

Skype Sightings at eBay Live

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An undercurrent of Skype awareness around eBay Live's opening day

I remained in Boston for the first day of eBay Live - eBay's annual event for its infrastructure players and Resellers - and found evidence of Skype awareness in various ways:

The Cheerleader: a Skype Partner exhibits on the eBay Live show floor

The User: an eBay-focused customs broker uses Skype to encourage prospective Buyers and Sellers to call for more information

The Education, Part I: Skype 101 Computer Lab at eBay University

The Education, Part II: Enhance Your Business with Skype

The Quiet Revolution: How Skype is getting absorbed into a Fortune 500 company's field network.



The Cheerleader: Now that I have your attention.. My professional services client OnState, publisher of the OnState ACD Call Center for Skype, announced a partnership with eBay online services provider **Seamless Development** who were exhibiting at eBay Live. Simply the presence of the Skype logo in the **Seamless Development** booth drew attention from many attendees who wanted to know more about the basics of Skype itself. And of course for attendees interested in cost effectively reducing their customer service costs, OnState was able to provide a live demonstration of their ability to

communicate in real time - via Voice and/or Chat - with any website visitor as well as manage the enquiries such that appropriately qualified agents responded, activity was evenly spread across agents and customer activity was logged for followup. Suffice it to say more than one prospect latched onto the potential for this service to save the six figure cost of a PBX to manage a small call center. And, as for those simply enquiring about Skype, there is still a large user base out there that expresses surprise when they find many basic Skype services, but especially video calls, are free.

The Skype User: I spent a lot of my time wandering the show floor talking largely with exhibitors to learn about what role they play in the eBay infrastructure and asking about Skype awareness. Many had heard of Skype; their ears perked up when I extended the discussion into business offerings of Skype partners, such as Convenos with their Webex-killer meeting center and its ability to reduce the voice component cost of online presentations worldwide , Unyte's desktop sharing conversation tool and OnState's solution discussed above. But when I stopped to talk with Jennifer Clarke at A&A Customs Brokers in Vancouver for a demo of their duty and tax calculator and Canadian shipping module for eBay listings she had told me about at lunch earlier in the week, she ended her demonstration by going to their eBay Motors web page where there are three SkypeMe buttons as shown above (and because I use the Skype Toolbar for Firefox, their 800 number for a SkypeOut call is also highlighted). Jennifer then expressed her desire to have a single button and to have the calls more professionally managed across multiple agents... {see above}.

eBay Education, Part I: Skype 101 Computer Lab. While wandering the floor I met up with Brianna Reynaud of Skype's North American Marketing Communications. She told me about a presentation earlier in the day in one of the eBay Computer Labs where Michael Kaiser , an

eBay education specialist, had walked about 35 attendees through the process of downloading and installing Skype along with setting up a Skype account. While the participants were across a wide spectrum of PC expertise, the discussions quickly turned to how they could incorporate Skype into their business activities. A couple of attendees went so far as to place SkypeOut orders while at the session. Michael also introduced some anecdotes where Skype had been helpful in his personal life. But the most significant outcome was how the presentation had stimulated many of the attendees to consider how they could work Skype into their eBay activities.

eBay Education, Part II: Enhance Your Business with Skype. This session was led by eBay education specialist Steve Lindhorst who quickly found that he had an audience with various levels of experience with Skype. For instance, from a show of hands only 25% of the attendees had actually used Skype; for the remainder there was curiosity ranging from how to set up Skype (they had obviously missed the previous day's event) through to why Skype should be used in their eBay business activities. Steve quickly reviewed how to set up Skype but then moved onto introducing issues such as integrating a Skype button onto your eBay website, a review of Skype for Business and the Control Panel, international calling plans, personal anecdotes, conference calling, Skype Toolbars, sending money via PayPal, Pamela, Skylook and other third party business applications. Steve concluded with a demonstration of SkypeFind and how he had used it during his travels to locate restaurants. According to Brianna, many of the attendees had not been aware of (i) the "free" aspect of Skype and (ii) the wide range of features available in addition to basic voice and text chat. One eBay "wholesaler" realized that the Skype ecosystem provided a path for expanding her "call center" activity beyond her current four phone lines without the cost of a PBX.

The Quiet Revolution: I had gone up to the food court for lunch and ordered a hamburger and iced tea at a sit down bar. Along came an "newbie" eBay Reseller who was taking time off from his full time job at a Fortune 500 company to attend eBay Live and learn about selling on eBay. He started telling me how his employer would not let Skype cross their firewall (along with GMail amongst others) but how all their field personnel were using Skype to communicate amongst each other out in the field. Reminds me of the introduction of PC's in the early 1980's; the first ones were acquired by individual employees who quietly brought them into larger enterprises, without the acquiescence of IT managers, as personal tools to facilitate getting their job done. Skype is apparently quite relevant to these field personnel.

Bottom Line: it's obvious that there is a significant level of undeveloped business for Skype within the eBay ecosystem. For next year's eBay Live, I would recommend that Skype take not a booth but a "lab" classroom (they had neither this year) where they provide ongoing sessions where attendees could bring their own laptops or use in-room PC's to explore all aspects of Skype from initial installation to business applications under the tutelage of Skype specialists. Why do I suggest this? Because this approach worked for me at both AST and Quarterdeck in developing leading hardware and software businesses in Canada. In fact, training sessions for Resellers on QEMM when first brought to Canada in late 1990 resulted in a quadrupling of QEMM revenues within a six month period. The Skype ecosystem is now at the maturity and awareness level where these types of training sessions can pay off handsomely for both Skype and its Partners. Some aspects of developing technology business do not change over the decades. This is a proven route for eBay and Skype to follow in integrating Skype into eBay activities. Successful entrepreneurs are always hungry for (profit generating) knowledge.