

Selling on online marketplaces

Advice for UK sellers



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Contents

Summary	2
1. Advertising items for sale	3
Refunds and returns	3
Who pays for returns?	3
2. Packaging your items	4
Addressing	4
Packaging	4
Posting fragile items	5
Restricted and prohibited items	6
3. Posting your items	7
Responsibility for safe delivery	7
Parcel size, weight, and postage fees	8
Proof of postage or proof of delivery?	8
Insurance	9
4. If something goes wrong	10
The buyer didn't pay for the item	10
The buyer said they didn't receive the item	10
The buyer said the item arrived late	11
The buyer said the item arrived damaged	11
The buyer wants to return the item but I don't offer returns	11
The buyer refuses to pay return costs	12
The buyer said they returned the item but I didn't receive it	12
The buyer returned the item but it was damaged	12
5. Growing your business	13
6. For further assistance	13

Summary

This guide is designed to help you when selling items on online marketplaces such as eBay, Amazon Marketplace and Gumtree.

This advice is primarily aimed at people selling goods online as a private individual, rather than businesses. And we provide advice for private sellers thinking of growing their business and what new rules may apply.

Here is a quick checklist of things to be aware of when selling on online marketplaces, with more detailed advice on each step in the following sections.

Advertising items for sale

- Does your description of the item and any photographs used an accurate reflection of its condition?
- Have you checked the refunds and returns policy of the marketplace you're using?
- Will you offer returns? If you do offer returns, have you specified who will pay the return postage costs?



Packaging your items

- Have you packed your item safely and securely? Is the address clear?
- Is the item you are sending restricted or prohibited by your chosen parcel delivery company?
- Have you taken any photos of the final packaging in case of a dispute over damage?



Posting your items

- Have you checked if the online marketplace has policies around how quickly you need to post your items?
- Have you got proof of the date you posted your item?
- If you are posting a high value item, have you bought insurance?
- Will you get proof of delivery for your item?

1. Advertising items for sale

When describing items for sale, as a private seller, you must ensure that the goods you are selling match their description and any photographs used. For example, if you list an item as “like new” it cannot be faulty or damaged, and you cannot use photographs of a new or undamaged item to advertise a second hand product.

Refunds and returns

As a private seller, you have to offer a refund if the item is not as described. Unlike online purchases from businesses, buyers do not have a 14 day ‘cooling off’ period within which they are able to return an item for any reason. Even though you don’t legally have to do so, many private sellers do accept returns as listings with clear returns processes tend to sell better than those which do not accept returns.¹

Some online marketplaces will have additional restrictions over what can and cannot be returned so it is important that you check this before you decide which marketplace you want to use.



Who pays for returns?

Most online marketplaces specify that the buyer pays for return costs, unless the item is faulty, in which case you would pay the costs of return postage.

However, different online marketplaces will have different policies on paying return costs so it is important to make sure you are happy with these before posting your item for sale.

¹ Ebay, [How to handle returns](#)

2. Packaging your items

Addressing

Items should be clearly addressed to make it easier for the parcel delivery company to deliver to the correct address. When sending items within the UK you should:

- Place the buyers name and address in the bottom left corner of the parcel
- Make sure the address can be read easily - consider printing the address label if your handwriting isn't clear
- Make sure to use a pen or ink that is clear against the colour of the parcel
- Place the correct postage on the top right
- Include a return address, usually on the back of the parcel, so that your item can be sent back to you if the buyer needs to return the item or the parcel operator is unable to deliver it

Packaging

You are responsible for your items arriving to your buyer in the same condition they left you. It is therefore important to consider the journey your item needs to take and that the packaging you use is appropriate.

You should think about things like the distance your item is travelling, whether the buyer has requested the item to be left outside if they are not home, or whether your item is fragile when deciding on the most appropriate packaging.

In particular, be aware of issues with:

- Reusing old packaging, which becomes weaker after every use.
- Using gift ribbons or string when wrapping your item, as these can get caught in parcel sorting machines causing damage or delay.

- Wrapping your item as a gift, or signalling that the contents are valuable could make the package more attractive to thieves, especially if left outside if your buyer is not at home.



Posting fragile items

The parcel sorting process is usually done by machines, so your item needs to be securely packaged. Packages may also sometimes need to be stacked so should be able to withstand reasonable downwards pressure.

If your item is extremely fragile, you should write this on the package, or use a 'fragile' or 'handle with care' sticker to alert staff that the item could be easily damaged.

Making sure your item is packaged appropriately is your responsibility, and it may be difficult to claim compensation for damage during delivery if you have not taken adequate measures to protect your item. If problems do occur, evidence of appropriate packaging may help you resolve the issue so it may be useful to take a photo of how you item was packaged and addressed before posting.

Be sure to check your chosen parcel delivery company's policies on fragile items, as some will not accept any responsibility for the damage of particular types of items such as glassware or musical instruments.



Restricted and prohibited items

As a seller, it is your responsibility to check whether the item you are sending is restricted or prohibited. Failure to comply with the correct rules could result in prosecution.

Prohibited items are things which can under no circumstances be sent via post.

Restricted items can be sent in the post, but need to comply with specific packaging guidelines

The rules over what is restricted or prohibited can vary depending on which delivery company you choose and whether you are sending to a UK address or internationally so it is important that you check the policies of your chosen parcel delivery company.

3. Posting your items

Unless you agree otherwise, it is your responsibility to arrange delivery of sold items to buyers within a reasonable timeframe. Although you might want to post items as soon as possible, you may wish to wait until you have received payment before sending an item to a buyer.

If a buyer has let you know that they need the item for a particular date, you must ensure that their items are received by that date or you will need to provide them with a refund.

Responsibility for safe delivery

Unless your buyer is collecting the item or has agreed to arrange their own delivery of items, you are usually responsible for the goods until the buyer receives them.

This means that if anything goes wrong with delivery, and the item arrives late or is damaged, it is up to you to resolve the problem. This could mean providing a refund to a buyer if the item did not arrive, or sending them a suitable replacement, if you have one.

If an item has been damaged or lost in the post, as long as the item is adequately packaged and insured, you will be able to make a claim for compensation with the parcel delivery company.

Resolving a compensation claim could take some time and online marketplaces may have their own policies about the speed with which you need to process a refund. You will need to check this to make sure you do not go over this time limit while waiting for a refund from the parcel delivery company.

Parcel size, weight, and postage fees

Different parcel delivery companies have different size and weight restrictions on the goods that they deliver, so it is worth checking their websites or contacting them directly if you are unsure. Different delivery companies will also charge different fees depending on the size and weight of your item, so it is worth checking a few to make sure you are getting the best price.



Proof of postage or proof of delivery?

When you have posted your item, it is a good idea to get proof of postage such as a receipt to prove the date that you posted the item. This will help you in any dispute over late delivery.

Proof of postage will not help you if the buyer claims never to have received the item. To prove that the buyer did receive the item you need proof of delivery. This is evidence provided by the parcel delivery company that the parcel was safely delivered to the specified address, and may also include the signature of the person who took delivery of the parcel.

Proof of postage is normally free of charge, but proof of delivery costs extra as you'll need to choose a delivery service that is either signed for or tracked.

It may be difficult to obtain proof of delivery when sending an item internationally, so in this case it is worth checking with your chosen parcel delivery company whether the item can be tracked internationally or not before paying extra for this service.



Insurance

There is always a risk that parcels may be damaged or lost in the post. You should always make sure that the delivery service you choose has an insurance value above the value of your item so that you will be able to claim full compensation if anything goes wrong.

It may also be useful to familiarise yourself with the compensation or insurance policies of your chosen parcel delivery company as they do have different time limits for making a claim.

Most parcel delivery services include a basic level of insurance as standard, but if you are posting a high value item, it may well be worth paying for extra insurance to cover the whole value.

4. If something goes wrong

The buyer didn't pay for the item

This issue should be taken up with the marketplace you sold the item through. They should have policies in place to deal with non-payment. You do not need to post out items before they've been paid for so it's a good idea to check whether payment has been received before sending items to your buyer.

The buyer said they didn't receive the item

If the buyer claims to have not received the item, you will need to have proof of delivery to claim otherwise.

If you paid for a tracked or signed for service, you will be able to see whether the item was signed for, and by whom, or the date on which it was marked as successfully delivered.

If you can see that the item has not been successfully delivered, you will need to contact the parcel delivery company and make a claim for compensation. Different parcel delivery companies have different time-frames within which you can make a claim, but you will normally need to provide:

- Your name and address
- Name and address the item was sent to
- The date on which the parcel was sent
- A description of the contents and weight of the parcel
- Proof of postage
- Proof of service used or cost paid

The buyer said the item arrived late

Unless you agreed a specific date with the buyer, or the marketplace you used has particular policies about when goods need to be dispatched, you must post items within a reasonable time.

If you did agree a specific date with the buyer and the item arrives late you must offer the buyer the opportunity to return the item for a full refund.

If the item has been delayed by the delivery company, you can use proof of postage as evidence you dispatched the item in a timely manner and may need to make a claim for compensation from the parcel delivery company.

The buyer said the item arrived damaged

If the item has been damaged in the post it is important to ask the buyer to take pictures of the condition of the packaging. You should also ask that the buyer keeps the damaged packaging, as the parcel delivery company may wish to inspect it.

You will then need to make a claim for compensation from the parcel delivery company. Different companies have different time-frames within which you can make a claim, but you will normally need to provide:

- Your name and address
- Name and address the item was sent to
- The date on which the parcel was sent
- A description of the contents and weight of the parcel
- Evidence of the poor condition of the packaging

The buyer wants to return the item but I don't offer returns

As a private seller, you must accept a return if the item was not as described in the product listing. So for example, if you said something was new, and it had

clearly been used you would need to pay for return costs and refund the cost of the item.

You should make your returns policy clear on your product listing, and can refer buyers to this in the case of a dispute.

The buyer refuses to pay return costs

Unless you have agreed to pay return costs, it is the buyer's responsibility to pay return postage. You should refer the buyer to your product listing page.

However, if it is the case that the item was not as described you will need to pay the return costs regardless of your normal policies.

The buyer said they returned the item but I didn't receive it

It is the sender of the item that is responsible for safe delivery. If the buyer posted the item back to you, they are responsible for it arriving to you in good condition.

If you don't receive an item the buyer claimed to have posted, you should raise this with the online marketplace. If the item never arrives, it will be the buyer's responsibility to raise a claim with the parcel delivery company for loss or damage, and you would not be liable to make a refund in this case.

The buyer returned the item but it was damaged

If you receive a return item which is not in the condition in which you originally sold it you should take photographic evidence and raise the issue with the online marketplace.

If you think the item was damaged in the post, you should take pictures of the condition of the packaging and send these to your buyer as they may find these useful if they need to raise a claim for compensation against the parcel delivery company used to send the item back to you.

5. Growing your business

If you decide that you want to sell online as a business different rules will apply such as giving more information when advertising products for sale, and goods having to be of satisfactory quality.

If you need advice on this, the Chartered Institute of Trading Standards offers business advice on their website: <https://businesscompanion.info/> or calling the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on: 03454 04 05 06 to find out whether your local Trading Standards offers businesses advice.

6. For further assistance

If you are having an issue with a sale on an online marketplace and need additional support, contact the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on: 03454 04 05 06 or via online form: [consumer query form](#)

For more information about the Citizens Advice consumer helpline visit: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>

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