

Buying Minerals on the Internet: Why it Rocks!

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Photographs by Ed Rosenzweig and Joe Budd

When I first started collecting minerals in the late 1960s, there were limited options to purchase mineral specimens. There were the occasional local shows, rock shops (which catered mostly to the lapidary hobby), and printed dealer catalogs. Tucson and other large shows were out of the question for me: As a kid, the cost of traveling to them was a multiple of my annual collecting budget! While the smaller local shows were great places to meet people and learn about mineralogy, the specimen quality and variety often left much to be desired. Dealer catalogs helped, but the lack of pictures and generally minimal information made mail order purchasing sometimes a dicey proposition. In addition, the lack of ability to compare prices across dealers certainly didn't provide any good information about the true value of a specimen.



Pyrite—Brossio Mine, Italy

The Internet has created a new paradigm for retail shopping, and the mineral hobby certainly has benefited! As a dealer, I cannot imagine doing business any other way. I have customers on six continents (I haven't shipped to Antarctica yet!) which would have been impossible even 15 years ago. Think of the amount of travel and time that having such a global business would have entailed without the internet—time that I can spend helping my customers learn about mineral collecting. Also, the lower overhead (no retail space cost, lowered travel and show costs) allows me to keep my margins narrower than they could be otherwise, pass these savings on to my customers, and have a more varied and interesting inventory.

However, the benefits to collectors are even greater! First, the explosion of available information created an empowered community. Resources such as Min-Dat allow everyone to become knowledgeable about mineralogy and collecting. Prior to the Internet, a

collector without access to a good and active local club had to be almost completely self-taught. Now, through various Internet forums and sites, I can obtain information from global sources, often from experts intimately familiar with the mining localities themselves.

Second, the ability to immediately compare prices and pictures of specimens has leveled the playing field between dealers and collectors. Even large shows such as Tucson or Munich don't provide this ability to directly compare offerings. I can pull up pictures and prices and compare them directly on my computer screen. Try taking a specimen from one dealer at Tucson to compare to a specimen from another dealer in a different venue! On the Internet, an intelligent shopper can get the best value for their collecting dollar quite easily simply by comparing specimens side-by-side online.

Third, the ability to order online is a boon for those of us who can't travel to shows. As a collector, I am no longer limited to local offerings but can shop from the vast array of global web sites. In addition, I'm no longer reliant on verbal descriptions of the specimens, but can view high-quality photographs or videos at my convenience. Through email, I can ask the same questions I would in person without time constraints or sales pressure. Compare that to the often hectic and crowded atmosphere at most shows!

Finally, since most dealers offer a flexible return policy, I can view the specimens at my leisure and in the comfort of my own home. The lighting in my case is often quite different than that at a show or rock shop, and I can see how the specimen looks with the rest of my collection.

Of course, there are important considerations when choosing an online dealer. Accurate photographs and specimen descriptions are key. At Edwards Minerals, we carefully ensure our photography faithfully represents the specimen. Our monitors are color-calibrated on a regular basis and we do not alter the saturation or color of our photographs.



Apatite—Urucum Mine, Brazil



Tourmaline—Paprok, Afghanistan

We also completely disclose any damage, repairs, or alteration to the specimen. Our return policy reflects our faith in our descriptions—any specimen can be returned (in the original sale condition) within ten days of receipt for a full refund for any reason. You should be wary of any dealer who does not allow flexible returns.

The experience, expertise, and reputation of the dealer is also important. After all, you rely on us to make sure the specimen is accurately labeled as to species and locality! Many old labels have obsolete nomenclature or geographical information. It is the dealer's responsibility to research each specimen and update or correct its labeling. With over 40 years of collecting experience and formal training in gemology, I can quickly identify mislabeled specimens or consult with my colleagues if necessary.

Also, you should transact only with dealers who can keep your personal information secure. Although some people feel online shopping carts are impersonal, I believe they are the best way to keep you safe (and the best way to purchase minerals in the middle of the night!). Utilizing state-of-the-art encryption to protect your information, and processed by a major third-party financial institution, our shopping cart gives you peace of mind when you purchase from us. In fact, none of your financial information is passed on to me. I only receive confirmation of your order, your contact information, and your billing and shipping information.

We're safe, we're knowledgeable, and we're excited to meet you online!

Visit my website www.edwardsminerals.com or call me to discuss minerals you would like to purchase, or with questions about specimens at (609) 577-4757. If you prefer email, send me a note at info@edwardsminerals.com. I'll leave the computer on for you!