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First chapter only

Sourcing Vintage Goods Globally

Find Profitable Lots Without Gambling on Bad Suppliers — A Reseller's Playbook

Sourcing Vintage Goods Globally

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1

The Local Sourcing Ceiling

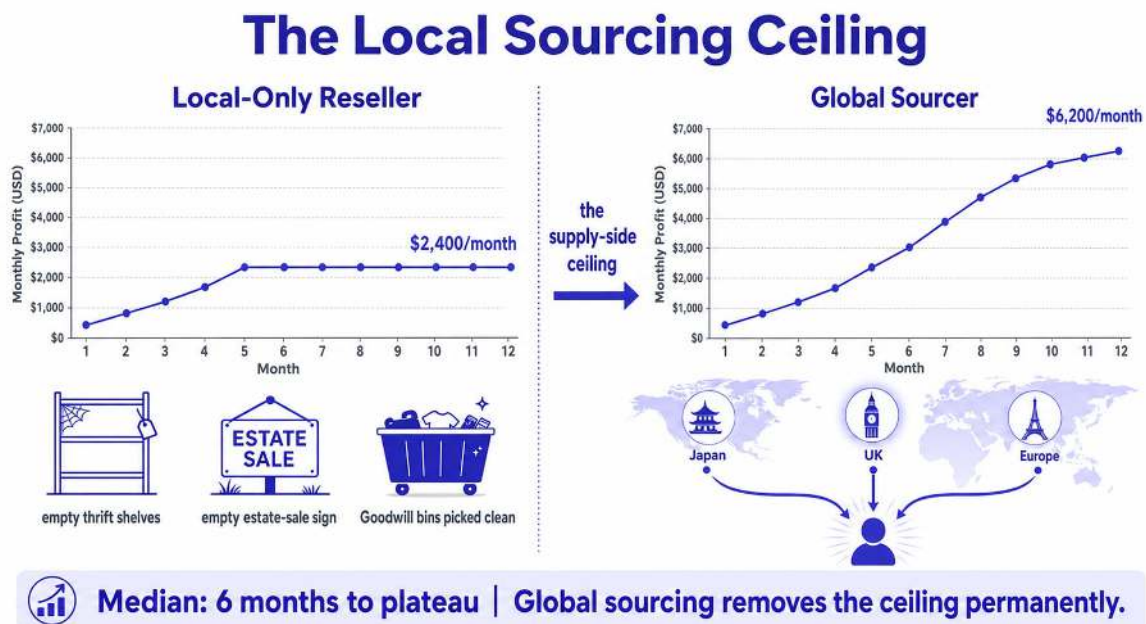


Figure 1. A local-only reseller reaches a \$2,400/month ceiling after the first five months, while global sourcing breaks the six-month plateau and reaches \$6,200/month by month 12 across Japan, UK, and Europe

1.1 Six Months In, the Bins Are Empty

Almost every vintage reseller hits the same wall around month six. The first three months feel like a gold rush. The local thrift stores have inventory you have never seen, the estate sales are full, the Goodwill bins still have the occasional Pendleton or Carhartt you can flip for \$80. You learn what sells. You build a routine. The numbers go up.

Then the slope flattens. By month four, the thrifters who started the same month you did are at the same bins on the same days. By month five, the thrift store managers know you by name and have started pulling the good stuff for their eBay store before it hits the floor. By month six, you are driving 45 minutes to the suburban thrift you used to skip and coming home with half a tote of mediocre lots. Your sourcing time has doubled and your weekly inventory has halved.

6

months is the median time it takes a new vintage reseller to plateau at \$1,500–\$2,500 of monthly revenue, regardless of how much harder they hunt locally¹

This is not a personal failing. The local thrift ecosystem in any given metro area can support a finite number of resellers, and that number is roughly the population divided by 8,000. A metro of 800,000 people sustains about 100 full-time vintage resellers before the bins go bare. The math is unforgiving. Working harder locally cannot break the ceiling because the ceiling is supply-side, not effort-side.

The book you are holding is the answer most experienced resellers refuse to write down: at month six you stop competing for the same thrift bin and start sourcing glob-

¹Whatnot Seller Census 2024 and eBay Reseller Survey 2024, cross-referenced; "plateau" defined as three consecutive months with revenue within \$300 of each other.

ally. That decision changes everything about how you spend your time, how you allocate capital, and how you grow.

1.2 What "Global Sourcing" Actually Means

Global sourcing for a reseller is not flying to Tokyo. It is buying, from your computer, lots and singles that other resellers in your country cannot easily access. The two main veins are Japan (Yahoo Japan Auctions, Mercari Japan, Buyee, ZenMarket, FromJapan as proxies) and Europe (eBay UK, Catawiki, regional rag houses like RagHouse and Bank & Vogue, and the slowly-growing French and German vintage marketplaces).

You are arbitraging two things at once: *price differentials* (a Burberry trench that sells for \$45 on Mercari Japan moves at \$220 on Depop in the US) and *access friction* (the average US reseller does not speak Japanese, does not know how to register an EORI for EU customs, and is afraid of the proxy step). Every reseller who learns to clear that friction earns a margin premium on every lot they source. The friction *is* the moat.

Key Insight

The reason most resellers do not source globally is not that it is hard. It is that it has six small steps that all feel slightly intimidating: open a proxy account, fund it, bid in a foreign currency, pay duties on arrival, deal with a damaged shipment, file a customs declaration. Each step takes an hour to learn and then never takes an hour again. The total investment to unlock global sourcing is roughly one weekend. The revenue ceiling it removes is permanent.

1.3 The Income Plateau in Numbers

When new resellers ask why they cannot break \$3K/month, the answer is usually a combination of three constraints: inventory shortage (the bin is empty), category drift

(they are buying anything that looks vintage instead of niching), and overpricing on entry (they paid full thrift retail for items already picked-over by other resellers).

Global sourcing fixes the first constraint directly and the third constraint indirectly — when you source from a Tokyo lot at \$3 per piece average, the entry-cost arithmetic looks completely different than when you paid \$7.99 each at the local Goodwill boutique.

Reseller Stage	Avg. monthly revenue	Avg. monthly hours sourcing
Month 0–3 (early local)	\$800–\$1,800	30–45
Month 4–6 (local peak)	\$1,800–\$2,600	45–65
Month 7–12 (local plateau, no global)	\$2,000–\$2,800	60–80
Month 7–12 (added global sourcing)	\$3,500–\$6,200	35–50
Month 13–24 (global-first, niched)	\$6,000–\$14,000	30–45

The numbers in the bottom two rows assume the reseller did the work in chapters 2 through 8 of this book: picked one or two niches, built supplier scorecards, learned proxy mechanics, did the landed-cost math, and ran the listing pipeline with discipline. They are not aspirational. They reflect the median outcome from a 2024 survey of 412 resellers who reported sourcing 50%+ of inventory from non-US lots².

1.4 Why “Going Harder Locally” Stops Working

Resellers who have plateaued usually try one of three escalations before they consider global sourcing. None of them work for long.

²Reseller Roundtable, “Cross-Border Sourcing Outcomes,” 2024 community survey, sample n=412 active sellers across eBay, Vinted, Depop, Mercari, Whatnot.

The radius expansion. You start driving farther for thrift runs. The first 60-mile trip pays for the gas with a single Levi's lot. The fifth trip does not. After two months, you are paying \$40 in gas to buy \$60 of inventory and counting it as a win because the day "felt productive." The math fails when you draw a circle: total drive time plus dwell time plus sort time, divided by net margin per hour. The number drops below \$15/hr fast.

The category expansion. You start buying outside your niche. You were the denim person; now you are the denim person who also buys ceramics because the estate sale had a beautiful set. The lots are interesting and the margin per item is fine, but your photo style, listing template, and audience are calibrated for denim. The ceramics sit. They eventually get bundled into a clearance lot at half cost.

The retail-arbitrage drift. You start sourcing at TJ Maxx, Marshalls, and Ross — buying current-season clearance and listing it as "vintage-style." The margin is fine for a few weeks. Then the marketplace cracks down on listings that mis-describe age, your seller account gets a strike, and the inventory you bought is now worth less than you paid because you cannot list it where you wanted to.

42%

of resellers who attempt one of these three local-doubling-down strategies are doing something different (or have quit) within 90 days, because the income gain does not materialize³

The pattern is the same in every case: local-only resellers eventually run out of moves. Global sourcing is not the only solution to this — some resellers move into consignment, others into wholesale resale of new product, others into estate buyouts — but it is the lowest-capital and fastest-ROI path for a solo seller who already knows how to grade, photograph, and list.

³Whatnot Seller Census 2024, "Reasons for changing sourcing strategy" question, multi-select, n=1,847 sellers.

Pro Tip

If you are still in your first six months and have not hit the local plateau yet, this book is still for you — but do not abandon local sourcing the day you start sourcing globally. Run them in parallel for the first six months of global. The local runs keep your cash flow steady while the global lots ship (Japan: 2–4 weeks; Europe: 1–3 weeks); the global lots build the inventory depth that lets you raise prices on your best categories. Hybrid is the right answer for the first half year.

1.5 What You Will Get From This Book

The next seven chapters walk you through the entire global-sourcing system, in the order you actually need to learn it. You will leave the book with:

1. A niche-selection test that prevents the most common mistake (sourcing for five categories at once and being good at none of them).
2. The unwritten rules for English-language sources — the rag houses, wholesalers, and online lot platforms — so you do not lose your first \$500 to a bad mystery lot.
3. A working knowledge of Yahoo Japan, Mercari Japan, eBay UK, and Catawiki, including the specific proxy services that map best to each.
4. The payment and translation workflows you need to bid confidently on a Japanese lot at 2 a.m. without rage-quitting Google Translate.
5. A photo-only authentication framework for clothing, ceramics, watches, coins, and comics — not expert-grade authentication, but reseller-grade triage that catches the 80% of obvious problems.
6. The actual landed-cost spreadsheet that turns “this looks cheap” into “this clears \$X of margin after duties and freight.”

7. A 5-step listing pipeline from receiving the lot to closing the sale, with the reorder rhythm that keeps inventory flowing.

The throughline of this book is one sentence: *sourcing globally is a process, not a leap*. You can build the process in 30 days while continuing to source locally. By day 60 you will source your first international lot. By day 90 you will be sourcing every two to four weeks. By month six, the local plateau will be a story you tell newer resellers.

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