

THE RESELLER'S GUIDE TO
SELLING
SHOES



KICK UP YOUR PROFITS
WITH NEW SHOES VIA AMAZON FBA

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The Reseller's Guide to Selling Shoes: Kick up Your Profits with New Shoes via Amazon FBA

Stephen and Rebecca Smotherman

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Who We Are

There are those in this world who have a passion for shoes. Some who even have an obsession.

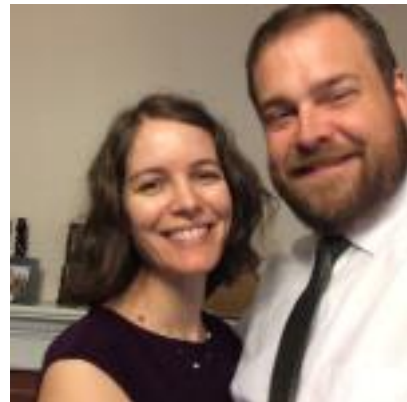
I would say that in the past Rebecca and I (Stephen) had a pretty healthy appreciation of shoes, but nothing close to a passion or obsession. Things began to change for us, however, in August of 2015. I'll get back to what happened in late 2015 in a moment, but first let me introduce myself and Rebecca to you.

I've been hooked on selling goods online since 1998 when I made my very first eBay sale. Selling on eBay was a fun hobby for me for over a decade, and it helped pay some of the bills. I became an eBay PowerSeller with Top Rated Seller Status and held those honors for many years.

In 2011 I discovered selling on Amazon via FBA. My whole e-commerce business began to transition from selling on eBay to selling on Amazon. I still sell on eBay, but Amazon gets the bulk of my business. In fact, Amazon has recognized me as a Top Holiday Seller. That means that out of all sellers on Amazon, my sales were in the top 25% as well as having an A+ customer satisfaction rating during the holiday selling season.

Selling on Amazon has helped move my e-commerce business from a hobby to the way I earn a full-time income. I've made a full-time income as an online reseller since 2012, and I absolutely love it. I enjoy being my own boss, working from home, and setting my own hours. I love being able to go treasure hunting and get paid for it. The freedom FBA provides is awesome.

In my personal life, my story changed forever for the good in 2013 when I married Rebecca. She began working part-time with me on my Amazon business shortly before the wedding, and we have loved being partners in life and in business. Rebecca has increasingly taken on more responsibility in our Amazon business, and since 2015 she has been in charge of all of our online arbitrage (OA), while I am responsible for our retail arbitrage (RA) and wholesale sourcing.



Since we are able to earn a full-time income by selling online and spending only part-time hours, we decided to blog about it. If you're ever curious how we are able

to sell on Amazon via FBA and earn a full-time income, then come join Rebecca and me over at www.fulltimefba.com. You can subscribe to updates, get a bunch of freebies, and hear our stories. We offer tons of free tips and tricks on how to best manage a full-time FBA business. We update the blog often and are always offering fresh content.

Our Experience Selling Shoes

In August 2015 Rebecca and I decided to step out in a new direction and add shoes to our Amazon FBA inventory. Our “healthy appreciation” of shoes began to grow into more of a passion for both sourcing and selling shoes online. We will go into more detail in the next chapter about why we made that decision and how selling shoes has benefited our business, but for now I’ll just say we began selling shoes as a way to diversify our inventory and increase our average selling price. We got off to a slow start, taking several months to ramp up our shoe inventory at Amazon warehouses to a point where we could see consistent sales in the shoes category and a significant impact on our overall sales and revenue.

However, within a year of starting to sell shoes, our revenue from that category had grown to become the largest percentage of our overall revenue from Amazon FBA. Here are a few stats to show you the growth we saw at the end of that first year:

Month	Shoe Sales on Amazon FBA	Return on Investment
June 2016	38% of overall revenue	210% ROI
July 2016	29% of overall revenue	214% ROI
August 2016	29% of overall revenue	154% ROI
September 2016	43% of overall revenue	125% ROI
October 2016	45% of overall revenue	125% ROI
November 2016	16% of overall revenue	113% ROI
December 2016	24% of overall revenue	82% ROI
January 2017	79% of overall revenue	63% ROI

We continued to see strong sales in the shoes category through November and December, with higher sales in both of those months than we had ever experienced in shoes before. The percentage of shoes in our overall revenue dropped in November and December because we ramped up our toy inventory for the Q4 selling season, which you will see reflected in the second column above.

You will also see that our ROI percentage fell over the last few months of the year, while our overall sales increased. The reason for that change in ROI is partly because Rebecca’s confidence in the shoes category has grown, and we have expanded our buying parameters to include lower ROIs. It’s also partly because we sold a lot of fast-turning slippers before and after Christmas at 50% ROI, which accounts for the lower ROI average in December and January.

Another fun way shoes impacted our overall revenue came during the slow-down in sales right before and after Christmas. There were several days during late December and early January where *our only sales for the day were shoes!* In years past we had continued our Q4 hustle and bought clearance toys to send in late December/early January to keep our sales flowing. In 2016, however, we chose to take some time off from RA sourcing, and we relied on our current shoe inventory and a couple of OA shoe shipments to maintain our sales during those weeks. We loved the results!

Moving forward in the months ahead, we are excited to continue selling shoes and see how we can grow our Amazon FBA business with the benefits that come from low competition and high average selling prices in the category. We're also excited to share with you what we've learned since 2015 while developing our shoe sales. If you find that selling shoes is a good fit for your Amazon business, we hope that you can benefit from our experiences and take away practical knowledge from this book that will help you increase your average selling price, boost your overall revenue, and give your business a steady stream of profits from shoes.



Because Rebecca has been the one in our business to focus on growing our shoe sales, she will be writing the content of the book starting in the next chapter. She has also prepared the video modules and some bonuses to go along with the content of this book. We hope you are able to learn a ton of useful information from this book, the videos, and the bonuses, and we look forward to hearing from you about your successes in selling shoes on Amazon.

If you have a shoe selling success story (wow, that's a mouthful), please share it with me by emailing me at stephen@fulltimefba.com.

Basic Understanding of Amazon FBA

I don't want to assume that everyone reading this book is familiar with the ins and outs of online reselling. To make the most out of the knowledge in this book, you need to know the basics about buying/selling on Amazon via FBA. If you don't have a foundational knowledge of these online platforms, check out these FREE ebook websites: <http://www.ebook-maniacs.com> and <http://www.free-ebooks.net>. All you need to do is enter the word "Amazon" or "Amazon FBA" in the search bar, and you will find many free ebooks on how to get started with Amazon.

If you'd rather read a book on paper (instead of on a screen) then I'd suggest you take a look at this book:

[Arbitrage](#) by Chris Green - In my opinion, the *best* book for understanding how buying and reselling online works.

Finally, if you want an online course that walks you through selling on Amazon (setting up your business, how to find products, and how to maximize profits), then I highly recommend these paid courses:

[The Proven Amazon Course](#) – One of the largest online courses that will help you set up and succeed with selling on Amazon.

[Amazon Boot Camp](#) – A video driven online course that takes you step-by-step through the whole Amazon selling process.

Click on the links to each course above and find out more about what they have to offer you. I've experienced both courses and highly recommend them. Even as a seasoned Amazon veteran, both have helped me learn new things about selling on Amazon and have increased my profits.

Disclaimer

While the purpose of this book is to show you how we are able to increase our overall Amazon FBA sales by selling in the shoes category, I know that each person reading this book will have results that are his or her own. The contents of this book are based on my opinions and experiences with

selling online and are not a guarantee that the reader will be able to replicate the formulas contained in this book. Unauthorized distribution, reselling, or copying of this material is unlawful. No portion of this book may be copied or resold without explicit permission from the Publisher.

I disclaim any personal liability, loss, or risk incurred as a result of any information or any advice contained herein, either directly or indirectly. All mention of promises to earn money, either implied or not implied, are strictly based on my opinion. I do not intend to render any legal, accounting, tax, or other professional advice in the document contained herein. I am not associated with or a representative of eBay, Amazon, or any other company mentioned herein unless specifically noted. I may receive affiliate revenue if you purchase or click-through any of the links within this book.



Tying Up Loose Ends

Thank you again for purchasing this book and video course. I'm really excited about all of the things you'll learn in the pages ahead and how it can impact your Amazon business. I'm confident that on the very next page Rebecca will get you started off on the right foot.

Chapter 2: Why Sell Shoes on Amazon?

Chances are you are not much different than us when it comes to your Amazon FBA business: You are always looking for ways to scale the business and grow both your sales and profits. Part of that business growth could come from finding more inexpensive and steady sources of inventory. Another part of business growth comes from constantly refining your processes to find better, more efficient systems. **Another great way to grow your Amazon FBA business is to consider adding new categories to the types of items you sell.**



If you're reading this book, you are either considering adding the shoes category to your Amazon inventory, or you already have added it and you're looking for ways to improve your methods within the category. Maybe you've tried selling shoes in the past, but you didn't achieve the success you were hoping for. In this chapter, I (Rebecca) hope to show you the reasons why selling shoes on Amazon can become one of the key factors in growing your business.

Diversify Your Inventory

Before fall of 2015, our main categories were toys, toys, toys, books, toys, home and kitchen, toys, and a smattering of sports, grocery, and health and beauty, with some more toys. We started out selling on Amazon like many sellers do, by selling in the most popular categories that don't require approval to sell in. Although we had branched out somewhat over the years beyond toys and books, the majority of our sales continued to come from those two categories.

We were beginning to feel like we were in a rut, and diversifying our inventory seemed like a good prospect. Diversifying your inventory can mean adding greater seasonal profits to your business as well as a nice stream of slow-but-steady profits throughout the year, depending on the category. For too long it seemed that we had been riding the wave of tremendous Q4 sales in toys, followed by nine months of scrambling to find consistent inventory to sell until the next Christmas season.

We wanted to find a category where we could consistently source products and diversify our inventory away from being so toy heavy. Don't get me wrong – we love selling toys and are always super excited when Q4 rolls around. But we wanted to branch out and try something new, and shoes were very appealing for us as a new category for reasons I'll get into below. Just as you are doing by reading this book

and watching the accompanying videos, we did our research on the category and came to the conclusion that shoes would be the next step we would take.

Increase Your Average Selling Price

Shoes are a great way to increase the average selling price (ASP) of your FBA inventory. Let me share with you some of how our sales have changed over the past few years, with the intention of showing you that ASP can make a big difference in your business.

From 2013 through 2015, we sold a lot of \$10 or \$15 toys. **A lot**. In order to make a full-time income at FBA, we were having to get out there and source a ton of those small-ish toys. As our sales grew, we had more capital to invest back into the business and buy more small-ish toys, and we saw a snowball effect over 2013 and 2014 where the number of items we had in our inventory continued to grow — but **so did the amount of work we had to do in order to maintain that growth**. We had to get out there and source more, and then we had to do more work to prep and ship all that inventory (or pay someone else to do more work for us).

Think about it this way: You can sell one widget for \$100 or ten widgets for \$10 apiece, and you make the same amount in sales, \$100. What about the prep and handling time, though? Those ten widgets require ten times the prep work, ten times the labels, ten times the handling to put into a shipping box. The FBA pick-and-pack fees will apply ten times to the \$100 of sales. The one \$100 widget, however, requires 1/10th of the prep work and only one pick-and-pack fee. If you can increase your ASP, then you can reduce your fees, your prep costs, and your time in handling the inventory. And so we made it a goal to find a way to increase our ASP and gain some breathing room in the time and money we were investing in our business.

Year	Average Selling Price	Increase from previous year
2013	\$13.98	n/a
2014	\$15.42	\$1.44
2015	\$23.88	\$8.46
2016	\$33.54	\$9.66
2017*	\$49.68	\$16.14

We don't have the numbers from before 2013 for our ASP, but you can see in the graph above that when we had a full year of selling shoes (2016), our ASP jumped significantly from the previous years when we were not selling shoes. The more shoes we add to our inventory, the higher our ASP becomes.

Note: 2017 numbers are only recorded up to January 2017. Our ASP in January 2017 was significantly higher than previous months because (you guessed it) our sales came predominantly from shoes, 79% of our overall revenue.

Throughout the end of 2014 into all of 2015, we saw a big change in both our number of units sent to FBA and our dollar amount of sales: our number of units sent in **went down** while our dollar amount of sales **went up**. Stephen has gone into great detail as to why that happened in [The Reseller's Guide to How to Keep a Camel](#), so I won't hash it all out again here. But the summary version is that we began using historical data on sales rank and prices to make smarter sourcing decisions, and it had a tremendous impact on the sell-through rate of our inventory. We were no longer buying inventory that tanked in price and sat in the FBA warehouses for months on end. But we still hadn't solved the problem of needing to continually find and prep more and more small-ish items to maintain (much less grow!) our sales.

In 2016, we sold a much lower number of inventory items, but our ASP has gone up considerably because of the number of shoes we've sold. Our ASP in the shoes category in 2016 was \$72, while our overall ASP across all categories increased from \$24 in 2015 to \$34 in 2016.

Think about that for a moment. Out of all the shoes we sold in 2016, the *average* selling price was \$72. On a regular basis we sell shoes for over \$100. That kind of selling price is a huge change from the \$10 and \$15 toys we were selling in years past. Now, we still sell toys, and I'll get into the reasons for that when we talk about sourcing budgets in the next chapter, but we no longer rely solely on a constant stream of small-ish toys in and out of the FBA warehouse for our profits.

A relatively high ASP can be a step towards both saving time and increasing profits. Don't we all want to make more money and spend less time doing it?

Higher Disbursements

One logical result of increasing the ASP of your inventory is that your Amazon disbursements will also increase. Sell higher priced items, get higher dollar amounts of sales, get higher disbursements, have more money to reinvest in inventory, and start the whole process over again.

Selling shoes on Amazon can help produce a steady stream of income throughout the year. It doesn't happen overnight, but after a period of ramping up and building a solid inventory of shoes at the FBA warehouses, you can begin to see a noticeable difference in your Amazon disbursements due to shoe sales. You can refer back to the numbers I gave in the Introduction chapter to see how our revenue was impacted by shoe sales. We have [a policy at Full-Time FBA](#) of not sharing our exact dollar amounts of sales or profits, but I will tell you this: In 2016, our overall FBA sales increased 50% from 2015, and we believe the addition of shoes to our

inventory helped fuel that increase in sales and subsequent increase in our disbursements.

We'll discuss more in the next chapter about what to expect as far as the time required to begin seeing that noticeable difference (Spoiler alert: It's good to have realistic expectations about the ramping up period and not expect a quick return on your money within just a couple of weeks).

Fewer Competitors in the Shoes Category

Another reason we opted to add shoes to our Amazon FBA inventory is the fewer number of competitors in the shoes category. Overall there are fewer FBA sellers selling shoes, and there are fewer sellers on any one ASIN of a shoe. Why is this important? Fewer competitors means greater potential for the prices of your inventory to remain stable.

Shoes are a gated category for Amazon sellers, which significantly lowers the number of competitors on any given item. While many low ranking books or toys might typically have 100+ sellers, it's relatively easy to find low ranking shoes on a regular basis with only a handful of sellers – or even one or none on certain variations.

When we got ungated in shoes, the process still required applying with a flat file and photos, so the number of competitors was even lower than it currently is. As of this writing, automatic approvals are a regular occurrence, meaning Amazon typically approves sellers for the shoes category with only a few clicks and answering a few simple questions. Because of these auto approvals, the number of sellers in the category has increased somewhat, but not enough for us to be unable to find listings with little or no competition. And even though some shoe sellers bemoan auto-ungating as the end of big profits in shoes, we've found that the recent round of brand and ASIN restrictions have further kept the competition at a minimum, and



we believe it will continue to do so into the future. (You can [watch our YouTube video](#) for more on our optimistic view of the recent brand restrictions.)

Tying Up Loose Ends

The tagline for our Full-Time FBA blog is “turn part-time hours into a full-time income via Amazon FBA.” We lead busy lives, and we want to make the most of our time and efforts in our business. We can see evidence that adding the shoes category to our FBA inventory truly has increased both our ASP and our Amazon disbursements. Selling shoes has increased our revenue while decreasing the number of units we’ve sold, which means decreasing the time and money we spend on processing inventory.

All of the reasons above make it worthwhile to consider adding shoes to your Amazon inventory — but is it a given that every seller should jump right into selling shoes? We don’t think so, and in the next chapter I’ll give you the reasons why you might consider waiting to add shoes to your inventory, or at the very least why you should adjust your mindset and expectations when it comes to selling shoes.

Chapter 3: Selling Shoes is Not for Loafers

By now you're probably feeling pretty excited about the prospect of selling in the shoes category and all of the potential benefits we discussed in the previous chapter. I know that's how I felt when I first started looking at sourcing shoes.

Our Initial Shoe Experiment

After Stephen and I got approved by Amazon to sell in the shoes category, we decided I would spend a two-week period sourcing shoes through online arbitrage (OA), track the resulting sales, calculate our return on investment (ROI) and profits, and then decide from there how we wanted to proceed with adding shoes to our overall FBA strategy. To facilitate this process, I subscribed to a daily shoe deal list and made my purchases based on leads from that list, along with rabbit trails they led me down.

Every day for two weeks, I diligently looked at the deals on my list, spent my sourcing budget, and waited for the shoes to arrive at our doorstep. The shoes came in, we processed them, and we sent them to FBA and waited for the sales.

And waited. And waited. And waited.

I didn't source any more shoes online for about five or six weeks after that, as I waited to see how our experiment turned out. The sales trickled in sooooooowwwwwwwwwly from those two weeks of sourcing. I was very discouraged: Shoes I thought were a low rank at the time I bought them turned out to not sell for weeks and weeks and weeks. I thought maybe my deal list was a bust (Spoiler alert: I was just using it incorrectly – we'll talk more about how to best use deal lists later in the book). I questioned whether I should stop thinking about buying shoes and just stick to toys, books, or another category I already knew well.

Rather than completely giving up, I decided to learn more, ask a ton of questions, reach out to people who have experience in the category, and try again. It was a slow process, but here we are 18 months later (at the time of this writing) – and shoes are consistently our top first or second highest category in dollar amount of sales.

Caveats about Selling Shoes on Amazon

As a result of our initial experiment and the lessons I learned from it, there are a few caveats I want to issue about selling shoes on Amazon before we move on to the details of sourcing and shipping shoes in the rest of this book. Consider the points below to be the things I wish someone had sat me down and talked with me about *before* I invested a large chunk of cash in shoes to sell on Amazon. There's no

substitute for gaining your own experience and coming to your own conclusions, but why learn things the hard way if someone else can give a little insight before you get started?

*Note: In the bonuses for this course, I'm including a checklist of questions to ask yourself related to these caveats. These questions should help you think through the decision of whether you're ready to start sourcing shoes on Amazon. **You can download the checklist of questions from the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.***

Shoes Require a Lot of Capital to Source

Unlike categories such as books or toys, with shoes it's not possible to take a small amount of capital, buy items at a ridiculously low price and high ROI, and turn a fast profit that you can reinvest within a short amount of time. Shoes can give you a great ROI and fantastic ASP, but the buy cost for one pair of shoes typically ranges from \$20 upward. It's not uncommon to spend \$50 or more on one pair of shoes; therefore it's not uncommon to spend several hundred dollars on one style of shoe.

Shoes are Long-Tail Items

Not only does it take a large initial investment (relative to other categories) to start buying shoes, it takes a lot of patience. Shoes typically do not sell at the same velocity as toys, books, groceries, and other faster moving categories. Shoes aren't typically something that you can replenish, either. You generally buy a style of shoe, send it in to FBA, and move on to finding the next pair of shoes.



I sank a bunch of money into shoes in our original two-week experiment and became frustrated and disappointed that I didn't get my return on that investment as soon as I had hoped. I eventually did sell all the shoes from that two weeks, but it took as long as six months for some of those shoes to sell – and in some cases as long as nine months. Once they did sell, the high ASP was nice to eventually see in our disbursement, but if we had needed that money back any sooner than nine months, we would have been in trouble. Which leads to my next point...

Shoes Tie up Capital during the Ramping up Period

Because shoes are long-tail relative to other categories and because they require a lot of capital to source relative to other categories, getting a steady stream of income from shoe sales requires a ramping up period.

The key with getting a steady stream of high ASP sales from shoes is to give yourself several months to ramp up. It will take several months of sending in a steady stream of shoes, and then you have to wait for those high-priced shoe sales to start trickling in. If you continually source shoes and send them in on a regular basis, after a while you will see the fruits of your labor in the form of higher disbursements and higher ASP. Stephen is always saying that patience brings profits, and that is definitely the case in the shoes category.

Are you prepared to tie up a large chunk of capital while you are ramping up your shoe inventory and getting to the point where you have a steady stream of sales?

Budgeting to Ramp up Shoes

A couple of ways to avoid the problem I experienced during the two-week experiment is to 1) give yourself a longer period of time to test out shoes and 2) give yourself a consistent budget to work with during that time period without subtracting from your budget for your faster turning inventory. This way, you can ramp up your shoe inventory without seeing a drop off in sales from faster turning items.

I recommend dividing your sourcing budget into different categories and making sure that each category is sufficiently funded after each disbursement period. Everyone has different priorities for sourcing, so you need to evaluate your own business and decide how you should focus your capital, time, and energy.

Here's an example of how we divide our sourcing budget every two weeks when we get our Amazon disbursement:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Amazon Disbursement} = \\ &\text{personal income} + \text{business expenses} + \text{sourcing money} \\ &\text{(in that order)} \end{aligned}$$

Sourcing Money =
fast turning RA + wholesale + shoes
(in that order)

We make sure that we have the money we need to maintain our fast turning RA and wholesale purchases *first*, and then we invest the rest of it in shoes. Over time, the amount we have available to invest in shoes has grown to the point that we often can't even spend that amount during the two-week period before the next disbursement. It took patience to get there, but it's possible to see that kind of growth if you're careful with your budget.

Shoes Can Potentially Incur Higher FBA Fees than Other Categories

Because shoes are long-tail items, they have the potential to incur higher storage fees than other items, both monthly storage fees and the biannual long-term storage fees. Also, shoes take up more space in the FBA warehouse than other items, such as books, so the storage fees for shoes can be higher compared to smaller items. On our latest report of potential long-term storage fees, our shoes ranged from \$1 to \$7 per pair for potential fees.

We will discuss this topic more in a future chapter about making buying decisions, but for now it's sufficient to say that you can offset the higher fees for shoes by working the potential cost of storage fees into your calculations when you make your buying decision. If you know there definitely is or potentially could be a higher fee for selling a pair of shoes, you need to make sure you're buying your shoes at a low enough price with a high enough selling price to get an ROI that will more than cover those fees and still give you great profits.

Sales Rank in Shoes Acts Differently than Other Categories

Each shoe listing on Amazon can potentially have dozens of variations, depending on the number of colors and sizes available. When you look at the sales rank for a pair of shoes you want to source, you aren't

Product Dimensions: 14 x 10 x 6 inches
Shipping Weight: 2 pounds ([View shipping rates and policies](#))
ASIN: B00VNFT502
Item model number: 724010-004
Date first available at Amazon.com: April 1, 2015
Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #1,428 in Shoes ([See Top 100 in Shoes](#))
#1 in [Sports & Outdoors](#) > [Fan Shop](#) > [Footwear](#) > [Sneakers](#)
#9 in [Shoes](#) > [Men's](#) > [Athletic](#) > [Team Sports](#) > [Men's](#)
Average Customer Review: ★★★★★ 165 customer reviews

looking at the sales rank for that particular pair of shoes; you're looking at the sales rank for all of those variations combined. If the Amazon product page says a pair of shoes is ranked #1,428 in the overall shoes category, you have no way to know which size and which color of those shoes are receiving the sales that give it that low rank.

To further complicate matters, CamelCamelCamel and Keepa (two free online tools that track Amazon sales numbers) do not show sales rank history for shoes. When I'm making sourcing decisions, I don't even bother looking at Camel for shoes. Keepa, however, does provide crucial information about whether or not Amazon has ever been in stock on any variation of shoes, and it shows price history. I highly recommend becoming fluent in using Keepa for making shoe sourcing decisions (you can get started reading Keepa graphs with [this blog post](#)).

If you don't have a foundation in selling on Amazon, it can be hard to jump in with shoes and navigate the difficulties of shoe sales rank. I recommend learning to understand Amazon sales rank in other categories (such as toys, books, home and kitchen, sports, etc) that do not tend to have variations before you start experimenting with selling in a category with variations like shoes.

Understanding shoe sales rank is like learning to play jazz music; first you have to build a foundation by understanding how 4/4 or 3/4 time works before you can start improvising and playing around with syncopation. Maybe a musical prodigy can skip the basics, but most of us need to build that foundation first. Same with selling shoes. Most of us need the experience in understanding sales rank in categories without variations before we move into selling shoes.

We will discuss how to overcome the difficulties in interpreting shoe sales rank in the chapter on buying decisions.

Shoes Can Pose a Higher Risk than Other Categories

Because the buy cost of each pair of shoes is typically higher than the buy cost per item in other categories, selling shoes can pose a higher risk for sellers than selling in other categories. When you invest in shoes, you are tying up a high amount of capital in a low number of items. Your eggs aren't spread across as many baskets as they would be if you were investing in \$2 books to flip on Amazon.

Think of it this way: Let's say you have \$30 to spend on inventory. You could buy one pair of shoes, or you could buy 15 of those \$2 books. If you buy the shoes, all of your risk is in that one pair of shoes. If something happens to that pair of shoes (it becomes restricted, it's damaged on the way to your house from your OA source, it's returned obviously worn and no longer sellable as new, etc), your entire \$30 investment is affected. Or what if competitors lower the price of the shoes, making it

impossible for you to remain competitively priced while maintaining a decent ROI? What if Amazon comes in stock on the shoes at a much lower price?

On the other hand, if you spend \$30 on 15 books and something happens to two or three of them, you still have a dozen other books to make a profit on. I'm not trying here to convince you to sell books on Amazon instead of shoes. I'm just trying to prepare you for the mindset shift you'll need to make when you start selling shoes. A \$30 loss doesn't seem like a big deal, but multiply that risk across all of your sourcing budget and shoes carry more risk than inventory with a lower buy cost. You need to be prepared mentally for the difference in risk involved when investing in shoes, and you need to weigh that risk against the potential profits before making shoe purchases.

We will discuss more in future chapters about mitigating the risk involved in returns and about the risk of restrictions.

Why We Sell Shoes through FBA (and Why We Don't Co-mingle)

Most of our readers are aware that our blog is called Full-Time FBA, not Full-Time Amazon Seller. We sell all of our shoes at Amazon through the FBA (Fulfillment by Amazon) program. On occasion we sell some of our inventory via Merchant Fulfilled, but the percentage of our FBA inventory is typically 99% or higher of our total Amazon inventory.

I won't say there are no profits to be made selling shoes on Amazon via Merchant Fulfilled, but we believe the best money on Amazon lies in selling shoes via FBA. Here are a few reasons why:

- More sales because of free two-day shipping for Prime members
- More time in the Buy Box for FBA sellers
- Save time and money because Amazon does all your shipping
- Save time and money because Amazon handles your customer service
- Save space and money because Amazon stores your inventory

When you've ramped up your shoe inventory to several hundred pairs of shoes on hand at the FBA warehouses, the cost of FBA fees versus the savings in fees by Merchant Fulfilling those shoes really has no comparison. We much prefer to pay a little extra in FBA fees than to rent or buy our own warehouse space, catalog our shoes, and do the work ourselves or pay an employee to pick, pack, and ship those shoes.

When it comes to whether or not to save time by co-mingling inventory, we always choose *not* to go stickerless. We always choose to label our inventory with our own FNSKU, especially in a higher risk category like shoes. Shoes have a greater potential to receive inauthentic claims from customers than items in other categories, and we

don't want our shoe inventory mixed in with the inventory of another FBA seller who may or may not have a legitimate source for their shoes. It's not worth the time savings to risk possible account suspension.

We will discuss more about protecting your seller account in the chapter on where to source shoes.

Tying Up Loose Ends

All in all, I'm not trying to use this chapter to dissuade you from selling shoes on Amazon. On the contrary, I truly hope you're able to make informed decisions and start selling shoes **if** and **when** it's the right choice for your business. **You** are ultimately the best person to decide if selling shoes is right for your business, but I wanted to make sure you have sufficient information to evaluate that decision before jumping in.

Shoes aren't for everyone selling on Amazon. The learning curve can be steeper than with other categories, shoes require a lot of capital, and the wait for sales can seem like an eternity. Even if you read every word I say above and every word in every Facebook group about shoes, it still takes trial-and-error to learn the category through your own experience. Everyone will have different results, and everyone will find different areas where they excel and prefer to source. What works for me might not work across the board.

But if you're willing to commit the time and money to learning the category...and some more time...and then a little more time...the profits are worth it.

Chapter 4: Amazon Guidelines for Selling Shoes

When Amazon gates a category for their third party sellers, they tend to have well-founded reasons for doing so. The shoes category is no exception.

Reasons for Gating the Shoes Category

Within the [Amazon guidelines](#) it states that “Amazon limits the addition of new sellers in the Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses category to ensure that customers are able to buy with confidence from all sellers on Amazon.” Be sure to notice the last part of that sentence because it’s where the crux of the matter lies: **Amazon wants to protect their customers and make sure they will continue buying with confidence on their website.**

If you get ungated and start selling in the shoes category, you must continually show Amazon you also have their customers’ satisfaction and buying confidence as your number one priority. If you don’t keep the customer buying experience as your main motivation for how you sell shoes on Amazon, you could damage your selling account metrics and give Amazon reason to suspend you.

Why would Amazon be concerned about customer buying confidence when it comes to selling shoes on their website? You can read the answer to that question directly in Amazon’s requirements for selling in the shoe category:

*“The requirements for selling in the Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses category reflect **buyer concern for product quality, product branding, and consumer safety.** Adherence to import and export restrictions is also important to **ensuring that buyers can purchase authentic, high-quality Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses products.**”*

Shoes (and handbags, which are in the same category) are one of the most commonly counterfeited items on the market. Certain brands of shoes tend to be counterfeited most often, and in turn those brands may be restricted even to sellers who are ungated in the shoes category. Amazon and brand owners alike want to protect their reputation as far as customers are concerned, in order to have happy buyers who return for repeat sales, leave positive reviews, and recommend their products to their friends.



One easy step for Amazon to take towards protecting their reputation as an excellent website for buying shoes is to gate the category for third-party sellers. Gating doesn't completely eliminate their problems with low-quality, inauthentic shoes being sold on their platform, but it creates a barrier to entry. Part of the reason for the ungating process is to give sellers an extra layer of awareness about Amazon's high expectations for their shoe sellers.

Amazon Selling Guidelines for Shoes

You can [click here](#) to read for yourself the requirements for selling shoes on Amazon. Here are a few points I want to emphasize for you before we discuss in the next chapter where to source shoes:

- * *"Must be new. We do not allow any used Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses products."*
- * *"Must be authentic. We do not allow any counterfeit, replica, or knock-off products."*
- * *"Must meet North America product safety standards."*
- * *"Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses products from major brands must be listed using the manufacturer's UPC code."* Amazon does offer some exemptions for UPC requirements in some cases, but for major brands of shoes you will need to list them for sale according to their UPC.

Parent-Child Relationships on Shoe ASINs

Another potential reason for the ungating process for the shoes category is that shoe ASINs have a parent-child relationship, which differs from other categories like toys or books.

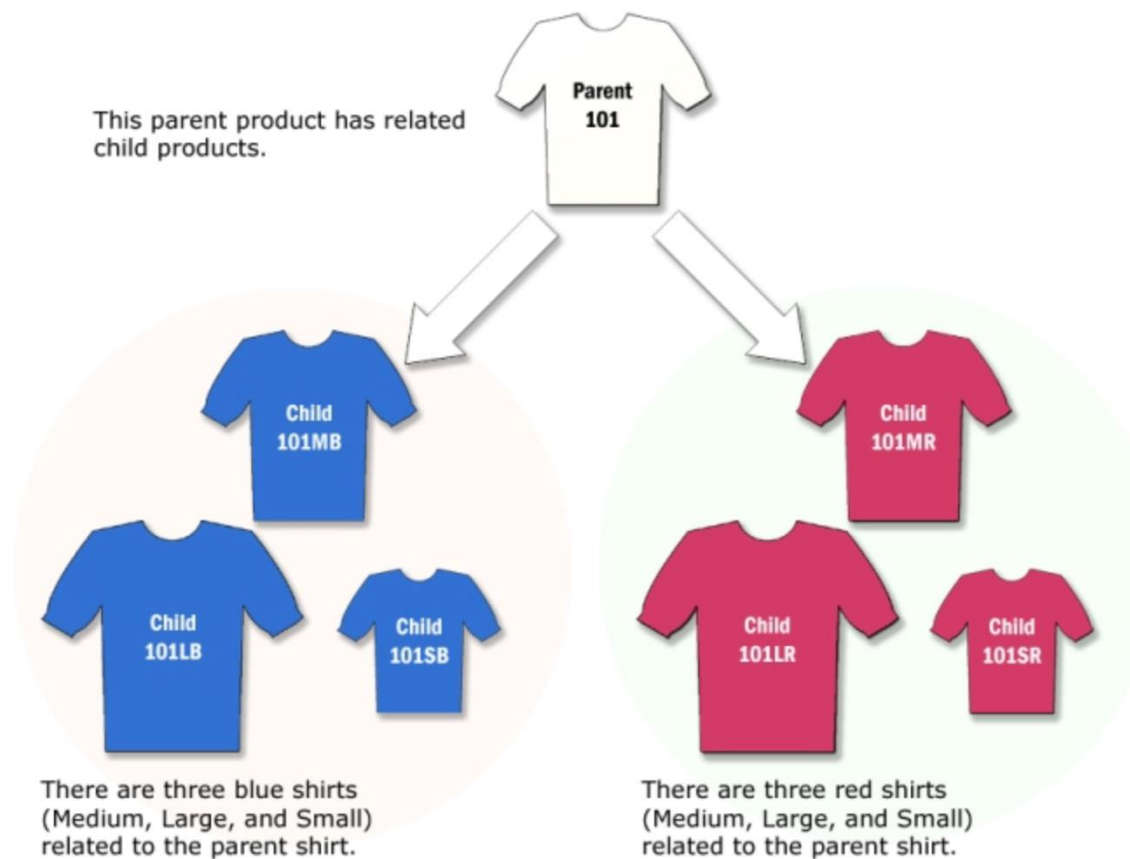
I recommend that you read the Amazon guidelines' description of parent-child relationships. You can go directly to that Amazon guidelines web page by clicking [this link](#).

Here's my quick summary of the important parts of the guidelines page:

- Amazon wants *"to help customers easily discover, compare and purchase different variations of a product."*
- Variations can help *"reduce the number of search results so that customers can more quickly find the product they are looking for."*
- Variations can also make *"it easy for customers to discover and compare different versions of a product on a single page."*

For shoes, the Amazon catalog is set up with one parent ASIN for the main product title, and then each variation of color and size has its own child ASIN connected to that parent ASIN. When you list your shoes for sale on Amazon, you will have a different SKU for each child ASIN variation in your inventory.

This illustration from the Amazon guidelines demonstrates the way the parent-child relationship works (the graphic uses clothes instead of shoes, but it's the same concept):



Here's more info from the Amazon guidelines web page to further illustrate the concept of parent and child ASINs and SKUs:

“Every variational relationship includes a parent and a number of unique children. The parent can be thought of as a non-buyable ‘umbrella’ which connects the different variational children. When you create a variational relationship, you use a parent SKU as this umbrella for your products. The parent SKU should represent the core product. Do not include any child-level information (size, color, UPC) on the parent SKU.”

Because Amazon wants to maintain a clean, streamlined product catalog, they require products to be listed by parent-child relationship wherever possible. If the catalog is streamlined and uniform, customers are more likely to find what they are searching for on Amazon — and more likely to make a purchase. One aspect of the approval process to sell in shoes relates to making sure that third-party sellers understand how parent-child relationships work.

Ungating in Shoes

Originally the ungating process for shoes was more complicated than it currently is. When we received approval to sell in the category in 2015, we had to submit sample photos and sample flat files showing that we understood how to format the files correctly and how to follow Amazon’s catalog guidelines for parent-child relationships, product titles, descriptions, bullet points, etc.

While it was a pain to submit (and resubmit when we did it incorrectly the first time!), the process of ungating was educational and helped me understand more about Amazon’s expectations for keeping a uniform catalog. It can seem annoying to have to follow all their rules, but again it comes back to customer satisfaction. Buyers are happier and make more purchases if they can see similar formats and high-quality photos on every page of the Amazon catalog.

At the time of this writing, Amazon does not require submission of photos and flat files for approval in the shoes category. That could change at any moment, just like anything else to do with selling on Amazon. If it does change, there are websites and services who can help with the approval process. If you’re good at reading and following detailed instructions, you should be able to go through the more complicated approval process simply by following the instructions Amazon gives.

Like I said, though, as of early 2017 Amazon *does not* require the more complicated approval process. Instead you must go to [this web page](#) with the category requirements for Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses, and then click the “Request approval” button at the bottom. You will need to answer a series of questions (just answer to the best of your ability and be honest), and submit your application for approval.

Categories and Products Requiring Approval

Sellers are required to obtain approval from Amazon before listing in certain product categories.

The table below lists the categories that currently require approval. If you would like to sell in one of these categories, click the link next to the category name and follow the instructions to submit your application.

Category	
Automotive & Powersports	View requirements
Beauty	View requirements
Clothing & Accessories	View requirements
Collectible Books	View requirements
Collectible Coins	View requirements
Entertainment Collectibles	View requirements
Fine Art	View requirements
Gift Cards	View requirements
Grocery & Gourmet Foods	View requirements
Health & Personal Care	View requirements
Independent Design	View requirements
Jewelry	View requirements
Luggage & Travel Accessories	View requirements
Major Appliances	View requirements
Services	View requirements
Sexual Wellness	View requirements
Shoes, Handbags & Sunglasses	View requirements

Some sellers report that they are automatically approved within a few moments of submission, while others wait a short time before receiving approval. You can check the status of your application by logging in to Seller Central, go to “Add a Product” under the “Inventory” tab, and click “Selling application status.” If you don’t receive approval the first time, you can always ask Seller Central for feedback on how to improve your application and then try again at a later date.

Chapter 5: Where to Source Shoes

With the exception of garage sales and thrift stores, shoes can be sourced at many of the same locations as other Amazon inventory. We'll go over those locations in a moment, but first...

Go Back and Read the Guidelines!

Before we get into a discussion about the possible locations for sourcing shoes, I want to redirect your attention to the previous chapter about the Amazon guidelines for selling in the shoes category. If you've been through the approval process for selling shoes, you should be familiar with these requirements by now, but it doesn't hurt to revisit these guidelines from time to time. If you just skipped over that chapter, it would be worth your time to go back and take a look at the guidelines again.

Maintaining these requirements while selling shoes on Amazon is crucial to your selling account's health. If you fail to meet these requirements, you are at risk of damaging your seller metrics and potentially having your account suspended. You should take these requirements seriously.

The reason I'm bringing up the guidelines again at this point is that where and how you source shoes is directly related to how you understand and follow the guidelines.

- If the guidelines say you can only sell new shoes on Amazon but you aren't sure if a pair of shoes is truly in new condition, you shouldn't source those shoes.
- If you're supposed to list shoes according to their UPC but you have the opportunity to buy shoes without an easily identifiable UPC, you shouldn't source those shoes and just try to list them on the product page that most closely resembles your shoes.
- If you find a good deal on shoes that are in plain, unbranded boxes and you have no proof they are authentic, you should not source them.

These are just a few examples of things you should think through as you're deciding where to source shoes. There are many other possibilities for why you would decide against sourcing at a certain location, and you should be thinking critically as you're sourcing so that you're aware of those other possibilities as they come up. It's not worth it to sell a pair of questionable shoes for a good profit but put your selling account at risk by doing so.

However, there are plenty of reputable locations for sourcing shoes that can make a good profit for resale on Amazon. We'll discuss the pros and cons of different types of shoe sources below.

Retail Arbitrage (RA)

Pros:

- Many sellers find an abundant supply of shoes in populated areas. If you live in an area within driving distance of many retail stores, you can source shoes for Amazon FBA on a regular rotation and come up with an almost endless supply. Many people source shoes through RA alone and make huge profits.
- Clearance sections of local stores can provide sources of shoes that no one else in the country can find at the same low price that you find. If you can lower your buy cost, you can increase your ROI, and you can give yourself an edge in pricing under your competition.
- You can collaborate with other FBA sellers in Facebook groups dedicated to RA shoe sourcing, or you can buy a spot in a BOLO (be on the lookout) group dedicated to RA shoe sourcing at a particular retail chain. Both of these methods will save you time in finding great RA shoe deals.
- RA sourcing gives you the opportunity to visually inspect both the shoe and the shoebox before you decide to make a purchase. If the shoe doesn't look new or the shoebox is damaged, you can pass on the purchase.
- RA sourcing provides an opportunity to send in your shoes to the FBA warehouse with a quicker turnaround than if you source through methods that require shipping to you first. Theoretically, if you source shoes this morning through RA, you can bring them back to your house or workspace, prep them, and send them off to the FBA warehouse by the end of the afternoon. The quicker they get to the warehouse, the quicker they can sell.



Cons:

- Sourcing shoes at retail stores means buying a lot of one-offs and adding a high number of SKUs to your inventory, which requires more maintenance

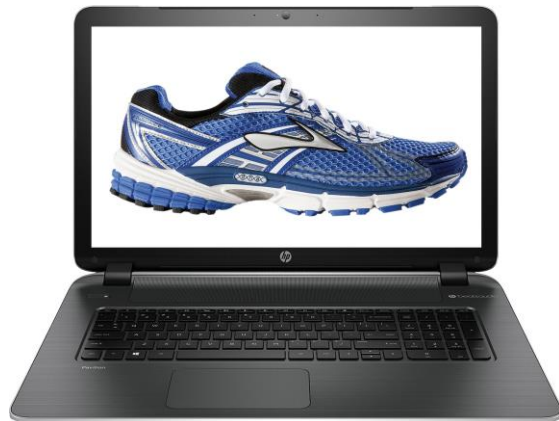
when it comes to repricing, checking for stranded inventory, and other inventory issues within Seller Central.

- RA sources give receipts for your shoe purchases rather than invoices. Receipts sometimes provide less protection for your seller account against potential counterfeit claims than an invoice would.
- Driving around town to lots of retail stores can be a time-intensive way to source for shoes. You also have to consider the cost of gas and wear-and-tear to your car when doing RA.
- Some sellers like to source at outlet stores for shoes to resell, but we recommend being very vigilant about any shoes you might source from outlets. Some outlet shoes might be overstock or clearanced shoes with no difference from the products found at regular retail stores, but other outlet shoes could potentially have slight defects preventing the retailer from offering them at their regular retail store. In the case of shoes with slight defects, you cannot sell them in new condition on Amazon. Be very careful in your inspection before purchasing shoes from an outlet store.

Online Arbitrage (OA)

Pros:

- OA sourcing provides great flexibility in your schedule — you can source for shoes any time you want, independent of any store's hours of operation.
- Even if you live in the tiniest, most remote town with no retail stores in a 100 mile radius, as long as you have a wifi signal you can source for shoes online.
- OA sourcing can greatly reduce (or eliminate!) the mileage you put on your car related to your FBA business. In 2014 and 2015 I averaged 3,000 miles per year of driving while doing RA. When I switched to focusing solely on OA shoe sourcing in early 2016, my mileage came to a screeching halt: I logged a whopping 12.6 miles for the entire year! That's a huge savings in gas and wear-and-tear on my car.



- OA shoe sourcing has great potential for lowering your buy cost through online coupons and for getting cash back on your purchases by using sites like [Ebates](#) and [Swagbucks](#). We paid for our family vacation in 2016 by using the cash back we got from Ebates on our shoe sourcing purchases! You can also use the [Honey](#) extension to automate adding coupon codes to your OA purchases, save money, and increase your ROI.
- OA shoe sourcing provides many opportunities for outsourcing certain aspects of your sourcing. Many sellers like to hire a virtual assistant to find shoe deals for them online. Others, myself included, prefer to buy deal lists and have a number of online shoe finds delivered to their inbox every day. I'll talk more in the chapter on deal lists about how to make the most of your OA subscriptions.
- You can also automate aspects of your sourcing by using programs such as OAXray or Tactical Arbitrage to scan online stores and find shoes to resell within your own buying parameters.
- When you source for shoes through OA and have them sent to your house or workspace, you have a constant stream of free boxes and dunnage to reuse for your FBA shipments.
- Or if you choose to send your OA shoes directly to a prep center, you can avoid having to spend any time or effort to prep and ship your shoes. For a reasonable fee, you can outsource the mundane part of selling shoes through FBA and give yourself more time to focus on other aspects of your business.

Cons:

- Online stores can have a limit to the number of shoes you can buy, either because of buying limits or because of limited availability of certain sizes, styles, or colors.
- Because anybody anywhere can find the same deals you find on shoes online, you have to be quick to make a purchase before the shoes are no longer available. You also have to be diligent in using coupons, cash back sites, and other ways of lowering your buy cost so you can stay competitive in your price on Amazon and still get a good ROI.
- As with RA, OA shoe sources can lead to buying a lot of one-offs and adding a high number of SKUs to your inventory, which requires more maintenance when it comes to repricing, checking for stranded inventory, and other inventory issues within Seller Central.

- As with RA, OA sources give receipts for your shoe purchases rather than invoices. Receipts sometimes provide less protection for your seller account against potential counterfeit claims than an invoice would.
- You cannot inspect the shoes or shoeboxes before you make an OA purchase. You can end up receiving damaged shoe boxes, shoes that have clearly been worn and are no longer new, or shoes with markings on the soles. We will discuss in the chapter on prepping shoes what to do if you receive OA shoes that are damaged or unsellable.
- OA sourcing can also lead to receiving the wrong items. In the past we have received the wrong color of shoe, two shoes of different sizes in one box, two left shoes in one box, one shoe in a box, or a completely different style of shoe from what we ordered. Again, we will discuss how to handle these issues in the chapter on prepping shoes.

Wholesale

Pros:

- One huge benefit to buying shoes wholesale is that you receive an invoice for your purchases. Having a good system of tying invoices to shoes you're selling on Amazon is the best way to protect your seller account from any inauthentic claims.
- Like OA, buying shoes through wholesale sources can greatly reduce (or eliminate!) the mileage you put on your car related to your FBA business, giving you a substantial savings in gas and wear-and-tear on your car.
- The reordering process is easy and efficient when you buy inventory through wholesale sources. You can save time and effort by simply reordering shoes when you've run out of stock, rather than having to go out and find a completely new shoe to sell like with RA and OA.
- If you choose to send your wholesale shoes directly to a prep center, you can avoid having to spend any time or effort to prep and ship your shoes. For a reasonable fee, you can outsource the mundane part of selling shoes through FBA and give yourself more time to focus on other aspects of your business.



Cons:

- Most sellers find it difficult to get wholesale accounts for shoes without having a brick-and-mortar store in addition to their online store. One way to work around this is if you know someone who owns a brick-and-mortar store who will receive shoe shipments for you.
- In order to meet minimum order requirements, you might have to go deeper per variation than you would otherwise be comfortable with. We will talk more in the chapter on buying decisions about why sellers don't typically go as deep on shoe variations as they do in products in other categories.

Liquidation

Pros:

- Liquidation sources can be a lucrative way to buy shoes to sell on Amazon for pennies on the dollar. With this kind of reduced buy cost, you can greatly increase your ROI, and you can give yourself an edge in pricing under your competition.
- Liquidation allows you to buy in bulk, which can save time from having to drive around town or scour the internet looking for shoes to source.



Cons:

- Liquidation purchases typically do not come with a line-item invoice, which can be risky to your seller account if you have to defend yourself against an inauthentic claim.
- You can't always verify ahead of time the quality or sellability of a liquidation purchase. You might end up making a liquidation purchase that is 10% awesome buys for Amazon but 90% duds that end up going to a donation center. You have to decide if it's worth your time and money to make these types of liquidation purchases.

Amazon-to-Amazon Flips

Another type of OA purchase are Amazon-to-Amazon (or AZ-to-AZ) flips, where you buy a product directly from Amazon when it's priced lower than normal, with the intention of selling it at a higher price. Sellers use the sales data from [Keepa.com](https://www.Keepa.com) to look at how often Amazon is in and out of stock and the price history for Amazon and third-party sellers to decide if there's money to be made by buying an item from Amazon to flip.

AZ-to-AZ flips have the same pros and cons that you find in other types of OA. One added con for these types of flips is you're banking on the fact that Amazon will go out of stock on a pair of shoes and stay out of stock long enough for you to sell your inventory, or that they will share the Buy Box with you if they raise their price from the low price you bought at. There's no guarantee either of those things will happen, so you have to take that risk into consideration when making AZ-to-AZ purchases.

Note: If you are a Prime member, you cannot use Prime two-day shipping to purchase items for resale, but instead must choose standard shipping.

Protecting Your Seller Account

We've mentioned it a couple of times above, but we're going to spend a little more time now talking about the need to protect your seller account from inauthentic claims.

Amazon is increasingly tightening their grip on third-party sellers who have inauthentic claims filed against them by customers. More and more both the ungating process and the process of defending yourself against an inauthentic claim require thorough and indisputable proof of legitimate sources for the inventory you sell on Amazon.

What this boils down to for sellers is that wholesale invoices are the most solid form to use as proof of legitimacy with Amazon — but what about retail and online arbitrage receipts? Are receipts useless when it comes to proving your case with Amazon if your account is suspended?

As with so many issues related to selling on Amazon, the answer to those questions is, "It depends."

Some sellers have found in recent months that retail receipts are a sufficient proof of authenticity. The key to using retail receipts if you have an inauthentic claim is to be thorough in your paper trail linking your receipts to the inventory items in question. You must have a detailed system of filing your **receipts with UPCs** of the shoes you've purchased for resale on Amazon and then be able to link any shoes you sell with a receipt if there's any question about authenticity. Amazon wants to see that

you purchased these shoes from a legitimate source, and they depend on UPCs to tie all of this information together.

Where the paper trail can get fuzzy is if you are sourcing from stores that do not use UPCs on their receipts. Some retail stores (like TJ Maxx, for example) use in-house codes on price stickers and receipts, making it difficult to prove to Amazon that you actually bought an item from that source. Here's a scenario where you can see how this would work:

You buy a pair of shoes from TJ Maxx, and you diligently file away your receipt. A few months down the road, that pair of shoes has sold on Amazon for a tidy profit, but then you get a flag on your account that the customer has claimed the shoes are inauthentic. Amazon now wants you to produce your invoice or receipt to show that you didn't get these shoes from a shady source. You pull out your receipt from the date you got those shoes, and you find that none of the items on the receipt have a UPC listed with them. They only have TJ Maxx's in-house code. So you have no proof that the shoes with that UPC were actually purchased on that date at TJ Maxx. No UPC, no proof.

The workaround for this is to take photos of your inventory along with the in-house code on the price sticker before you send items off to the FBA warehouse. You should include in the photo as much detail as possible: the inventory item, the price sticker with the code visible, the UPC barcode, and the receipt if possible.

You can then organize your photos in a program like Evernote for easy access. The same type of process can be followed if you source online shoes and receive an email or packing slip receipt that has a store's in-house code instead of a UPC.

Of course, the best way to prevent inauthentic claims or claims of "used sold as new" is to only source shoes in pristine condition and in their original branded shoebox. There's always going to be a customer here and there who makes a false claim (whether intentional or not), but why needlessly give anyone any shadow of doubt? We'll talk more in the chapter on prepping your shoes about making sure that your inventory is sent off to the FBA warehouse in the condition an Amazon customer would expect when buying a new pair of shoes.

Tying Up Loose Ends

Remember: Amazon wants you to place the customer first in every situation, and they want their shoe customers to buy with confidence. It's up to us as shoe sellers to make sure that happens.

Among all of the sources we discussed above, there are thousands of opportunities for profitable shoes to sell on Amazon. It's up to each seller to decide which types of sources work best for their business model and personal schedule. If you try out one method and decide you don't like it, try another and see if it's a better fit. I started out trying to source shoes through RA and had zero luck. Every time I scanned shoes in stores I felt frustrated and clueless — even though tons of other sellers post pictures of themselves with several carts full of shoes in the checkout line at retail stores. So I tried OA instead and really found my groove for shoe sourcing. With a little patience and determination, you can find what works best for your business, too.

Chapter 6: Buying Decisions

Now we get to the nitty gritty details that all shoe sellers must eventually come to terms with: How do I know which shoes to source?

Choose Your Personal Strategy

Buying decisions are typically where you make or break your Amazon FBA business, and selling shoes is no exception to that statement. One thing you will hear me stress over and over again in this chapter is that YOUR business is YOUR business, and ultimately YOUR strategy is YOUR strategy. I can share with you some questions to consider when making buying decisions and sometimes I can even share with you whether or not I would buy or pass on a particular pair of shoes — but only YOU can decide which shoes YOU want to buy and how YOU want to build YOUR shoe inventory at Amazon.



I like to use this example when we're talking about how to make buying decisions on shoes. One of the frequent questions I get from sellers who are new to shoes is, "Should I buy common shoe sizes or outlying sizes?" Or another way of saying it is, "Do the really big or really small sizes sell better on Amazon or do the typical shoe sizes sell better?"

My answer: Yes.

I'm sure that answer can be frustrating when you're looking for an easy answer and wanting someone to help you with difficult buying decisions. In reality, though, the question isn't about which sizes are right and which sizes are wrong. It's about which strategy you as a seller want to pursue.

A similar question in other categories might be, "Should I buy hot toys or hard-to-find toys?" Or "Should I buy long-tail items or fast-turns?" Well, the answer depends on your business model and your sourcing strategy. Both sides of the coin are valid options; you just have to decide which strategy YOU want to pursue.

Other sellers can tell you the pros and cons of different strategies, but then you need to take that information, apply it to your business, and move forward with confidence. As you develop your strategy, be sure to stick with your parameters for

a substantial period of time and watch how your sales go; then you can tweak your parameters as necessary and experiment with new ones.

Buying Parameters

I'm going to give you some bullet points below with some parameters for you to think through as you make buying decisions. In the bonuses for this course, I'm including a worksheet for you to use when thinking through the shoe buying parameters for your particular business. This worksheet should help you solidify your buying parameters and facilitate the process of making shoe buying decisions. I suggest printing out the worksheet and filling it out as you work through the next two chapters of this book. **You can download the Shoe Buying Parameters Worksheet from the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

ROI and Profit

As with any other category you're sourcing for Amazon, you want to make sure you set strict parameters for yourself when it comes to your expected ROI and profit for shoes.

For ROI, every seller has their own comfort zone for what they expect to make back on their investment after their Amazon inventory sells. Some prefer to always make 100% ROI, while other sellers are just as comfortable in a lower range. Depending on how fast the items will sell, it is not unheard of to make big profits on items that are only bringing back a 30% ROI. The key is how fast you're able to turn those items around and sell them, combined with the volume of sales. If items are turning over in sales very quickly and in large numbers, a lower ROI is not a problem. If items turn over more slowly, you typically want them to make a higher ROI.

Because of the long-tail nature for shoes, I started out only buying shoes that would bring me back a 100% or higher ROI. I stuck with this as my parameter for several months before I was willing to venture out to lower ROIs.

The expected profit of shoes is another factor to consider when you are making a buying decision, especially if you have experience selling in other categories where you typically make a small amount of profit per item. You need to give yourself a solid profit parameter so that you don't end up buying shoes with an expected profit of \$8 or \$9, get a return on those shoes, and lose any future profits because of a \$5 return fee. We will talk more about these considerations in the budgeting section below.

Styles

When you're first getting started you'll want to give yourself plenty of time and leeway to get to know the brands and styles of shoes on Amazon. It's similar to when I first got started selling toys. I didn't know at the beginning which characters or product lines were popular with which age groups, but I learned over time. It's the same with shoes. Eventually you will get an idea of which brands and styles are popular for hikers, for runners, for toddlers, for all-day comfort on the job, and so on.

Over time you will also get an idea of which styles you like selling best. Some sellers might make huge profits on certain styles, but if it doesn't work for you, move on and find what does work in your business. For example, I've heard other sellers say they've made a fortune on certain types of flip-flops, but I've never been able to find any that sell well — so flip-flops are on my list of styles I avoid. On the other hand, I've heard some sellers say they avoid selling very tall high-heeled shoes, but we've sold plenty of them and don't shy away. You really have to experiment and find what you prefer.

Brands

You'll also want to pay attention to which brands you decide to source for Amazon. Obviously, if a brand is restricted on Amazon, you'll want to pass on it unless you have another platform to sell it on. You can refer to the chapter on brand restrictions for more information on handling this issue with Amazon FBA.

Aside from restrictions, though, you will still need to make decisions about which brands you want to sell. Is a brand popular with counterfeiters? You might want to avoid it (unless you have a wholesale source) for the sake of protecting your seller account against inauthentic claims. Is a brand prone to returns? Is a brand easy to source from lots of locations and more likely to see an increase in competition and a decrease in selling price? These are a few questions you can ask yourself as you make your buying decisions.

Colors

This might seem like an odd parameter to include, but it's a point you will want to consider when you're making a buying decision. Are you going to sell any color of shoe that you find or are you going to stick with only certain colors?

You might be tempted to say, "I'll sell any color of shoe that will get me a sale" and just breeze past this question. But the problem with shoes is that you *can't* tell with certainty which color of a pair of shoes is getting the sales, unless there is only one

color variation on the listing. We'll get into more details about what variations entail and how to deal with them in the chapter on sales rank.

For now, though, I will say that many sellers choose to stick with neutral colors of shoes (think black, white, gray, brown, or even navy) because those are the colors most buyers choose. Those neutral colors are easiest for buyers to match with the rest of their wardrobe, and they tend to see the steadiest sales. Other sellers, however, choose to focus on the outlying colors that some buyers might be willing to pay a premium for (think red, pink, purple, green, yellow, orange, anything bright and unusual, including patterns like floral or leopard print). It's up to you which direction you want to go with your buying decisions.

Personally, I don't buy shoes in a crazy floral print or neon green, no matter how cute they are — unless the only options on a low ranking shoe are bright colors and no neutrals; then I'll branch out.

Sizes

Size variations are similar to color variations when it comes to buying decisions. Do you want to stick with common sizes or expand your parameters to the outlying sizes? With the common sizes, you are likely to see faster sales. On the other hand, some sellers swear by selling the outlying sizes (very small or very large) because buyers are willing to pay a premium for them online. Many buyers who need these outlying sizes become frustrated with shopping in brick-and-mortar stores who don't carry the size they need, and they will pay big money to speed the process of finding their size on Amazon.

Now, usually after I tell people it's up to you as a seller to decide if you want to buy common sizes or outlying sizes, the next question I get is, "What are the common sizes and what are the outliers?" Yet again, the answer to this question varies. (Are you sensing a theme here?) You might get several different answers if you ask several different sellers. Typically, though, I would say the common sizes for men are 9, 10, and 11 and for women are 7, 8, and 9. I've found that sizes smaller or larger than those ranges tend to act more like outliers, in my experience.

Another decision you'll need to make about sizes is whether you want to sell half sizes or different widths. Some sellers shy away from half sizes, but I personally have done well with selling them. Some sellers will source half sizes for women but not for men; again, it's up to you to decide, but I've done well with half sizes in men's shoes and don't avoid them.

When it comes to width, some brands and styles of shoes do better than others with width variations other than regular width. Certain brands (like Naturalizer or Easy Spirit, to name a couple) are known for having a variety of width variations, and buyers stay loyal to those brands to meet their sizing needs. For many brands, you

typically only will see regular width available, with a wide version popping up on rare occasions. In those cases where the brand isn't known for its width variations, I tend to avoid the wide width shoes because I have found they don't sell as quickly as regular width.

Here is a list of the typical abbreviations you will see for shoe widths:

Women	Narrow AA or 2A	Men	Narrow C
	Average B or B(M)		Average D(M)
	Wide C/D		Wide E
	Extra-Wide E		

You may also see shoes listed by their European sizes. Here's a list of the common European shoe sizes and their U.S. equivalent:

US Women's Size	European Size	US Men's Size
5-5.5	36	
6-6.5	37	
7	38	
7.5-8	39	6-6.5
8.5-9	40	7-7.5
9.5-10	41	8-8.5
10-10.5	42	8.5-9
11-11.5	43	9.5-10
12	44	10-11
	45	11.5
	46	12
	47	13
	48	14

Over time you will start to notice that certain brands tend to have more options for width or tend to be sold by the European sizing rather than U.S. sizing. On these brands, you will want to pay attention to the reviews on the Amazon product page, as well as the "fits as expected" percentage, to see if you might expect more returns due to sizing problems. Some sellers choose to avoid shoes listed by European sizing or shoes that have a lot of width variations, while others (you guessed it) focus on shoes with these types of variations and do very well with their sales. Personally (and this is just my current personal preference and not me saying that my way is better), I don't have problems with selling shoes with European sizing, but I prefer to stay away from shoes with lots of wide and narrow size variations.

Number of Variations

We've already discussed how you need to consider which sizes and colors you want to include in your buying parameters, but another issue to consider is the overall number of variations included on a particular Amazon product page.

The number of variations on a shoe listing (or any listing with parent-child relationships, for that matter) affects how you interpret the sales rank of that product page. I know a lot of readers' #1 question when it comes to buying parameters relates to sales rank, and I promise we are going to get into more details on that discussion in the next chapter — but for the purposes of this list of factors affecting your buying decisions, I simply want to say that a high number of variations on a product page can be risky.

The reason a high number of variations carries more risk is that you have no tried-and-true way to know which size or color of a shoe is driving the sales on the parent ASIN's sales rank. For every color or size of shoe included as a child variation, you are increasing the number of potential individual ASINs and decreasing your chances that any one ASIN on that page is the one getting the sales.

Think of it this way. You have two product pages for shoes on Amazon. Shoe #1 comes in black, brown, and white, and it comes in sizes 5 through 11, no half sizes, only medium width. So that is three colors and seven total size options possible for Shoe #1.



Shoe #2 comes in black, white, dark brown, tan, navy, black patent leather, black suede, red, leopard print, zebra print, pink floral, blue floral, red floral, and polka dots. It has sizes 5 through 11, includes half sizes, and it has narrow, medium, and wide width. So Shoe #2 has 14 colors and 13 sizes for medium, 13 sizes for narrow, 13 sizes for wide, or 39 total size options.

Let's do the math to figure out how many potential child variations each pair of shoes could have.

Shoe #1 = 3 colors x 7 sizes = 21 potential variations

Shoe #2 = 14 colors x 39 sizes = 546 potential variations

Now, not every single color of Shoe #2 is going to be available in every single size, but you get the idea. The fewer color and size options for a shoe listing, the fewer overall variations are possible for that parent ASIN.

Color: Black



We'll get into more details about how all of this affects sales rank in the next chapter, but I tend to buy shoes with a relatively low number of color and size variations because of that effect on sales rank. Typically, I don't like to buy shoes with more than five or six color options, although other sellers might have a higher or lower number for their color parameter. For sizes, I don't have a hard and fast rule for the number available. I do tend to stay away from listings with a lot of narrow and wide options, although I don't mind listings with half sizes.

Number of Reviews

You can increase your chances of buying shoes that will sell by sticking within certain color and size parameters, as well as by looking at the customer reviews.

If you look at the customer reviews on an Amazon shoe listing, you will notice that reviews from verified Amazon purchases include the size and color of the shoe the customer bought. This is important information for us as sellers. It's fairly safe to assume that colors with more reviews are receiving more sales.

If you are considering buying a shoe on a listing that has multiple color variations, you can look through the reviews and see

★★★★★ Beautiful, very well made, classy looking shoes

By Amazon Customer on July 10, 2016

Size: 6.5 B(M) US Color: Burgundy Leather Verified Purchase

if the color you're interested in is getting lots of action. If lots of folks are reviewing the fluorescent orange variation but no one has reviewed the slime green variation, you might prioritize buying the orange over the green.

The [How Many? extension](#) for the Google Chrome browser is a handy way to extract all of the information on shoe variations, including the number of reviews for each variation. You can check out the bonus video module for more information on how to use How Many? to make better buying decisions for shoes. **You can view this bonus video in the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Some sellers also like to look at the overall star rating of the shoe, especially if it has a high number of reviews. If a shoe has dozens of reviews and overall only 2.5 stars, you might need to be concerned that there's a problem with the shoe and you could get returns.

However, if a shoe has 2.5 stars and only a handful of reviews, the problem might be with the reviewers, not the shoe. At that point you would want to check on how long the shoe has been available on Amazon. If it's only a short time, few reviews are to be expected. If it's been a year and a half with only five reviews, this shoe isn't selling.

"Fits As Expected" Percentage

Another component of Amazon shoe reviews is whether or not the shoe fits as expected, runs large, or runs small. For shoes with a substantial number of reviews, Amazon will show the percentages of how the customers rank the shoe sizing. This percentage can be found directly above the drop-down menu for the size choices on the product page. If there isn't a percentage listed, Amazon likely has not received enough customer reviews to include the percentage for this particular pair of shoes.

Price: \$54.99  & Free Returns. [Details](#)

Fit: As expected (75%)

Size:

6 B(M) US  [Size Chart](#)

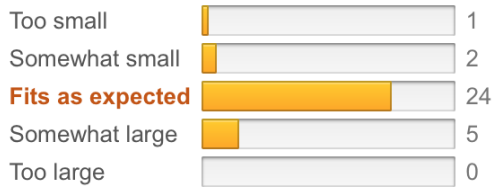
Color: Bronze



On the product page, you can click on the link with the percentage to pull up a more detailed breakdown of how customers ranked the shoe sizing: too small, somewhat small, fits as expected, somewhat large, and too large.

The percentage of customers who rank the shoe as running too small or too large is likely to affect the number of returns a shoe might get.

75% of customers say this fits as expected.



Is this feature helpful?

“Great fit and super comfortable!”

lidia maza | Fit: As expected

“Fits great, looks classy, can go with pants or skirts, dressed up or dressed down.”

jujubered | Fit: As expected

“These are such nice shoes and they fit great.”

Action Loving Woman | Fit: As expected

Fit: [As expected \(75%\)](#) ▾

If a majority of customers are saying that the shoe doesn't fit the way it should (that is, that a size 8 in this shoe isn't the same as a size 8 in other shoes or that a medium width is narrower than medium width in other shoes), you can assume that more customers than normal are returning these shoes, and you might want to avoid sourcing them.

Some sellers choose not to buy shoes with a “fits as expected” percentage below 60% or 70%, while some may keep the percentage even higher.

Be sure not to glance over the number of the percentage and not pay attention to the text beside it on the product page. If a higher number of customers are saying the shoe runs small, the text on the product page will say “Fit: Somewhat small (65%).” If you just glance at the number, you might accidentally purchase shoes for resale thinking that 65% of customers thought they fit as expected. Make sure to double-check the text beside the percentage for the actual sizing description.

Other Factors to Decide On

A few other situations tend to arise with shoe selling that you will want to think through ahead of time and determine your personal sourcing strategy. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself as you're setting up your buying parameters:

- Should you buy shoes in season or out of season?

Some sellers like to buy clearance-priced shoes at the end of the season and list them to sell on Amazon knowing they might not sell until the following season. For example, you can get a great deal on snow boots on clearance in April or sandals in September.

You can find super low buy costs by buying at the end of the season, but you also need to consider the potential monthly storage fees, long-term storage fees, and the opportunity cost of tying up capital for several months.

- Should you buy trendy shoes or timeless shoes?

Again, the answer to this question comes down to personal preference. Some sellers like to chase the fashion fads, while others like to stick with shoe styles that receive steady sales year after year.

- Should you compete with Amazon?

Some sellers don't mind competing with Amazon for shoe sales, while others (myself included) avoid it. Amazon can be a Buy Box hog with shoes, particularly if you try to price the same as or only a few dollars lower than Amazon. But if you are able to price significantly lower than Amazon (because you got a fantastic deal and have a super low buy cost), it's not impossible to get the Buy Box and get the next sale instead of Amazon getting it. Competing with Amazon on shoes is a fine art which requires time and patience to learn, but it can be done.

- Should you compete with other FBA sellers or Merchant Fulfilled sellers?
How many sellers is too many sellers?

In addition to considering whether or not Amazon sells a shoe, you should also look at the number of other sellers on a shoe listing and the number each seller has in stock. You can check out [our blog post](#) on how to manually determine the number of items your competitor has in stock, or you can use a Google Chrome extension like [How Many?](#) to make the work easier on both your web browser and your smart phone.

One point to keep in mind: If you are checking the stock level for Amazon on a particular child ASIN, they sometimes use a buying limit of 3 units per item. If you check the stock level manually or you use How Many? to find out the stock level for Amazon, be aware that "3 in stock" doesn't necessarily mean they only have 3 units in stock; it could be 100 units in stock with a buying limit of 3. This limit only applies if Amazon is the seller, not for third-party sellers.

Now, you're going to need a mindset shift from what qualifies as "a lot of other sellers" in other categories. In toys you might think that 100+ sellers is a lot, or even 30+ sellers, depending on the sales rank. But for shoes you want to find ASINs that have much fewer sellers selling each child variation — think fewer than ten, with fewer than five being even better.

If I find a shoe that only has Merchant Fulfilled sellers in stock, I get excited about the possibility of coming in as the only FBA seller. If a shoe has a handful of FBA sellers, I look at the number of pairs each seller has in stock before deciding whether or not I want to compete with them. If I will need to price competitively (within a few dollars of the other sellers), I don't like to join the competition when there are more than five or six sellers, regardless of how many each seller has in stock. I've

noticed that the race to the bottom starts when you get more than just a handful of sellers, especially when automatic repricers are involved.

But if my buy cost is low enough that I can sell at a significantly lower price than the other FBA sellers, I will look at the number of pairs each seller has in stock. If each seller only has one in stock, I will still consider buying the shoes to sell. If someone has a large number of multiples in stock, I think twice about trying to compete. Will that seller lower their price to compete with me? Will they get the Buy Box more often than me because they have a higher stock level? Depending on my sourcing budget for the week, I may buy that pair of shoes, or I may move on to find other shoes to source that don't have as much competition.

My absolute favorite shoes to source are ones where *no one* is in stock on a handful of variations within a listing with a low sales rank and plenty in stock on other variations. If you can source the out-of-stock variations, you can benefit from the low sales rank and higher traffic from people looking at other variations, and you're likely to get a fast sale at the price you want. My mind has been blown at times when I send a shipment of shoes, which are supposedly a long-tail item, but they sell within a day or a week of being checked in at the FBA warehouse. The key is to find those out-of-stock variations.

You can find out more about using the How Many? extension for Google Chrome and making sourcing decisions in the bonus module of your course. I can't imagine trying to source without the How Many? program – it really helps me stay a step ahead of the competition (groan, I know, another shoe pun!).

- Should you buy a shoe if the price is much higher than other variations?

Sometimes you will find a shoe for sale that has a crazy high price for one variation compared to most of the other variations. For instance, the size 5 and 11 variations are priced at \$99 while all the other sizes in between are priced at \$49. Or you might find that one color of a shoe style is priced significantly higher than other colors.

The buying decision for outliers in price comes back to your own personal preference and risk tolerance. Some sellers like to sell outliers and get the higher ASP, even though it might take longer to wait for just the right customer to come along and pay that higher price. Other sellers like to stick with pricing competitively to other variations, provided they have a low enough buy cost and high enough ROI; they would rather try to go for the faster sale than to hold out for a higher ASP.

- Should you add shoe variations to an existing listing? Should you create completely new shoe listings?

With any new Amazon listing, you have to consider the benefit of the time and effort spent in creating the listing compared to the amount of profits you could potentially make from that listing.

When you find a child ASIN that isn't available for sale on the Amazon product page for the parent ASIN, you can add that child variation through the "Add a Product" feature on Seller Central, or you can upload a flat file with the information for several child variations all at one time. I've had success adding child variations for both shoes and clothing, and once you get the hang of the process it can totally be worth your time. We have more info in the bonus section about how to add a child variation, including a screen capture video walk-through of the process. **You can view this bonus video in the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Again, when you are bringing an unavailable variation to an otherwise popular, low-ranking shoe product page, you could potentially get a fast sale at a good price. I will say, however, that the unavailable variation is more likely to get a fast sale if it's not an outlier in size or color. If you add a size 12 women's shoe to a listing, it isn't going to move as fast as if you were adding a size 7.5.

When it comes to creating a shoe listing from scratch, I personally haven't found a good enough deal to make it worth my time, but I know plenty of other sellers have done it with success. If I were to go to the trouble of creating a new shoe listing, I would want to be able to source all the size variations of the colors I have available, and I would want to have more than one of each variation available for sale. Even better would be to have a way to replenish those variations when they sell out — think wholesale source, not an RA one-off purchase. Creating a listing (especially one with parent-child relationships) can be time-consuming, and gaining traction to get sales can require even more patience. You want the financial profits to be worth the time and effort you put into creating that listing.

Budgeting

We discussed a little about budgeting for your shoe sourcing in an earlier chapter. Remember we said that shoes can be long-tail items, so it may take a while to ramp up your FBA inventory before you start seeing the daily sales you would like to see. If you don't budget ahead of time and plan for how you want to keep consistent sales coming in while your shoe inventory is ramping up, you could experience a slump in sales and feel discouraged that your shoe sales are "failing."



Like we said in the earlier chapter, I recommend dividing your sourcing budget into different categories, depending on your business model. For Stephen and I, we like to keep some faster turning RA and wholesale shipments in other categories headed in to the FBA warehouses along with our OA shoe shipments. We get an Amazon

disbursement every two weeks, and after we pay our family's bills and our business expenses, we divide up what's left over into those three sourcing categories: RA, wholesale, and OA shoes.

Amazon Disbursement =
personal income + business expenses + sourcing money
(in that order)

Sourcing Money =
fast turning RA + wholesale + shoes
(in that order)

How much money I can spend on shoes every week depends on how our sales have gone in the previous two-week disbursement period. If sales are a little slow, we continue to focus the bulk of our sourcing money and energy on fast turns in order to spark a bit more life in our sales. If sales are steady or even doing better than expected, we tend to focus more sourcing money towards investing in shoes than we would on those slower disbursement periods.

Everyone's business model is different. You may not have a problem coming up with plenty of capital to invest in shoes every two weeks, and you may just give yourself a general dollar amount to work with each period and buy as many shoes as you can. But if you're on a shoestring budget (oh yes, I went there!) and you're dependent on your FBA income in any way, I highly advise not putting all of your sourcing money into shoes right away. Continue to source in the categories you know, while you slowly build up your shoe inventory and get to know how the category works. Over time your disbursements should see a snowball effect where they get larger and larger, and you will have more money to spend sourcing shoes.

So you might be asking, "How does budgeting affect my buying decisions?" A very good question, considering this is a chapter on how to make good buying decisions.

The answer is this: Your buying parameters in each area listed above will change depending on how much you are able to budget for shoes in a two-week period.

If you have \$400 to \$500 to spend on shoes in a two-week period, that means you're working with \$200 to \$250 a week. If you have \$2000 to spend on shoes in a two-week period, you're working with \$1000 a week. When it comes to sourcing shoes at a \$25 to \$50 buy cost, that could be the difference between buying 5 to 10 pairs of shoes in a week versus 20 to 40 pairs in a week. I tend to think differently about what I want to buy if my capital is tied up in 5 to 10 items versus 20 to 40 items.

When I have a lower amount of available capital, I like to stick with items that are a more sure bet, items that are going to get a higher ROI, and items that have a lower buy cost. When I have more available capital, I will expand my parameters and buy inventory that I wouldn't take a risk on if I had less money to source with. Of course, everyone is different in how they run their business, but that is my thought process when it comes to budgeting and making shoe sourcing decisions.

Here's a chart for how I break down my thinking on some of the main parameters, according to how much capital I might have available in a two-week period. Note: I'm not going to put dollar amounts on what constitutes "lower amount" and "higher amount," since that amount will be different for me versus you versus Jimmy versus Sally. The *thought process* is what matters here, not whether you and I are sourcing with the exact same amount of money.

	Lower amount of available capital	Higher amount of available capital
Sales rank and # of variations	Top 1%	Expand to top 3%-4%
ROI	90%-100%	Expand as low as 50%, depending on amount of capital
Buy cost of shoe	No higher than \$25-\$35	Expand to go as high as \$50-\$60
Sizes	Stick with common sizes	Expand to include 1 or 2 more sizes on either end of my common size range
Color	Only neutrals	Expand to branch out if the listing is otherwise great

Remember, the above chart is just an example of the type of thought process you need to be thinking through when you're developing your buying parameters and your budget. These aren't my exact recommendations; they are just examples of the types of differences you might have in your parameters depending on how much capital you have in a two-week period.

We have included a worksheet as part of the bonuses for this course, where you can work through your business's particulars when it comes to buying parameters and budgeting. I highly recommend thinking through these questions before you set out sourcing, in order to save yourself some mental anguish of trying to make a buying decision on the fly. If you've set your parameters ahead of time, it will help you in the heat of the moment to know if something is definitely a pass for you or if it's a potential buy.

While you are getting familiar with the shoes category, you could have one copy of the worksheet filled out for a lower amount of available capital and another copy filled out for a higher amount of available capital. **You can download the Shoe Buying Parameters Worksheet from the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Other Factors to Include in Your Buy Cost

With shoes, you need to consider additional costs for selling via FBA other than simply the buy cost at the store. You also need to factor in the following considerations:

- Prepping — Either the time it takes you or the amount you pay a helper or prep center.
- Shipping — Shoes are bulkier and heavier than certain other categories.
- Monthly storage fees — Shoes take up more space than items in other categories and could cost you more per month than you are accustomed to.
- Long-term storage fees — Shoes can be more of a long-tail item, so plan to potentially have long-term storage fees for some of them. On our latest report of potential long-term storage fees, our shoes ranged from \$1 to \$7 per pair for potential fees.
- Returns — You should assume you will get returns on a certain percentage of your shoe inventory, and you need to take those returns into account when you're deciding buy cost parameters and profit minimum. When a shoe is returned via FBA, you as the seller are charged a "FBA Customer Return Fee" which typically ranges between \$4 and \$5.

It might be acceptable in your business model to only make \$5 profit on a toy, but a pair of shoes typically should be making more profit for you. Otherwise, you won't be able to afford all the associated fees, prepping, and potential returns that you need to subtract from your sales amount when you are calculating your overall profit.

Increasing Your ROI

As with any category of selling on Amazon, you can set yourself apart from your competition in shoes by using a few tactics to save money on your buy cost and increase your ROI.

- Use discounted gift cards.

If you like to do RA or OA at a particular store on a regular basis, look into buying discounted gift cards at websites like [Raise](#). Discounted gift cards can often be purchased from 4% up to sometimes 18% off the face value of the gift card. Using these cards can stretch your sourcing dollars and increase your ROI.

- Use a cash back credit card.

We do NOT recommend buying shoes or any other Amazon inventory on credit, but we frequently use a cash back credit card to make inventory purchases and then pay back the entire balance within a couple of weeks. We never buy more on a credit card than we have available to pay back before the time we will be charged interest.

- Use cash back websites for OA.

We always go through websites like [Ebates](#) and [Swagbucks](#) when making our OA purchases, in order to get a percentage of the purchase back. Ebates sends us a check for our cash back once a quarter, and Swagbucks gives us points 30 days after purchase that we trade for gift cards. Some sites where we do OA have a higher cash back percentage on Ebates, and some have a higher percentage on Swagbucks, so we always double-check the percentage before making a purchase. Both websites have a handy Google Chrome extension.

- Use coupon websites for OA.

We also make sure to check for any online coupons before making an OA purchase. Some online stores make their coupon codes very clear on their website before you make a purchase, but others require a little hunting. We like to let the website RetailMeNot and the Chrome extension [Honey](#) do our coupon hunting for us.

- Stay on top of local and national sales.

Keep on the lookout for local sales and clearance events for RA purchases, and subscribe to email newsletters for both local and national store clearance and sale opportunities.

You never know when that extra percentage of cash back or coupon discount will give you the edge over your competitor's price on Amazon!

Tying Up Loose Ends

When it comes to your Amazon FBA shoe selling strategy, you must take ownership of your decisions and your plans. It's possible to just hit the stores and start scanning and buying shoes without much preparation, just to see what works and what doesn't. I'm sure some sellers have found success by that method. But I really recommend that you come up with a personal strategy before you start buying shoes. It doesn't have to be a detailed strategy in the beginning, but at the very least I recommend thinking through some buying parameters and setting a budget before you start purchasing shoes.

Chapter 7: Sales Rank and Shoes

What is Sales Rank and Why Is It Important?

Sales rank is the ever changing number that Amazon assigns to its products to signify how popular each item currently is. The lower the sales rank number, the more often that item sells. Amazon even has quick links to see all of the items currently in the Top 100 of each major category. While this may seem pretty simple to understand, the reality is that sales rank is one of the most misunderstood aspects of selling on Amazon.

Product Dimensions: 14 x 10 x 6 inches
Shipping Weight: 2 pounds ([View shipping rates and policies](#))
ASIN: B00VNFT502
Item model number: 724010-004
Date first available at Amazon.com: April 4, 2015
Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #1,428 in Shoes ([See Top 100 in Shoes](#))
#1 in [Sports & Outdoors](#) > [Fan Shop](#) > [Footwear](#) > [Sneakers](#)
#9 in [Shoes](#) > [Men's](#) > [Athletic](#) > [Team Sports](#) > [Men's](#)
Average Customer Review: ★★★★★ 165 customer reviews

When an Amazon seller is looking to add products to their inventory, they usually ask themselves two questions:

1. What is the return on investment, ROI? (Or will I make money on this item if it sells?)
2. What is the sales rank? (Or how fast does this item sell?)

The question of ROI is simple enough. While you could do the math in your head, most Amazon selling apps (like Profit Bandit or Scoutify from Inventory Lab) can do the math for you and let you know if you sell that item what your ROI would be, but the question of how to understand sales rank is a subject worth dissecting. The better you understand sales rank, the better sourcing decisions you can make.

Understanding Sales Rank

The best way to understand sales rank is to pay attention. Unfortunately, Amazon does not publicize the algorithm used to calculate sales rank. The only way we can try to understand sales rank is to look at the limited data we have and then use that data to make the best decision possible.

Here are the basics of understanding sales rank:

1. Sales rank is like a snapshot in time telling how well an item has recently sold.
2. Amazon updates the sales rank of every item in their catalog about once every hour.
3. Just one sale can have a dramatic effect on the sales rank number.

4. The sales rank of an item can improve the same amount no matter if the sale is an Amazon sale, a third-party new sale, or a third-party used sale.
5. If an item has no sales rank then it either has never sold on Amazon (be it a newly listed item or an old item) or has not sold in a very, very long time (likely 2+ years).
6. Just because an item has a “good” sales rank doesn’t mean it is guaranteed to sell in the future.
7. Just because an item has a “bad” sales rank doesn’t mean it is guaranteed to never sell again.

Let’s break down all of the above basics of sales rank and go deeper in regards to selling shoes.

1. Sales rank is like a snapshot in time telling how well an item has recently sold.

Imagine scanning two different pairs of shoes. The data for Shoe A shows you that it has a sales rank of 150,000 and Shoe B has a sales rank of 151,000. Even though both of these shoes have a similar sales rank, it doesn’t mean that both shoes have the same amount of sales velocity. In fact, Shoe A could be consistently selling once a week, while Shoe B could have sold only once in the last year. The only thing the shoes have in common is that they both have sold somewhat recently.

2. Amazon updates the sales rank of every item in their catalog about once every hour.

About once an hour, Amazon takes all of the sales it has registered and incorporates that sales data into the sales rank algorithm for every item in their product catalog. Getting the sales rank directly from Amazon gives you the most recent and most reliable information.

3. Just one sale can have a dramatic effect on the sales rank number.

Remember Shoe B from above? It had a sales rank of 151,000 but only averages about one sale per year. If Shoe B sold today and shows a sales rank of 151,000, it’s possible that just yesterday Shoe B was ranked around 2,000,000. Wow! Did you catch that? Just one sale can cause an item to have a huge jump forward in sales rank.

4. The sales rank of an item can improve the same amount no matter if the sale is an Amazon sale, a third-party new sale, or a third-party used sale.

When it comes to updating sales rank, Amazon does not look at who the seller was (be it Amazon or a third-party seller) or the condition of the item (new, used, collectible) when it calculates sales rank. Of course, with shoes you’re only dealing with new items, so you have one less factor to consider when researching sales rank in this category — and that’s a good thing, right? Hey, we have to take our victories

where we can get them when it comes to something as complicated as Amazon sales rank and shoes.

5. If an item has no sales rank then it either has never sold on Amazon (be it a newly listed item or an old item) or has not sold in a very, very long time (likely 2+ years).

The only time a product will get a sales rank is if it has sold. Makes sense, right? I mean, it is called *sales* rank. No sales equal no sales rank.

6. Just because a shoe has a “good” sales rank doesn’t mean it is guaranteed to sell in the future.

While it’s possible to use sales rank and sales rank history to predict future sales, it is no guarantee the item will sell again in the future. There are many random outside forces we have no control over that may cause an item to not ever sell again. While the chances are very small that the item will never sell again, it’s at least something I want you to be aware of. There is never a way to guarantee an item will sell again.

7. Just because a shoe has a “bad” sales rank doesn’t mean it is guaranteed to never sell again.

So many people pass over possible inventory items because they think the sales rank is so bad it will never sell again. In general, I don’t like to buy higher ranking shoes to resell, but I’ll talk in the Keepa section about the times when I do consider buying shoes with a higher rank.

Understanding Sales Rank and Shoes

Now that we’ve established the basics of how Amazon sales rank works, I have some bad news for you.

Sales rank in the shoes category doesn’t work the same way as in other categories because of the parent-child relationships for shoes. Bummer, I know.

Even bigger bummer: If you’re like me and Stephen, you absolutely depend on the historical sales rank data from CamelCamelCamel and Keepa to make smart sourcing decisions, but because sales rank for shoes works differently, you can’t get the same type of data from those sources.

This fact alone about CamelCamelCamel and Keepa drove me absolutely crazy when I first started sourcing shoes. I felt completely helpless to make good buying decisions. I really felt like it was a crapshoot every time I pulled the trigger on a purchase when I was sourcing. Honestly, if anything could have kept me from moving forward in selling shoes, this would have been it.

But there are tons of ways to overcome the lack of historical sales rank data, and you really can make smart sourcing decisions for shoes. Remember the previous chapter? The one where I listed all the things you should consider when making a buying decision? There's a reason I put that chapter first and this one second. I want to stress to you that you *can* make good sourcing decisions with shoes even though you don't have access to sales rank history. I want you to focus first and foremost on the positives before you start letting yourself get down about this negative.

Don't get me wrong, though. Sales rank in shoes isn't completely invalid, and it isn't something to ignore. You just want to think of it differently than you would in categories without the parent-child relationship, and you want to hone your skills in using other factors to make good buying decisions.

Sales Rank of Parent ASIN

When Amazon tracks the sales rank of an item that has a parent ASIN with related child ASINs under it, the number being tracked is the overall sales rank of the parent ASIN, including every single child ASIN. So when you see the sales rank of a shoe on its Amazon product page, you are not seeing the sales rank of the size and color variation you might be interested in sourcing. You are seeing the sales rank of that size and color variation along with every single other size and color variation under that parent ASIN.

This is where the number of variations under the parent ASIN comes into play. The number of variations affects how much you should rely on the sales rank for deciding how fast a shoe will sell.

How can you tell the sales rank of the black size 8 shoe under a parent ASIN? You can't. You can only see how well the overall parent ASIN is selling. But if a product page only has a relatively low number of child variations possible for that parent ASIN, you have a better chance of understanding the sales rank for one particular child ASIN than if the page has a high number of possible variations.

It might be that a shoe with 100 variations only has 5 to 10 variations that are getting the bulk of sales for the overall parent ASIN. As long as you are buying one of those 5 to 10 variations, you can trust that the sales rank applies to your shoe — but if you're buying variations number 11 to 100, you're taking a risk that those shoes won't sell as quickly (or ever).

The simple way to look at this relationship between sales rank and number of variations is this:

Low number of variations = better chance of one variation reflecting the sales rank
High number of variations = less chance of one variation reflecting the sales rank

As an example, let's take a look back at our discussion of the two different shoes in the previous chapter, under the section on number of variations. Shoe #1 had three colors and seven sizes, or 21 total potential variations. Shoe #2 had 14 colors and 39 sizes, or 546 total potential variations.

Let's say Shoe #1 has a sales rank of 10,000 and Shoe #2 has a sales rank of 10,500. They're very similar in rank, so I would love to take a next step of looking at CamelCamelCamel and Keepa to see if that similar rank stays consistent across time or if it is only similar because one shoe has recently seen a sale. But I can't do that...so I need to start looking at the other factors we covered in the chapter on buying decisions.



For the sake of this illustration, let's say that everything is equal about the child ASIN we're interested in sourcing. It's a women's heel, name brand, black, size 8, regular width, same number of reviews, same "fits as expected" percentage. The only difference in the two shoes is that Shoe #1 is one variation out of 21 possible variations on its product page, while Shoe #2 is one variation out of 546 possible variations on its product page.

So one out of 21 versus one out of 546. The black size 8 of Shoe #1 has a greater probability of actually reflecting the sales rank on the product page. Shoe #2 has so many possible variations, the black size 8 has a lower probability of actually reflecting the sales rank on the product page.

Remember point #3 about sales rank above, "*Just one sale can have a dramatic effect on the sales rank number.*" The same thing applies to shoes as it applies in other categories, except with shoes **it is impossible to tell which one variation received the one sale that affected the sales rank.** For either one of the shoes in our example here, Shoe #1 or Shoe #2, there's no way to know if the sales rank yesterday was 30,000 or if it is always consistent around 10,000. One sale could have changed the sales rank dramatically, and that one sale could have come from a brown size 6 or a black size 8 – no one knows! Now, if you're keeping an eye on a pair of shoes that you're considering, and you take the time to wait a day or two to see if the sales rank changes dramatically, you can overcome the lack of sales rank history. Otherwise, you're left relying on all the other factors in making a decision, including whether you think the probability is low or high of your particular size-color variation reflecting the overall parent ASIN sales rank.

It may seem like you're left without some important resources when you're sourcing shoes. You may feel like you're having to make more decisions with your gut than

with your intellect and cold, hard data. Over time, though, you will get to where you can compensate for that lack of data, and your gut will begin to feel more reliable.

No one likes to hear this, but the best way to fine tune your ability to source shoes without sales rank data is to look at what's left in your inventory six to twelve months after you send your shipments in to the FBA warehouse. Pay careful attention to which shoes are selling fast and which shoes aren't budging, track the details, and tweak your buying decisions accordingly.

So, What Is a Good Sales Rank in Shoes?

Let's be real. That's the question everyone wants answered, right?

Most sellers like to stick within certain sales rank parameters when buying in different categories on Amazon. You can look at the overall number of items in a category and then calculate the range for staying within the top 1%, top 3%, top 5%, top 10%, and so on. If you want to have an up-to-date sales rank chart with these percentages delivered to your email inbox every month, be sure you are subscribed at <http://www.fulltimefba.com/salesrank>.


Amazon threw all of us shoe sellers for a loop in late January 2017 by changing the way they display sales rank for shoes in their catalog. Prior to that time, shoes were given a sales rank based on sales from the entire shoes category. Then Amazon suddenly began displaying sales rank on the product pages for shoes sub-categories, like fashion sneakers, pumps, sandals, and so on.

Product Dimensions: 11 x 4 x 7 inches
Shipping Weight: 3 pounds ([View shipping rates and policies](#))
ASIN: B018EW7ZEE
Date first available at Amazon.com: November 23, 2015
Amazon Best Sellers Rank:
#63 in [Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry](#) > [Women](#) > [Shoes](#) > [Fashion Sneakers](#)
#2676 in [Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry](#) > [Women](#) > [Shoes](#)
Average Customer Review: ★★★★★ 195 customer reviews
If you are a seller for this product, would you like to [suggest updates through seller support](#)?

To make matters even more confusing, third-party apps (like Inventory Lab and Scoutify) began showing sales rank data not for the shoes category...not for shoes sub-categories...but for the entire umbrella category of clothing, shoes & jewelry! Huh???

Dashboard Research List Inventory

Scout

 **Brooks Womens Ravenna 7**
 Shoes
 Ranked 5,214
 Offers 0

Same pair of shoes as above; Inventory Lab shows rank for Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry

Variations

In the span of a week, I bought several variations of a shoe ranked below 10,000 in shoes at the time of purchase, but by the time I entered them in Inventory Lab a few days later, they were displaying a rank of over 100,000. I thought I must have made a bad purchase, but I decided to send them in anyway. I just didn't want to deal with a return of that many pairs of shoes at that point.

But then low and behold, half those ASINs now ranked over 100,000 sold within two days of getting to the warehouse. Around the same time, other shoe sellers began posting on Facebook that they were experiencing the same phenomenon, and slowly the Amazon seller community was able to piece together what was happening with changes in sales rank for shoes. I realized I needed to shift my mindset and come to terms with the "new normal" for sales rank for shoes.

If you're joining the Amazon shoe selling party after January 2017, you won't need to learn a new normal. Shoes as part of the overall clothing, shoes & jewelry sales rank will be your only normal. But I wanted you to be aware of this change, mainly for the sake of background knowledge, but also partly to reinforce the idea that Amazon can make changes at any point in time. As Amazon sellers we must always be ready to adapt!

Another thing to keep in mind when you think about this change in how Amazon labels sales rank for shoes is that, well, it *is* just a label. My example in the previous paragraph proves that sales rank is somewhat of an arbitrary label. Just because those shoes changed to 100,000 rank overnight, they didn't stop selling. Customers still wanted to buy them. Customers don't look at that arbitrary sales rank label; sellers do. The shoes were still a great brand and great style, still had quality photos and keywords, still were in demand by customers after the sales rank change. None of that changed. Hopefully we as sellers can make the most of *all* of our knowledge of what makes a good shoe to source and resell, not just depend solely on a sales rank number.

Now back to our question, what is a good sales rank for shoes? Here's what a mini sales rank chart would look like for the Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry category:

1%	3%	5%	10%
346,903	1,040,710	1,734,517	3,469,034

(Note: These numbers will fluctuate over time. Be sure to check the latest [sales rank chart](#) from Full-Time FBA for the most up-to-date data.)

Personally, I bought shoes in the top 3% before the sales rank change in January 2017, but since that time I have been sticking with the top 1% while I get a feel for how things work with those changes. As I understand more about how shoes are going to respond in sales, I may expand my parameter again.

Even though I like to stick to shoes in the top 1% of sales rank, that doesn't mean that a shoe ranked 10,000 or even 5,000 is an automatic buy for me. If a shoe has a lot of color and size variations, I stay away from it, even if it is ranked super low.

I will consider breaking my sales rank parameters if the shoes have a low number of color variations *and* a substantial number of size-color variations are out of stock. The sales rank will just creep higher and higher if buyers can't find the colors they want — but what if I could source those colors and provide them for the buyers? Sales just might increase and the rank would drop. In certain situations, if I can source lots of size-color variations of those out-of-stock colors on a high-ranked shoe, I just might do it. I wouldn't do it if I can only source one unit of one variation, but if I can get multiples of lots of variations to fill out the missing options on that product page, I would consider it, even if the rank is higher than I'm normally comfortable with.

As with so many other facets of selling on Amazon, deciding your comfort zone for shoe sales rank is something you have to work out for your own individual business. Some sellers may think I'm being too conservative with these sales rank parameters, while others might think they are too risky. Ultimately, your business is your business, and your parameters are your parameters.

Using Keepa with Shoe Sourcing

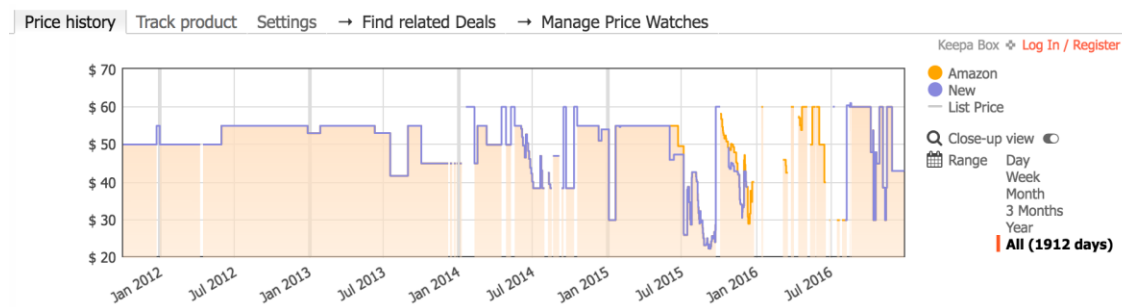
I know I said earlier in this chapter that the bummer news for shoe sourcing decisions is the lack of sales rank and price history data on CamelCamelCamel and Keepa, but actually that statement needs a bit of qualification to it. CamelCamelCamel and Keepa do not show sales rank history for the child ASINs of shoes on Amazon — but the awesome news is that Keepa does show the price history for child ASINs!

Even though you can't see the sales rank history for a particular child on Keepa, you can still glean a lot of useful information from Keepa graphs for shoes. Let's go over the types of information to be looking for on Keepa graphs when you are shoe sourcing.

Note: We highly recommend installing the Keepa browser extension so you can see Keepa graphs directly on the Amazon product page when you're doing research on your computer. We use the Google Chrome Keepa browser extension, but it is also available for Firefox.

Amazon's stock history

I don't like to compete with Amazon in selling shoes, so this part of the Keepa graph is huge for me. The orange-shaded parts of the graph represent times that Amazon was in stock, while the white parts represent times when Amazon is out of stock. The coloring can be consistent across all variations of a shoe, or it can show considerable differences for particular variations. You just have to do the research to see what's going on with Amazon's stock history for each variation.



You will need to decide whether you are willing to buy shoe variations with an all-white graph (meaning Amazon has never been in stock), shoes where Amazon was in stock a while back but hasn't come back in stock, shoes where Amazon is regularly in and out of stock, or shoes where Amazon is consistently in stock. Your buy price and the Amazon price history play an important factor in this decision, as well.

Price history

A Keepa graph for shoe variations also shows the price history for both Amazon and third-party sellers. Amazon's price is shown by the orange line at the top of the orange shading when Amazon is in stock. Third-party sellers' prices are reflected by the blue line on the graph. When there is no Amazon orange shading and no blue line, that shoe variation was unavailable. You can see from the picture above that third-party seller prices can increase when Amazon is out of stock; otherwise, Amazon and third-party sellers are staying at the same price.

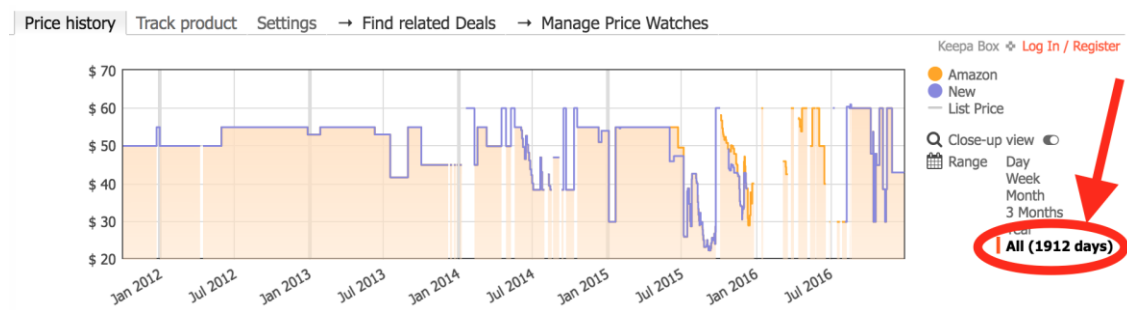
It is important to look at this price history and see if your shoes stay stable over a period of time or if they fluctuate with seasons throughout the year. The price of a pair of boots may go up during the summer when there are few available on Amazon, or it may go down during the summer when sellers are trying to dump their overstock before long-term storage fees. If the Amazon price is going up and down substantially on a Keepa graph, it may reflect Amazon price-matching that shoe with other websites.

A Keepa graph for shoes with at least a year of history will show you if there are price changes across the seasons. A graph with at least two years of history can show you if there are any price trends across the seasons.

If, in order to make a good ROI, you need to keep your selling price high compared to the historical price of the shoes, you might be taking a risk in buying that pair of shoes, unless you can lower your buy cost to increase your ROI.

Days on Keepa

You can look on the Amazon product page to find the date a parent shoe ASIN was first available on Amazon, but you can look at the Keepa graph for an individual child ASIN to see how long that particular variation has been available. By looking at a few other child variations' Keepa graphs in comparison, you can tell if one particular variation has only been recently added to the catalog while others have been selling longer.



Some sellers prefer to only buy shoes that have a substantial amount of time in the Amazon catalog, and they stay away from shoes that have only been available for a few months or less.

Tying Up Loose Ends

A fast selling shoe is different from a fast selling toy. A low ranking shoe might take a month to sell, but still be considered fast selling! Compare that to a fast selling toy that you might expect to sell within a day or week of hitting the warehouse. The

difference is that with shoes, you're not just waiting for a customer to come along who likes this brand and style of shoe — you're also waiting for someone who likes that brand and style *and needs a particular color and size*.

Again, now that we've worked through all the aspects of making a buying decision when you're sourcing shoes, I highly recommend filling out the worksheet for buying parameters included in the bonus material of this course. **You can download the Shoe Buying Parameters Worksheet from the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Once you've established your personal parameters, I recommend typing them up and keeping it as a handy reference while you're sourcing. If you do RA, you can print it to carry with you, or you can make a photo or widget on your phone. If you do OA, print it out and post it near your computer.

Eventually your parameters will be ingrained in your consciousness to the point that you don't have to refer to your notes. In the meantime, do whatever it takes to drill those parameters into your brain and help yourself make smarter buying decisions. You will definitely want to tweak those parameters over time as you gain more experience, but you can't tweak them until you set them! Set your parameters now, do some experimenting with your shoe sourcing, and learn how best to adjust your buying as you move forward in your Amazon FBA business.

Chapter 8: Using Deal Lists

Once you have determined your basic sourcing parameters when it comes to selling shoes on Amazon, the next step is to, well, get out there and start sourcing!

Are Subscription Deal Lists Worth It?

In our Amazon FBA business, we have found that the most efficient and effective method for us to source shoes on a regular basis is to use daily deal lists and Google Chrome extensions.

A deal list is a service offered to resellers, where you can subscribe to receive a list of possible leads on products to buy at retail stores (either in store or online) and resell on Amazon. A good deal list will be capped at a certain number of subscribers to prevent oversaturation.

Chrome extensions are mini-programs you install in your Chrome browser to automate the process of searches or calculations. Some Chrome extensions are free, while others require a one-time fee or a monthly subscription.

Subscriptions may not be for everyone, but the time savings for Stephen and me have been tremendous. We do all OA for our shoes, but other sellers stick with only RA and still streamline their sourcing by subscribing to groups that provide information for shoe deals available in particular retail stores at any given time.

When I first got started subscribing to these types of services, I had some reservations about paying money to get daily deal lists, leads from stores, or a Chrome extension:

- Is it really worth the money?
- Will I really find enough items to purchase from these subscriptions?
- Will these lists be sent to so many Amazon sellers that anything I buy from them will increase in competition and decrease in selling price?

As I've gained experience in using deal lists and extensions, I've developed a way for deciding whether or not a sourcing tool works for me as a reseller. In the bonus content of this course I'm providing a list of resources, including the tools I depend on most for my shoe sourcing. I've tried out more tools, lists, and Chrome extensions than the ones mentioned in that bonus content, but the products on that list are the ones I've stuck with and received the most benefit from.

Each time I try a new sourcing tool, I follow the same set of guidelines so that I can make an objective decision about whether it is good in the long run for our Amazon FBA business. I'll share my steps for making these decisions with you below, but

know that your own guidelines may vary. The great thing about selling on Amazon is that you can conduct your own experiments – you're your own boss, so decide what you want to try and how you want to try it, play around, and have fun!

Maximize Free Trials

Most subscription services offer a three-day or seven-day trial or a money back guarantee period. If they don't offer one, ask for one. If they still don't give it to you, that might be a red flag for that service.

The great thing about a free trial period for a service that provides you with leads on items to resell is you can use the money you make from those items to buy more months of the subscription. If you can't find enough during the free trial period to pay for your next subscription plus plenty of profit, then you know that particular service isn't for you.



Subscribe for a Test Period

Free trials are great, but three days or seven days still isn't that long. If you subscribe for one month, you'll get a better sense of what the product offers on a regular basis. This isn't like signing up for a cell phone contract — you won't be committed to subscribe for two years. Just try a month, see how it goes, and make your decision on whether you want to keep subscribing. Don't forget to set a reminder in your calendar to assess the situation when it gets close to time for the month to end.

With shoes, I also set reminders once a quarter so that I can look at my numbers and reevaluate the kind of profits I'm getting from each of my subscriptions. Because of the long-tail aspect of the shoes category, it can be hard to tell after just one month how that inventory is going to perform. At the very least, after a month I can tell how many leads I took action on during that period; then, after three months I can assess how those leads are performing when it comes to actual FBA sales.

Track Your Shoe Buys

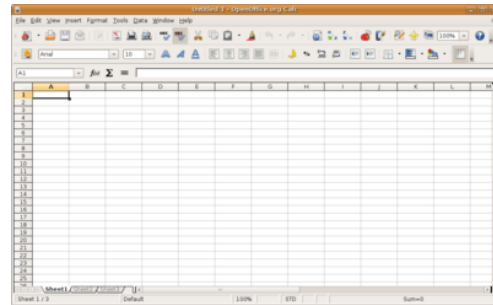
You won't be able to make an objective decision at the end of a test month of a subscription if you don't pay attention to



what you're actually doing with that subscription during the test period. Keep a notebook or spreadsheet with notes about the following:

- how many pairs of shoes you purchase
- how much money you spend
- how many shoes sell
- how quickly they sell
- how much the selling price differs from the time you sent it in to FBA
- which stores you bought them from
- any other information you wish to track

At the very least, I set up a spreadsheet where I can directly copy and paste the information I'm getting each day from my OA subscriptions. I have a tab in the spreadsheet dedicated to each list, and I keep a running file of my purchases. I receive my lists in either Excel or Google spreadsheets, and I can easily copy a row from the deal list, paste it into my buy list, and add my date of purchase and any other notes.



This buy list is extremely useful when it's time to list my shoes for sale on Amazon. I use it to double-check the ASIN I want to list them under, remind myself of the price I paid, and verify what I was expecting to set as the selling price.

For some services, you might not receive your shoe leads in a spreadsheet format. I still recommend setting up some type of record system where you can keep track of the ASIN, buy price, and expected sale price. If you are doing RA, you can also keep a buy list in your scanning app (for instance, we use Scoutify which comes bundled with Inventory Lab) as you are out in the stores buying shoes, and then you can export the information into a spreadsheet where you can format the columns and add information as you wish.

Along with spreadsheets, I recommend setting up each of your lists as a "supplier" in your listing program, so that you can run a supplier profitability report every month or every quarter. You can check out [this blog post](#) where I go into more detail about how I enter and use this information within Inventory Lab. I love that I can see in a brief report how each subscription list is performing with ROI, sales amounts, and profits.

Use Lists to Increase Your Understanding of the Category

This might seem a little like you're coming at the subject backwards and from the wrong direction, but I have learned a ton of information about how the shoes category works from studying how a list is put together. Every list is put together slightly differently, but most of them include the same basic information about

pricing, ROI, profit, etc. Some lists go into more detail and include number of reviews, overall star rating, “fits as expected” percentage, and other more obscure information.

When I was first getting started, I felt so clueless about what I should even be looking at when I was considering whether or not to buy a pair of shoes. I would look at a list and feel overwhelmed that all the data was more than I could handle.

But then I decided to break it down into bite-sized chunks and think through this question: *Why is this column of data even included in this list?*

Someone somewhere thought that information was important when making a shoe buying decision, so they included it in the list. But why? When I started thinking critically through each of the columns, I could see trends in what types of parameters the list set, and I started to learn how those parameters could affect the performance of shoes sent to an FBA warehouse.

Use Filters to Solidify Your Parameters

One way to help you stick to your buying parameters is to use the filters provided by the maker of the subscription list or the filters within your spreadsheet. The very first thing I do when I start looking at a list each day is filter out items below my minimum ROI requirement. I also filter out items from certain stores I’ve had trouble with in the past. If I can eliminate a few items right off the bat, I can save myself time in not having to look at them and keep myself from being tempted to buy something that doesn’t fit my guidelines. You know how you’re tempted to buy something, anything, just to keep from walking out of a store empty-handed when you’re doing retail arbitrage? The same phenomenon happens with OA, but you can prevent it by using your filters well.

Follow Rabbit Trails

The great thing about deal lists and groups is that they set you off in the direction of deals...but then you’re on your own! You have the freedom to buy the exact item on the list, or you can buy other items similar to it. If you’re only buying the exact items on the list, you’re limiting yourself as a reseller. Spend the extra time to do some research on the rabbit trails, and you may find even better deals that no one else knows about.



Likewise, you're not going to have good results if you get a daily deal list and just blindly buy every shoe on that list without vetting those shoes thoroughly. The lists are designed with certain parameters in mind, but not every item on the list is going to fit every buyer's individual parameters. In fact, it would be highly unusual if you bought even one or two pairs of shoes off of a list every single day you receive it. These lists are leads, not absolute-for-certain-must-buys.

Many times I have received a list that included a coupon code a store was running that day, along with a shoe lead that would be profitable with that coupon code. I spent a little time digging a bit further at that store, and I found even more buys in a completely different brand and style of shoe than the one on that original lead. Or I have received a lead for one color and size of shoe, only to do a little investigation and find out that a different color had *several* sizes that would be just as profitable. Score!

One time I jokingly told Stephen I was going to take a day off from doing OA and let him go through my deal lists for once. In typical quick-witted Stephen fashion he replied, "So basically I just take the list and go through and buy everything on it, right? Ok, got it, will do."

You can imagine the eye rolling I gave him after that statement. No, no, no, that is *not* what I do with this list everyday. But all kidding aside, if you approach these lists as a way to get a head start on finding great deals, you may find out that rabbit trails are one of the best ways to get tons of value out of a subscription list or group. One lead from the subscription can set you off in the direction of an awesome shoe find that no one else receiving that lead would have even thought about!

Do Thorough Research

Deal lists are typically arranged with lots of data and links to give you as much information as you need to get started doing research on each lead, and it's up to you to do your due diligence with that information. The best lists will format that information in a way that makes your part in the research super easy, but you also need to understand that ultimately *you* are responsible for making sure all of your research bases are covered.



In addition to looking through all the information presented on the Amazon product page, you can consider doing a Google search to find cheaper prices at a different store. You can look the item up on eBay to see if you can learn anything about the quality of this lead from what's available on eBay.

Always check the Keepa graph, like we talked about in the previous chapter on sales rank and shoes. You won't be able to glean any sales rank history from the graph, but you can see Amazon's stock history and the price history of the variation you're looking at.

One handy tip about sales rank and deal lists: Sometimes your list can inadvertently become a way to track sales rank history. If I don't have time to look at a list I got on Wednesday morning and I wait until Thursday afternoon to do my research, I can look at the current sales rank on Amazon in comparison to the sales rank on the list. There have been numerous times I saw that a shoe had a 10,000-ish rank on the list, but by just the next day it was already over 20,000. What does that tell me? It says that the 10,000-ish rank was likely because one color-size variation had a sale the day before, but it hasn't sold any other variations in that time period and probably doesn't usually sell as often as I would like. I might have bought the shoe at 10,000 rank, but not at 20,000 — so pay close attention to the current sales rank in comparison to the rank on the list.

Don't Get Lazy

You really have to take ownership when it comes to fully implementing these deal lists. You can't depend on lists or groups to do all the work of sourcing for you. In order to truly get your money's worth out of them, you have to use them as a jumping off point and run with it from there on your own. You aren't going to get your money's worth if you install a paid Chrome extension and never use it, or if you get a deal list in your inbox every day but never open that email (much less open the attached spreadsheet), or if you join a group but never follow through on the information shared within that group.



Set aside a specific time each day to work through your list or play around with an extension like OAXray. If you don't put it on your calendar, you're much more likely to forget it or slough it off. Be consistent and you will develop a habit of doing solid OA or RA each day. Most lists are released at around the same time each day, so figure out when it will be in your inbox and set a reminder on your phone to look at it as soon as possible after it's released.

Tying Up Loose Ends

It's up to you whether you decide to do all of your sourcing on your own or whether you go the route of subscribing to a list or a group. These types of subscriptions are not cheap, which can be a sticking point for people with a tight FBA budget. For us, we decided that the time saved by subscribing to lists and Chrome extensions more than made up for the cost of the subscriptions.

I put together a list called "Tools for Sourcing Shoes" that includes the apps, Chrome extensions, deal lists, and other programs I use on a regular basis for sourcing shoes. **You can download the Tools for Sourcing Shoes PDF from the course bonuses in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Chapter 9: Brand Restrictions and Shoes

Brand Restrictions and Sourcing

When it comes to buying items to sell on Amazon, every seller must consider how to successfully navigate the current state of Amazon brand restrictions. In this chapter, I want to help you better understand why Amazon is adding more brands to their list of brands needing approval to sell on Amazon, how these brand restrictions need to impact your shoe sourcing, and how to best respond when a brand you are selling becomes restricted.



Note: Although it is wise to think through what you should do in response to these recent changes in brand restrictions on Amazon, it is important to keep in mind that the percentage of restricted brands is still very, very small compared to the percentage of brands that are *not* restricted,

Why Amazon Restricts Brands

It's not news to most FBA sellers that Amazon tries to do everything they can to protect their customers from unknowingly buying counterfeit merchandise on their platform. Throughout the years, in order to protect the customer buying experience, Amazon has implemented incremental changes making it harder and harder for counterfeiters to successfully sell their fake merchandise on Amazon. Sometimes these changes can cause Amazon sellers of legitimate merchandise to need to adjust their sourcing strategies. In this section, we want to help you think through how you can best respond to these changes, as well as how to prepare for possible future changes.

For many years, Amazon had only a small number of brands that most resellers were not approved to sell. The number of restricted brands wasn't large, and although Amazon does not issue an official list of restrictions, most resellers knew which brands to avoid. Until recently it was pretty rare that a new brand was added to the unofficial list of restricted brands.

To make things more confusing, Amazon is typically very inconsistent with how they handle their brand restrictions. For example, Amazon decided one day in 2016 to restrict adidas brand merchandise, and many sellers had all of their adidas

inventory (both clothing and shoes) suddenly stranded. Within a few days, the brand was unrestricted again, and the inventory could be listed again. In another example, many sellers suddenly became restricted to sell Nike shoes, while others were not restricted – and still others were restricted only on certain ASINs. It can be dizzying trying to keep up with all of these changes and how they apply to you as an individual seller.

Overall, Amazon began to ramp up their brand restrictions in 2016 in a way that caused (and for some, is still causing) stress and uncertainty about how to best handle sourcing inventory, particularly in the shoes category. These feelings of uncertainty can stem from a few aspects of how Amazon handles brand restrictions:

- **Amazon announces brand restrictions without warning.** One day, your inventory items of a particular brand are selling, and the next day they are inactive.
- **Amazon can restrict brands that a seller has sold many, many units of in the past.** Many sellers who focus on a particular brand end up living in worry if they have dozens or even hundreds of a particular brand in stock. They feel they have no way to know if their inventory could be active on Amazon one day, and then inactive the next day due to a brand restriction.
- **Amazon doesn't always make it clear how to respond to brand restrictions.** When a brand suddenly becomes restricted, some Amazon sellers don't know what to do.
- **The requirements to become approved to sell certain brands on Amazon can seem impossible to meet.** Sometimes Amazon will accept invoices from wholesalers for brand approval. Sometimes they require a letter from the brand owner. Sometimes they require a large non-refundable fee.

I don't share all of this to alarm you, to cause you to want to stop selling on Amazon, or to scare you away from selling shoes. I share this with you so that you're well prepared for the possibilities that may be ahead. In my and Stephen's opinion, there is nothing to fear from these brand restrictions, as long as you make contingency plans for what to do if a brand you are selling becomes restricted.

Brand Restrictions and Sourcing Strategies

There are a number of ways that brand restrictions could affect your shoe sourcing strategies and a number of ways you can respond to those possibilities. I highly encourage you to think critically about your own business, your available capital, your business model, and your own personal risk tolerance when you're making decisions about how to source shoes for Amazon.

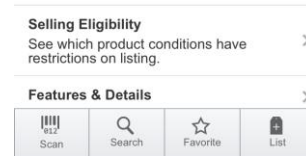
A vitally important aspect of your shoe sourcing research should be to verify that you are approved to sell a brand before you make any purchases. **Always check the**

Amazon Seller app for your eligibility to sell any shoes you plan on buying to sell on Amazon. You can also check for your listing limitations on the “Add a Product” page of Seller Central.

Listed in this section are a few possible strategies you can follow when it comes to sourcing and brand restrictions. You can implement any or all of these strategies, or come up with your own.



1. **Stop sourcing any brand you think might become restricted in the future.** You could try and guess which brands Amazon may restrict next, but you could only be guessing and possibly miss multiple opportunities to make profits. In an ideal situation, the shoes you source for FBA should sell fast enough that a future brand restriction might not ever happen while you're in stock. Of course, we don't live in an ideal world, so we need to think through the possibilities just in case.
2. **Only buy small amounts of shoes from brands you suspect may become restricted in the future.** Again, you could try to predict which brands will become restricted, but you could lose out on a great deal of money by skipping over some really profitable items.
3. **Apply to become approved to sell certain brands on Amazon.** This is worth a try, but unless you have a wholesale account with the brand, it's going to be next to impossible to apply and get approved.
4. **Don't change a thing about your sourcing and respond appropriately if a brand you sell becomes restricted.** If your sourcing skills are top notch, then this plan is probably best, as you're probably going to sell the items you source fairly quickly. If there are items you source that end up not selling as fast as you expect them to, then you can either reprice them to sell faster, or wait it out... and if that brand becomes restricted, you can respond accordingly.



How to Respond If a Brand You Sell Becomes Restricted

There are two main ways to respond if you get an email from Amazon communicating that a brand you are selling (or have sold in the past) has become restricted. Hopefully it's pretty obvious which way I recommend.

Response Method #1

Respond with panic, freak out, and possibly consider quitting Amazon.

I hope you can see this is not the best way to respond, but it's a response we see all the time in reseller-focused Facebook groups. Not only is freaking out unproductive, it's also unprofitable. Please do not waste your time panicking when you can spend your time working to improve your business instead.

Response Method #2

Respond with wise actions.

Let's break down a wise way to respond when you discover a brand you're selling becomes restricted. These actions can benefit your Amazon FBA business in general and your shoe inventory in particular.

If you receive word that a brand has become restricted on Amazon, check your inventory in Amazon Seller Central and see if your brand-related inventory is inactive or not.

1. If your inventory is still active, that means you haven't (yet!) been restricted from selling this brand. I recommend repricing your inventory to sell out of it ASAP. It's possible that the brand restriction has not impacted some of your listings yet but it will at a later date, so now is the time to try and sell as soon as you can.
2. If your inventory is now inactive, that means you have been restricted from selling this brand. You will need to open up a removal order ([here's how](#)) and have the inactive inventory returned to you. Once the merchandise has been returned to your place of business, consider these opportunities to get capital back from these items:
 - Consider selling your restricted items on eBay. If customers can't buy these items on Amazon for a good price because of the new restrictions, some of them will go to eBay to look for the items to buy. I've had good success with selling some of my items on eBay after they became restricted on Amazon.
 - Consider selling these items locally on Craigslist. In order to get the most money for your item, read up on Craigslist best practices before you try and sell on that platform. Also be sure you read up on safe places to meet when you close the sale.
 - Look into other online platforms to sell these items.

- If the return window is still open, you could consider returning these items to the store you first purchased them from. I only recommend this method if you do not have large quantities of items to return, so that you do not damage your relationship with the retail store.

Assessing Risk

Based on what you now know about current brand restrictions and possible future ones, how do you go about deciding where and how to make adjustments to your FBA business – or even whether you should make adjustments at all? Many of your sourcing decisions throughout the year come down to assessing your business' risk when it comes to brand restrictions.



Here are a few tips for considering your risk as you make shoe sourcing decisions:

- **Understand every business is risky by nature.** There is no risk-free business out there, whether you are talking about business in general or Amazon FBA in particular. If you're going to succeed at doing business, you need to understand the nature of risk and accept it as a part of the process.
- **Look at the probability of certain outcomes.** How likely is it for you in your situation to encounter certain circumstances? In my own personal case, I am asking myself what the likelihood is that a brand I am selling will suddenly become restricted. How deep in inventory am I in those brands that are most likely to become restricted?
- **Gain some perspective.** Perspective can be a game changer as far as your business mindset is concerned. Lately, the city where I live has had a lot of thunderstorms. You can often hear thunder from the office and look out the window to see ominous clouds and pouring rain. But that's just the view from the office. From plenty of other places in the world, the view is sunny and bright. The same is true about your FBA business: Don't settle into a gloomy, cloudy, negative view, but regain perspective about all the areas that are going right in FBA selling. Spend some time talking with others in the FBA community about positive steps you can take to advance your business.
- **Identify areas where you can make practical changes to your business.** Do you need to focus less on retail arbitrage and focus more on finding wholesale sources? Then do that. Is abandoning retail arbitrage the answer across the board for everyone in FBA? Probably not. Is it the answer for your business? I don't know; only you can evaluate your situation and come to that determination. But spend some time evaluating your own business and identifying how you can take practical steps to make any

necessary changes, and see how much you can accomplish once those changes are made.

- **Realize there are no guarantees.** There is no 100% fool-proof way to protect yourself and your business against every possible eventuality. Amazon is going to continue to change the way things work for third-party sellers. New brands might become restricted at any moment, and new difficulties can arise in the process of sending in shipments to FBA warehouses. But there are always adjustments you can make to adapt to the new regulations and processes. There are always ways to adjust your business and continue to find profits, on Amazon and elsewhere.

Tying Up Loose Ends

When it comes to shoe sourcing, always fall back on *doing your research up front*. The best overall plan of action for dealing with possible brand restrictions is to check the Amazon Seller app or Seller Central to see if you're approved to sell the shoes you plan on sourcing. Only purchase as many of an item that you are comfortable buying. If a brand becomes restricted after you buy it (not likely, but possible), I encourage you to make wise choices with how you respond.

The Amazon catalog is massive, with thousands of potential shoes for you to sell. Even with brand restrictions, there is overwhelming potential for huge profits from Amazon FBA shoe sales. Do your research, and find those deals to resell! Don't let your mind be limited by a few restrictions, and get out there to find the treasure waiting for you.

Chapter 10: Inspecting and Prepping Shoes

Once you've made the decision on whether or not a pair of shoes would be a good buy to resell on Amazon, you need to inspect and prep the shoes to send to the FBA warehouse. If you are doing retail arbitrage, you can inspect the shoes in the store before you purchase them, a huge plus for doing RA. If the shoes don't pass inspection, don't buy them. If you are doing online arbitrage or another type of sourcing where the shoes are shipped to you after you purchase them, you will need to carefully inspect the shoes upon arrival to decide if they are in new condition for sale on Amazon.

Think Like an Amazon Customer

The biggest mindset shift you need to make when selling shoes on Amazon is to always think like your customer with every action and decision you make. Amazon's goal is to be the most customer-centric business in the world, in order to build customer trust and keep buyers coming back to their platform again and again. You must understand Amazon's mindset and make your decisions based upon customer happiness if you want to succeed on Amazon in the long term.

As you are inspecting and prepping your shoes, always come back to this question:

What would the customer expect when opening up their Amazon package and finding this pair of shoes?

You can flesh that question out with any aspect of inspecting and prepping your shoes, and we'll talk about these different points to consider as we go through this chapter. Every point of inspecting and prepping your shoes must come back to how a customer would react to the shoes. If the customer is buying a new pair of shoes on Amazon, how would they feel about opening up their package and finding the pair of shoes you have sent to the warehouse? Would they be satisfied that the shoes are absolutely new? Would they be pleased with the packaging? Or would they be disappointed that the shoebox is crushed, there isn't any protective covering around each shoe, and the heels are scuffed?



If you don't shift your mindset to make customer happiness your greatest concern, you are putting your Amazon seller account at risk. It's tempting as a seller to cut

corners to save time or money — *but do not do it!* If you receive a shipment of shoes with a crushed shoebox, don't just send it in as is, just to save the time and money of having to deal with it. If you receive a shipment of shoes and find that they aren't in new condition, don't just turn a blind eye and try to sell them as new anyway. You may think you're saving time or money by just selling the shoes anyway, but you have to ask yourself if it's worth it to make a \$50 profit by putting your seller account at risk of inauthentic claims or "used sold as new" claims. That \$50 profit won't go very far if your account is suspended.

You have to put yourself in the customer's shoes – well, not literally the shoes you are hoping to sell them, but their figurative shoes. Think like your customer, not like a seller out to make a quick buck. Take the time to learn what makes Amazon shoe customers happy, and then make their happiness your priority as a seller.

Amazon Guidelines

You will remember from the [Amazon guidelines](#) covered in previous chapters that shoes sold on Amazon must:

- Be in new condition
- Be authentic
- Pass North American safety standards
- Be listed by their UPC

The inspection process we will outline below is to insure that your shoes are sent to the warehouse in new condition following each of these guidelines listed above.

The Amazon guidelines also give basic instructions for how to prep and package items being sent to the FBA warehouse. I recommend that you [click this link](#) to read for yourself the detailed guidelines for Amazon's prep and packaging requirements for all items sent to the warehouse. I will copy here for you the portion directly related to shoes:

"Footwear, regardless of material, must be packaged with no shoe material exposed, either in shoe boxes or bagged in a polybag with a suffocation warning. Shoe box lids must be secured with a non-adhesive band or removable tape."

We will discuss how to prep shoes in more detail below, or you can watch the video modules of this course for a demonstration of the inspection and prepping process. We've also included in the bonus materials for this course an Inspection and Prepping Checklist that you can print out and post for easy reference in your work station. **You can access the video modules and download the Inspection and Prepping Checklist from the course materials in your Full-Time FBA account.**

Inspecting Shoes

The inspection process is a vital component of guaranteeing customer happiness and protecting your Amazon seller account. You will want to do a thorough job of inspecting each pair of shoes you sell through FBA. If you have someone help you with the prepping process, make sure you teach them each step of inspecting shoes. If you use a prep center, make sure they guarantee that their workers follow a thorough inspection process. Regardless of who does the actual inspection, you as the seller are ultimately responsible for all shoes you list through your seller account, so be intentional about everyone you work with going above and beyond in the inspection and prepping process.

If you are doing RA, you will want to inspect every pair of shoes before you make your purchase. If you're doing OA, this inspection will happen after your shipment arrives at your house or the prep center. One of the drawbacks to doing OA is that sometimes you end up with the wrong shoes or damaged shoes in your shipment. You just have to decide whether this drawback outweighs the benefits of doing OA in your business model. We will have a section at the end of this chapter for how to deal with OA shoes that don't pass inspection.

Shoebbox

The first impression your customers will get of their shoes comes from the shoebbox. For some types of shoes and for some customers, the shoebbox isn't that big of a deal — but for others, the shoebbox is an important part of the overall purchase.

You should inspect your shoeboxes by asking the following questions:

- Does the shoe have a box? Does it *need* a box? Some shoes (like flip-flops, crocs, and slippers) don't need a shoebox and should be poly bagged.
- Does the box have the shoe's branding? Does it *need* the shoe's branding? We'll address that question more below.
- Does the box have a lid? Has an attached lid been torn off?
- Are the corners of the box crushed?
- Does the box have a price written on it?
- Does the box have store or price stickers on it?

You might be thinking, "What's the big deal? You're going to wear the shoes, not the box. Doesn't the box just get thrown out eventually?" And that's where we need to start thinking like the customer, not like a seller out to make the biggest profits possible. The shoes might be for a gift, in which case the shoebox should not be damaged in any way. In other cases, the customer might want to store the shoes in their original box, almost like a collector item. This type of customer isn't going to want a shoebox with crushed corners or a ripped lid.

Let's work through each of the above questions. The first couple of questions can be discussed together.

- **Does the shoe have a box? Does it *need* a box?**
- **Does the box have the shoe's branding? Does it *need* the shoe's branding?**

You have no way to know what the customer's intention is for buying the shoes. When it comes to pricier, high end shoes, you need to assume that the customer wants the shoebox and they want it to be in pristine condition. You also need to assume that the customer wants the original branded shoebox, not a generic plain brown



replacement shoebox, especially if you're dealing with a brand of shoes that is more likely to be counterfeited. If someone pays \$150 for a pair of name brand shoes and you send them to the warehouse in a generic brown box, you are greatly increasing your likelihood of receiving an inauthentic claim and damaging your seller account.

For lower end, less expensive shoes (in the \$30-\$40 range or lower), it's less likely that the customer will be upset if they don't receive a branded shoebox. If you feel comfortable that a pair of shoes isn't going to receive an inauthentic claim, you can use a plain shoebox found online at Uline or Amazon.

The question about whether or not to use a generic shoebox is one you will come to understand the more experience you gain with different shoe brands and styles. Some brands are more than just a pair of shoes; they are an experience. Customers for these shoes want to open a branded box with branded tissue paper. In the case of super expensive shoes, it's a no-brainer not to send the shoes in to the warehouse in a generic box or poly bag. But when you get into the mid-range shoes (\$50 or more), it's a bit more questionable whether a customer will be upset if they don't get the branded box.

For this reason, some sellers (myself included) don't use generic shoeboxes. If I receive an online shipment with a questionable or unusable shoebox, I set that pair of shoes aside and do not include it in my FBA shipment. If I were doing RA, I wouldn't buy a pair of shoes to resell from a clearance rack with a damaged box or generic box. Our seller account is our family's livelihood, and I don't want to take that risk. Now, technically the Amazon guidelines quoted above don't state that the box must be the original branded box or even that there must be a box, as long as

the shoes are poly bagged instead. But an unhappy customer only knows that they expected a branded shoebox when they file their inauthentic claim — they don't know the Amazon seller guidelines. You just have to decide if it's worth the risk for your business.

- **Does the box have a lid? Has an attached lid been torn off?**

If a shoebox comes without a lid or is supposed to have an attached lid that's been torn off, you will need to make a similar judgment call as in the scenarios above. Some sellers choose to poly bag the shoes in the box with the missing lid. Some sellers choose to poly bag the shoes without the box. Some sellers replace the box with a generic shoebox. Others will pass on buying these shoes.

- **Are the corners of the box crushed?**

If the shoebox has been damaged so that the corners of the shoebox are crushed, you need to make a similar judgment call. You need to consider how the customer would feel if they receive a shoebox with crushed corners. If the damage is minor, you might be able to repair it with clear tape, taking into consideration how the end results will look to the customer. You also need to consider that a shoebox is meant to protect the shoes themselves from being damaged or crushed. If the corners of the shoebox have caved in, they aren't going to be able to protect the shoes in shipment or in handling at the warehouse. It's better to pass on selling a pair of shoes than to risk the shoes being destroyed along the way.

- **Does the box have a price written on it?**

Some stores use marker to write a clearance price on the shoebox. If the shoebox is made from glossy cardboard, you might be able to clean the writing off. If the cardboard isn't glossy, you aren't going to be able to clean marker off it, and you'll likely only make it worse by trying. You will need to make a judgment call about replacing the shoebox, poly bagging the shoes, covering the writing (if it's small enough) with your FBA barcode sticker, or passing on the buy.

- **Does the box have store or price stickers on it?**

If a shoebox comes with any type of store or price stickers on it, you will need to remove them with a heat gun, Scotty peeler, and Goo Gone, the same way you would with any other item you sell on Amazon. Again, you will want to avoid using any type of cleaning solution or Goo Gone on a cardboard box that isn't glossy, since the box will just absorb the solution and make a sticky mess.

Whew! Who knew there was so much to say about shoeboxes? It may seem frustrating to see so many shoes for sale at retail stores with lidless boxes or to receive OA shipments with damaged boxes, but overall I've found that the number of sellable shoes out there totally makes it worth it to sift through the losers. For the

sake of your seller account, though, please don't get blinded by dollar signs and cut corners on the shoeboxes.

Shoe Condition

After the shoebox passes your inspection, you will want to check on the shoe condition to verify it is in absolutely new condition.

To do this, remove the shoes from the box and visually inspect every angle of the shoes. Check the soles for any signs of wear, any dirt, any markings of any type. Certain types of writing on the soles can be removed if you are careful, but if there's any scuffs or wear and tear on the soles, you cannot sell the shoes as new.

You will also want to check the toes, heels, and sides of the shoes for any type of scuffing, rubbing, or marks that would indicate the shoes have been worn. If there's any wear and tear on the shoes, they are not in new condition, and you cannot sell them on Amazon.



Just as with the shoeboxes, you don't want to cut any corners in this part of the inspection, which is why I recommend removing the shoes from the box to inspect them, rather than just doing a cursory glance with the shoes still in the box. If a pair of shoes has signs of being worn, a customer is likely to complain to Amazon that you have sold them a used pair of shoes, and "used sold as new" is one of the worst claims you can have on your seller account to put it at risk of suspension. Please do not risk your account thinking a customer won't notice a little scuffing on the bottom of shoes. It isn't fair to the customer, and it isn't worth the small amount of profit you will make.

Shoe Size, Color, and Style

Next you will want to thoroughly inspect the shoes to verify they perfectly match the Amazon product page where you want to list them.

- **Are the shoes the correct size?**

Make sure that both shoes are the same size as each other, that they are the same size as printed on the box, and that you are listing them under the correct size on the Amazon product page. Be sure to double-check the width and whether or not the

shoes are a half size. The print on the shoe tags is usually so small you practically need a microscope to read it, so be very careful not to overlook any differences.

- **Are the shoes the correct color?**

Sometimes the color listed on the shoebox or on a website might vary slightly from the color used in the Amazon product page. Make absolutely certain you are listing the shoes on the correct color variation on Amazon. Also, double-check to make sure the color printed on the box matches the color of the actual shoes in the box.

- **Are the shoes the correct style?**

Some shoe brands use the same style name with a new model number each year, particularly with athletic shoes. Double-check to make sure the shoes you have sourced are exactly the same style and model on the Amazon product page.

Other Oddities

Whether you are doing RA or receiving shoes in OA shipments, there's no telling what you might find when you open a shoebox. Be sure to check for anything else out of the ordinary, such as the following:

- Two left shoes or two right shoes
- Only one shoe
- The completely wrong pair of shoes
- Shoes with a store security device still attached (I found this in an OA shipment just this morning.)
- Receipts or OA packing slips still in the shoebox
- Any other type of item that doesn't belong in the shoebox

Prepping Shoes

Prepping shoes, for the most part, is not unlike prepping other items for sale through Amazon FBA.

Remove stickers from box.

If the shoebox has any store or price stickers on it, you will want to remove them with a heat gun, Scotty peeler, and Goo Gone, if the box is made from glossy cardboard. You can watch a video Stephen made showing how to remove price stickers by [clicking here](#).

If the shoebox material is not glossy cardboard but the rougher kind of cardboard, you should not try to remove the stickiness from the box with Goo Gone or any

other type of liquid. The rough cardboard will just absorb the liquid and make a messy stain. You can still try to remove the sticker with a heat gun and Scotty peeler. Depending on the size of the sticker, you can cover it or any sticky residue with your FBA barcode label. If you don't think you can remove the sticker or residue in a manner that leaves the shoebox looking new and undamaged, you will need to consider other options, including using a generic shoebox or selling the shoes on a different platform.

Remove writing or tags from soles of shoes.

Sometimes a store will staple a price tag to the sole of a shoe. You can carefully remove the staple and tag, making sure that there is no noticeable hole left behind.

Other stores will mark the soles of shoes with a pen or silver marker. If the sole is made of certain types of rubber, you can use a cleaning solution, Goo Gone, or Magic Eraser to remove the marking. Sometimes you can even use an erasable marker (intended for use on white boards) to mark over the marking and then rub it off.

Be very careful when removing any tags or marks from the soles of shoes, and as always, if there is any type of mark left on the shoe, do not attempt to sell it as new on Amazon. You will need to sell it on eBay or another platform where you can sell shoes as "like new" with detailed condition notes about the marking.

Fasten any fasteners.

If the shoe has laces, make sure the laces are tied in a bundle, not left flopping around untied. If the shoe has zippers, zip them. Whatever type of fastener is used, make sure it is fastened correctly and the shoe looks new and presentable. It's just one extra step to make sure the customer opens a box and is pleased with the appearance of their new shoes.

Arrange any filler materials.

Some shoes come with a filler material inside the shoe to help it keep its shape. It might be brown paper, tissue paper, or a cardboard or foam insert. Dress shoes might also come with a small stick holding the insert in place and keeping the heel of the shoe in shape. If these materials have been removed from inside the shoes and are floating around in the shoebox, replace them in the shoes and arrange the shoes nicely. We keep a package of plain white tissue paper at our work station to use as replacement filler as needed. We also use it to wrap the shoes inside the box if the original tissue paper is missing or badly torn.

Your main objective in prepping the shoes and the inside of the shoebox is to give the customer a pleasant experience when they open the box. You do not want the customer to be disappointed by opening a box with shoes that have obviously been tried on in a store and just shoved back in the box without any further care. Again,

do not cut corners. Take the time and effort to give the customers a nice presentation.

Secure the box lid.

The Amazon guidelines state that shoebox “lids must be secured with a non-adhesive band or removable tape.” Do not use any type of tape or adhesive on the lid that will damage the box when it is removed.

You have a few options for how to secure the lids:

- Stretch wrap

The method I use 95% of the time is to stretch wrap the lid securely to the box. We have a demonstration of how to do this in the video module for this section, which you can find by logging in to your Full-Time FBA account.

- Rubberband

You can also use a thick rubberband around the box and lid. Make sure the band is thick enough not to break during handling at the warehouse or in the heat of a non-climate-controlled environment (a shipping truck or the warehouse).

- Poly bag

In some cases I choose to poly bag a shoebox to secure the lid. I only go with this option very rarely, usually in cases where I doubt the box is sturdy enough to withstand shipping and handling at the warehouse.

In some cases, poly bag the shoes instead of shipping in a shoebox.

Some types of shoes do not come with a shoebox. These are typically shoes like crocs, flip-flops, athletic sandals, or slippers — any type of shoe you would buy hanging on a rack at a store, rather than on a shelf of shoeboxes.

For these shoes, you will need to poly bag them and attach a suffocation warning label. You can see a demonstration of how to do this in the video module for this section, which you can find by logging in to your Full-Time FBA account.

Many of these types of shoes come with a hanger. The [Amazon prep guidelines](#) state you should not include hangers when prepping and packaging apparel. You will need to carefully remove the hanger and make sure any barcodes are covered before you poly bag the shoes.

Attach your FBA barcode sticker.

As we noted earlier in the book, we don't recommend sending shoes stickerless or co-mingled to the FBA warehouse. Once your shoes are properly inspected, prepped, and listed, attach your FBA barcode sticker over the UPC barcode on the shoebox or on the poly bag. Make sure any other barcode stickers have been removed or covered up with plain white stickers.

Handling OA Shoes that Don't Pass Inspection

If you are sourcing for shoes through OA, you will inevitably receive some shipments with shoes you can't sell as new on Amazon. You will also start to learn over time which online stores do a better job of sending quality shoes and quality shoeboxes, as well as which stores do a better job than others at protecting the shoes during shipment. For instance, Famous Footwear is famous for more than their shoes; they are also well known for shipping online orders without shoeboxes or in Famous Footwear branded boxes, rather than the shoe branded box. Every seller has to make a decision for themselves whether they want to source from certain online stores, knowing the risk they take in buying online sight-unseen.

One thing you want to be certain of when you are making an online purchase is whether or not you can return shoes. Some online stores (for examples, Dillards.com) put a notice in bold type on their online listings that they do not accept returns for clearance shoes. Make sure you are comfortable with the risk you are taking with the exchange or return policy before you make your online purchase.

So what do you do if you get a shoe shipment with a damaged box or two left shoes?

Find a brick-and-mortar store to exchange or return the shoes.

Some online stores have brick-and-mortar counterparts. If you live in the same area as the B&M store, you can return or exchange shoes in person.

Call to initiate a return.

Some stores do not have a B&M location, or there might not be a location near where you live. In these instances, you can follow the procedure on the store website or your email invoice to initiate a return. Some stores list an email address along with a phone number as a way to initiate a return, but I have found that calling always works best. It is easier and quicker to call and explain yourself, rather than trying to go back and forth with someone on email who might not actually be reading word for word what you have typed.

Again, be sure you are familiar with the store's return policy before you make a purchase. Some stores offer free return shipping, while others do not.

Sell on another platform.

In some instances, it is easier to sell a pair of shoes on another platform than it is to try to return or exchange them. I recommend maintaining an active seller account on eBay as a way to sell shoes that aren't in new condition or don't have a pristine shoebox. Be sure to make thorough condition notes on your eBay listing so that the buyer is aware of any defects in the shoes and/or the box.

You probably won't be able to get as high a price for your shoes on eBay as you would selling them new on Amazon, but as I've said so many times already, it is completely worth it to lose out on a little bit of profit in the short term to protect your Amazon seller account from customer claims in the long term.

Tying Up Loose Ends

When it comes to inspecting and prepping shoes, as well as handling potential problem shoes, you need to take the same approach as with other decisions in your Amazon business. You need to take ownership of your business model and take actions based on what is best for your overall business. For some sellers it might be acceptable to poly bag shoes or use a generic box, while for others it isn't. As long as you are following the Amazon guidelines and maintaining your integrity and business ethics, there is some leeway in the decisions you make about sourcing and prepping shoes.

Ultimately, you need to decide what is worth your time and effort. Some sellers love doing RA for the fact they don't have to deal with making purchases sight-unseen and handling potential problem shoes. Others love OA for the convenience of sourcing from home. Whichever decision you make, you can develop methods and processes for prepping and sending in shoes to the FBA warehouse that will maintain the strict levels of customer happiness Amazon strives for.

Chapter 11: Listing and Pricing Shoes

You bought your shoes. You inspected your shoes. You prepped your shoes. Now it's time to get those shoes listed on Amazon FBA and priced for a sale!

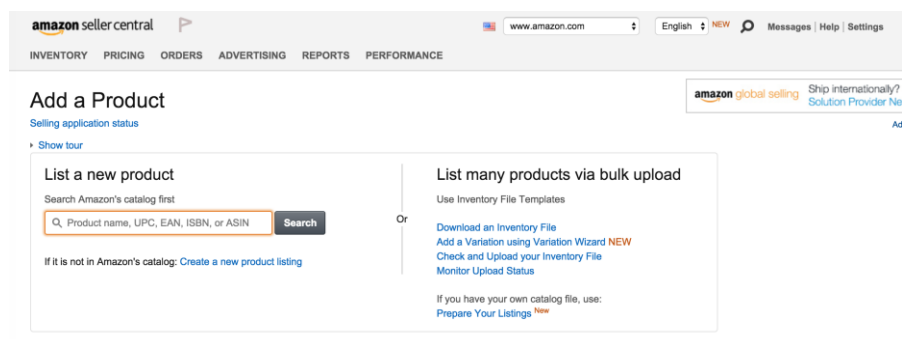
Listing Shoes

Because of the parent-child relationship for shoes and all the associated ASINs and UPCs that come with those variations, listing shoes on Amazon can become tedious at times. If you have 10 pairs of shoes with 10 different variations, even if it's the same brand and style, you're going to have to create 10 different listings within your inventory, one for each variation. You definitely want to have a barcode scanner so you aren't having to manually enter all of those UPCs.

When you are listing your shoes, double-check to make sure you are putting your shoes on the correct product page. You should do this double-check no matter what type of inventory you're listing, but I want to emphasize the need to do this with shoes. Make absolutely certain you have the right style of shoe, not a slightly different model.

Also, other sellers might make changes to the product page between the time you make your purchase and the time you list your shoes, so make certain no substantial changes have taken place before you send the shoes off to the warehouse. If there are substantial changes that I disagree with when I start to list (for instance, someone has added size variations but didn't spell the color the right way, creating multiple versions of the same color), I usually add the shoe to my Merchant Fulfilled inventory with a quantity of zero, open a ticket to make the appropriate corrections, and only send the shoe with an FBA shipment once the correction has gone through. Part of this process is called "normalizing" (Amazon term) a product page, and we will go through how to do this in the bonus material of this course. **You can access the bonus materials by logging in to your Full-Time FBA account.**

Another step in the listing process might be to add variations to an existing product page through the "Add a Product" feature in Seller



Central. I made a screen capture video showing step-by-step how to add variations, and you will find it in the bonus material of this course. **You can access the bonus materials by logging in to your Full-Time FBA account.**

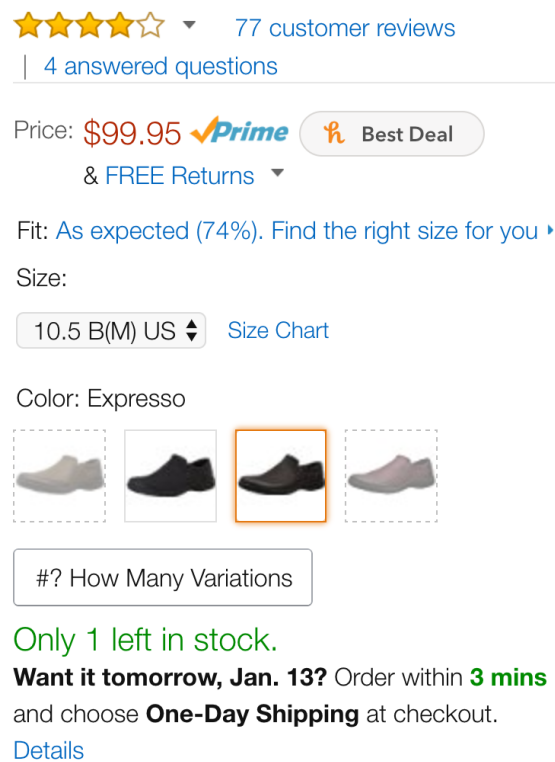
Pricing Competitively

As you are making your shoe buys, I highly recommend keeping good notes about prices in order to facilitate the pricing process of listing your shoes on Amazon. Whether you're making a buy list on your smart phone scanning app or you're compiling an OA spreadsheet, it's important to be able to jog your memory of the price you had in mind when you made the purchase.

Just as with other categories on Amazon, one of your goals as a shoe seller is to make sure your shoes are getting time in the Buy Box on your shoe's product page. The Buy Box is the place where the vast majority of Amazon purchases are made. When a seller has the Buy Box, their price is the one listed front and center on the product page for that shoe's color-size variation. When the customer clicks "Add to Cart," that seller gets moved a step closer to a sale.

I typically try to price my shoes the same as the lowest FBA seller, unless that seller is priced incredibly high — so high that I doubt the price will actually get a sale. If the lowest FBA seller is priced in a similar range to other sizes and colors on that product page, I price the same as the lowest FBA. I don't try to go a penny lower or a percentage lower. Other buyers may have that strategy, and that's fine, but personally I don't like to set off a repricer war or start the race to the bottom. I've found that as long as I'm priced the same as the lowest FBA seller, we will rotate the Buy Box and eventually sell our shoes.

When it comes to competing with Merchant Fulfilled sellers, I price at the point where I will get the ROI I'm looking for, rather than trying to match the MF price. Honestly, I don't really view MF sellers as my competition when it comes to shoes, in a lot of respects. The typical customer who buys shoes on Amazon is likely to be a Prime member and likely to only be looking at FBA prices anyway. I set my price to



The screenshot shows an Amazon product page for shoes. At the top, there are 5 stars with a dropdown arrow and the text "77 customer reviews" and "4 answered questions". Below this, the price is listed as "\$99.95" with a Prime logo and a "Best Deal" badge. Underneath the price, it says "& FREE Returns". The fit information is "Fit: As expected (74%). Find the right size for you". The size is set to "10.5 B(M) US" with a "Size Chart" link. The color is "Expresso" and there are four color swatches shown, with the "Expresso" one highlighted. At the bottom, there is a "#? How Many Variations" button and a green notification that says "Only 1 left in stock." followed by "Want it tomorrow, Jan. 13? Order within 3 mins and choose One-Day Shipping at checkout." and a "Details" link.

get that customer, not compete with a super low MF price. Now, if the low MF price for Shoe Variation #1 is comparable to the low FBA price on Shoe Variations #2 through #10, I'm going to view that price as the place I need to be, and yes, at that point I will be competing with the MF price. But as a general rule, if the MF price is way lower than all the other FBA sellers, I stick to competing with the FBA sellers.

The Buy Box and Shoes

One thing to note about shoe product pages is that Amazon might suppress the Buy Box if they feel the price of a variation is set too high. To the right is a screen shot of what a suppressed Buy Box would look like. There is no price listed, nor is there an "Add to Cart" button, only a link saying "Available from these sellers."

Customers will still make purchases even if the Buy Box is suppressed, but it's one more click for them to make to see the prices of available shoes, which might cause them to give up and look elsewhere. Not every Amazon customer is savvy enough to even know they can click "Available from these sellers" and see FBA options for sale.

I've tried to figure out what the trigger is for suppressing the Buy Box in shoes, and I'm stumped. Generally, Amazon wants your price to be low enough that customers are dazzled and keep coming back for more. A general rule is to make sure your FBA price is set lower than the list price of the shoe, otherwise you might trigger a suppressed Buy Box — but that really is a general practice. In some cases, your price could be lower than the list price and still trigger the suppression, while in other cases it could be higher and not trigger the suppression. Just be aware this phenomenon occurs, and if you have a suppressed Buy Box and don't get a sale within the time frame you are looking for, you might need to tweak the price and see if it brings the Buy Box back.

Whether or not Amazon will share the Buy Box in the shoes category is another area where I am stumped about any rhyme or reason when it occurs. I've seen a small handful of listings where an FBA seller has set their price lower than Amazon and

★★★★☆ 77 customer reviews

| 4 answered questions

Note: This item is only available from third-party sellers ([see all offers](#)).

Fit: [As expected \(74%\)](#). [Find the right size for you](#) ▶

Size:

7 B(M) US

Color: Charcoal Brown



[Available from these sellers.](#)

been able to get the Buy Box away from Amazon. But the number of those instances really is fairly small, and I don't know why it is in those cases that Amazon has decided to share the Buy Box. In the majority of instances where I've seen FBA sellers listed on a shoe with Amazon, even if they are priced lower, Amazon keeps the Buy Box. In fact, from what I understand from other sellers, trying to price lower than Amazon in order to get the Buy Box often only triggers Amazon to lower their price to match or beat yours. I know it's possible to compete with Amazon for the shoe Buy Box, but I personally don't like to take that strategy in my business model.

Repricing Shoes

The majority of shoes we list on Amazon do not have a large amount of competition from other sellers, so repricing to stay at the lowest price isn't really something we worry about when it comes to our shoe inventory. If I do reprice a pair of shoes to compete with another seller, I try to make note of whether that competitor's price soon after drops by one or two pennies. If it does, I'm going to assume they have a repricer set up, and I don't get into a race to the bottom with them. I tend to prefer waiting it out and letting the Buy Box rotation get to me eventually.

Overall, I have noticed less need to reprice my shoe inventory than I need to do with my inventory in other categories with higher numbers of sellers. Shoe prices tend to stay much more stable than categories like toys. We do inevitably end up with some shoes that stay in the warehouse much longer than others, and after a few months I start to lower my prices and try to get a faster sale, especially if long-term storage fees are coming up. But in general I prefer to wait for the sale, rather than constantly tinker with prices over a period of months.

Chapter 12: Handling Returns

Almost without fail, when an Amazon seller talks about how great the profits are with shoes, the response they get is this: “Yeah, but what about the return rates? Is it even worth it with all the returns?”

I’ll be the first to admit: the *psychological* hit you take as a seller is harder when you get a return on a \$120 pair of running shoes than for the return of a \$15 toy. But the *financial* hit doesn’t have to be that hard.

The key to minimizing your losses when it comes to any type of returns on Amazon, but with shoes in particular, is to document everything and be proactive in contacting Amazon to deal with any issues that arise.

Reasons for Returns

When customers request to return a product they bought via FBA, Amazon gives them an immediate refund and a shipping label to return the item to the proper warehouse. Customers are on the honor system to indeed return the item they no longer want, so it’s up to you to check on the item after the customer receives a refund. To find out more about your returned items, log in to Seller Central and then click on Reports > Fulfillment > FBA Customer Returns.



Here are the main “dispositions” (Amazon term) in which a customer will return an item and how to best respond:

1. **SELLABLE** – When a pair of shoes is returned to Amazon, many times the warehouse workers inspect them and see that they haven’t been worn and simply enter them back into your inventory as “sellable” or “fulfillable.” Unless you’re worried that the shoes are actually not in sellable condition, there is nothing more you need to do, except wait for the next sale. If you are worried that the shoes aren’t really in sellable condition, then open up a removal order to inspect them yourself.

2. **DAMAGED** – There are multiple reasons why an item would be returned as damaged. It’s possible that the item was damaged in an FBA warehouse prior to the shipping process to the customer. If the item was damaged in transit, then it’s the fault of Amazon (if the FBA worker did not pack the item well) or it’s deemed as your fault for not protecting the item before shipping it to Amazon. It could also be your fault if you sent an already damaged item to Amazon. If it’s your fault, then there is no reimbursement, but if Amazon is to blame, then you are eligible for

reimbursement. If Amazon does not automatically issue a reimbursement, you can open a ticket with Seller Central and request a reimbursement.

3. CUSTOMER DAMAGED – Items that are returned as “customer damaged” will not be returned to your sellable inventory. Customer damaged does not mean that the customer bought the item, broke it, and then is attempting to return it. Customer damaged means that the customer opened the item, and it is no longer in new condition. Sometimes the customer says they opened the item, but they never really did and it’s still in new condition. The best plan of action for these items is to open up a removal order and get them sent back to you.

With shoes we have found that if a warehouse worker does mark a pair of returned shoes as customer damaged and the shoes move to our unfulfillable inventory, that doesn’t necessarily mean the shoes are damaged — or that they’ve even be removed from the box.

If shoes are marked in your inventory as unfulfillable and customer damaged, have them returned to you for inspection so you can decide what to do from there. Sometimes the shoes haven’t been worn and can be sent back to the FBA warehouse in new condition. We’ve received returned shoes for inspection and found that our original stretch wrap was never removed from the shoebox. Who knows why the warehouse worker marked them as customer damaged?!

If the shoes clearly have been worn, you can still sell them on eBay with detailed condition notes. You **cannot** send worn shoes back in to the FBA warehouse. These shoes are now in used condition and cannot be sold as new.

4. CARRIER DAMAGED – If the shoes were damaged in transit, then it’s the fault of the shipping company (like UPS, FedEx, USPS, etc) for not taking good care of the package during the shipping process. These shoes aren’t exactly returns, but they do move to your unfulfillable inventory and become eligible for reimbursement, since it was not your fault they were damaged. If Amazon does not automatically issue a reimbursement, you can open a ticket with Seller Central and request a reimbursement. If you receive a reimbursement for a damaged item, you cannot request to have that item returned to you.

5. WAREHOUSE DAMAGED — Shoes become “warehouse damaged” if at some point in the handling process at the warehouse they receive damage. These shoes aren’t exactly returns, but they do move to your unfulfillable inventory and become eligible for reimbursement, since it was not your fault they were damaged. If Amazon does not automatically issue a reimbursement, you can open a ticket with Seller Central and request a reimbursement. If you receive a reimbursement for a damaged item, you cannot request to have that item returned to you.

6. DEFECTIVE – It’s odd to think of a shoe as being defective, but occasionally a customer will use this reason for initiating a return on a pair of shoes. When this

happens, the FBA customer is refunded, but the item stays in your inventory as unfulfillable.

The best plan of action here is to create a removal order and have the shoes returned to you for inspection. Some buyers don't realize they can get a free return label for shoes by saying they don't fit, and instead they will click "defective" as their return reason to get free shipping. We've had "defective" shoes returned to us for inspection only to find one shoe was tried on, but the other shoe never had the packing materials removed from it, or we've received them back to find our original stretch wrap was never removed from the shoebox. In these cases where the shoes are still in brand new condition, we can return them to the warehouse to be sold via FBA once again.

Important: If a customer claims an item is defective but in reality it's not, then it's up to you to protect your account and fix this false claim. Too many claims of "defective" can hurt your seller metrics and put your account in danger of suspension. Follow the steps in the section below if a customer falsely claims an item is defective in order to get a free return.

Protecting Your Account When Shoes are Returned

When it comes to getting returns, you must take a few critical steps as an FBA seller to protect your account. If you don't stay on top of your returns and do your due diligence to make sure your account is taken care of, you could suffer negative consequences down the road.

So, what do you need to do to protect your account when a customer returns a pair of shoes?

- **Protect your seller feedback score by contacting the buyer.**

Sometimes after a buyer requests a refund, the next thing they do is leave feedback for you, the seller. Whether the customer leaves you negative feedback or not, I think it's a good idea to contact them and personally apologize for their negative experience. I would say something like this:

"Amazon just notified me that you have requested a return for item X. I'm so sorry that the item did not meet your expectations. Since this was a Prime order, Amazon is supposed to provide you with an immediate refund, so I am following up to make sure the refund was successful. I would also like to know if there is anything I can do to make things better. Thank you for taking the time to read this message, and have a great day."

Sometimes just sending that email will stop the buyer from leaving you negative feedback. If they have already left negative feedback, then this email opens up the

door for the customer to see you as a helpful person, and they might consider removing the feedback.

- **Protect your seller account against customer claims.**

Another layer of protection for your seller account is to check on the reason for the return. Customers can choose a variety of reasons for returning an item, including accidentally ordered, no longer needed, unauthorized purchase, description on website is not accurate, or wrong item was sent, among other reasons. Some of the reasons for return require the customer to pay return shipping. Some of the reasons do not.

Because of this free return shipping issue, you want to verify whether any items returned as “defective” are in fact defective. It’s sad but true that some buyers will choose “defective” as their reason for return solely to get free return shipping. They have no idea that this action harms third-party sellers on Amazon. They just want to save \$5 on shipping, and that’s the easiest way to do it. In the case of shoes, the customer might choose “defective” as their reason, not knowing that Amazon provides free return shipping for shoes if they don’t fit.

- *Notify Amazon of false defective claims.*

If a pair of shoes is returned to you as defective and has clearly never been opened or worn, Amazon needs to know. In these cases, you should take the following steps:

- Open a ticket with Seller Central.
- In your message, tell them that the shoes were returned as defective but have never been worn or opened, whichever is the case.
- Along with your message, attach a photo of the returned shoes with the return packing slip from Amazon, as well as a close-up photo of the packing slip with the numbers and text visible.

Note: ONLY take these actions if you are absolutely beyond-a-shadow-of-a-doubt positive that an item is not defective. If an item truly is defective, you must take responsibility as a seller for finding out why and then stop selling that defective item.

When we’ve taken the above steps with non-defective shoes in the past, we’ve received a message from Amazon stating they can tell from our photo that the item is unopened, unworn, or not defective and thanking us for calling this to their attention.

If the item is unopened and in new condition, Amazon will not give a reimbursement, since you can just send it back in again to be sold.

Following these steps will help protect your account from any dings that could trigger the suspension bots every Amazon seller fears. You don't have to fear returns, as long as you are diligent to be proactive in protecting your account.

- Double-check the product page for “description on website is not accurate.”

In some cases, a buyer will return a pair of shoes (or any other item sold on Amazon) and say their reason for return is that the “description on website is not accurate.” Getting these types of returns is another time to be diligent in protecting your seller account.

The first step you need to take with this type of return is to go to the product page and double-check the actual description. Double-check that the shoes from your inventory *exactly* match the description on the page.



Take particular notice of the model number of athletic shoes, since they can change from year to year. You cannot sell last year's model on this year's model's product page.

Also take notice of the shoe color. Double-check every aspect of the shoe to make sure the color matches the photo on the product page exactly. Some shoes will have a different color sole or a different color band around the bottom edge of the shoe. You must make sure that the color of your shoes matches every aspect of the color on the product page.

If your shoes were returned with the reason “description on website is not accurate” but you feel this is a false claim, you can open a ticket with Amazon to document the claim by following the steps for a false defective claim in the section above.

If you find that the shoes truly do not match the description on the website, you should immediately check your inventory for any other variations of that shoe with the same problem and have them returned to you. You can then decide what to do next:

- list them on the correct product page
- create the correct variation if it does not yet exist
- sell them on another platform

Again, you want to be diligent in taking care of these types of issues with returns as a measure to protect your seller account. You might be tempted to think, “Will the buyer really notice that the sole is a different color than the photo?” But it's not worth it to get a small amount of profit and put your account at risk, not to mention

how unfair it is to the customer to sell them an item other than the one they think they are buying.

What if the Customer Never Returns the Shoes?

The majority of customer returns are requested within 30 days of the original purchase. After a refund is granted, the customer has 45 days to return the item to Amazon. But what happens when a refund has been issued and the item is not returned after 45 days?

Amazon is supposed to monitor these returns and should automatically reimburse you when an item is not returned, but they don't follow through with the reimbursements 100% of the time. For some reason, some incomplete returns are missed. When this happens, you need to be proactive and request a reimbursement. Just open up a new case in Seller Central and let them know that a refunded item was never returned. Amazon will investigate and eventually reimburse you. It's your money, so be sure you get it.

Selling Your Returns on Other Platforms

In some instances when you have Amazon returns that are deemed unfulfillable, you can sell your returned shoes on another platform. We recommend maintaining an active seller account on eBay as a way to sell returned shoes that aren't in new condition or have a damaged shoebox. Be sure to make thorough condition notes on your eBay listing so the buyer is aware of any defects in the shoes and/or the box.

You probably won't be able to get as high a price for your shoes on eBay as you would selling them new on Amazon, but I want to continue to stress this point: It is completely worth it to lose out on a little bit of profit in the short term to protect your Amazon seller account from customer claims in the long term.

Tying Up Loose Ends

We have found that the majority of our returned shoes can still be sold on Amazon, with a rare few needing to be sold on eBay. When you start crunching the numbers, the return rate for shoes may appear higher than other categories, but if you're still able to sell the shoes in the end, the impact on your business isn't that high.

Remember, the occasional return is just part of business and is nothing to worry about. Don't ignore your unsellable returned shoes because they will just sit in an FBA warehouse and continue to rack up monthly storage fees. Take action and do what you can to get those shoes to become sellable or to make sure you get reimbursed for shoes that were never actually returned

Chapter 13: Conclusion

What else is there to say about selling shoes on Amazon FBA?

Please don't forget to use all of the bonus materials and worksheets, and please go through the video content of inspecting, prepping, and processing shoes. We have designed the bonus materials to give you even more framework for your current stage on your Amazon shoe journey. **You can access the video content and bonus materials by logging in to your Full-Time FBA account.**

We have tried to cover all the basics of selling shoes in this book and video course, and we have tried to delve deeper in the areas that need the most attention when you are learning the shoes category on Amazon. The shoes category has brought our FBA business a great boost in steady sales and profits. If you decide that the shoe fits for your business (could that be the final pun of this book?!), we hope you see the same kind of boost in your business, too.

Please keep us posted on your success stories with selling shoes on Amazon by emailing us at stephen@fulltimefba.com, or you can post your stories in our Full-Time FBA [Facebook group](#). We would love to hear from you!

Bonus Module List

Please do not forget to check out all the bonus materials that come with your copy of *The Reseller's Guide to Selling Shoes*. You can log in to your Full-Time FBA account to access the videos and the PDF downloads.

Bonus Videos:

- Finding the ASIN for a Shoe Variation (includes looking up the ASIN on the Amazon product page for in-stock shoes and in Seller Central for out-of-stock shoes)
- Faster Way to Find ASINs for Out-of-Stock Shoe Variations in Inventory Lab
- Using How Many? Variations to Compare Prices and Make Buying Decisions
- How to Add a Variation to a Shoe Listing Using “Add a Product” in Seller Central
- Optimize Your eBay Listings when Importing from Amazon with JoeLister

Bonus PDFs:

- Checklist of Questions to Ask Yourself Before Starting to Buy Shoes
- Shoe Buying Parameter Worksheet
- Inspection and Prep Checklist
- Tools for Sourcing Shoes
- Increase Your Amazon FBA Shoe Sales with Multi-Channel Fulfillment on eBay
- How to “Normalize” a Shoe Listing

Glossary of Acronyms

The following is a list of Amazon FBA-related acronyms found in this book. For a more complete list of Amazon-related acronyms, please check out www.fulltimefba.com/acronyms.

ASIN = Amazon standard identification number

ASP = average sales price

B&M = brick-and-mortar store

BOLO = be on the lookout

CCC = CamelCamelCamel

FBA = Fulfillment by Amazon

FNSKU = fulfillment network SKU (stock keeping unit)

MCF = multi-channel fulfillment

MF = merchant fulfilled

OA = online arbitrage

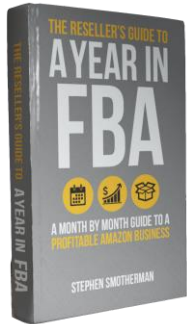
OOS = out of stock

RA = retail arbitrage

ROI = return on investment

SKU = stock keeping unit

Other Resources from Stephen and Rebecca Smotherman



The Reseller's Guide to a Year in FBA: A Month by Month Guide to a Profitable Amazon Business

This book is over 160 pages jam-packed with tips, resources, and strategies that will help you have your best Amazon FBA year ever.

The book covers, month by month, exactly what to expect and what you need to prepare for when it comes to maximizing your profits for selling via Amazon FBA. Don't get left behind on the countless opportunities to grow your Amazon business to the next level. From January to December, [*The Reseller's Guide to a Year in FBA*](#) will help you stay ahead of the game!

www.fulltimefba.com/yearinfba



EBOOK + VIDEO COURSE

The Reseller's Guide to How to Keepa Camel: Using Amazon Sales History to Make Smart Sourcing Decisions

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to buy inventory that almost always sells quickly? Do you ever get frustrated because it seems like by the time your inventory arrives

at Amazon, your competition has “tanked” the price and you're not able to sell your inventory at the prices you wanted? If it seems like your Amazon sourcing is more of a gamble than a sure thing, then this course is for you.

[*How to Keepa Camel*](#) is a full course featuring a 130+ page eBook and over 4.5 hours of video content that will walk you through how to use the free online resources Keepa and CamelCamelCamel. These resources record vital pricing and sales rank history for almost every item sold on Amazon. When you can properly read a Keepa or CamelCamelCamel graph, then you can use the data to make well-informed predictions about the future of prices and sales on Amazon. With this knowledge you can make the best sourcing decisions possible.

www.howtokeepacamel.com

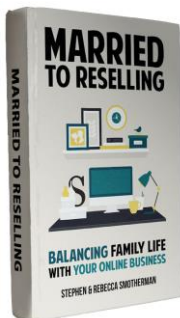


The Reseller's Guide to Board Games: How to Turn Play Money into Real Money

I want to show you just how easy it is to make hundreds of dollars a week selling new and used board games. Selling board games is a great niche to add to your online selling business. Whether you sell on eBay or Amazon, board games can be very profitable, but only if you know what you're doing. I find so many board games to sell that I don't mind sharing with you all of my secrets.

Board games are everywhere. You just need to know where to look for them. In [*The Reseller's Guide to Board Games*](#), I'll walk you through the complete process of finding, buying, preparing, and selling board games for maximum profits. You'll learn all the tips and tricks I use to find board games that don't just double or triple my money, but actually can take my initial investment and multiply it exponentially.

www.fulltimefba.com/boardgames



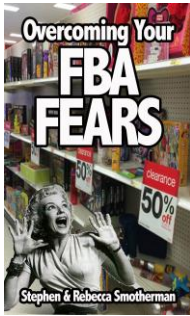
Married to Reselling: Balancing Family Life With Your Online Business

Working from home sounds easy, but if you've done it for any amount of time, you know that it can be difficult. There are times at home when you need to be working, but your spouse or kids are demanding your attention. You don't want to ignore them, but sometimes it could really interfere with the work that needs to get done. And the opposite is true as well. Sometimes we can get so caught up in the life of a reseller that we begin to neglect the people we love most, who are often in the next room wondering when we're going to take a break and spend some time with them.

In [*Married to Reselling*](#), my wife Rebecca and I will walk with you through ways we can all find success in balancing our time with family while working from home. We'll tackle both the business and personal sides of life as a reseller, and we'll help you explore a system that works best for you and your family. This package includes the book plus 5 bonuses (including a free audiobook and videos).

If you're looking for ways to balance your family life with your online business and find success with both, then this book is for you.

www.fulltimefba.com/married



Overcoming Your FBA Fears

Too many times in our FBA businesses, we let our fears hold us back from achieving our fullest potential. In this book we address ten of the most common fears in running an FBA business. The goal of *Overcoming Your FBA Fears* is to replace your fears with truths and challenge you to take actions that will propel you further down the road of success. You no longer have to let these fears hold you back as a reseller! Available now for Kindle.

www.fulltimefba.com/fbafears



Overcoming Your FBA Fears, Volume 2

We are back with more on how to overcome your FBA fears! In volume 2, we cover ten more fears that could potentially stall your Amazon FBA business from achieving maximum profits and maximum success. Available now for Kindle.

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