



10 Tips for Buying Gear Online

■ David Kalt has always loved guitars. “In my 20s I started to obsess about collecting different guitars,” he says. Following college, the political science major took a job in a recording studio, where he developed a passion for technology. He soon found himself leaving the music business behind, founding the options trading platform OptionsXpress holdings in 1999.

When the Chicago resident sold OptionsXpress to Charles Schwab in 2011 for more than a billion dollars, he decided he wanted to “slow down a little bit” and get back to music. He purchased the iconic store Chicago Music Exchange three years ago. “I am surrounded by beautiful guitars and great musicians all day, who inspire me,” he says.

More recently, Kalt combined his two biggest passions—music and technology—and founded Reverb.com, an online marketplace for musicians. It looks like his high tech genius is at work again, as the site boasts 9,000 unique visitors every day, growing 35% each month since its February launch.

“The beautiful thing is that instruments don’t really depreciate,” explains Kalt. “There’s tons of used gear out there that needs to be reused and recycled; it sounds better and has more vibe to it when it’s used and broken in.” His personal favorite: “I have a ’64 Stratocaster which means a lot to me. I bought it when I had my first inkling of success, and I could justify the \$5,000 investment. That guitar has tripled in value since I bought it in 2005.”

Here are David Kalt's 10 tips for buying an instrument online:

1) **Make an offer.** Just like buying a car, you can treat the "sticker price" as a place to begin the negotiation. Don't be afraid to wheel and deal, and that includes new guitars and gear sold by traditional retailers. Research shows that users who make an offer end up saving around 15% off the sticker price (based on transactions on Reverb.com).

2) **Don't look past used gear.** Items like effects pedals are often resold in mint or near-mint condition at a huge discount off the street price. In fact, in most cases you can save around 30% off the street price on pedals and other gear.

3) **Buy extra peace of mind.** It's normally extra to get insurance and require a signature on delivery, but it's worth every penny to make sure that your piece of gear is covered. Many shippers (Fedex, UPS) offer automatic coverage at certain levels, so be sure to check their sites to know what you're getting.

4) **Use the feedback system.** Buying from a private seller can sometimes feel risky, so make sure to ask for any feedback ratings that are available. Ask the seller to send you their feedback from reputable sites like eBay and/or to refer you to previous buyers.

5) **Get lots of photos.** Don't settle for one or two grainy photos, or none at all. Ask the seller to take the instrument outside and photograph it in natural light, without a flash. For vintage guitars, ask them to have the guitar disassembled so that all internal parts, date stamps, serial numbers, and any other relevant information can be photographed.

6) **Know your style.** Sure, you want a Les Paul or a Strat, but did you know that these guitars can often have four to five different neck shapes, and nearly endless pickup combinations? All of these can drastically change the feel and sound of the instrument. Prior to buying, make sure to ask about neck shape, fret size, pickups, weight, and if the guitar has been modified in any way.

7) **Get the story.** Vintage guitars have lived a life of their own, and unless you ask you might never know that a guitar has traveled the world, been played on a famous record, or sat untouched in a closet for 30 years. Find out where the guitar has been. Was it used for gigging or mostly at-home use? Are there any cool stories about the instrument, such as famous owners?

8) **Don't settle for simple descriptions.** Demand details about the condition of the guitar. Is the neck straight? How much wear is on the frets? Is there excessive buzzing or dead notes? Are the electronics quiet, or do they emit excessive or "scratchy" noise when adjusted. When was the last time the guitar was set up?

9) **Know the return policy before you buy.** It's amazing how often returns come up, and more amazing how rarely they're discussed before the transaction. Go the extra mile and get an e-mail from the seller agreeing to a return policy in writing.

10) **Use a price guide.** Buyers should always know ahead of time what they should be paying for a piece of gear. When shopping for a new guitar, check the going rate for a used, and then use this information to negotiate. Check multiple sources like Gruhn's, the Reverb Price Guide, and eBay's Completed Listings.

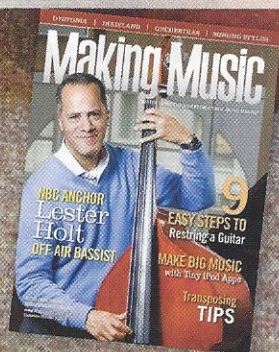
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