

I'D RATHER GO TO K-MART!

(Tips for a successful auction)

By: Lyn Liechty Auctioneer

"I don't like auctions. They aren't fun." "What I want always goes for too much money."

"It will be the last thing they sell." "Auctioneers are all crooked." "I'd rather go to K Mart!" Ever hear comments like these? Pay attention auctioneers, this could be your untapped market.

There are a vast number of people just waiting to be converted to auctions. They just do not know it! Ever wonder why they feel this way? Many times these are the voices of ignorance.

They still believe in many negative myths about the auction profession. Many have either never attended an auction or they have attended an auction and left dissatisfied and unhappy.

Sometimes these thoughts were formulated when they were subjected to the unprofessional conduct of some of our peers. I call these auction companies the "anything goes" auction services. I firmly believe as professional auctioneers we have a duty and responsibility to address these issues. Most of us, I believe, strive for professionalism in the conduct of our auctions, sadly, some do not. I have attended auctions where the auctioneer would become visibly angry and berate the crowd if he did not get the prices he desired. I have witnessed auctions where people were "planted" in the crowd to artificially boost the selling price. I have seen auctioneers literally "pull bids out of the sky". I have seen auctions advertised as absolute, when in fact it was apparent there were hidden reserves. We have all seen this and yet we wonder why some do not like auctions!

Selling property at public auction is a profession and as such, we auction people have a responsibility to perform in a professional manner. It is all about image and we must always focus on developing and polishing a professional image. There are many ways we can do this and it is a never-ending job. I would encourage all auctioneers to first, give serious

consideration to joining auction related associations such as the National Auctioneers Association and the various state auction associations. Not only are these excellent credentials to have but also the more you associate yourself with quality the more improvement you will see in yourself. There is nothing better than learning from your peers. Take your auctions seriously, and understand all that is involved in planning and conducting a successful auction.

Remember, however, a good auction is a unique blend of both business and entertainment!

A successful auction starts with the initial contact. It could be as simple as losing a sale because of an unprofessional outgoing message on your telephone voice mail. It does not need to be deadpan serious nor should it be a silly one. Keep it professional but make it friendly. Try to smile while you are recording your message, then listen to it and see what a difference it makes! Make your appointments convenient for the sellers, be prompt and always make sure you dress in an appropriate manner. That doesn't necessarily mean a three-piece suit. I wore my church clothes to an appointment one time only to discover the sellers were aging hippies and very anti-establishment. I was a complete turn off to them and did not get the sale. In that case, it may have been a good thing! Listen to and be sensitive to your sellers needs, but make sure there is an understanding that you are being hired because of your talent and expertise. After all, if the seller is capable of doing all this, why should he hire you?

Show your seller the reasons a professionally conducted auction can be a positive and rewarding event. Try to get a "feel" for what the seller's expectations are and if they are being realistic. It is much better to deal with these issues before signing the contract than to deal with it at the final settlement. Do whatever you can to insure you and the seller will be on the "same page". Uninformed sellers need to understand the unique qualities of an auction and that it is not a retail operation.

While prices cannot be guaranteed, it is by far the best way to liquidate quickly and efficiently a large variety of items. Explaining market value and the concept of competitive bidding is of paramount importance.

Advertising and marketing an auction is one of the biggest challenges facing today's auctioneer. The time has passed where you can "throw" a couple of hastily written ads in a few local papers and be satisfied. Write your ads carefully and creatively. With the rising costs in newspaper ads and the competitive nature of today's auction profession it is important to write attractive, eye-catching ads and yet keep them cost effective,

A wise auctioneer consults with his seller on advertising costs prior to signing the contract. You really want to avoid "sticker shock" at the final settlement. Depending on the size and type of auction, you may wish to consider TV or radio ads. And of course do not forget Internet advertising. More and more buyers are bypassing the newspaper and searching on the Internet to locate auctions in their area. Remember, this is all about image and building customer interest. Plan your marketing carefully and choose your advertising wisely. You never know where that next buyer is coming from.

Take pride in your profession. Strive to have professional looking equipment, ie, tables, display cases, office trailer, sound system etc. Keep your equipment clean and in good repair. Surround yourself with a well-trained staff that care as much as you do about the success of the sale. A good ring man is worth his weight in gold and can make a good auctioneer really shine. Experienced, well-trained clerks and cashiers are a must for any successful auction.

Conduct your auction in a friendly but businesslike manner, have a plan of action, but understand being flexible is critical to any auction. We all know it is not unusual to have to make quick "on the spot" decisions. If your crowd comes late, are you tempted to "push" back the start time? Don't! If your buyers know you will wait for them then they will be all too happy to accommodate you. If they know you always start on time then the serious buyers will be there. This may not sound like a major problem but it is a control issue and is very important. Always remember, at an auction "time is money" and you as the auctioneer must be in control of the entire process, from start to finish.

Try to greet your buyers as they arrive. This is a great way to learn where they are coming from, determine what their interests are and gives you a feel for the crowd

and helps in the overall conduct of the auction. Not to mention that buyers love a little personal attention and will reward you with healthy bids and repeat business. Take the time to thank the crowd during the auction for attending and compliment your good bidders when appropriate. Remember, happy buyers stay for the entire auction and will bid and buy! Unhappy people will either leave the auction or make you wish they would! These two groups will both talk about you long after the auction is over. Which group would you like to see at your auction?

Present a friendly, positive attitude throughout the auction even if it is a tough sale, but always be firm in your decisions and make sure the only person in control is the auctioneer. If you lose control of your crowd, then you have lost the auction.

Auction day can only have one person in charge and it better be the one conducting the sale! Never forget you are doing much more than merely selling property. Oftentimes what you are selling are somebody else's memories. It is more than just "stuff"!

A successful auction ends with your final visit with the seller. Do you create a paper trail and do you give the seller copies of all relevant auction documents? If not, you might want to think about it. My sellers receive copies of all ads, expenses, clerking tickets, buyer registration etc. When conducting an auction I strive to insure my sellers are not caught off guard with undisclosed surprises. This starts with the initial contact and continues right through the final settlement. Usually when I leave the sellers home, even if the auction was not as financially rewarding as we would have liked, I leave with the knowledge that I have just gained a new friend. Someone who will not be afraid to tell all who will listen about the hard work and compassionate care that was provided. Word of mouth is the best advertising you can have and it costs nothing but time, ethical conduct and hard work. That, my friends, is how you will more than likely get your next sale.

Article submitted by **Lyn Liechty Auctioneer** of Adrian Michigan. Lyn is an NAA and MSAA (Michigan State Auctioneers Association) member. You may contact Lyn at lynliechtyauctions@hotmail.com or visit his website at www.lynliechty.com