Conducting an Online Quilt Auction

This information is based on the experience we had conducting an online auction for Roseville Quilters Guild. It will be a start for you but certainly won't be all-inclusive.

Organization

In Roseville Guild we had a committee of 5 people who worked on the auction.

Find an auction platform

The first one we heard about was used by Valley Quilt Guild in Yuba City and by Monterey Peninsula Quilt Guild-

Rally Up: https://rallyup.com/

We chose Charity Auctions Today (CAT) for Roseville Quilters Guild-

Charity Auctions Today: https://www.charityauctionstoday.com/

These are others we've heard were highly recommended-

Auctria: https://www.auctria.com/

Bidding Owl: https://www.biddingowl.com/

Determine the requirements and benefits your auction platform offers

How many pictures of an item can you include? Rally Up limits it to one; CAT can be up to five. Each platform has its own limits. We discovered people like to see the front of a quilt, but also a close-up and the back if possible.

For CAT, you also need to develop an introduction that tells bidders who you are and where the money raised will go.

You'll need to put a payment process in place, because the platform should process credit card payments and needs a way to direct them to your guild's account. We used Stripe. For us that was very easy because we already had a Stripe account. PayPal may also be an option. It may take some time to set up the payment process. We were also given the option to customize our own invoice – which was more of a receipt, but on it we also were able to put pickup/delivery instructions.

The platform should collect and pass on the appropriate sales tax amount. You need to tell them the tax rate for your area but it will be up to the guild to send appropriate taxes to the state.

CAT let us set up our auction at our own pace and pick a future date for it to open and close. Their support was excellent; they even reviewed our site with us to be sure it would work and we hadn't forgotten anything.

CAT has bidders register their credit cards when they first place a bid. Then the system automatically notifies them if they are out-bid on an item and has a link taking them directly back to the item in case they want to increase their bid.

Some sites let you use a different bidding system, one similar to Ebay, where bidders put in their maximum bid and the system will bid for them until that maximum is reached. Monterey Peninsula told us they started with that system but bidders were confused so they dropped it in future auctions.

Collect and prepare quilts and/or other items to auction

Get a good photograph of your auction items, hanging straight with good lighting. If your platform allows it, people like to see a close-up or two and a picture of the back.

Give the quilt a name if it doesn't already have one.

Write a catchy or informative description. This is a good place to point out anything special, such as custom quilting, hand embroidery, or anything unique or that you want to emphasize. Be sure to include the quilt (or item) size.

CAT had us list a starting bid; determine minimum bid increments (we picked $5 – their standard bid increments increased as the bids got higher, but we didn't like that); and let us establish a "reserve" if we wanted to, an amount under which we wouldn't sell the item. In our first auction, we decided the minimum starting bid was the lowest we would accept and did not establish reserves. In our second, we did establish a reserve and set the starting bid at about ½ of the reserve. The problem we found was that while bidders were told by the system that their bid didn't meet the reserve, they were not told what the reserve was. We had some items that were $10 under the reserve and did not sell. We thought in future auctions we would call people and tell them what the reserve was and how far away from it they were.

CAT allows us to start inputting information about an auction anytime we want. We can start our fall auction while our spring auction is going on if we want.

We started a spreadsheet that listed the name of the quilt, who donated, minimum bid (reserve), what to do if the item does not sell, etc. CAT will provide a nice list of items once everything is put into the system. MY POINT – The list is easiest if sorted by item NAME.

We stored items by line # on the list. It would be BEST to tag each item with its name and store alphabetically. Being organized at this point helps distribution go smoothly.

All the auction items had to be stored until end of the auction. We start collecting items for our next auction as soon as we are done with one auction. We stored them in plastic bags with the names on the outside.

Publicity

Virtually all the publicity for an online auction is done through social media: personal email messages, Facebook, Craig's List, Next Door, Instagram, and whatever else you can think of.

Most important – ask everyone to ask everyone seeing their post to forward to their contacts. You tell one person, and they tell two people, and they tell two people.

Delivery

In our case, most of our sold quilts were picked up by the purchaser or delivered by one of our members (especially when they were sold to friends or relatives). In our first auction we only mailed to 3 people.

We used USPS flat-rate boxes, which made it easy to determine postage rates. We contacted the 3 purchasers and had them pay by Venmo or PayPal to one of our committee members, who then turned the money over to the guild, which then reimbursed the person who purchased the boxes and mailed them.

Reports

The auction platform should provide you with reports you need to finish up your auction. CAT had some excellent reports including which quilts sold and for how much, who the purchaser was, how much sales tax was collected, and many others.

We were also able to collect email addresses from those who bid this time so we can contact them directly the next time we do an online quilt auction.

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