old purse. She says, "I thought, 'Gee, should I sell this?' I didn't have enough stuff to hold a garage sale. I'd heard about eBay, so I thought I would see what it was like to sell something. I found out just how easy it was to set up an ID and to register. I ended up getting $20 for the purse, which was much more than I would have at a garage sale. I was hooked."

After she felt comfortable selling on eBay, things fell into place: "You start thinking, 'Let's see, that thing sold, what else do we have that we can sell?' When I really saw that I could do this on a regular basis, I thought, 'I can do this all the time; I can have some fun money.'"

Opening an eBay Store

An *eBay Store* is a Web site within eBay's own voluminous Web empire. It's a place where sellers can post items for sale at fixed prices. The great advantage of having a store is that it enables a seller to keep merchandise available for purchase for 30, 60, 90, or even an unlimited number of days at a time. It gives customers another way to buy from you, and it can significantly increase your sales in other venues or of items you sell at auction on eBay, too.

Starting an eBay Store is a big undertaking and therefore something you should do only when you already have a proven system for selling items on eBay at auction. You should also have a ready source of inventory with which you can stock your store. The problem with stores is that they cost $15.95 and up per month, depending on the package you choose, and you have to sell that much just to break even every month. For sellers who have a small profit margin, it can sometimes be a struggle to make back that monthly payment, especially in the slow post-holiday months.

Sellers reach customers on multiple sales venues

When I wrote previous editions of this book, eBay was the marketplace of choice for enterprising entrepreneurs wanting to sell antiques, consumer goods, handicrafts, and just about any other kind of merchandise. In this edition, the atmosphere is different. I have written a number of profiles of sites that either compete directly with eBay or provide a niche alternative to the auction giant. Experienced sellers no longer focus solely on eBay. Rather, eBay is just one of a number of venues for them. For some sellers who are fed up with eBay's listing and final value fees, eBay doesn't play any role at all; they sell through their own Web sites and other marketplaces.

Laura Milnor Iverson has been selling her original artwork online since 2002 through her Zen Breeze Art Gallery Web site (`www.zenbreeze.com`, shown in the following figure). She also sells on eBay (User ID: iversongallery) where she is currently a Top-Rated Seller. Another successful venue is her store on CafePress (`http://shop.cafepress.com/zenbreeze.com`). You can also find Laura on the following sites:

- Bonanzle (`www.bonanzle.com/booths/ZenBreeze`)
- ArtFire (`www.artfire.com/users/zenbreeze`)
- 1000 Markets (`www.1000markets.com/users/zenbreeze`)
- eCrater (`http://zenbreeze.ecrater.com/`)
- Etsy (`www.etsy.com/shop/laurali`)

"I have a bunch of basic (free) stores, linked together by using a search tag — my Web site name: zenbreeze," she says. She sells her art online full time. Her CafePress sales, in particular, enable her to buy her own calendars on the site to send to relatives overseas.

Laura has been online long enough that much of her business comes from referrals made by satisfied customers who perform "viral marketing." In other cases, when she sells a painting or print, she sends an e-mail with a link to her sales items on CafePress. This free marketing brings her more business.

Sometimes, she even gets commissions. "I often get requests from buyers to get a painting on some item or another." She marks up her artwork modestly, making a profit of only about 15 percent.

"In this economy, I find that you have to spend more time online listing on a variety of venues," she comments. "There's no single one that's going to generate enough income."

When you know what you want to sell and have good-quality inventory to offer (not just castoffs that went unsold at auction), go to the eBay Stores home page (`stores.ebay.com`) and click the Open a Store link to get the ball rolling. You need to decide on a name for your store and to organize your merchandise into sales categories. You also need to attend to and update your store to make it a success. But having a store can be a key step toward making an eBay business work, and if you're serious about making eBay a regular source of income, I encourage you to give the store option a try.

A 2008 article on the AuctionBytes Web site describes how eBay gets your items listed on Google and contains links to eBay tutorials on search engine optimization. You can read the article at `www.auctionbytes.com/cab/abu/y208/m11/abu0227/s02`.

Striving for PowerSeller status

PowerSellers are among the elite on eBay. Those members who have the coveted icon next to their names can feel justifiably proud of their accomplishments. They have met the stringent requirements for PowerSellers, which emphasize consistent sales, a high and regular number of completed sales, and excellent customer service. Moving from occasional seller to PowerSeller is a substantial change — and quite a thrill, I assure you. Requirements include

- At least 100 unique feedback results — 98 percent of which are positive
- A minimum of $1,000 of average gross monthly sales, or 100 items sold per month, for three consecutive months
- A good standing record — achieved by complying with eBay Listing Policies
- A current account — achieved by contacting bidders within three business days and upholding the eBay Community Values

In return for the hard work required to meet these standards, PowerSellers do get a number of benefits. These include discounts on eBay final value fees, merchandise with a special logo on it, customer support via telephone, a special discussion board just for PowerSellers, and more. The big benefit is that the number of bids and purchases goes up because buyers have more confidence in you.

The PowerSeller program isn't something you apply for. eBay reviews your sales statistics and invites you to join the program when you meet the requirements. You can find out more about the requirements and benefits of the PowerSeller program at `http://pages.ebay.com/sellerinformation/powerseller/welcome.html`.

Branching Out to Other Marketplaces

For many online sellers, an eBay store is only a starting point. They also set up storefronts on similar marketplaces. Having multiple venues lets you reach a wider customer base. Your sites can link to one another, which improves their placement on Google. You can advertise your sites on a site called EveryPlaceISell, which is run by my colleagues Ina and David Steiner. This site lets sellers collect links to all their storefronts on one convenient page. For example, Figure 13-4 shows links to no fewer than 16 venues where you can purchase photos by nature photographer Skye Ryan-Evans, who sells her work through her Web site, Rustic Moon Crafts (`www.rusticmoon crafts.com`).

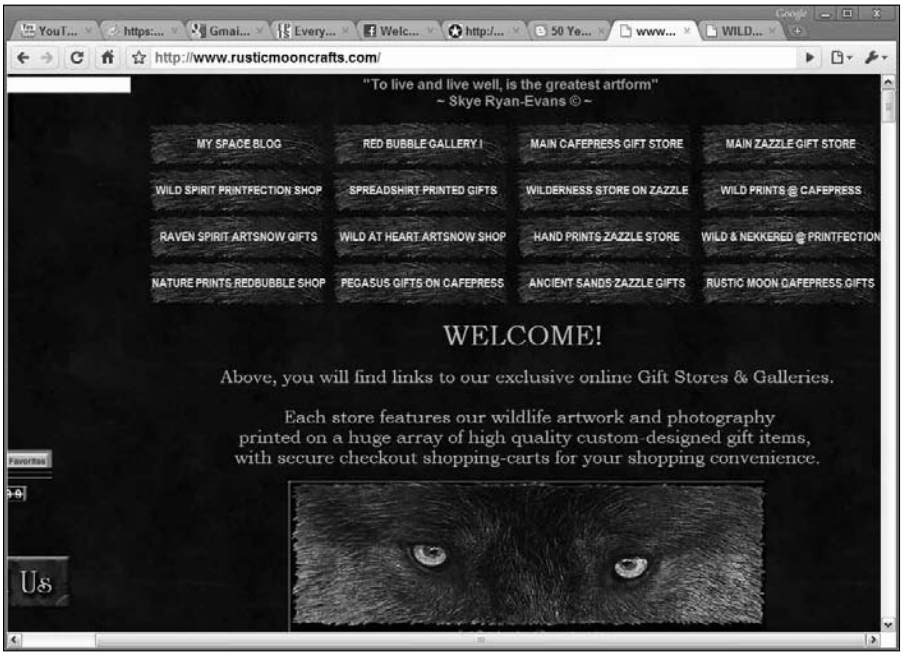

Figure 13-4: You can open multiple storefronts and link them to one another.