

“How to Enter and Price Your Auction Items for a Coast Division Auction”

What has prompted this article? As the Division Paymaster and the person entering all of the auction transactions into the computer, I have seen a marked increase in the number of auction items that do not receive a single bid (a no-bid item). This observation at the last meet prompted the auction accounting committee to review the items on the no-bid table near the end of the auction and the quantity was staggering. There were some items of value for more than \$1.00 but simply no one was interested in them or the starting (minimum) bid was too high. But the majority of the no-bid items were truly not worth even \$1.00.

What is the solution? Packaging your unwanted trains, train parts, tools, electronics, etc. to be the most appealing to the Coast Division members in attendance at an auction is the solution. So you ask, how can I be sure that my items will sell? This is a question that every member placing items in the Coast Division auction seems to ask themselves...well, at least they should be! Remember, you're putting these items up for auction because you don't want them anymore and the last thing you want to do with them is take them back home.

So, what do I have to do to be sure they will sell? First thing to remember is that the minimum bid for any auction item in our auctions is \$1.00. Keeping that in mind, look at your items and ask yourself if YOU would pay at least a dollar for the item you are entering. If you won't pay a dollar for it, then most likely no one else will either and you are taking it home. Again, how can I be sure that it will sell? If the item isn't worth a dollar, then package it with another or several other items that will ensure that it will be desirable to someone. The adage that "One man's junk is another man's treasure" is very applicable to auction items; but it has to look and feel like a bargain to the bidder.

If you have a bunch of old electronics parts to sell, remember there are not many modelers who dabble in electronics parts. You will need to enhance the value of those parts with something of general interest to several people; like adding a car kit or two along with the electronics item. Remember, YOU don't want to take it home; you want someone else to do that.

On the other end of the minimum bid spectrum, placing a minimum bid at or near retail value will not garner any bids. Setting a minimum bid that is near retail simply says to a potential bidder that you really don't want to sell the item. If you have a Athearn "Blue Box" locomotive that cost \$16.98 and you put a minimum bid of \$20 on it, you don't really want to sell it. Be realistic with your minimum bids.

Conversely; If you have items that have a realistic street value of OVER \$25 each... consider making them each a separate item. If you put a large number of high-value items together, the lot will tend to price out at a much lower total value, because fewer bidders will stay in the auction as the price goes up. For instance, a lot of 10 items, each with a street price of \$30 is likely NOT to sell for \$300, but for something like half as much. Bundling high-value items also has the effect of discouraging individual bidders who might have bid-up a single item they found especially attractive. (Matched sets are the obvious exclusion to this guidance.).

In today's environment, eBay and deep discount internet retailers are handling the resale of nice, high value items. These venues are keeping most of the brass models and expensive plastic models away from our auctions. We are left with the lower value items that our members still want to sell. In order to sell your items you must do all that you can to make them at least appear to have a value worth bidding on.

Because of the large number of no-bid items, we have had to eliminate the sale of no-bids during and after the auction. It has become too difficult and time consuming to locate the desired item in the piles of no-bids. The best way to ensure that you get that item is to pay attention to the auction and bid on it when the item is active with the auctioneer. Let's say the item you want is item 250 and the auction is at item 75, you want to duck out for a smoke, lunch or conversation, ask a friend to come and get you when item 240 goes up for auction. It is not the auction committee's fault if you miss the item you couldn't live without. We (the auction committee) miss a lot of items we want because we are too busy moving sold and no-bid items to the tables or recording the sales. We see the item pass by us after the item has been sold.

The auctions at every meet are nearly the sole supporting activity of the Coast Division. The only other income is the net from the food service and the NMRA rebate of about \$400 per year. That will pay for one of four meeting sites. The auction supports the other three meeting sites (yes, we pay to rent the space), the postcard meeting notices (\$600/year), contest awards, etc. Packaging your auction items to sell provides the Coast Division with 10% of what it sold for.

From a personal observation, I have often heard complaints from members about a few buyers at the auctions who are buying to resell at train shows in their retail booths. Remember first that these persons are dues-paying NMRA members with every right to purchase at our auctions. Secondly, these persons are buying to **RESELL** the items at a later date. They are NOT going to pay too much for anything or they can't make a profit (their end-game). If you really want the item, then bid until you win! You'll still get it at a reasonable price and you'll be supporting your Division (the seller pays 10% of the sold price to the Division).