys again. On eBay, you do not own the customer, so a second sale means paying the full ~\$7.20 fee again, and you may not even reach them. On Shopify, you already own that customer, they are on your email list, so a repeat sale costs essentially **nothing** to generate:

Shopify repeat sale (no new acquisition cost):

- $\$50 - \$1.75 \text{ processing} - \$15 \text{ COGS} - \$5 \text{ shipping} = \mathbf{\$28.25 \text{ profit}}$.

That is more than the eBay sale *and* far more than the cold Shopify sale. So the picture is:

Scenario	Profit on \$50 sale
eBay (always pays full fee)	\$22.80
Shopify, cold/first sale (with CAC)	\$13.25
Shopify, repeat sale (owned customer)	\$28.25

Lifetime value is the real story

This is why customer ownership matters so much. Imagine a customer who buys four times over their relationship with you:

- **On eBay:** you pay the ~\$7.20 fee on all four sales ($4 \times \$22.80 = \91.20 total profit), and you have no direct relationship to encourage those repeat purchases in the first place.
- **On Shopify:** you pay CAC once on the first sale (\$13.25 profit), then three repeat sales at \$28.25 each ($3 \times \$28.25 = \84.75), totaling **\$98 profit**, and you built a brand and an audience asset along the way.

The more a customer buys again, the more decisively Shopify wins, because you pay to acquire them once and profit richly on every subsequent sale, while eBay charges you its full fee forever and never lets you build the relationship. For products with repeat purchase potential (consumables, fashion, anything with brand loyalty), Shopify's model is far more profitable over time. For one-off, used, or niche items a customer buys once and never again, eBay's free traffic and lack of fixed costs often win.

Margin context

In aggregate, well-run Shopify (DTC) brands typically net 10–20% after all costs including marketing, and the best exceed that, precisely because owned, repeat customers raise lifetime value above acquisition cost. eBay sellers operate on the per-sale math above: a clean ~14% fee, no marketing spend, but no compounding customer base. The platform that maximizes *your* profit depends on your product (one-off vs repeat), your ability to acquire customers efficiently, and your time horizon (a quick sale vs building a brand).

6. FAQ

Is Shopify or eBay better for beginners?

eBay is usually the easier, lower-risk start: it is free to open, costs nothing if you don't sell, and brings built-in buyers, so you can begin with no marketing budget or audience. Shopify requires a monthly subscription and, harder still, the ability to drive your own traffic, which is a steeper learning curve. Many sellers start on eBay to learn and generate cash, then add Shopify once they have a product and brand worth building.

Which has lower fees, Shopify or eBay?

Shopify, by far, on a per-sale basis. Shopify charges about 2.9% + 30¢ in payment processing with no marketplace commission, while eBay charges roughly 13.6% plus a per-order fee. On a \$50 sale that is about \$1.75 on Shopify versus \$7.20 on eBay. But eBay's higher fee includes the traffic it sends you, whereas Shopify's low fee does not, so you must add your own marketing costs to compare fairly.

Does Shopify or eBay cost more to start?

eBay costs almost nothing to start, the account is free and you pay only when you sell. Shopify has fixed monthly costs from day one (a subscription of \$39+, plus a domain, possibly a theme and apps), so it costs more upfront and keeps costing whether or not you make sales. eBay's costs are variable; Shopify's are fixed.

Where will I get more customers?

It depends on your effort and budget. eBay gives you immediate access to about 135 million active buyers with no marketing, but you compete with other sellers and don't keep those customers. Shopify gives you no built-in audience, you must attract every visitor through ads, content, and social, but the customers you acquire are yours to keep and remarket to. eBay is faster for instant traffic; Shopify is better for building an owned audience.

Which is more profitable?

It depends on your product and time horizon. For one-off sales and used or niche items, eBay is often more profitable because its free traffic beats paying to acquire a cold customer. For products people buy repeatedly, Shopify wins over time, because you pay to acquire a customer once and then profit on every repeat sale at near-zero marketing cost, while eBay charges its full fee on every transaction forever.

Can I sell on both Shopify and eBay at the same time?

Yes, and many successful sellers do. A common strategy is to use eBay for reach, liquidation, and one-off or used items (tapping its built-in traffic) while using Shopify to build a brand, capture repeat customers, and own the relationship. Listing tools can sync inventory across both. Running both lets you capture eBay's instant audience and Shopify's long-term ownership simultaneously.

Do I own my customers on eBay?

Generally no. Buyers on eBay are eBay's customers, you typically cannot email or directly remarket to them, and each sale is largely a one-off. This is a key limitation: to sell to the same buyer again, you usually pay eBay's fee again and have little ability to build a direct relationship. On Shopify, by contrast, you own your customer list and data outright.

Which is better for building a brand?

Shopify, clearly. You control the entire experience, your domain, design, checkout, packaging, and customer communication, so you can build a recognizable brand and a loyal, repeat audience. eBay's standardized marketplace gives you little branding control; your listing looks much like every competitor's, and buyers rarely remember which seller they bought from.

What products are better suited to each?

eBay excels for used, vintage, collectible, niche, and one-off items that benefit from its search-driven, intent-rich audience, and for anything you want to sell quickly with no marketing. Shopify excels for branded, new, repeat-purchase products (consumables, fashion, specialty goods) where you can build a brand and a returning customer base worth the marketing investment.

Should I move from eBay to Shopify?

Not necessarily move, often add. eBay remains valuable for reach and quick sales even after you launch a Shopify store. The natural progression is to start on eBay (low risk, instant traffic), validate your products and build cash flow, then launch Shopify to capture repeat customers and build a brand, running both channels rather than abandoning the one that still brings free traffic.

Which lets me start selling faster?

eBay, by a wide margin. Because the audience is already there, you can list an item and make a sale the same day with no marketing. On Shopify, even after you build the store, you still have to attract your first visitors through ads, content, or social, which takes time and usually money. If speed to first sale matters most, eBay wins; if building something lasting matters more, Shopify's slower start pays off later.

Is one platform cheaper overall?

It depends on volume and repeat purchases, not just the fee rate. At low volume or for one-off sales, eBay is usually cheaper overall because it has no fixed costs and you pay nothing to acquire customers. At higher volume with repeat customers, Shopify becomes cheaper per sale over time, because its low fees and owned, re-marketable audience beat paying eBay's full fee on every transaction forever. Map your expected volume and repeat rate before deciding which is truly cheaper for you.

7. Conclusion

So, Shopify or eBay, which is better for sellers? The honest answer is that they are built for different jobs, and the right choice depends on what you sell, how you sell it, and what you are trying to build. eBay is a marketplace you rent: near-zero cost to start, instant access to

roughly 135 million ready buyers, and no marketing required, paid for with a high per-sale fee (~13.6% plus a per-order fee) and the fact that you never own the customer. Shopify is a store you build: tiny per-sale fees (~2.9% + 30¢, no commission) and complete control and ownership, paid for with fixed monthly costs and the full burden of driving your own traffic.

The mistake to avoid is judging the two on fees alone. Shopify's fees are a fraction of eBay's, but that gap is deceptive, because eBay's fee includes the traffic it delivers, while Shopify's does not. Once you account for the cost of acquiring customers, a single cold sale can actually be *more* profitable on eBay, while a repeat sale to an owned customer is far more profitable on Shopify. That is the real trade-off: eBay rents you an audience transaction by transaction, while Shopify lets you build an audience you own and profit from again and again. The more your customers come back, the more Shopify's model pays off; the more your sales are one-offs, the more eBay's free traffic and zero overhead win.

For most sellers, the smartest answer is not either/or but both, in sequence or in parallel. Start on eBay to sell immediately with no risk, learn the ropes, and generate cash from its built-in audience. Then, as you find products worth building around, launch a Shopify store to capture repeat customers, own your data, and grow a real brand, while keeping eBay as a channel for reach and one-off items. Use eBay for what it does best (instant traffic, low commitment) and Shopify for what it does best (ownership, branding, repeat business), and you stop choosing between the two platforms and start letting each do the job it was designed for.

Platform fees, costs, and audience figures reflect each platform's structure as of mid-2026 and change over time; exact costs depend on category, plan, business model, product, and marketing approach. Always verify current rates in eBay Seller Hub and on Shopify's pricing page before deciding. This guide is general educational information, not financial advice.