

January 24, 2016 - How to Shop Around for Deals Newcomers and Elmers Net Robert AK3Q

One of the best ways to buy equipment used to be local swap meets, where hams sold to hams, and where for the most part, people were honest. After all, a person's reputation was on the line, someone who would be seen in the community

-- now a lot of sales are eBay, QRZ.com, eHam, etc., and still many people are upright

-- but there are those sleaze-balls who rip people off; also just being farther removed from the people to whom you are selling let's people slide with more

-- the first rule of buying anything, anywhere, is let the buyer beware.

-- the second thing is that prices are overly high in most cases, particularly used things.

-- time was when hams knew the value of things, and folks did not try to get more out of something than it was worth

-- somewhere along the line people started getting more money than sense, and prices went up artificially

-- eBay has had a lot to do with the artificially high prices, and unfortunately even hams have started valuing their equipment higher than it should be

-- kind of a catch-22

With all of that said, we still need to buy things, old and new, and so we will try to figure out some of the best ways to do that here

-- research is your best friend, whatever the product

-- well, research and/or a trusted Elmer

My Approaches: New Equipment

Compare prices after checking out reviews, information, and experiences

-- user reviews/comments

-- technical reviews by radio publications

-- blog reviews from people who seem to know what they are talking about based on other things I have read from them, or comparing something I already know

-- eHam.com

-- within these reviews you are likely to find out where someone bought something, or where there is a deal, discount etc.

-- Google, Bing, Yahoo, whatever your preference, these search engines will likely return more info than you ever need

-- purchasing something then involves going price comparison shopping to places like Universal Radio (great information about most products BTW); Gigaparts, Ham Radio Outlet, R&L, CheapHam.com; Texas Towers, and any others that come up in a basic product search;

- I will even check Amazon, but find little in the way of ham equipment other than some of the cheaper Chinese Radios and cables, but you can be taken in by too cheap prices, especially for cables
- I do keep an eye on Amazon for the inexpensive SDR dongles and supplies
- I keep bookmarks for all of the major stores

Old Equipment

- mainly I browse forums dealing with older equipment
- again these are usually found pretty quickly with Google, Bing, Yahoo etc.
- also eHam reviews of products can lead to links for old equipment
- likewise blogs, forums, yahoo groups can be good sources of information
- I belong to almost 100 yahoo groups (Gmail has something similar), and for most I set the mail settings to not send me anything, but allow me access to the website
- talking with other hams (or eavesdropping on conversations and taking notes – I am not above that!)
- talking with Elmers who have had experience with something I am looking into

Example: Vintage Equipment

EICO 628 Tube Tester

Maybe I read a review or article about the EICO 625 in The Spectrum Monitor or QST which gets my interest up – what now?

- Google Search: EICO 625 (BTW I set Google so that when I click on a link it opens in a new Tab so I do not lose my original search results)
 - often I will look at various images of the item which Google will bring up, and this helps me understand the equipment better than just a text decryption
 - I can also sometimes see images from a museum or collection to let me know what a good version should look like
 - start chasing Rabbit trails – one search result may open up another and another, or I may continue down the list of original search results
 - Eventually I know what the item is, if I can get a manual, people's general impression of the item, and how easy or how hard it is to get one
 - Then I likely go to eBay and look around; sometimes searches can be specific, other times it requires a more general search
- eBay Search: EICO 625
- turns up a few, maybe many, or maybe nothing at all, but then says similar items, and maybe I find the EICO model 625 which was extremely popular
 - I can get a feel for price vs. quality; in this case I see where the prices seem a bit high (overinflated sense of worth?!)

-- along the way maybe a similar item comes up such as the EICO 628 Tube Tester

-- I go back to Google, search for the 628. Read reviews etc., and maybe decide I like that tester as well

-- as it turns out the 628 model is not quite as well known, but here is a great example of one at an okay price, and the seller is even offering to accept reasonable offers

-- I make an offer which works for me, he takes it or rejects it, and I go from there

An alternative experience I had recently was to go to eBay and look for vintage capacity/condenser testers

-- I found one that looked interesting from the description and images, and so I then went *a-Googling*

-- in the process of reading about the tester I found a set of YouTube videos on a restoration and testing of the unit, and watched all three videos. It was clear the guy making the videos was experienced, and when he recommended the unit above a lot of others, backed up with reasons why he thought it was a good unit, I went back and made an offer on the one I saw on eBay.

-- in the mean time I looked for other similar pieces of equipment from that manufacturer, because it was clear from the videos I saw that the company made good stuff as part of a home-training program for repair technicians

-- now I have an active search going in eBay for anything made by NRI; there will only be a piece of equipment here and there which I might be interested in, but at least I won't miss knowing about what comes up for sale