

Government Surplus for Sale

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I was recently browsing through the classified section in my local newspaper looking for a great deal. Of course, I don't know what I was looking to buy—anything that struck me as useful and kitschy would do. As I was perusing the tiny columns of even tinier text, I came across an ad that promised to teach me the “inside secrets” of finding incredible deals offered by the U.S. government. This ad guaranteed that by simply purchasing a book, I would be able to buy my next car for pennies on the dollar.

I toyed with the idea of buying the book, but got to thinking, did I really have to lay out the funds for this information? Or, as I suspected, was all of the information I needed available online? So, I set to work to find out.

THE FIRST STOP

My first stop was the U.S. General Services Administration's *Guide to Federal Government Sales*. This publication is an excellent resource for anyone new to purchasing goods and services from the U.S. government. You can access this guide at the **Federal Consumer Information Center** (www.pueblo.gsa.gov). In this guide, I found almost all of the information I was looking for—that is, specific information about how to access items currently available from government agencies.

As it turns out, the U.S. government sells everything from real estate to seized personal items such as jewelry. In addition, the U.S. government sells a wide range of surplus items that may or may not be interesting to the average buyer. For example, I still haven't figured out what I would do with 17 used (and abused) metal vaults. But, as they say, one man's trash. . . . Below are highlights of the agencies I found most interesting:

By far, the most comprehensive web site is **GSA Auctions** (www.gsaauctions.gov). The U.S. General Services Administration manages this online auction. To view the items for auction, you must complete a free registration form. After getting past the login, you can browse through thousands of items including automobiles, boats, computers and electronics, construction equipment, and furniture.

CRIME DOESN'T PAY—BUT YOU CAN PROFIT

You can find a list of seized property for sale by visiting the **U.S. Marshals' web site** (www.usdoj.gov/marshals). However, you can not bid on these items directly on the U.S. Marshals' web site. Rather, the U.S. Marshals' office has contracted with **bid4assets** (www.bid4assets.com), a commercial web site, to handle these auctions.

On the day I visited the web site, I could have bid on a mobile home in Florida or a 1999 Lamborghini Diablo Roadster.

Bid4assets also handles online auctions for several other federal and state government agencies.

IT'S IN THE MAIL

Have you ever wondered what happened to that package that was “lost in the mail”? Check out the U.S. Postal Service's auctions at **eBay** (www.pages.ebay.com/promo/usps.html). On these pages, you can bid on anything from books and movies to collectibles.

All of the items for auction are either unclaimed or damaged. Often, these items were undeliverable and had no return address. So, unless you want your dirty laundry (or anything else you send through the mail) opened for public view, be sure to include your return address when sending a package.

SURPLUS PLUS

If you love to spend your Saturday afternoon combing your local Army/Navy surplus store, you should check out the **Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service (DRMS) web site** (www.drms.com). Here you can find items used by the military such as machine tools, electronics, vehicles, aircraft parts, clothing, bearings, hardware, paint, oils, fuels, chemicals, batteries, and much more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Although no one web site has all of the information about government sales, at **FedSales.gov** (www.fedsales.gov) you can subscribe to a mailing list to receive information about government surplus property sales from Federal agencies. FedSales.gov is the U.S. government's portal for all federal government auctions, surplus, and sales. FedSales.gov also features links to state government sales and international government sales.

If you cannot find what you are looking for, check out **FirstGov** (<http://firstgov.gov>). This web portal provides links to a variety of government information. For example, you can access information about everything from recent congressional budget reports to the location of national parks. FirstGov is divided into sections designed to help you find what you need quickly. In addition to providing links to information about the federal government, FirstGov provides links to state government web sites and international government web sites.

The U.S. government is the largest consumer of goods and services in the country. So, it stands to reason that the U.S. government would have a few items left over after a hard day's work—items that you may find useful. As for me, I'm sure I can find some use for those 17 metal vaults—I mean, who could pass up such a deal? ●