

Trinkets & Treasures

Rachel Read examines the online shopping phenomenon that is Etsy and gets some expert tips on how to get the best from the site.

Remember those cute local craft fairs and small independent boutiques stuffed with one-of-a-kind treasures from your childhood? These days, with the rise of the mega mall, it can sometimes seem like those kinds of shopping experiences are dying out. But, international online marketplace Etsy may well be the answer!

Why Etsy?

Founded in 2005, Etsy is an online Aladdin's cave for all things unique and handmade, including clothes, accessories, art, homewares, cosmetics, toys and vintage goods – and with more than 22 million members, they must be doing something right.

Katie Kay, a regular Etsy customer who writes about her latest finds in a column called Instant Goddess, loves that Etsy offers her something different from the average chain store buys. “You can purchase from far-flung corners of the globe, discover some real gems handcrafted by independent designers for that unique feel, and not run the risk of running into every Tom, Dick and Harry wearing it on the high street – and all without leaving the comfort of your armchair!”

Katie also speaks approvingly of the reasonable prices of most Etsy goods. Since sellers don't have to pay for a bricks-and-mortar rental space, they are able to offer their goods at much more competitive prices. Also,





since everyone's looking to stand out amongst the throngs of other Etsy sellers, there are deals to be had.

Buyers and sellers alike also enjoy the community feel of the site. Norbyah Norlasco, who documents her favourite Etsy vendors on her style blog "I'm A Norbyah", loves the "personal connection" she feels with some of her most-frequented Etsy stores – and it's those relationships that keep her coming back for more.

Norbyah recommends reading vendors' "About" pages to discover more about their backstories, or using the "Conversation" function to engage in dialogue with them; she's even ended up going for coffee with some local vendors here. "Some Etsy shop owners will tag me in their post

when they list an item that they think I'll like," she explains, "but there is no push to actually purchase it – it's almost like having your own personal shopper."

Getting started

Signing up for an Etsy account is easy: either log in using your Facebook profile or create a purely Etsy account from scratch, and then the Etsy world is your oyster.

With more than 800,000 active sellers, the Etsy marketplace can initially be overwhelming, so our Etsy experts recommend using the "Search" function to narrow down potential buys. "If there's a designer you like, use their name in your search to find items that have been inspired

by them," advises Katie, who also says inputting the likes of J.Crew, Kate Spade and Anthropologie always get her great jewellery results. You can also narrow down searches using Etsy's pre-determined categories, for instance showing only certain colours of item, or those that have been tagged as vintage or handmade.

One important detail to note is whether your chosen vendor ships to Hong Kong; set your home country in your account profile and narrow down delivery options during your search to ensure that you aren't tempted by items that can never be yours. Similarly, exercise extra caution with China sellers, as their postal service can often be slow or result in items arriving damaged. "Use SF Courier

Photo: Kristy Janvier/Flin Flon





Express where possible,” Katie advises. “Otherwise, you’ll be waiting a long time for your goodies.”

Don’t forget to start “Conversations” with sellers if you have any other questions, especially regarding the size or style of items. “Vendors are usually extremely helpful,” Katie says, “and they will be happy to take extra photos for you to help in the decision process.” If you’re buying for others and would rather not run the risk of getting them the wrong thing, purchasing an Etsy gift card, where the recipient can choose what to buy for themselves, is a great alternative, and most stores will accept these as payment.

Etsy also has numerous tools built

into the site to make the shopping process easier. “Favoriting” allows you to bookmark a product or store for future reference (or even to share with gift-buying friends and relatives), and means that Etsy will automatically notify you with updates about other items in the shop that you might like. Similarly, “Treasury” lists are curated, themed collections where users can handpick their 16 most-loved items. Use these virtual wish lists to discover other Etsy folk whose style you share, and then shop their top picks.

Payment for Etsy goods depends on the seller, with major credit cards and PayPal both widely accepted, which allow a certain level of anti-fraud protection. Etsy now also has

mobile apps for iPads, iPhones and Androids that sync information between devices, allowing you access to your profile and “Favorites” on the go.

Looking to sell?

Etsy has very few requirements for those wishing to set up an online store. There is no minimum number of product listings or transactions per month, making it ideal for small-scale independent retailers or DIY-ers hoping to make extra funds from their hobby. Joining and setting up a store is free, and it costs just US\$0.20 to list an item for four months, with Etsy taking a 3.5 per cent cut of the item’s sale price if it is purchased. There is

Photos: Left and centre: Hyun Joo Cho/BagyBags; Right: Amber Byrne Mahoney for Leah Goren

A FEW FAVOURITES

If getting started seems overwhelming, why not try a few of these:

- Katie describes herself as a “total jewel junkie” and her number one go-to accessories seller is **Emily Gao Jewelry**. If you’re in need of an eye-catching statement necklace, look no further. Meanwhile, for personalised stationery, Katie recommends **Pikake Press** and **I Design That**, plus **Tadpole Creations** and **The Wishing Elephant** for funky kids’ goods.
- A couple of vintage queen Norbyah’s most-loved vendors are Vicki Malone’s **Vic & Lili**, Singapore-based **Five Stones Vintage** for “some of the best novelty prints I’ve seen”, dresses from **Flin Flon to Hong Kong**, and vintage accessories from **VezaVe**.
- Kitty recommends Brooklyn-based illustrator **Leah Goren** for “beautiful ink brush girls that she prints onto silk scarves and little bags”. Some of her other favourites are the unique art prints from **Celine Loup** and **Yelena Bryksenkova**, whilst the quirky Tupac or David Bowie cufflinks from **Leroy’s Place** should definitely prove a talking point at your next dinner party!
- Vicki’s current top three? Cool vintage maps for your walls from **Place In Time Maps**, minimalist personalised jewellery from **Shop Luca**, and cute but practical handmade bags from **BagyBags**.



Photos: Left and upper right: Leah Goren; Bottom right: Leroy Brown/Leroy's Place

even a dedicated seller handbook on Etsy's blog filled with tips and tricks for vendors, and they also offer the chance to sign up for regular email updates on how to grow your business.

The fact that Etsy is now renowned as a global marketplace for the unique and independent means that it's a no-brainer for sellers offering just those things, giving them an attractive and easy-to-use platform to share their goods with an engaged international audience at the touch of a button. Vicki Malone, who sells vintage clothing via her Etsy store Vic & Lili, notes that Etsy is a "haven for handmade and vintage goodies – the ideal marketplace for the kind of customer I was looking for."

Meanwhile Kitty N. Wong, a local artist who sells her hand-created works on Etsy shop Themarrow, praises the speed and simplicity of the process: "I love that you can finish a new painting and list it that night – super easy! It's a beautiful platform to show off your work."

There are relatively few drawbacks for Etsy sellers, other than the sheer competition out there. "Having to make my shop stand out amongst thousands of others is quite the hard task!" says Vicki. Both Vicki and Kitty recommend updating your store frequently with new items to keep it fresh for buyers, both to remind them of your presence and also to draw in new eyes to discover

your wares.

Taking great product photos is another must (Katie notes that misleading photos are one of the few drawbacks to her Etsy experiences to date), whilst Vicki also highlights "pretty packaging" as another little detail to show customers you care, offering the personalised experience that the high street often lacks.

It seems that Etsy has brought the spirit of independent craftsmanship right into the 21st century and straight into the homes of a global audience who can't get enough of their unique, handmade finds. So, whether you're looking to buy or sell, now you know where to get clicking. 📷