



Wireless Bidding Options

Is the latest technology right for your auction?

Do you hop on the latest bandwagon, technology-wise? Were you the first among your friends to get an iPhone or iPad? If so, you have probably at least considered using one of the many vendors of auction services that provides the ability to bid via a wireless connection. But these innovations may not be right for your organization, your goals and your budget.

Before we go any further, let's stipulate that we're talking about EVENT auctions here—where people attend a social event which is also a fundraising auction. We're not talking about online auctions, where all bidding is done online from the bidder's computer or Smartphone, and is usually open to people not associated with the sponsoring organization. Think [EBay](#), or the nonprofit versions such as [Bidding for Good](#) or [BenefitEvents](#). Internet technology is essential to these auctions, but until fairly recently, has not been an option for event auctions.

There are vendors aplenty who will provide you with the software and hardware to make bidding a breeze: just try Googling "Charity Event Auctions Smartphone Bidding" for a seemingly endless list. But as is true of most technological solutions, there are pluses and minuses to using these systems.

How It Works:

In silent auctions, items up for bid are displayed on tables, along with a paper bid sheet where bids are written. Bidders vie for the item by increasing their bid. Popular items can have many bids before the final sale price is achieved. At the end of the auction, winning bids are tallied and winning bidders pay for the items they won. This whole process can be made to run very smoothly with the use of an auction database (such as [EasyAuction™](#)).

In an auction using wireless technology for bidding, although items may be displayed on tables at the auction, there are no paper bid sheets. Items are viewed on a web page set up especially for the event by the vendor. When a person wants to bid on an item, they access this web page, look up the item, and type in their bid. This can be done on any device connected to the Internet, usually either an iPad (provided by the auction vendor) or Smartphone (usually owned by the bidder). Some auctions use a combination of the two devices, with iPads located conveniently throughout the auction venue for those who do not have Smartphones. The software associated with the web page automatically records the winning bids and produces a bill for the winning bidders.

Advantages/Disadvantages

There are some real benefits with using wireless technology for bidding:

- Bidders can submit bids and check on the status of the item immediately without having to move around the room. This can result in higher returns for items, as re-bids are often done with a single mouse-click.
- Bids can be submitted by those who cannot attend the auction. Whether the auction is open only during the hours of the event or offered before or after the event auction, increasing the number of people who can bid can result in higher returns.
- For tech-savvy attendees, the use of wireless bidding can increase the excitement of the event.
- Since all of the vendors of this type of technology provide credit card processing built into their data systems (at least all the ones I've reviewed do!), checkout can be very quick and easy. Credit card information is usually provided before bidding is allowed, making that time-consuming step unnecessary at checkout.
- The organization will have immediate feedback as to how the auction is going at any time. This makes it possible to emphasize goals throughout the auction.

However, using wireless technology for bidding is not the best solution for all organizations. Be sure you can answer these questions before making your decision:

- Are most of your auction attendees technologically capable and comfortable with bidding online with no prior training?

Even though it may seem that everyone knows how to use the Internet, it is not universally true! You may need to provide helpers to navigate an unfamiliar system. Although the potential is there to make more money with wireless bidding, it also might be a drag on your earnings if bidders are uncomfortable with the interface.

- Are bidders comfortable making purchases online?

Many of the wireless systems require bidders to provide credit card information before bidding. Even in today's world of online purchasing, there are many people who simply do not trust that their information will be kept confidential. At a minimum, you will need to provide some assurance to your bidders that security is guaranteed.

- Do you expect to use the auction event to build community, as well as raise money?

If so, wireless technology may not be the best option for you. When paper bid sheets are used, people interact while bidding. They can't bid from their dinner table—they have to move around. Friendly competition for popular items can increase the fun and excitement of the event. If bidders are spending their time staring at a small screen, they are probably not interacting with others!

- What are the costs of using a wireless system?

It's a given that you're going to need to spend some money to run your auction, whether it's for using an auction database, to provide a credit card alternative for payments, or provide wireless bidding. Most wireless bidding providers charge fees for leasing equipment (iPads, credit card readers, etc.), credit card processing (often at higher rates than stand-alone merchant accounts) and many charge a percentage of the money raised. Weigh this carefully: how much additional income do you anticipate raising using this technology? Does it outweigh the cost of providing

it? What is the comparative cost of a system that facilitates your auction without providing online bidding?

- Who will provide the staff to run the auction?

This varies by company. Some provide a self-implementing system; they will send you the hardware and provide training documents so you can run the auction with volunteers. Some provide training sessions; others charge for this service. Many of the companies I reviewed will provide staff to help you on auction night. Of course, you can expect to pay dearly for this service.

Vendors

If you're interested in researching wireless bidding further, here's a partial list of vendors to check out. This list is not an endorsement of any vendor (though I've worked with [BenefitEvents](http://www.benefit-events.com) and found them very helpful), so be sure to assess a few vendors before making your decision:

AuctionsByCellular	http://www.auctionsbycellular.com/
BenefitEvents	http://benefitevents.com
Bidding for Good	http://www.biddingforgood.com
Greater Giving	http://www.greatergiving.com/
MaestroSoft	http://www.maestrosoft.com/