

Statement of Bill Ingersoll

Owner, Bikes, Trikes and Quads

on

“Flipping the Switch on Rural Digital Entrepreneurship”

Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business

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Chairwoman Velazquez, Ranking Member Chabot, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this important hearing on how digital tools improve rural entrepreneurship. My name is Bill Ingersoll, and I own Bikes, Trikes, and Quads, a small business I started in rural Sloansville, New York. We sell Motocross and ATV equipment on eBay to customers around the US and increasingly around the world. I appreciate the opportunity to share my experiences on some of the tools that make running my eBay business possible in rural America- including rural broadband access, universal and reliable postal service, and breaking down barriers through global trade.

I grew up racing Motocross in upstate New York. My entire life changed when I was injured in a Motocross crash and left paralyzed in 2008. After the accident, I could no longer work construction or do many of the other things I had done previously, but I was determined to move forward with my life. My grandfather and I had always fixed up old ATVs as a hobby, so I was looking at a way to turn that hobby into a business. Not long after, I was trying to find some parts to modify an ATV we had so that I could get around our property more easily, and ended up tracking them down on eBay. The process was so easy and convenient for me as a buyer that I began to look into selling parts on eBay. We already had a large stock of parts from ATVs and dirt bikes from years of racing so we decided to give it a try. We opened our eBay store in 2010 and have been selling since. I now have 3 employees and run my business out of a warehouse on my property.

I often look back today, 10 years later and wonder what life might look like now without eBay and I really don't know. Being 23 years old with minimal education in a poor rural area never fostered good odds for an able-bodied person, let alone someone who was now disabled.

eBay, and being able to run an online business, has given me a life that I might not have otherwise enjoyed.

Living in rural upstate New York, I would not be able to use eBay if I didn't have access to high-speed and affordable broadband. Unfortunately, broadband reliance and even phone connectivity continue to be constant issues for our company. Rural broadband is essential to ensuring that rural small business owners and entrepreneurs can take advantage of the latest technologies and reach customers around the world, no matter where they live in our country. We need real investment in improving and expanding our rural communications infrastructure so that businesses like mine can take advantage of innovative tools and marketplaces like eBay.

Even though my store is online, I still have to actually ship products to customers around the country and around the globe. I rely heavily on the US Postal Service to reach my customers- over 80% of our shipments go through the USPS. I understand that there are proposals out there that would make package delivery to rural parts of the country like my hometown "non-essential." I can't imagine how anyone could consider small businesses like mine "non-essential," but cutting access to postal services or raising prices for rural package delivery would be disastrous for rural small businesses. Most people don't know that private shippers charge surcharges to deliver to rural areas. If I had to rely only on private shippers, or if package prices went up dramatically, my costs would go through the roof. Like broadband, the US Postal Service is essential for **all** Americans, no matter where they live, and without it, rural small businesses will have a harder time competing with giant e-commerce companies that have their own warehouses and logistics networks. Small e-commerce businesses depend on reliable, affordable, and universal postal service.

On top of selling to our customers in the US, selling globally has been key to our success. We have shipped thousands of orders globally to some countries where ATVs are their prime mode of transportation. Selling worldwide allowed us to reach customers and realize new business opportunities that we would have otherwise not considered. These opportunities are a direct result of conducting business online and never would have existed before the internet. Small online businesses like mine across the US, in rural and urban areas, need trade policies that cut red tape for low value shipments by supporting higher de minimis thresholds throughout the world. That way, small businesses like mine can truly take advantage of one of the best things the internet has to offer – hundreds of millions of buyers all over the world.

On behalf of small online rural businesses across the country, thank you again for holding this important hearing. I look forward to your questions.