

auctions.com

auctions.com / auctionuniverse.com / fsauctions.co.uk / sold.com.au / etc

*http://www.auctions.com launched in November-97
Classified Ventures Inc was founded in mid-97*

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Target market: consumer
Price range: US\$1 - US\$100,000

auctions.com ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2/5	Ease of use - 7/10
Customer support - 6/10	Feature Set- 6.5/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 41/60

68.3%

Classified Ventures Inc

The memorably titled auctions.com originated as auctionuniverse.com, which was launched by US backers the Times Mirror Group in November 1997. In November 1998, Classified Ventures Inc - a joint venture between 8 leading media companies including Gannett, Knight Ridder, The Washington Post and The Tribune - acquired the site and its affiliates. By mid 1999 Auction Universe relaunched as auctions.com with an image overhaul and increased connections with Classified Ventures' parent media companies. Classified Ventures backs a range of online projects - including cars.com, apartments.com and auctions.com - designed to take newspaper classified ads to a national level.

Auctions.com is the world's fastest growing on-line auction network. Lots are available in over 6,000 product categories, with in excess of 2 million items available for bidding across the entire network.

Auction.com's main value proposition is the association with a large network of newspapers, magazines, websites and broadcast media outlets through the Classified Ventures umbrella, guaranteeing a wide consumer marketing reach through traditional media outlets. Furthermore, online auctions through the site are affiliated not just through other websites, but to local newspapers, specialist publications and broadcast media. In turn, local newspapers or regional websites can create their own auction site at minimal development cost in return for adding classifieds and lots to the auction.com network. This policy has already paid off, with the UK's largest Internet Service Provider, Freeserve, joint-venturing auctions.com for its fsauction.co.uk site. In Australia, auction.com has joint-ventured to create sold.com.au, Australia's largest consumer auction site. Such partnerships extend auctions.com's market position, while maximising the number of products available for auction across the whole network.

auctions.com

Product range:

(number of items available at time of review in bracket)

Ancient Artefacts (23), Antique Other (120), Architectural (6), Art, Paintings, Prints, Sculpture (352), Ceramic, China & Porcelain (147), Folk & Handcrafted Art (83), Furnishings (17), Glass (111), Kitchen, Dinner, Tableware (17), Metalware (57), Pottery (138), Textiles & Linens (10), Advertising (4) Autographs (365) Books & Manuscripts (210), Newspapers & Magazines (250), Other Paper Collectibles (67), Photographica (13), Postcards (6), Animation (150), Comics & Comic Art (1470), Non-Sports Cards (1324), sci-fi Memorabilia (20), Disneyana (43), Dollhouses & Miniatures, Dolls (144), Games & Puzzles (9), Models & Scale Replicas (11), Automobilia (8), Bells (5), Bottles & Cans (1), Boxes (3), Breweriana (15), British Royal Collectibles (63), Buttons, Medals & Pinbacks (2), Candy Containers (5), Casino & Gambling (8), Circus (22), Clocks & Timepieces (87), Collector Plates (90), Ethnographic & Religious (84), Farming Collectibles (11), Figurines & Decorative Items (67), Handcrafts & Sewing (22), Kitsch (1), Knives & Swords (28), Magicians & Magic (6), Militaria (81), Millennium (1), Motorcycle Memorabilia (15), Movie Memorabilia (452), Music Memorabilia (122), Oceana & Maritime (8), Other Collectibles (92), Other Memorabilia Printing, Railroadiana (6), Salesmen Samples & Models, Science (9), Soda & Fountain Collectibles (69), Souvenirs (9), Television Memorabilia (240), Tins & Trays (4), Tobacciana (25),

Tools & Machinery (8), US - Historic & Political (17), World - Historic & Political (8),

World's Fairs & Expositions (7), Writing Instruments (2), Coins & Numismatic (482), Stamps & Philately (171), Auto Racing Diecast (856), Baseball Collectibles (992), Baseball Trading Cards (6703),

Basketball Collectibles (240), Basketball Trading Cards (688), Football Collectibles (414),

Football Trading Cards (2840), Golf (39), Hockey (554), NASCAR & Auto Racing (198), Other Sports (97), Wrestling (64)

Payment:

Payment is settled between buyer and seller, although auctions.com offers a system called Bid\$afe (patent pending) where the cost of an item is debited from the buyer's account, but not forwarded to the seller until the goods are received satisfactorily. Sellers must open an account with auctions.com with a minimum \$10 balance, against which sales fees and enhancement costings are deducted.

Insurance

None offered

Key features

Auctions.com has in excess of 6,000 categories, with items placed for bids in any subsites or affiliate-sites available for bidding across the entire Auction.com network. The site offers both person-to-person and business-to-person auctions.

Users are able to partake in Dutch, Standard and Reserve Auctions as well as fixed price sales. A 'Robobid' service will automatically increase bids over a period of time to a maximum price set by the bidder. Delivery and payment are settled between buyer and seller, although auctions.com can act as an intermediary with the Bid\$afe option.

A basic listing is available to any registered user for free, although enhancements - such as bold heading, increased information or extra photos - are available at variable rates from ten cents upwards. In the event of a sale, the seller is charged 2.5% of the winning bid.

Auction.com offers a pager service whereby users can be forwarded text messages regarding bid status

While, like most auction services, no guarantees are provided that sellers and buyers will honour their agreement, auctions.com does utilise a ratings system. Each user has a starting rating of zero, and for each transaction, the respective buyer or seller to that user can either add a point or deduct a point to that rating, dependent on whether they met their agreement or not. This allows all users of the site to check a buyer or sellers rating before entering a transaction.

Business users can establish merchant accounts, which vary from a Merchant Package, offering unlimited free basic listings, to Merchant Site, where auctions.com will design, build and host an autonomous auction site for a company. By joining a Merchant agreement, business get 10,000 free banner ads per year across auctions.com and related sites.

Fulfilment

Settled between buyer and seller.

Guarantee

Few guarantees are offered, although auction.com will refund a sales fee in the event of a bidder failing to pay, while bidders can retract an offer made subject to agreement from the seller. Ultimately, auctions are made at the buyer's own risk, and escrow services are recommended.

Terms and conditions

Members must be over 18 years

Buyers and sellers failing to fulfil a bid or offer made are subject to termination of membership.

Auctions.com limits its liability absolutely, including mis-processing of a bid due to technical problems.

Auctions may only be terminated early in the event of damage of goods, or an erroneous duplication of listing.

Overview of prices:

- Standard Listing: \$.10
- Boldface Title: \$.25
- Italic Title: \$.25
- Additional Categories: \$.10
- First Photo: No Charge
- Auctions.com Image Hosting Service - \$.25!
- Additional Photos: No Charge (include in "Description" using HTML)
- Optional Web Site: \$1.00
- Showcase Category: \$4.95
- Showcase Auction: \$24.95
- Auto-Relist: Free
- Sales Transaction Fee: 2.5% of the final selling price.

The Sales Transaction fee is only collected for successful, closed auctions.

Review of auctions.com

Auctions.com is a very strong general-consumer auction site, with growth potential to ultimately tackle eBay, given its range of affiliate deals. While the look-and-feel and tone of the site will not attract serious collectors, the range and quantity of products should certainly attract amateur hobbyists and collectors.

The site is quick to load, and it is possible to place a bid in four clicks or less (provided the user is already registered). The site is, on the whole, organised logically, although some categories and sub categories may cause confusion. For example, TV Memorabilia is located under 'Collectibles and Memorabilia' but not under 'Music, TV & Entertainment' which may confuse users.

Customer information and FAQs is extremely comprehensive, although given the quantity of information available, the structure and navigation of it needs to be organised more clearly. Many of the more obvious issues such as security, privacy, payment and shipping are hard to locate, while other topics such as the Robobid function get unnecessarily prominent coverage.

Aesthetically the site takes a simple and functional approach, clearly targeting the largest common-denominator with an almost factory outlet-style look-and-feel.

The range of products is excellent, with a large quantity of items available in each category. However, categories with the most items available are generally collectibles and memorabilia, making the range of antiques and art appear lacklustre in comparison.

There is a healthy collection of features available, including Robobid, Bid\$afe and pager notification. The inclusion of a shipping service such as QXL's safe-ship would be very useful, while auctions.com makes no attempt to add any value-adding content.

Outlook

With the benefit of affiliation with traditional media publications and services, auctions.com is well positioned to continue expansion, especially with people new to the Internet or auction sites. Links with ISPs such as Freeserve in the UK should continue to prove profitable as such companies move into DTV and WAP services.

Auctions.com's position in the online art, antiques and collectibles market will be limited by the highly consumer-orientated design and tone. Nevertheless the merchant accounts feature-set could appear very attractive to dealers looking to offer products to a large audience.

The company has remained relatively quiet about future plans, although a live auction facility has been tried and tested, and the pager based services already in operation should allow a swift progression into mobile services.

The affiliate programmes already in place will ensure a strong position in the US market, and in the UK through Freeserve. However further expansion and joint ventures are definitely needed for the company to have a genuine international presence.

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Yahoo! Inc. was founded in 1994*

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CEO
Timothy Koogle

Founders
Jerry Yang & David Filo

Target market: consumer, small trader
Price range: \$0.25cents - \$1m

auctions.yahoo.com ratings

Speed - 9/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 1/5	Ease of use - 7.5/10
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 6.5/10	Range of products - 8.75/10	Total - 43.75/60

72.9%

Yahoo! Inc.

Yahoo.com is the world's most popular and visited website, getting at April 2000 145 million unique users per month. Yahoo! Inc was founded by David Filo and Jerry Yang, PhD, graduates of Electrical Engineering at Stanford University, in April 1994.

For April 2000 Yahoo's global registration base grew to more than 125 million cumulative registrations for its member services. The company saw traffic increase to a record 625 million page views per day on average during March 2000 and enabled more than \$1 billion of online transactions through the Yahoo! global network. The company had net revenues totalling \$228.3m for the quarter ended March 31, 2000

Yahoo! Auctions is the world's leading free auction service. For April 2000, it surpassed 2.5 million active daily listings, up from 1.5 million active daily listings in December 1999. In addition, Yahoo! launched auctions in Taiwan, bringing the company's total number of localised auctions services outside the U.S. to 19 countries. These include: Denmark; France; Germany; Italy; Norway; Spain; Sweden; UK & Ireland; in Europe. Australia & New Zealand; China; Hong Kong; Japan; Korea; Singapore and Taiwan in the Pacific Rim. Argentina; Brazil; Canada; and Mexico in the Americas. In addition, Yahoo! acquired Arthas.com (d.b.a. dotBank.com) to provide buyers and sellers with a personal payment service to more easily complete transactions. During the first quarter of 2000, Yahoo! also launched Yahoo! B2B Marketplace, a comprehensive directory of variable and fixed-priced listings of equipment, inventory and product listings from business-to-business commerce sites, to enable companies to purchase products and services more cost efficiently and effectively.

Yahoo's success in the auction sector is driven in part by the size of its user-base, but mainly through being the only major auction site to offer free listings and commission-free trading. Users are able to purchase enhancements, but all standard listings are without fee. On this basis Yahoo! Auctions are able to offer 2.5 million items daily with over 375,000 items in the antiques, art and collectibles category (which is also the US version's most popular category).

auctions.yahoo.com

Product range:

Art (55,068) - Animation, Paintings, Photographs; Autographs (23,389); Books (16,371) Clocks & Timepieces (6,546); Home & Garden (113,475) Furniture, Porcelain; Memorabilia (9,144,016) Rock and Roll@, Sports@, Royalty@; Militaria (11,775) Civil War, WW II, Canada; Numismatics (53,800) Coins, Currency, Supplies; Science & Nature (4,789) Bones & Fossils, Rocks & Minerals, Sea Shells; Science Fiction (18,022) Star Wars, Star Trek, X Files; Stamps (37,627)

Payment:

Settled between buyer & seller. No recommended payment systems or escrow services are offered, but advice is given for the pros and cons of each service.

Insurance

None offered, insurance must be settled between buyer and seller

Key features

Considering its size, Yahoo! Auctions offers very little in the way of unique features. This is compensated by the services' free listings and commission-free trading, giving users a no-frills cost-free environment to buy and sell.

To find an item, users can either perform a keyword search, search by category, or do a proximity search allowing users to find items for sale within a set radius of their postal code.

Users can pay for basic enhancements for their listing, including bold titling and logos alongside listing. To be a featured auction, users pay \$0.25 for each day of an auction's duration. This fee places the item at the bottom of the featured list; to get a higher listing, users can pay greater amounts. No guarantee is offered as to placing, and no price guidelines are given to advise how much should be paid to ensure inclusion. This policy undoubtedly encourages users to pay a higher premium than is perhaps necessary to get a featured listing on the front page of the key category.

Frequent sellers on Yahoo! Auctions can utilise the Bulk Loader program to submit a large number of lots.

The site offers no form of guarantee or insurance, and advises users to settle disputes amongst themselves, or through a governmental body in the event of fraud. Users are able to contact Yahoo! in the event of such misuse, although no telephone support is offered. Yahoo! encourages use of the feedback system which works in the same way as on other sites: deducting points for negative comment and adding points for positive ones to a user's rating.

Yahoo! also offers a Neighbourhood Watch scheme allowing users with a positive feedback rating to recommend the removal of any auction inappropriately or illegally listed.

Registered users are able to set up a 'booth' detailing their selling activity, and other personal information including a link to a personal webpage.

Yahoo! offers proxy bidding, and provides full auction updates to both buyers and sellers by email. User are allocated a page where they can regularly check the status of all auctions they are currently involved in.

In line with eBay's Business-to-Business marketplace, Yahoo! has established B2B auction listings, although the number of lots and activity is much fewer than the main auction listings.

Charity auctions play an integral part of the site's front page, and it is here that the greatest bidding activity appears, with profile items such as Brittany Spear's personal outfits.

Yahoo Auctions have the greatest international reach with seven regionalised versions in Europe: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK & Ireland; six in the Pacific Rim: Australia & NZ, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and three in the Americas: Brazil, Canada, Mexico.

Fulfilment

None offered, postage must be settled between seller/buyer, although Yahoo! provides basic information and links for three postal services: United States Postal Service, Federal Express, and Airborne Express

Guarantee

None offered, although customer support will attempt to mediate in a dispute. Generally, however, Yahoo! Auctions recommends using legal help to settle a dispute beyond that of refunding fees and that users check feedback ratings before completing a purchase.

Terms and conditions

Sellers must register a credit card with Yahoo! before offering an item for auction. Although this is never charged unless enhancements are used, Yahoo! uses it to verify that each user is a unique 'real' person, and also to restrict access to the adult areas of the site.

Other terms and conditions are consistent with Yahoo's policy as a whole. This details such misuses of service as spamming, publication of obscene or offensive material, fraudulent description of items. In addition buyers must agree that a bid is final. Users must be over 18 and agree to not manipulate bidding or feedback in anyway.

Items that are not permitted for listing on Yahoo include firearms, fresh food, alcohol, live animals, used underwear, bodily parts and fluids, copyright infringing items, and non-antique firearms.

Pricing

Listing, the setting of a reserve price, image hosting and sale commissions are all nil.

To list an item with a bold typeface costs \$2, and to list with a 'gift icon' costs \$1.

To become a featured auction, users pay a minimum of \$0.25 for each day of the auction. This amount can be increased to gain greater positioning, although Yahoo! provides no guidelines or guarantee as to how much users should pay or where it will be positioned.

Review of auctions.yahoo.com

Yahoo! Auctions follows the parent portal's policy of simple, no-frills design to aid rapid page-loading and cross-browser compatibility. The result is a somewhat ugly, utilitarian and strictly functional design. This is offset, however, by lightening-fast load times, and straightforward navigation. By having a site where each page loads almost instantaneously, clicking on the wrong link, or browsing the wrong category is less of a problem as it can be rectified very quickly. This greatly increases the stickiness of the site.

The range of products is excellent, with over 375,000 lots available in the antiques, art and collectibles sector. This comes from a total daily product listing of approximately 2.5 million, a figure not far behind eBay's auctions, and a clear sign that the free-auction policy has paid off.

However, serious collectors of fine art or antiques are unlikely to find much of interest in these listings: although the antiques and collectibles category is Yahoo's most popular section, the most popular sub-categories are memorabilia, Disneyana, scfi-fi, coins, stamps, autographs and advertising memorabilia. Any antique furniture is listed in the generic 'furniture' category which is a combination of flat-packed cupboards and the occasional 1940s dining table.

Likewise serious artists are unlikely to be attracted to the art auctions as a place to sell, with an original watercolour valued at \$900 failing to get any improvement on its asking price of \$87, despite being a 'featured auction'. The bulk of the remaining items in the art category are either prints, autographed photos of famous artists, or family heirlooms of little value to anyone who wasn't related to the artist.

Despite this, the range of collectibles is impressive, and someone who collected early Coca-Cola paraphernalia, for example, would be more than satisfied with the range of items on offer.

Bidding activity in general is quite quiet, with perhaps only one in twenty of items listed getting a bid. However, the large bulk of items with bids placed on them had activity of upwards of five bids.

The feature set is very basic for an auction of this size, but given that the services are free, it does not appear to be a problem. Customer information is reasonable, with plenty of FAQs and walkthroughs although they are a little jumbled and inconsistent. One welcome feature is the offered option to contact Yahoo's customer care after each page of help if there are any further questions.

Overall Yahoo! Auctions is faster and more comprehensive than the large majority of other auction sites. Equally its international reach far exceeds that of even eBay. As long as Yahoo! maintains free-listing and commission-free trading, the absence of many features and the utilitarian design will be humoured by its users. Nevertheless, to remain competitive in the face of other auction sites that may also offer free listings, Yahoo! Auctions should make more efforts to improve their presentation. To attract serious antiques and art traders and dealers, much more work would be needed.

Outlook

Yahoo! Auctions, as a generic auction service, look set to continue strong growth and popularity, buoyed by Yahoo's megalithic user base and the policy of offering free-auctions. In relation to the art and antiques market, Yahoo! Auctions show far less promise. The main incentive for dealers is commission-free selling, but the number of items on offer means that high-value items at bargain prices will often get lost. From a buyer's perspective it is unlikely that high-income bidders will be sufficiently attracted to the service - with its bargain-basement look-and-feel - to spend much time browsing. And with so many items on offer, it is likely that potential buyers will have to spend a lot of time doing just that.

To become a serious player in the art, antiques and collectibles market, Yahoo! will either need to purchase a specialist site, an auction house - as in the case of eBay's purchase of Butterfield, or put greater investment into creating a specialist sub-site - which could comfortably include some of Yahoo's wealth of intellectual property and content.

Yahoo! Inc's general strategy for the first decade of the millennium is to become leader in mobile and WAP based services, and has secured deals with leading telecoms companies in each of its main territories to offer streamlined cellular services. Although no plans were announced at time of review, it is expected that WAP-based auction tracking will be offered in the near future.

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CEO
Meg Whitman

Founder & Chairman
Pierre Omidya

Target market: consumer
Price range: US\$0.01 - +US\$15m

ebay.com ratings

Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2.5/5	Ease of use - 8/10	83.3%
Customer support - 8/10	Feature Set- 9.5/10	Range of products - 10/10	Total - 50/60	

eBay Inc

Main facts:

- Launched in 1995 by Pierre Omidyar after his wife - an avid collector of Pez - commented that the Internet would be a good place to join collectors worldwide.
- Boasts approximately 10 million unique users and 1.5 billion page impressions per month. According to Media Metrix (January 2000 survey), this accounts for 6.5% of the web's total daily traffic. The site has 10 million registered users.
- A total of over 60 million items have been successfully auctioned
- eBay has over 4,320 categories with 450,000 items placed for auction every 24 hours. Each day over 4 million auctions are available for bidding.
- At the time of writing, eBay offered over 120,000 items in the art and antiques category and over 1 million in the collectibles category.
- eBay is the world's most visited e-commerce site, and one of the few consumer sites to show a profit.
- Sales for 1999 rose by 276% to \$2.8 billion from \$745 million in 1998.

In the five years since launch, eBay has become part of the Internet elite of such high-brand recognition sites as Yahoo, Amazon and AOL. The company has also made a profit for three

years in succession and seen growth of almost 600% between 1997 and 1999. Besides the media coverage for its position as the web's leading consumer e-commerce site, eBay has enjoyed huge publicity for some of its headline grabbing bids, including human organs, babies, a nuclear warhead and 'a man's soul'.

Although with over 120,000 lots in the art and antiques category eBay has a greater product range than its competitors, the look, feel and tone of the site is targeted more at the consumer market than the serious collector. To address this, in October 1999 the company launched eBay Great Collections (see profile), a separate site offering fine art, antiques and rare collectibles, with a more conservative design scheme. This strategy was helped by the successful purchase in May 1999 of Butterfield & Butterfield (see profile), one of the largest physical auctioneers in the world. In the same month, eBay completed the purchase of Kruse International, a leading physical auctioneer of collectable cars, allowing the launch of car auction categories. Continuing the expansion in 1999, eBay purchased Billpoint, a pioneer in person-to-person credit card payments across the Internet.

Also during 1999, eBay launched 53 regional sites targeting the 50 top US metropolitan districts in an attempt to localise content. This move was partially to encourage the sale of items that are too bulky or expensive to ship, and items that people prefer to view before purchase. eBay continued its expansion overseas during 1999 and 2000 through a range of methods. ebay.co.uk was built from scratch, and enjoyed strong usage buoyed by the waiving of listing fees. The company purchased one of Germany's leading auction sites - alando.de.ag - in July 1999 to facilitate expansion there, while a 30% investment in eBay Japan by NEC, funded a move into the east. eBay also operates sites in Canada and Australia.

A large proportion of eBay's sales and marketing budget is spent on affiliation deals with AOL and the Disney Go network. eBay paid Go \$30 million for a four year deal to appear as 'preferred personal trading service' across Disney, Lycos and ABC sites. In addition, eBay re-wrote a three year \$12 million contract with AOL to gain increased coverage for \$75 million over the three year period. eBay sources have indicated the AOL partnership has proved highly successful, and is likely to continue.

ebay.com

Product range:

Antiques (post-1900) (5340), Antiquities (3490), Architectural (4374), Art:Fine (32663) - General (1894), Drawings (769), Multiple Techniques (1989), Paintings (8445), Photographic Images (942), Prints (16351), Sculptures (2273), Asian Antiques (5579), Books, Manuscripts (4789) - General (2392), African (17), American (1703), Asian (99), English (325), European (232), Latin American (21), Ceramics (3549); Ethnographic (3310), European (1083), Folk Art (3356), Furniture (3914), Glass (3536), Maps, Atlases (1112), Maritime (792), Medical (882), Metalware (4969), Musical Instruments (855), Primitives (3632), Reproductions (1880), Science Instruments (853), Silver (8614) Silver Plate (3464), Textiles, Linens (6486) - General (1160), Fabric (867), Lace, Crochet, Doilies (886), Linens (1188), Quilts (1075), Rugs (887), Samplers (160), Tapestry (263); Toleware (576), Woodenware (1826); Antiques & Art (121230)

Books (220866), Magazines (51850), Memorabilia (155261), Movies (120987), Music (231333), Musical Instruments (27424),

Coins: US (46627), Coins: World (15422), Currency: US (4407), Currency: World (3636), Exonumia (4114), Scripophily (1613), Stamps (87005), Collectibles (1034784); Dolls, Doll Houses (70777), Dolls (43397), Barbie (18155), Figures (1969), House, Miniatures (7256); Jewelry, Gemstones (198343), Artist Jewellery (4961), Beads (18685), Boxes (1150), Cufflinks/Tieclaspers (1787), Gemstones (42850), Jewellery (128910); Pottery & Glass (233839), Glass (81700), Porcelain (72888), Pottery (76317), Stoneware (2934); Sports Memorabilia (506237)

Payment:

Settled between buyer and seller. eBay recommends the i-Escrow service allowing buyer to deposit money with the i-Escrow site, but only release it upon satisfactory reception of goods.

In addition, during 1999, eBay acquired and implemented Billpoint, a system to allow person-to-person credit card transactions across the Internet. Opening a Billpoint account allows eBay sellers to send a credit card invoice to their buyer, without having to establish a merchant account or receive bank clearance. The cost of the service for sellers starts at \$0.35. An advantage of the system is that buyers' credit card details are never viewed by the seller, allowing greater peace-of-mind for the buyer.

Insurance

Most items sold through eBay are covered by insurance provided by cynoSure Financial, which is underwritten by Lloyds of London. This covers items that are sold but never received, and items that fail to match their description. Insurance is for up to \$200, less a deductible \$25. Claims must be made within a 60 day period, and are subject to both buyer and seller having a positive feedback rating (i.e. a rating above zero)

Key features

eBay has arguably the broadest features set out of the sites profiled. These include:

- **Power Sellers Program.** For businesses trading on eBay with transaction value of \$2,000 or more per month. The system offers 24-7 support and special 'Power Seller' logos besides each sale. It ranges from Bronze membership for transactions above \$2,000, through silver to gold for transactions greater than \$25,000 per month.
- **SafeHarbor.** A suite of tools and resources to add security to eBay transactions. These include free insurance; dispute settlement help and advice; escrow services and legal, copyright and tax guidelines. The service is backed up with over 180 staff who investigate misuses of service.
- **Feedback Forums.** eBay users are given ratings by both sellers and buyers who have dealt with them. A positive comments adds one point to their feedback rating, while a negative comment deducts one. The system is actively used by eBay customers, with some users rating over 10,000 points in feedback. Unless a user decides to make their feedback private, eBay buyers and sellers can read all responses received by the person they are making a transaction with.
- **My eBay.** Users can log in and view the status of all active bids and sales on one page.
- **About Me.** Users are offered a free personal page which can contain photographs, news, external links and in-depth information.
- **Business Exchange.** In the first quarter of 2000, eBay launched a business to business trading service specialising in the needs of small businesses with fewer than 100 employees. The subsite has a smarter and more corporate design scheme, and offers office and IT equipment and consumables.
- **Shipping.** eBay has teamed up with iStamp to provide PC based printing of postage stamps within the US.
- **Affiliate program.** Webmasters placing eBay links and banners on their site will receive \$3 for every click-through that is followed up with a registration within a 90 day period.
- **Proxy bids & Dutch Auctions.** eBay will automatically bid up to an undisclosed maximum figure on behalf of a buyer. In the event of a bidder placing a maximum bid below that of a fellow bidder, eBay will instantly notify the bidder that their bid has failed. eBay also allows for Dutch Auctions.
- **Billpoint.** The Billpoint payment system facilitates person-to-person payment by credit card.

- **Mister Lister.** Mister Lister is eBay's proprietary bulk listing tool, allowing users to complete product databases and collections on their computer, before uploading all to the site for sale. The software is only available for Microsoft-based operating systems.
- **Gallery mode.** The gallery showcase items in a catalogue of pictures rather than as text.
- **Personal shopper.** Buyers can register the types of items of interest to them, and be alerted by email whenever such items are made available on eBay.
- **eBay Anywhere.** A strategy launched in 1999 to allow eBay users to access trading information through pagers, WAP-enabled phones and Palm personal data assistants.
- **Chat rooms.** eBay has a large number of active chat rooms and discussion groups covering aspects of the site, and separate categories, such as Antiques & Art, Jewellery and Furbies.
- **News & Features.** eBay offers articles such as 'The History of Antiques' and 'Factors affecting value' alongside a newsletter called the eBay Insider (formerly eBay Life). Users are kept up-to-date on a daily basis from the webmaster team regarding the site's status and periods of down-time.

Fulfilment

Although settled between buyer and seller, eBay has a number of 'preferred' shipment methods. These include eStamps, which offers US users of the site US\$25 of free postage that can be printed from their computer. Other preferred services include Mail Boxes Etc, which provide packaging solutions; and iShip which offers delivery and order tracking.

Guarantee

eBay makes no direct guarantees, limiting all liabilities in the user agreement. However, eBay provides insurance on items sold between US\$25 and US\$200, and has a team of over 180 people in the SafeHarbor department, working to limit fraud, misconduct and misuse of service.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply under eBay's User Agreement, which covers the following:

- Under 18s and disqualified members are unable to become members.
- eBay is only a venue and is limited all forms of liability, including member identity, product description or legality or successful completion of a bid.
- Other than in the case of non-binding bid items (real estate and businesses), users agree that all bids are binding.
- eBay's Verified Rights Owner (VeRO) program works to prevent the infringement of copyright or intellectual property of a third party.
- Items must not be available on other auction sites during the bidding process.
- All information provided must be accurate.
- In the event of a feedback rating of -4 (four negative comments), membership is automatically suspended.
- All sellers must have a credit card account with eBay (Visa, MasterCard, Amex or Discover). Members receive a monthly invoice by email, with their account debited several days later. Interest of 1.5% is added to outstanding payments above \$1 on a monthly basis. Failure to settle an account can lead to permanent disqualification from the service.
- Dutch auctions are only available to members with non-negative feedback ratings and at least 60 days trading experience

- Failure to meet these terms and conditions will result in warning and/or temporary, indefinite and permanent termination of membership.

Pricing structure.

The insertion fee is pegged to the opening value or reserve price and ranges from \$0.25 for items less than \$10, up to \$2 for items over \$50. Listings for Dutch auctions are calculated at the opening price multiplied by the number of items to a maximum of \$2. Auctions of real estate face a \$50 insertion fee (but are not subject to final value fee).

To include a reserve price, a fee of \$0.50 is charge for items reserved at \$25, and \$1 for items at \$25 and over. This fee is refunded in the event of a sale.

Enhancements are charged on each item as follows: \$2 for putting item names in bold; \$1 for putting a gift icon next to the listing (to suggest the product would make a good gift); \$15 for putting the item as a 'featured auction' in the category front page; \$100 for putting your item in the featured auctions section with the possibility that it will appear on eBay's front page; \$0.25 for listing a picture of the item in a relevant gallery; and \$20 for listing a picture in a featured gallery.

Final Value Fees are staggered from 1.25% to 5%. This is calculated by charging 5% on the first \$25, 2.5% on the next \$1,000 and 1.25% thereafter.

Fees can be refunded in the event of a sale falling through.

Review of ebay.com

Given the large quantity of traffic and bidding activity, eBay has suffered in the past from significant down-time (time when the site is inaccessible) as well as slow access. Such issues now appear to be largely resolved, with the site loading quickly and without error. Information detailing periods of server and site maintenance are welcome, and explanations are given by eBay's engineers for faults, errors and planned remedies.

The design is logical and consistent, with clean simple pages allowing for quick yahoo-style viewing. Each category has its own unique logo, showing efforts by the designers to target eBay's variety of users specifically. With bright primary colours and deliberately hap-hazard layout, the designers have worked to make the site feel fun, relaxed and non-corporate. While such a strategy succeeds in disguising the fact that this is the most successful consumer e-commerce site on the Internet, many serious collectors and dealers would be put off, while in comparison to other auction sites, the design appears quite out-dated. Although eBay is logical in layout and has a vast amount of content, it almost suffers from it's own strength, with a huge number of support pages and FAQs often repeating the same information. While effort has clearly been made to offer as much help as possible, and indeed eBay is amongst the strongest sites in this area, more could be done to ease usage. In addition, while the site has clearly been designed to keep code to a minimum for speedy access and for maximum compatibility across browsers, the lack of more sophisticated design features such as rollovers or Flash-based introductions tours gives the site an antiquated (in web terms) look and feel.

In an attempt to attract serious collectors and dealers who may have been put off by eBay's 'fun and friendly' consumer slant, the eBay Great Collections subsite was launched, with a more conservative and less garish look and feel. Ironically, GreatCollections (see profile) suffers from a lack of bidding activity on it's profile lots, while the main eBay site has a number of popular and valuable items. These included, at time of review, a set of four first-edition Winnie the Pooh books with 44 bids totalling over \$12,500 and a 1930s porcelain barber's chair fetching in excess of \$30,000.

It is in bidding activity that eBay really excels across the board. While the majority of items were without a bid, given the 3.5 million lots available at any one time this is understandable. Of those attracting bids, which is possibly as high as 40%, strong lots invariably attract interest and fair prices. This included, at time of review, an English castle for \$15m with 144 bids. However most of the more successful lots are those priced under \$20.

eBay has a fantastic feature set, offering just about all features available on other sites, and more. Chatrooms are busy and informative, and the various browsing tools (gallery, grab bag, big ticket) help make searching the site easier. In terms of free 'value-added' content, eBay lags behind iCollector or auctionwatch, and the few articles offered in each category ('the history of Antiques') would be seen as laughable by many dealers.

Pricing is steeper than any other site, though this is offset by the greater chances of making a sale. It is clear that a large number of eBay's sellers have made a full-time career out of trading through the service, and there are numerous success stories of such people available to read. In addition, the inclusion of insurance on items sold through the site goes some way to compensate for higher fees.

Customer support is largely excellent with intelligent question based searches, detailed FAQs and the SafeHarbor program to mediate disputes and misuse of service. Telephone support is not advertised on the site, although is offered to customers patient enough to download the Form 10-K and get the number from that.

Overall, in many aspects, eBay is in a league of it's own. Features, range of products, bidding activity, fulfilment in the event of a successful bid, customer support and international reach are all first class. However, design aesthetics and value-added content are lacking, with perhaps a design overhaul needed to take the online auction pioneer fully into the 21st century.

Outlook

As well as being - with Yahoo and AOL - one of the few consumer sites to show a profit, eBay has succeeded in creating a powerful and loyal community. Among the most popular issues in eBay's chatrooms include serious and extensive threads entitled 'telling friends about your eBay addiction'. Many eBay users have quit jobs to take up selling on a full time basis, while others claim to 'dream' of doing that. Such a website community is a highly valuable asset, and alone guarantees eBay's position at the head of online auctions for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, this loyalty has created a virtuous circle on the site, with most eBay users actively using feedback forums, and driving traffic to the site.

Transaction value, items offered for sale, and profit have grown at an impressive rate, and eBay's financial model should guarantee continued earnings growth. However internationally, where eBay has been slower to expand, it is questionable whether online auction users will be sufficiently attracted to the site to pay listing fees, when other sites offer listings for free as well as lower commission.

In the UK, for example, eBay has enjoyed great success in attracting new customers despite arriving several years after European auction leader QXL. However such growth appears based on eBay's decision to waive listing fees for a fixed period. Users in the UK message boards expressed that they would instantly move to another auction site when eBay reinstated its fees. In order to become a key international player, eBay may need to purchase more localised operations and perhaps adopt a more lenient pricing structure given its late entry into these markets.

Another possible cause for concern is slowly dwindling profit margins. Of course the ability to show a profit at all in the New Economy is very rare, and eBay is clearly spending more of it's considerable income on expansion and R&D. Nevertheless, while net revenues have grown 600% between 1996 and 1999, profit has grown 225%. Between 1997 and 1999, eBay's operating expenses have risen from 55% of net revenues to 75%, while the cost of Net revenues have risen from 20% to 25%. This actually means that eBay posted an operating loss of \$1.2m in income from operations in 1999, although interest and other income helped the company to post an overall profit. Given the volatility of Internet companies, and costly and aggressive expansion required to keep market leadership, such increases are understandable. However, if eBay continues operating with such shrinking profit margins, a year-end loss for the company is not inconceivable for 2001, or even 2000.

Such concerns shouldn't be over-played however, eBay remains the largest, most successful and most popular person to person trading forum on the Internet, with no signs of letting up.

ehammer.com

ehammer.com

*http://www.ehammer.com launched in August-98
eHammer Inc was founded in August-1998*

eHammer Inc,
83 Autubom Street,
New Haven,
Connecticut,
06510,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 203 785 0441

Fax:
+1 203 785 0444

Email:
info@ehammer.com

CEO
Fred Giampietro

**Director of
Communications**
Philip Rynehart

Target market: Serious consumer / collector
Price range: US\$1 - +US\$5,000

ehammer.com ratings

Speed - 7/10	Design (functionality) - 2.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2/5	Ease of use - 6.5/10	64.2%
Customer support - 9/10	Feature Set- 5/10	Range of products - 6.5/10	Total - 38.5/60	

eHammer Inc

eHammer was launched in August 1998 and has gained a reputation for higher value lots across the antiques, art and rare collectibles market. There are a reasonable number of lots available, with bidding on around 30-40% of items. In addition, the site offers auction halls which lists a number of specially registered dealers. This diverse group of dealers offered some strong product, including a Chippendale mirror and a 1730s Sebastian Klotz violin.

While the site offers little more than any of its rivals, the absence of commercial categories such as 'Pez' and 'Beanies Babies' has helped to attract dealers and collector looking for a dedicated site, as evidenced by the strength of bidding activity.

ehammer.com

Product range:

American Antiques (359) Mexican and South American (6) Antiques - British and European (90) Militaria and Weapons (6) Antiquities (9) Music - Instruments - Equipment (24) Architectural (4) Music Recordings (56) Artwork and Prints (161) Native American (9) Asian Antiques (28) Natures Finest (6) Autographs (2) Nautical (3) Books and Magazines (43) Oriental Carpets (3) Breweriana (4) Photography (16) Casino and Gambling (0) Political (2) Charity (0) Pottery and Porcelain (68) Circus and Carnival (1) Religious (3) Coin-Op (0) Silver (7) Coins and Currency (5) Sports (21) Collectibles (176) Stage-Screen-TV Memorabilia (7) Comic Books and Art (5) Stamps (4) Ephemera (401) Textiles and Vintage Clothing (39) Ethnographic (2) Tobacciana (11) Figurines-Plates-Ornaments (13) Toys (43) Firefighting-Law Enforcement (1) Trading Cards (13) Fraternal Organisations (1)

*Transportation (5) Glass (32) Twentieth Century Design (40) Jewellery (316) Vintage Radios-
TVs-Telephones (0) Kitchen Collectibles (39) Western Americana (31) Mechanical Music (2)*

Payment:

eHammer recommends the i-Escrow service, which charges 5% of the transaction amount on US\$5 minimum payment.

Insurance

None offered

Key features

eHammer offers standard auction services with proxy bidding and user feedback. User feedback is slightly more sophisticated than some services in that each user is given three numbers after their username - one each for the quantity of positive, neutral and negative comments.

eHammer also offers auction halls or galleries (both names are used to describe the service). This is a dealer network with 15 registered dealers and bulk users of eHammer registered.

Sellers are billed every 30 days from the moment they open their account. eHammer offers broad customer information and support, as well as telephone support. There are no special affiliate deals for eHammer's users in areas of shipping, fulfilment or insurance.

Fulfilment

eHammer recommends FedEx, UPS or Mail Boxes etc for shipping.

Guarantee

None offered, although customer support will attempt to mediate in a dispute. Generally, however, eHammer recommends using legal help to settle a dispute beyond that of refunding fees.

Terms and conditions

eHammer's User Agreement is largely the same as the other leading sites, covering members' agreements to provide accurate information, the binding nature of a bid or sale, limits on the sale of firearms and other law-violating items, the use of the site to advertise other sites or services, and the copyright of information on the site. Interestingly, the terms and conditions make no stipulations as to the member's age (most sites require users to be over 18), although the requirement of a credit card to sell an item, would presumably prevent minors from using the site.

Overview of pricing structure:

Listing fees:

- Items priced \$ 0.00-9.99 cost \$ 0.25
- Items priced \$ 10.00-24.99 cost \$ 0.50
- Items priced \$ 25.00-49.99 cost \$ 1.00
- Items priced \$ 50.00 and above cost \$ 2.00
- Commission - 2.5% in the event of a successful sale

Advanced features:

- Boldface-Type Auction \$ 1.25 - auction listed in boldface type.
- Featured Category Auction \$ 8.50 - auction listed in the top section of its category(ies).
- Premier Auction \$ 38.00 - auction listed in the Premier Auction listings on the Home Page or on a page linked directly from the Home Page Premier Auctions.
- Extended Auction (9-15 days) \$ 2.00
- Extended Auction (16-30 days) \$ 5.00
- Extra Category (per) \$ 1.00
- Image Upload (per) \$0.25

Review of ehammer.com

The eHammer site is relatively fast and has a logical, if somewhat cluttered navigation system. The front page is the least attractive part of the site, and the design often appears to have been created solely by a poorly programmed database engine. A redesign is needed as, almost two years after launch, it is both out of date and buggy, with broken links, and navbars occasionally appearing twice.

Customer support is good, with help topics covering all areas of interest. Company information or background is not available on the site, but a telephone support phone number is provided on the front page.

Each category appears well balanced in the number of lots offered, although bidding activity varies quite considerably across the site: from no-bids across an entire category such as comic art or children's books, to plenty in areas such as musical instruments and decorative art.

eHammer's has achieved the remarkable feat of attracting significant numbers of industry dealers and collectors to sell items, without every trying to brand the site as a 'serious' auction site. No added-value features are available, while advanced features standard on many sites are either absent, or - in the case of the bulk loader - involve end-user coding. Despite this, eHammer offers a wealth of quality items, with - by industry standards - very strong bid activity.

Outlook

eHammer is in need of reinvestment, both to revamp the interface and add features such as auction tracking, live bidding or WAP tracking that are becoming standardised on other sites. The inclusion of value-added content or services such as chatroom and message boards would be welcome, as would affiliation deals with industry news services and providers.

While the site is flawed in many aspects, it has managed to sustain a more than respectable number of auctions and strong bidding activity across most categories. This alone would suggest the site has a future, though it remains to be seen how much capital eHammer can attract to update a service that will soon appear outdated.

justglass.com

justglass.com

*http://www.justglass.com launched in January-98
Speciality Internet Auctions Inc was founded in January-98*

Speciality Internet Auctions Inc,
PO Box 20146,
Cincinnati,
OH,
45220,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 513 961 5794

Fax:
+1 513 651 0860

Email:
questions@justglass.com

Co-CEOs
Rosemary Trietsch
Reyne Haines.

Target market: Both professional dealers and personal collectors.

Price range: US\$10 - US\$4,500

justglass.com ratings

Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 8/10
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 7.5/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 46/60

76.7%

Speciality Internet Auctions Inc

Just Glass debuted on January 1st 1998 as an online community for glass enthusiasts and collectors worldwide. It is co-owned by Rosemary Trietsch and Reyne Haines.

The site offers listings in a range of glass-related auction categories. Just Glass also offers access to 14 glass dealers alongside event listings; message board; bookshop; chatroom; and an online magazine. In September 1999, the site removed all listings fees and commissions from auction listings, and henceforth saw a vast increase in the number of items listed. For such a niche category there is a very respectable range of items on offer, with in excess of 2,500 items available at time of review.

In May 2000, Just Glass announced a deal to co-manage the glass section of The Collecting Channel's Ask the Appraiser section. Prior to this in August 1999, the company secured a deal with Collector Online (<http://www.collectoronline.com>) to be a preferred 'Inventory Channel'.

The site claims to receive approximately 5,000 visits per day, with some 370,000 total visits between launch and June 1st 2000. Particular successes for the site appear to be absentee bids for traditional auctions, with over \$120,000 worth of bids made in one week during May 1999.

justglass.com

Product range:

Ancient Glass (8), Art Glass (350), American (117), Bohemian (26), Czech (17), English (22), French (61), General (94), Italian (4), Avon (11), Barware (25), Boyd Glass (8),

Carnival Glass (106): Contemporary Carnival (27); General (10); Vintage Carnival (69)

Character/Premium Glasses (15), Coll. 40's, 50's, 60's Glass (90), Contemporary Glass (1970 - Present) (32), Crystal (761), Custard Glass (1), Cut Glass (25), Depression Glass (310), EAPG (46)

Elegant Depression Glass (344): Cambridge (52); Duncan Miller (34); Fostoria (98); General (68); Heisey (34); Imperial (22); Tiffin (13), Fenton (152), Fire-King / Anchor Hocking (114), Glass Animals (36), Glass Beads (3), Glass Bottles (24), Glass Jewellery (57), Glass Paper/Books (50), Glass Shoes (16), Kitchen Glass (29), Lamps / Lighting (19), Milk Glass (62), Misc. Glass (72), Mosser Glass (13), New Glass (24),

Opalescent Glass (32), Paperweights (81), Perfume Bottles (29), Phoenix / Consolidated (50), Pyrex (12),

Stained Glass (78), Pottery, Vaseline Glass (18), Westmoreland Glass (47)

Payment:

Payment settled between auctioneer and successful bidder. Justglass recommend that buyer and seller use Tradesafe, the web's oldest escrow company, to handle the successful bidder's payment until the goods have been received and checked. The site is also affiliated with PayPal.com to offer a credit card payment facility to users.

Insurance

No insurance is offered

Key features

Just Glass has a broad feature set. Overall the site offers:

- Non-commission and fee-free listing on items for auction
- The ability to sell items at a fixed price for a maximum period of 30 days.
- Weekly 24-hour auctions on Sundays called 'Sunday Madness'.
- Dealer shops with details and links to International specialist glass dealers
- An online magazine - Just Glass Online - with articles and features covering valuation, care and collecting.
- A reference library available only to registered users to aid valuation. This consists of a large database listing thousands of glass items sold through auctions and otherwise, with prices gained.
- Event listings for 'real world' fairs and conferences.
- A chatroom, offering live communication between glass enthusiasts.
- A popular message board with several thousand glass-related posts.
- Full colour item listings allowing html tags and external links.
- Standard two-number feedback system to allow buyers and sellers to rate each other before completing a transaction.
- An online bookshop offering 20% - 30% savings on a range of related titles.
- Various affiliate programmes with escrow, shipping and payment providers.

Fulfilment

Justglass is affiliated with Netship to handle fulfilment

Guarantee

No guarantee is offered

Terms and conditions

Justglass' terms and conditions are titled 'Official Rules' and whilst largely similar to most other sites, the emphasis is on maintaining the integrity of the site with very polite requests to the users regarding their behaviour and integrity to fulfil transactions. They state that any graphics of an adult nature, profane remarks amongst users and non glass related items will be immediately removed from the site. On the whole, they are not responsible for damaged items or incomplete transactions.

Review of justglass.com

JustGlass.com provides a strong range of related community, commerce and content services for glass collectors and dealers. The pleasantly designed site offers plenty of value-added content as well as commission and fee-free trading.

A straightforward and unfussy design ensures that each page is quick to download, encouraging rapid exploration and navigation. Font usage and pagination is slightly inconsistent across the site, but otherwise it is attractively designed with warm colours, glass related visual metaphors and plenty of white space.

The structure of Just Glass suffers the typical problem associated with websites that have added many new features since launch, resulting in a site where some of the most unique and valuable features are only accessible from the site map. For example, the navigation bar provides links to seller and buyer info, but not the bookstore, magazine or reference library.

The range of items on offer is excellent, encouraged no doubt by the commission-free listings. However bidding activity is very low, with no items viewed at time of review gaining bids. This could be aided with the addition of an auction watch feature.

In many ways Just Glass's broad and comprehensive feature-set positions it as more of an information service than auction, especially given the negligible bidding activity. The site statistics suggest enough traffic to merit more buyers, so it is likely that most visitors use the site for information only.

Customer support is excellent, with detailed FAQs; affiliate programmes for shipping, payment and escrow; and complete contact information. Declaring an intention to excel as the 'best glass site on the Internet', Just Glass asks its users to contact them freely with comments, suggestions and criticisms.

Outlook

Just Glass has announced plans to offer live glass auctions from September 2000, in association with David Ago Auctions. Beyond this, no long-term strategy has been revealed.

While the site is clearly a 'must-visit' for glass enthusiasts and dealers, it is hard to see any solid revenue-model on the site. Without this it is questionable how much longer the site will be able to support itself. With low bidding activity, perhaps the most likely move will be to re-align as a gateway site for the sector, using the strong feature-set to give a value-incentive for glass collectors to use Just Glass as first point of call.

auction

potteryauction.com

potteryauction.com

*http://www.potteryauction.com launched in October-97
Pottery Auctions Inc was founded in 10/01/97*

Pottery Auctions Inc,
PO Box 224,
Winter Park,
FL,
32790,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 407 740 8260

Email:
publicrelations@potteryau
ctions.com

CEO
Barry Brooks

Target market: Pottery and ceramic enthusiasts and dealers
Price range: US\$1 - US\$650

potteryauction.com ratings

Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2/5	Ease of use - 7.5/10
Customer support - 6/10	Feature Set- 5/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 40/60

66.7%

Pottery Auctions Inc

Pottery Auction was founded by Barry Brooks in 1998, and offers a person-to-person auction environment for pottery and ceramic items. It has established links with JustClass.com, CollectingChannel.com and escrow.com. No further information is available from the company.

potteryauction.com

Product range:

American Art Pottery, Asian, Bauer, Brush-McCoy, British Pottery, California, Camark, Cookie Jars, Dinnerware, European Pottery, Franciscan, Fulper&Stangl, Frankoma, Fiesta, Fiesta: Vintage, Folk, General Pottery, Hull, Hall, Haeger, McCoy, Majolica, Metlox, New Pottery, Niloak, Native American, North Carolina, Pfaltzgraff, Pisgah Forest, Peters and Reed, Pottery Books, Raku, Rookwood, Roseville, Royal Copley, Red Wing&RumRill, Shawnee, S&P Shakers, Stoneware, Studio Pottery, Scandinavian, Van Briggie, Weller, Watt, Wade, Utilitarian, Porcelain, Belleek, Chintz, Haviland, Limoges, RS Prussia, Nippon, Noritake, Lefton, Lenox, Tea Pots & Sets, Royal Doulton, Chalkware, Staffordshire, Decorative ceramics, Made in Japan, Figurines, Hummel, Goebel, Ceramic Sculpture, Pottery Supplies, Lamps, Collector Plates.

Payment:

Payment settled between buyer and seller.

Insurance

No insurance is offered

Key features

Lots are available for bidding in a wide range of specialist categories by either proxy bidding, where the site automatically increments the user's bid towards a maximum value; or show bidding, whereby the user sets a fixed single value bid. During the auction, which can last 3, 5, 7, 10 or 14 days, bidders are updated daily by email as to the lot's status. Users can also request daily email notification of all new items added in categories of special interest, such as Royal Doulton.

In addition to the auctions, the site offers several pages of information about valuation and care, as well as an affiliated chatroom and message board.

The site also offers a bookstore, and an eCommerce affiliate section offering software and general electrical equipment.

Pottery Auction utilises a standard feedback system, with members gaining in excess of 50 positive comments automatically qualifying for a 'Premium Seller' icon.

Fulfilment

Potteryauction.com is linked to and advocates the services of Escrow.com with regards to fulfilment of transactions, giving the user a brief description of why an escrow service should be used and that they often charge a payment holding fee. The site also suggests that the finer details of the transaction (who will pay the shipping fees and taxes etc) be arranged before a bid is made.

Guarantee

No guarantee is offered

Terms and conditions

Potteryauctions.com limits liability in all circumstances.

Review of potteryauction.com

Pottery Auction appears to cover the sector very well, with a large number of lots in each category. Likewise, bidding activity is stronger than other speciality sites.

Speed is generally not an issue, with pages loading quickly in the absence of graphic decoration. The front page of the site is graphically appealing, but fails to highlight any of the auctions listed. The rest of the site is dryer in appearance, with sparse styling, design or ornamentation beyond the navigation bar. Font usage is inconsistent, while there is little continuity in margins from page to page. However, the layout of each lot is generally concise and logical. The structure and navigation of Pottery Auction as a whole is intuitive.

As mentioned the quantity and spread of lots is excellent, while bidding activity is reasonable, albeit thin in some areas. The feedback system appears to be popular and frequently used by regular bidders.

Customer support is generally decent, with telephone support available Monday to Sunday. Attempts to test the support number, however, were only met with an answerphone at time of review. The help pages are clearly written, and most queries are covered in the FAQs. However company information is completely absent with the site failing to even mention the

name of site's holding company. While no provision is made for fulfilment, insurance and payment, Pottery Auctions does provide a list of links to related shipping and escrow sites.

Additional content amounts to one article and a list of event organisers. The chatroom and message boards are both taken from external sites, and - being unmoderated - have very little activity. For example, the message board lists approximately 20 posts, with only one reply between them. The eCommerce shop, which offers computer software and electrical goods, is completely out of place, and appears to have been added solely as a revenue generator.

Some Y2K problems were noted, with the year 2000 appearing as 100.

Overall, the site is basic in its functionality, but provides sufficient lots and bidding potential to attract pottery collectors and dealers.

Outlook

With very little original content, and no operating costs beyond marketing and customer support, Pottery Auctions should be able to continue operation for a considerable amount of time with little investment. However with an absence of decent content and 'value added' services, and an unappealing interface, it is questionable how long Pottery Auctions will fend off competition from other specialist sites.

http://www.qxl.com launched in Nov-97
QXL.com plc was founded in Sept-97

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 London,
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 UK,

Telephone:
 +44 208 962 7000

Fax:
 +44 208 962 7300

Email:
 help@qxl.com

CEO
 Jim Rose

VP Communications
 Alison Cabot

Target market: Consumer
Price range: £5 - £1m

qxl.com ratings				
Speed - 7/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2.75/5	Ease of use - 8/10	75.4%
Customer support - 8/10	Feature Set- 7/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 45.25/60	

QXL Ricard Plc

QXL was founded in September 1997 as Quixell (meaning quick sell) by former Financial Times journalist, Tim Jackson. The company conducted Europe's first online auction in November of that year. By November the following year, the company had changed its name to QXL, launched in Germany (qxl.de) and conducted Europe's first person-to-person auctions.

In February 1999, QXL secured a \$12m investment from APAX Partners - Europe's largest ever e-commerce investment at that time. The following month the company launched the world's first auction affiliate programme (allowing other websites to have a 'mini-auction' on their own site).

In October 1999, the company successfully floated on the NASDAQ and FTSE. At its peak, the UK share price had seen growth of 1200%. The company hit the headlines in April 2000 when shares saw single day growth of 350% after a US investment analyst recommended a target price of \$1000 per share (the shares stood at little over \$100 at the time of the tip). The share price has since fallen closer to the floatation price.

In the quarter ended March 31st 2000, QXL saw quarter-on-quarter growth in gross auction value of 87% to £9.1m; a 50% increase in registered users to 681,000; 123% increase in the value of items listed to 2.9 million; 40% increase in turnover; and an unexpected fall in operating loss before exceptionals to £11.1m from £11.4. This final figure led analysts to adjust the expected year for profitability to 2003 from 2004.

QXL has used its capital to aggressively expand across Europe, having expanded organically in Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands and the UK, and via acquisitions into Norway,

Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Poland. According to a report by Forrester Research published in September 1999, the company is Europe's most successful e-commerce provider.

On 16 May 2000, QXL announced a merger with Ricardo.de, Germany's largest auction site. Under the share-for-share exchange, the enlarged group, QXL Ricardo Plc, remains majority owned by QXL shareholders who own approximately 54% of share capital. QXL's CEO and Chairman maintain their positions in the new group. Since launch in July 1998, Ricardo has garnered over 670,000 registered users with a gross auction value in excess of £15m for the quarter ended 31 March 2000.

QXL has enjoyed some of the headline-grabbing bids that made eBay a household name in the US. These include parts of Wembley Stadium and the WW1 Ship, HMS President, with a starting price of £1m.

The company also enjoys partnerships with AOL UK, AOL France, AOL Germany, ZDNet, Lycos, Club Internet, VirginNet, LineOne, Nomade, X-Stream and Infoseek.

Hugh Scully's World of Antiques

In September 1999, the company announced plans to launch a dedicated Antiques service with the BBC's Antiques Roadshow star: Hugh Scully. Under plans announced in April 2000, users of 'Hugh Scully's World of Antiques' will be able to email a photo of an object or collectable and for £12 receive an 'expert' valuation within four days. Users will then be able to auction the item with advanced knowledge of a reserve price. The service is co-run by Charlotte Christofferson, who previously worked for Sotheby's and aims to provide more than a valuation service. There will be tutorials, antiques industry news, advice on investing in antiques, and help in restoration and care. Sectors covered initially are 'the more popular areas' including ceramics, books, furniture, oriental works of art, art nouveau and art deco, toys and dolls, silver, miniatures, rugs and carpets, sporting memorabilia and stamps. It is expected that more categories will be added as the service expands.

qxl.com

Product range:

Art Nouveau & Art Deco, Autographs, Beanies - Current, Beanies - Retired, Books & Manuscripts, Ceramics & Glass, Coins & Medals, Comics, Die-cast Models, Disney, Dolls & Toys, Fossils, Crystals & Gemstones, Furniture & Clocks, General, Jewellery, Memorabilia, Militaria, Model Railways, Oriental Works of Art, Phonocards, Pictures & Prints, Rugs & Carpets, Sci-Fi General, Sculpture & Decorative Arts, Silver & Vertu, Sports Collectibles, Stamps, Star Trek memorabilia, Star Wars memorabilia, Steam Models, Teddies, Trading Cards, Watches

Payment:

All major credit and debit cards. Payment for personal auctions is settled between buyer and seller, unless QXL's Safe Pay system is used, in which case QXL operates as a guarantee.

Insurance

QXL limits its own liability under the terms of its agreement, to the greater of £500 or an amount equal to the sums paid or payable by or to the user

Key features

QXL has three types of auction: QXL direct, which offers products directly from QXL itself; Merchant Partner Auctions where QXL sells products on behalf of a merchant or dealer; and Personal Auctions, where registered users of the site sell to other users. QXL has native

sites in Denmark, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the UK. While most native versions are direct copies of the QXL.com site, some - such as Poland - keep the name of the original site (www.allegro.pl) and only partially integrate look and feel.

Fulfilment

Shipping is available only for QXL Direct and Merchant Partner products, and ranges from £4 to £50, with evening delivery available at an extra cost. The company recently launched a SafeShip service for Personal Auctions, offering both pick-up from the seller and drop off to the buyer. Other than this, shipping arrangements for Personal Auctions must be agreed between seller and buyer.

Guarantee

For Personal Auctions, QXL offers a Safepay system, whereby the buyer pays QXL in full for the item ahead of shipping, and on receipt decides if it meets their requirements. If it does, QXL pays the seller in full. If not, the good is returned and QXL refunds the buyer. Both seller and buyer must agree to SafeShip and Safepay before the service can be used.

Terms and conditions

Each of the three auction types (QXL Direct, Merchant Partner Auctions and Personal Auctions) have different terms and conditions. Overall:

- All users must be registered with the site, and be of legal status to enter a contractual agreement.
- Prices are inclusive of VAT. QXL will provide Vat Invoices on demand. Bids must all be in the same currency.
- QXL Direct auctions are legally binding, although under certain circumstances, QXL may waive a user's bid on QXL Direct auctions for an admin fee of no more than £12.50
- Merchant Partner auctions are only legally binding to the bidder if explicitly stated. The merchant will usually contact the successful bidder to confirm price before charging.
- Personal Auctions are all legally binding to the bidder.
- QXL takes no legal responsibility for the quality of products, or the accuracy of the description of items sold through Merchant Partner Auctions or Personal auctions.
- QXL may, at its discretion, bid just below the reserve price of Merchant Partner auction to help encourage interest.

Review of qxl.com

An easy to use site with an impressive collection of original features, including Safe Pay, Safe Ship, my QXL and Hugh Scully's valuation service. The range of products is broad, although could benefit from further subcategories. For example, faxes and phones are grouped together: a search for a fax simply resulted in a list of phones. Customer support seems to be strong, with extensive FAQ's and contact details. From a design point of view, the structure is logical, if a little cluttered. The garish orange colour scheme goes some way to creating a strong and memorable online identity, but does make the viewing experience less pleasurable, and would be sure to put off many style-conscious buyers and sellers. Hugh Scully's World of Antiques takes a more conservative approach to design, although the sub-site is clearly targeted at people wanting to know more about antiques and art, as opposed to those with experience in the field. The QXL site also showed some cross-platform incompatibility, failing to load fully on an Apple Macintosh.

Outlook

QXL has continued to establish impressive links with leading European ISPs as well as to continue an expansion strategy that has kept it at the forefront of European auctions. Sites such as eBay will find it difficult countering the perception of QXL as a native European site.

In April 2000, QXL announced an agreement with BT Cellnet to provide auction services on WAP mobile phones. In the same month, the company also acquired Luxembourg based live auction technology company Idefi S.A., for £1.4m in shares (with an additional £1.4m worth of shares subject to performance). The technology will allow QXL users to partake in real time auctions via the Internet. Each auction will last for a short period of time and will be hosted by a QXL.com auctioneer who can communicate with and encourage bidders live on the site. The company also owns 50% of Ibdlive NV, the parent of ibdlive.com, a company that provides similar live bidding technology (see profile)

The company has a six point strategy for future growth:

- 1 - Build brand awareness and increase membership
- 2 - Leverage existing traffic
- 3 - Implement additional revenue streams
- 4 - Leverage and further develop strategic relationships
- 5 - Increase penetration of and localisation within Western Europe
- 6 - Further expand its range of merchandise and services

sothebys.amazon.com

sothebys.amazon.com

*http://www.sothebys.amazon.com launched in November-99
Amazon.com, Inc. was founded in 1996*

Amazon.com, Inc.,
PO Box 81226,
Seattle,
WA,
98108-1226,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 800 2629 2629

Fax:
+1 206 266 2950

Email:
sothebys-amazon-
support@amazon.com

CEO
Jeff Bezos

**Sothebys.com
counterpart**
Diana D Brookes

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.
Price range: US\$50 - US\$100,000

sothebys.amazon.com ratings

Speed - 6/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3/5	Ease of use - 7.5/10
Customer support - 5.5/10	Feature Set- 6/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 39.5/60

65.8%

Amazon.com, Inc.

In June 1999, Sotheby's and leading Internet eCommerce site Amazon, announced a ten year joint venture agreement. The resulting collaboration, sothebys.amazon.com, backed by a US\$45m investment in Sotheby's by Amazon, launched on November 19th 1999. The site, which has shown exceptionally strong bidding activity, appears as a subsection of Amazon's flagship site, under the category 'art and collectibles'.

The site offers business-to-consumer auctions with a range of items from both Sotheby's and Sotheby's network of associated dealers. The average price of lots is generally lower than at sothebys.com, and categories have a greater focus on collectibles and film and sports memorabilia.

As with all Sotheby's auctions, buyers pay a 10% buyer's premium on top of the purchase price, although all lots are guaranteed to match their description and are insured for the value listed. The premium, rare amongst online auction sites, does not appear to have deterred bidders, with strong bidding activity throughout. According to Sotheby's own sources, within three months of launch the site had sold 10,000 lots, with over 50% of lots sold. If this figure is accurate, and can be maintained, it indicates a sell-through rate higher than any other auction site. The average value of lots sold is over \$500.

sothebys.amazon.com

Product range:

Asian Art, Books & Manuscripts, Ceramics & Glass, Coins & Medals, Collectibles, Entertainment, Memorabilia, Furniture & Decorative Arts, Jewellery, Paintings, Drawings & Sculpture, Prints & Photographs, Rugs & Carpets, Silver & Objets de Vertu, Sports Memorabilia, Stamps, Toys & Dolls, Watches & Clocks.

Payment:

The site charges a 10% buyer and seller premium on top of every sale. It accepts all the major and some minor credit cards and accepts wire transfers when the item to be paid for exceeds the buyers credit card/s limit/s.

Insurance

Sothebys.amazon.com rely on their associate dealers to abide by the conditions set out in the Master Dealer Agreement that they must sign before becoming an associate dealer. Associate dealers are expected to handle all insurance claims regarding condition and authenticity of an item as well as claims related to shipping problems.

Key features

The feature-set of sothebys.amazon.com is relatively basic. Proxy and fixed-price bids are supported, with bidding in 20 different categories. Bid status and notification is provided through email. Bidding on an item only closes after ten minutes inactivity, so if two bidders are battling to purchase a lot, the sale remains open until one party stops bidding.

To aid sensible purchase and ownership, a range of informative collector's guides are provided, including a glossary of related jargon and phrases. Guides available at time of review covered Books and Manuscripts, Cameras, Lighters, and Pens, Ceramics, Clocks, Coins, Comic Books and Comic Art, Dolls, Drawings and Watercolours, Entertainment Memorabilia, Fashion, Furniture, Glass, Jewellery, Musical Instruments, Paintings, Photographs, Posters, Prints, Rugs and Carpets, Scientific Instruments, Sculpture, Silver and other Metal Objects, Sports Memorabilia, Stamps, Toys and Watches.

Payment is settled with Amazon.com, and shipping and insurance is arranged by the site. All items are shipped with a property certificate detailing the history of the item.

Sale of items through the site is open to Sotheby's network of 4800 Associated Dealers. To become such a dealer, the seller must be an established dealer or auctioneer, and be able to guarantee the quality and description of each lot offered.

Fulfilment

Associate dealers are required to ship merchandise using a traceable service (they recommend UPS) and to insure the merchandise for the buyer. In cases of a shipment arriving damaged or not arriving at all, the dealer must work with the bidder to resolve the claim.

Guarantee

If the case of an item being materially different or inauthentic, the dealer is required to address the problem. In material difference cases the buyer must contact the dealer within 2 weeks of purchase, while authenticity cases must be reported within 3 years of purchase. If the case is not resolved satisfactorily the buyer should submit a guarantee investigation request to Sothebys.amazon.com. As with Sothebys.com the guarantee does not cover certain areas of authenticity or cases where scientific advancements since the sale have disproved authenticity. In all cases the site encourages the buyers and associate dealers to refer to the conditions of sale.

Terms and conditions

Any user registering with the site must physically accept the terms and conditions (and are advised to review them before registration) by pressing an 'Accept' button. Standard terms and conditions apply with specific provisions related to associate dealers, buyers and sellers. They limit liability in all cases by channelling sales through its network of associate dealers and by existing as that channel. The company reserves the right to earn interest from funds passing through its account between buyer and seller. In cases of a buyer's late or incomplete payment for an item/s Sothebys.amazon.com sides with the dealer by charging interest on the missing sum, including any legal fees, commission or expenses, of 18% p/a (at time of review) or the highest rate under applicable law. All users are bound by the laws of the State of Washington.

Review of sothebys.amazon.com

Sothebys.amazon.com hosts a broad range of lots, attractively displayed, with an impressive level of bidding activity.

Site speed is reasonable, but considerably slower than many other sites reviewed. The layout of the site does not necessarily facilitate quick browsing, with, for example, each FAQ appearing on separate pages rather than one longer page with anchored links throughout. Aside from this, the site is sensibly and intuitively structured, with the option to bid within three clicks of loading the home page.

Aesthetically, the site is functional, and while appearing slightly smarter than the rest of the Amazon website, lacks any distinct styling. Special auctions that fall outside the main category listings are provided with a unique, colourful logo. Lots are generally very well displayed, with the layout of long lists of lots in a category being conducive to quick browsing.

The feature set is not particularly special, although the collecting guides are generally very good. While some advice given arguably patronises the reader ('always ensure the item is not a fake'), other parts are very useful, such as an overview of the different printing and paper techniques of the 20th Century in the poster collecting guide.

The range of products is very good, with a particularly strength in sports and entertainment memorabilia. As already mentioned, bidding activity is likewise excellent. At time of review, a mint condition baseball signed by Babe Ruth had received 10 bids to a value of \$26,500, over \$6,000 above the high estimate provided by Sotheby's.

Text-based help guides and FAQs are reasonable, covering most potential queries. However the promise of a 24-7 toll-free customer support is completely misleading. The site claims that calls to the US-based toll-free number from the UK, Germany, France, Japan and Australia will be without charge, but a telephone operator prefixes calls with a statement to the contrary. Most frustratingly, the claim of 24 hours a day, seven day a week customer support is duplicitous, as a weekend telephone call reached an answerphone message stating the Monday to Friday office hours.

Overall, it is an appealing site, which clearly proves that buyers will not be deterred by paying a 10% premium if the standard of lots is high enough, and sufficient guarantees come with the purchase of that lot.

Outlook

It is inevitable that questions regarding Sotheby's duellist strategy with online auctions will be asked. While sothebys.com is clearly appealing to a higher income, and arguably more sophisticated, client, it is not immediately clear why the company is supporting two sites that largely offer works of similar calibre. With sothebys.amazon.com offering (and getting bids for) items priced upwards of \$25,000, the differences are hard to see. Admittedly, the Amazon deal has allowed Sotheby's to extend their brand to a segment of Internet users who might otherwise not have given the auctioneer their custom, while an auctioneer of Sotheby's size would be marginalised without an impressive, highly functional flagship site.

Still, the question remains as to how long maintaining both sites will be financially viable. A possible near-term solution would be to share lots across both sites, thus increasing bidding interest in items previously only available on the sothebys.com website.

That said, while the Amazon deal may limit Sotheby's autonomy over 'look and feel', the collaboration has been a large success, and there appears to be no immediate reason to change the nature of it. As the site is upgraded to provide three-dimensional interactive icons of each lot, and more sellers join the network of dealers, revenues and bidding activity should only increase.

The subsite appears to be a potentially strong money spinner for both Amazon and Sotheby's. To enhance this further, the company should make moves to strengthen the community side of the service. As users are not directly involved in the selling process, the absence of chatrooms and message boards - integral to sites such as eBay, where users also have the opportunity to sell - is more keenly felt. Adding even basic community functionality such as a chatroom, would work to increase loyalty, stickiness and arguably, user interest in collecting.

aaac.com.au

aaac.com.au

http://www.aaac.com.au launched in 1998

A.A.A.C. Pty Ltd,
PO Box 488,
Lutwyche,
4030,
Australia,

Telephone:
+61 7 3256 0744

Fax:
+61 7 3256 0114

Email:
feedback@aac.com.au

CEO
Bill & Valentina Trindall

Target market: Collectors and dealers
Price range: AS\$2 - AS\$1000

aaac.com.au ratings				
Speed - 9/10	Design (functionality) - 1/5	Design (aesthetic) - 0.5/5	Ease of use - 4/10	42.5%
Customer support - 4.5/10	Feature Set- 2.5/10	Range of products - 4/10	Total - 25.5/60	

A.A.A.C. Pty Ltd

Albion Antique Auction Centre is an auctioneers located in Brisbane, The company is run by married couple, Bill and Valentina Trindall, who have worked in the antiques auction sector for over 20 years. The website was launched in 1998 to provide both an online presence and a virtual side to their operations.

aaac.com.au

Product range:

Antiques, Porcelain & Pottery, Glassware, Collectibles, Furniture, Jewellery, Memorabilia, Militaria, Toys, Games, Dolls, Ephemera

Payment:

Settled between buyer and seller

Insurance

None offered, insurance must be settled between buyer and seller

Key features

AAAC offers person-to-person auctions, classifieds, and a small trade directory as well as offering the full access to AAAC's own auctions.

Person to person auctions are offered in 11 categories, and are dealt with as legally binding transactions that AAAC are not responsible for.

The classifieds allow people to offer items for sale at a fixed price in five different categories (Antiques & Collectibles, Games & Hobbies, Books & Comics, Memorabilia & Sporting Items). Each category had an average of 5 items listed, although unfortunately the links to describe the costs involved in placing a classified were broken, so it is not clear whether this is a free service or not.

The trade directory lists 11 companies who have paid to get a sub-site as part of AAAC.

AAAC offers a currency converter to help overseas buyers

Fulfilment

None offered, postage must be settled between seller/buyer

Guarantee

No direct guarantee from AAAC, because it limits liability from the sale of goods. However, the site recommends two escrow services (companies that will hold payment until satisfactory delivery of goods) - Tradesafe and i-Escrow. However both of these are US services and have limitations: Tradesafe will take payment in trust, provided one of the parties resides in the U.S.A.; and i-Escrow will cover any transaction, but sellers will receive payment in the form of a cheque in US Dollars. Buyers will be required to pay by Credit Card.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply

Fees

Buyers and bidders are charged no fee. Sellers pay an initial AS\$2 fee for listing an item, as well as 5% of the total value upon the reserve being met. Photos are charged at AS\$1-3 depending on size

Review of aaac.com.au

The A.A.A.C. site is a friendly yet seriously outdated auction environment. Design is very basic, and has clearly not been changed or updated since 1998. Navigation is fast but confusing, without basic aids such as a navigation bar. The range of products available for auction was very small, with only 5 items to bid on in the 'antique' category. The policy of charging for a listing with photo has meant most items are not listed in such a way to be attractive to buyers. Similarly, sellers will probably be put off auctioning an item when site usage appears so low, and a \$2 placement fee is required.

One stronger feature of the site is customer information, with terms and conditions, and buying/selling guides reasonably clear. The tone of the copy is generally friendly, down-to-earth and informative.

However, such benefits do not begin to compensate for a site that would have looked out of date on the Internet in 1998.

Outlook

While the physical auction side of A.A.A.C may continue to provide a healthy income for the company, the site is unlikely to provide much return or growth without a major redesign backed up with an advertising campaign to attract more buyers and sellers. Company policy regards charging fees for photo listings should perhaps be reconsidered as well, for the A.A.A.C site cannot afford to put off potential sellers.

ewolfs.com

ewolfs.com

http://ewolfs.com launched in April-99
Wolf's Fine Art Auctioneers was founded in 1975

**Wolf's Fine Art
Auctioneers,**
1239 West 6th St.,
Cleveland,
OH,
44113,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 216 575 9653

Fax:
+1 216 621 8011

Email:
info@ewolfs.com

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

Price range: US\$500 - US\$200,000

ewolfs.com ratings

Speed - 9/10	Design (functionality) - 1/5	Design (aesthetic) - 1/5	Ease of use - 3.5/10
Customer support - 6/10	Feature Set- 6.75/10	Range of products - 6.5/10	Total - 33.75/60

56.3%

Wolf's Fine Art Auctioneers

Wolfs is a 25 year old physical auction company that began online auctions in the Spring of 1999. Though no auctions were open for bidding or browsing at time of review, it appears the company has enjoyed considerable success with online auctions. It sold a James Buttersworth oil painting for US\$187,000 in 1999, which Wolfs claims to have set a record at that time for a painting sold through the Internet. The back catalogue of online auctions shows a number of items that have fetched in excess of US\$30,000.

Based in Cleveland, Ohio, Wolfs continues to operate as a real world auctioneer, offering multi-million dollar sales, with occasional high-profile lots such as a collection of Chagall paintings.

ewolfs.com

Product range:

Paintings, Prints, Sculpture, Glassware, Fine Furniture & Ornaments, Ceramics, Silverware, Ethnographic Art, Toys, Garden Ornaments, Objet De Vertu & Miniatures.

Payment:

Ewolf's accepts the following credit cards: Amex, MasterCard, Visa and Discovery (the details of at least one must be submitted on registration) but other payment methods can be agreed upon with Ewolf's. A buyer's premium of 15% is added to all sales. A 7% Ohio sales

tax is also added unless the buyer has a resale license or the item is to be shipped out of the state.

Insurance

Ewofl advises prospective buyers to inspect and evaluate items they wish to purchase before bidding. After that they are responsible for the item's authenticity and condition for up to 30 days after the sale, claims must be written and accompanied by a letter from a qualified expert that challenges the authenticity/condition of the piece.

Key features

Ewofl offers two methods of purchase for art and antiques: online auctions, which occur every four weeks; and a gallery where users can purchase fixed price items.

The gallery includes a range of reproduction items and prints, alongside original artwork and furniture. It is divided into eight sections covering furniture, American paintings, European paintings, Asian art, sculpture, lighting, garden ornaments and reproductions; all available at a set price either through the Internet or from Wofl's own real gallery.

The online auctions initially appeared every three months, but since late 1999 have occurred monthly. Full catalogue and results listings are available for each auction, with images of each lot and the price attained. Catalogues for the next two online auctions are also listed with photographs, though it is not possible to place advanced bids. Auctions typically last two days.

As well as this the site offers information about the company, contact details and an appraisals submission form. Wofl also operates a mailing list.

Fulfilment

The site lists estimates for the shipping and insurance of items and states that it uses UPS to ship all goods. Prices vary according to the type of item, distance to be shipped and quantity but are listed by genre. Buyers may handle shipping arrangements themselves, in which case they must email: shipping@ewofl.com. All shipping costs will be charged to the credit card the buyer registered with.

Guarantee

Ewofl indicate that they will personally handle any claims of authenticity or condition submitted within 30 days of purchase and will also deal with any mistakes made by the shipping company or claims made against them and will refund the buyer in full where appropriate.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply and contain useful information regarding Ewofl's fulfilment commitments.

Review of ewofl.com

Ewofl.com suffers from some of the worst site design and structure found on the web. While this makes navigation little more than a process of trial and error, decent lots and strong bidding activity make this a noteworthy site.

Pages are very fast to load given the site's graphical simplicity, which is welcome given the number of pages a user might visit while trying to find a desired piece of information.

The central problem with the site is the absence of a consistent navigation bar. Many pages have a list of graphical links tucked away at the bottom, while some list a number of textual

links (with different names), and more still provide no further links. The site map is the best way to navigate the site, though even this suffers inconsistencies with the naming of sections and pages often differing from the sections themselves. As well as the differing of names for sections across the site, sometimes areas with the same name take the user to different places on each occasion.

Graphically, the site lacks even the most basic aspects of site design. While by no means ugly, the absence of navigation bar at the top or left-hand of each page; inconsistent page layout and font usage; and near-total lack of any design elements, gives the site the impression of personal web site from the mid-90s. Even the Ewolfs logo appears in numerous different forms and positions throughout the site, sometimes illegible, and at other time not. It should be noted that the photographs are well scanned and presented, while the quantity of white space given to them and other page elements makes pages straightforward to read.

Despite these quite considerable shortcomings, the site appears popular, with strong bidding activity on a wide wealth of items. Users are offered the alternative of fixed-price purchase on certain items, and are also able to submit an online appraisal form free of charge, giving an overall decent feature set.

Information about bidding and shipping is reasonable, though not as extensive as it could be. However, the inclusion of two phone numbers - one of which is toll-free - should allow most questions to be answered quickly.

To summarise, ewolfs.com is a site that doesn't attempt to make life easier for the user, yet appears to offer lots of sufficient quality to generate online interest.

Outlook

While Wolfs have not published any statements about their future plans or the success of ewolfs.com, it can only be presumed to be a successful venture given the company's decision to divert so many physical auctions to online-only auctions. Similarly, the auction schedule indicates an increase in the frequency in auctions. A spokeswoman for Ewolfs claims that site usage and bidding activity has increased since the site became 'more user friendly', suggesting that some efforts have been made to improve what is one of the worst examples of site design and structure from those sites reviewed.

It is clear that Wolfs needs further investment to get a complete site overhaul, and the relevant expertise to develop user-friendliness and stickiness. With this in place, Wolfs may well succeed in continuing their seeming success in online auctions.

sothebys.com

sothebys.com

http://www.sothebys.com launched in January-99
Sothebys.com Inc. was founded in March-1744

Sothebys.com Inc.,
1334 York Avenue,
New York,
NY,
10021,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 212 606 7000

Fax:
+1 847 236 5462

Email:
info@sothebys.com

CEO
Diana D Brookes

Chairman
Michael I Sovern

Target market: Both professional dealers and personal collectors.
Price range: US\$200 - US\$4m

sothebys.com ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 5/5	Ease of use - 9/10
Customer support - 10/10	Feature Set- 7.5/10	Range of products - 9/10	Total - 52.5/60

87.5%

Sothebys.com Inc.

ON March 11th 1744, Sotheby's founder, Samuel Baker, conducted the auction house's first sale. 250 years later in 1994, Sotheby's registered the domain name sothebys.com at a time when most companies were yet to learn of the Internet. Initially used for displaying company information, the site expanded to include an events calendar, and in May 1998, Sothebys.com began posting text versions of their catalogues online. From September 1999 these included illustrations, and by June 2000 numbered 700.

In June 1999, Sotheby's announced an alliance with leading Internet consumer eCommerce site, Amazon.com. The results of the partnership, sothebys.amazon.com launched on November 19th 1999 (see profile for more info). Two months later, on January 11th 2000, Sotheby's completely re-launched the sothebys.com website with online auction functionality. The launch of the two sites was the result of a US\$42m investment, raised through the sale of one million shares of Sotheby's stock at US\$35.44 each and options on a further one million shares for US\$10m to Amazon.com Inc.

Launching with some 5,000 lots, Sotheby's offers auctions from both their own catalogues, and those from a network of 'associated dealers'. Approximately half the lots at launch were taken from 400 such dealers. This figure is expected to grow as a higher proportion of Sotheby's 4,800 total Associates use the site. By February the company's using the service added in the region of 1,000 new lots per week.

The typical price range for lots ranges from \$200 to \$100,000, with approximately half the lots available standing with estimates below \$1,000. The auction site launched with a rare signed copy of the US declaration of independence, although with insufficient interest, it was

re-listed and offered again on June 29th 2000, with an estimated value of \$4-6 million (purchased in 1989 for \$4)

Both sothebys.com and sothebys.amazon.com fall under Sotheby's Internet Division, founded in 1998. Craig Moffett joined the division as President in December 1999, after leading the Boston Consulting Group team that managed the launch of Sotheby's two sites.

Sotheby's has committed to publishing sales results for online sales, although - at time of review - had yet to reveal when or how. For the fortnight of operations January 11th to January 25th, sales through the site topped \$4.7m. Site traffic for February stood at 6 million page impressions. According to Sotheby's, more than 80% of items in categories such as Americana, Asian Art, Valentine's Day Jewellery and Old Master Paintings, closed successfully during the first month's trading.

sothebys.com

Product range:

Paintings, Drawings, Watercolours, Sculpture, Prints, Jewellery, Photographs, Watches & Clocks, Furniture, Rugs & Textiles, Ceramics & Glass, Silver, Books & Manuscripts, Collectibles.

Payment:

Sothebys.com accepts payment via credit card only and cannot accept check or wire-transfer payments. The site accepts Visa, MasterCard (including Debit Cards with the MasterCard or Visa logo), American Express. Approximately one to two business days after an auction closes, the seller will calculate and e-mail the buyer their invoice, including shipping charges and taxes. The buyer will then be directed to the Confirm Payment page where they will select their preferred credit card.

If the credit card chosen does not have a high enough limit (including that of a second card's details given) the buyer will be asked to contact Customer Service to discuss alternate payment. Sotheby's charge a 10% buyers premium on top of every sale and charge the same 10% to the seller.

Insurance

Calculations for the cost of insurance are listed at the bottom of each page, with the amount debited from the purchasers' credit card when they settle their account.

Sotheby's Insurance Brokerage Services is associated with Marsh Private Client Services and offers insurance programs to homeowners, collectors, museums and estates over US \$1m to US residents only.

Sotheby's 'Personal Risk Management' specialists design and monitor individualised asset protection for property including homes, automobiles, fine art, antiques, jewellery and other valuable property. They are also able to discuss program consolidation to ensure uniform terms, eliminate costly duplication of coverage and reduce the number of policies.

Key features

Alongside full corporate, investor, historical, contact and press information, sothebys.com is divided into six main categories:

ONLINE AUCTIONS

Auctions are available in 13 categories, divided into 66 sub-categories. In addition, sothebys.com highlights featured auctions, which appear on the front page of the site; and Special Auctions, for one off sales. At time of review, Special Auctions included Picasso Prints and Ceramics and Art Nouveau and Deco.

Registered users can submit either a single (fixed price) or maximum (proxy) bid. There is no limit to the number of lots a user can bid on, although higher priced lots often become Signature Items, requiring additional telephone-based registration.

AUCTION HOUSE

This section provides information and help for Sotheby's global live auctions. Users can search a directory of over 700 online auction catalogues, get detailed information on each of Sotheby's 70-plus collecting departments and search the auction index of all prices attained at auction. Access to this index requires the user to know the catalogue number; users are unable to search solely by name, category or period.

In addition the section provides extensive advice for potential bidders and sellers in using Sotheby's services.

SOTHEBY'S CONNOISSEUR

An in-house magazine with extended information about certain lots, information about Sotheby's Institute educational events, and collecting guides. At time of review, these in-depth articles covered 19th Century, Books & Manuscripts, Old Masters, Prints, Rugs & Carpets, Silver and Watches, although Sotheby's expects to add more shortly.

CALENDAR

This provides full listings of forthcoming Sotheby's auctions and exhibitions, viewable by day, week or month.

SHOP SOTHEBY'S

Offers users the chance to purchase catalogues, subscribe to the Preview Magazine, or browse the bookshop, which covers a range of related titles.

SOTHEBY'S SERVICES

Sotheby's Services includes details of Sotheby's full range of products. Information is available on Sotheby's financial services; appraisals; insurance; restoration; International Realty, Sotheby's luxury real estate brokerage; and Deitch Projects, Sotheby's New York modern art gallery.

Fulfilment

At the bottom of every Lot page the buyer will find information regarding the shipping costs related to each lot, with shipping and insurance costs for the US and UK listed as either guaranteed or estimated. Sotheby's state that if the buyer would like to ship the property to Germany or Canada, they contact the seller for further information. Upon successful bid the buyer selects a destination and after the payment is authorised the lot will be shipped to the selected destination within 2-3 weeks, with larger items taking slightly longer.

Guarantee

Approximately 50% of sales through Sothebys.com are made through a network of associated sellers (4800 approx.) that, as a condition of association, must ensure the safe and prompt delivery of goods by choosing a shipping company which can track those goods at all times. The sellers must also be able to guarantee the authenticity and accurate descriptions of the items they offer. For condition claims the buyer must contact the seller within two weeks of receipt of the item; and for authenticity claims the buyer must contact the seller within three years of receipt. If the claim is not satisfactorily resolved then the

buyer may request an investigative report by Sothebys.com. Equally, the Sotheby's investigative report will examine claims concerning sales made by the company itself.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply for sales made by Sotheby's itself but maintain that it isn't responsible for sales made by any of its associated sellers. There are certain very specific cases listed in the terms and conditions that concern the authenticity and proof of authorship of items that relate to the current levels of scholars' expertise and to current counterfeit detection abilities. Only in some cases do these limit the buyer's rights. Sotheby's also reserve the right to collect interest from funds passing through its account between buyer and seller. It should also be noted that, besides the holding company being English with users bound by British law, the website is a US subsidiary and users must comply to US law.

Review of sothebys.com

It should be noted that sothebys.com has had the advantage of launching online auctions later than many of its rivals, thus allowing for a better and cleaner implementation of newer technologies. Furthermore the company has had a good amount of start-up capital (US \$42m), and the expert advice of Amazon's staff. While these factors have clearly helped the website to stand out from its rivals, credit is due to the developers for an outstanding example of design, functionality and implementation.

Server connection is very fast, although page-loads are a little slower given the number of graphics on each page. Most headline text on-screen takes the form of graphics, which, while making the site more attractive, does slow loading times. Some effort has been made to overcome this, with the photographs of each lot only viewable as a thumbnail on their listings page. Clicking on this opens a higher resolution large image in a separate window - a simple device that goes a long way toward speeding usage.

The site is very well and logically structured, with a simple navigational hierarchy of categories and sub-categories in the top-bar. First time users may suffer some confusion as to the difference between online auctions and live auctions, but this is unlikely to be a sticking point. Particularly useful in navigation is the appearance on every page of a complete file hierarchy (ie Auctions Online > Categories > Ceramics & Glass > Europe > Lot#: 1CA9) as well as search and help functions.

Sothebys.com's implementation of style sheets and Java is impeccable, and the database-driven content mixes seamlessly with static pages. No bugs, quirks or broken links were found, other than the press release page where the background image is repeated twice, thus hiding a small amount of text.

Graphically the site excels. Font usage, margins and pagination are consistent across the site, while spacing and column-breaks ease reading both on-screen and when printed out. Most pages are broken up with a wide variety of photos and graphical images. The use of drop shadows and overlapping text help lift important information from the page, while often creating a three-dimensional appearance without being too showy. Perhaps most impressive about the design is the attention to detail: from three line graphical drop-caps and slight drop-shadow on lot descriptions, to subtle gradients on text boxes and tiny graphical arrows to indicate file hierarchy.

The feature-set is broad enough to provide everything expected from an auction site, although there are no outstanding or unique features. Lot descriptions, however, are generally excellent, detailing everything from material and markings to condition and weight.

The range of products available online is amongst the broadest and most prestigious out of the sites reviewed. With Picasso ceramics starting at \$700, there is plenty for smaller purchasers to consider as well. Bidding activity is not as prescient as it could be, but there are enough bids displayed to suggest decent buyer interest. The inclusion of low and high estimates also makes browsing and bidding easier.

Customer service and support appears to cover every possible query and thought. FAQs and user guides are written in a down-to-earth and often humorous style, which would help diffuse any nervousness in first-time buyers dealing with such a large auctioneer. Of particular note is the inclusion of live telephone support. By clicking on a link and entering their phone number, users can receive either a phone call from Sotheby's customer support, or have a live online conversation with a customer service representative.

In summary, sothebys.com is an example of the best of web design, service and user-friendliness, supported by an outstanding range of lots.

Outlook

Sotheby's management have indicated that the purpose of their US\$42.1m investment in Internet projects is not to offer an alternative to live auctions, but to increase the number of people using Sotheby's products globally, with the hope that such people will eventually progress to Sotheby's physical auctions. Such a strategy should be successful, given the popularity of their sites. Sothebys.com CEO Diana D Brookes has indicated that registrations on the two sites within one week of launch exceeded the total new customers Sotheby's would normally expect during the course of a year.

Robert Ansell, Head of Sotheby's Associate Advisory Services for Europe and Australasia has suggested that the barrier preventing buyers from bidding through the Internet would decrease as broadband technologies allowed Sotheby's to post three-dimensional, interactive portrayals of lots on their site. Unmentioned to date, yet undoubtedly prescient amongst sothebys.com management, is the issue of live bidding. Given Sotheby's frequency of auctions, and the standard of its site, the company would be very well positioned to capitalise on this emerging trend. Perhaps, through reticence over fears of compromising the real-life auctions, Sotheby's will initially offer video feeds of auctions to give potential buyers an idea of such auctions. But the long-term target of offering users the ability to bid online in all Sotheby's auctions from anywhere in the world would put the site far at the forefront of art and antiques websites.

seriouscollector.com

seriouscollector.com

*http://www.seriouscollector.com launched in May-99
Serious Collector Inc. was founded in August-98*

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Fax:
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Email:
admin@seriouscollector.com

CEO
Beverly L Seyfert

**Founder / Chief
Strategy Officer**
Derrick M Bulkley

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

Price range: US\$3 - US\$28,000

seriouscollector.com ratings

Speed - 8.5/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2.5/5	Ease of use - 6/10	66.7%
Customer support - 4/10	Feature Set- 7.5/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 40/60	

Serious Collector Inc.

Serious Collector Inc, was founded in 1998 by collector and strategic management consultant Derrick M Bulkley. The site is targeted at 'serious collectors' and professional dealers, and is pitched at being an auction, trading forum and information site.

At April 24th, 2000, the site claimed to have 47,139 items for fixed-price sale; 1,366 members; 376 links to other related sites; 44 discussion groups and just 89 items on auction (none of which had any bids attached).

There are three types of site access: guest, collector and Professional Dealer. Guests are effectively anyone who views the site without signing in first, and they are allowed to view all areas of the site and receive email updates. Collectors may bid, buy or sell at auction, as can Professional Dealers, who may conduct fixed price sales in the market. Dealers are also given a page to advertise themselves and their services.

seriouscollector.com

Product range:

Antiques, Architecture & Design, Books & Manuscripts, Ephemera & Advertising, Fine & Graphic Arts, Folk & Ethnographic Art, Jewellery & Silver, Machines & Coin-Op, Maps & Globes, Memorabilia & Autographs, Militaria, Arms & Armour, Music & Instruments, Other & Miscellaneous, Philately, Numismatics, Photography & Optical, Porcelain, Pottery, Glass, Timepieces, Toys, Puzzles, & Hobbies

Payment:

Users must establish a credit card account with Serious Collector, and are billed monthly for all services accrued in that time. Professional dealers can receive monthly invoices on request.

Insurance

Serious Collector limits its liability completely, stating that 'we have no control over the quality, safety or legality of the items advertised, the truth or accuracy of the listings, the ability of sellers to sell items or the ability of buyers to buy items. We cannot and do not control whether or not sellers will complete the sale of items they offer or buyers will complete the purchase of items they have bid on.'

Key features

Serious Collector offers six main services:

- Auctions - any registered member can sell and buy in any of the numerous categories for 2.5% sales fee and a set up fee of between US\$0.50 and US\$2.
- Market - any registered Professional Dealer member can sell products without a sales fee.
- Forums - members can ask questions and reply to posts. A total of 44 posts were available in April 2000.
- Resources - members can add and suggest websites of interest related to particular sector, such as Antique Rugs. 376 resources had been added at April 2000.
- News - the site includes news stories sourced from around the web. A new story is added every 3-4 days.
- Members directory - users can search detailed information on any of the 1,366 members.

The site offers an integrated approach to content listings, so that if a user is searching auctions > timepieces > watches, they can with one click find related forums, market sales, resources and so forth.

Serious Collector claims to offer a proprietary online auction technology called 'Ageing of Bids' which allows auctions to extend beyond their initial time limit if bids are made towards the end of that period. Lots are also open to bidding for a minimum of 24 hours to ensure buyers in all time zones get an equal chance to bid.

Fulfilment

Fulfilment is settled between buyer and seller, with the costs usually on the seller above the price paid for an item.

Guarantee

There is no guarantee on any product bought through Serious Collector, unless issued by the dealer/seller themselves. Serious Collector states that in the even of a dispute, you release 'SeriousCollector.com (and our agents and employees) from claims, demands and damages (actual and consequential) of every kind and nature, known and unknown, suspected and unsuspected, disclosed and undisclosed, arising out of or in any way connected with such disputes.' Serious Collector limits liability from all events and damages, including those arising from negligence to the greater of \$100 or the amount of fees paid by the user over a 12 month period.

Terms and conditions

As well as limiting liability and retaining the right to amend or remove listings, Serious Collector uses the following pricing structure:

- Cost for an auction listing: US\$0.50 for items under US\$25, rising to US\$2 for items over US\$100. Serious Collector also takes 2.5% of the cost of an item in the event of a successful sale.
- Cost for a market listing: free if a registered Professional Dealer member.
- Enhancements: The name of the item can be put in bold for a fee of \$1 per month. The first 50k of images (approximately a 5*7 photo) is free, after which sellers in the market and auction sectors pay \$0.50 per additional 50k per calendar month.

Fees are charged to members each month, so all members must have a credit card account with the company.

Review of seriouscollector.com

A fast and compact site, although because of so many sub-categories it can take four or five clicks to actually get information on an item. A severe shortage of auction lots and discussion groups means that the majority of categories are unfilled. The market place has a far stronger range of products, although there was little that was unique or hard to find. The sector marked office furniture, boasted 13 items, while the majority of sectors of antique furniture had not items for sale at all.

The design is neat and consistent, and is clearly targeted at more seasoned buyers with serif-fonts and a conservative colour scheme. However, this already looks out of date in comparison with other similar sites, while a number of links resulted in errors.

The integrated content management, so that users can move from a sub category in the market to the same sub category in the forum is a clever device, although relatively useless when most subcategories are unfilled.

Customer documentation is limited, while the absence of any type of guarantee will not encourage e-commerce transactions. Even a simple 'preferred vendor' scheme through which Serious Collector guarantees the standard of a vendor or provider would boost the respectability of the site.

Outlook

Despite listing an impressive number of fixed-price items for sale (over 47,000), the current revenue model for the site is unlikely to sustain the service for much longer. Professional Dealer members are given free membership, advertising and use of the market place to sell fixed price items, and no charge is levied on any items sold through this market place. Such a good deal has obviously been the main contributing factor in the sections success. The auction section, however, with an almost embarrassing 89 lots and no bids, charges between \$0.50 and \$2 for a listing, as well as taking 2.5% of the final sale price. Additional charges are also levied for including a photo of the item, and for putting the title in bold.

This strategy appears to have limited SeriousCollector from either earning a strong revenue stream (because of the low number of lots), or generating a large number of auctions and bids (because of the costs involved). One item for auction on the site was an original vinyl press of The Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band which, at a \$3 asking price, stood well below it's market value. Not only did the item receive no bids, but the seller had already spent at least \$1 to get a listing and publish a photo.

While the site clearly needs to re-strategise and relaunch, there are some strong navigational techniques and ideas, while the 'serious collector' market is certainly one that could benefit from a dedicated portal.

icollector.com

icollector.com

http://www.icollector.com launched in December-97
Interactive Collector Limited (subsidiary of icollector.com Plc) was founded in Sep-94

Interactive Collector Limited (subsidiary of icollector.com Plc),
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UK,

Telephone:
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Fax:
020 7221 5900

Email:
crm@icollector.com

CEO
James Corsellis

Chief Marketing Officer
Juan Plata

Target market: Both professional dealers and personal collectors.

Price range: US\$1 - over \$20,000

icollector.com ratings

Speed - 8.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4.75/5	Ease of use - 8/10	80.4%
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 9.5/10	Range of products - 6.5/10	Total - 48.25/60	

Interactive Collector Limited

Interactive Collector Ltd was formed in September 1994 in the UK as Corsellis-Montford Ltd, named after founder and current CEO James Corsellis. In 1996 the company created a Plc parent company: Markequal Plc, later renamed as Corsellis-Montford Group Plc and in 1999 as iCollector Plc (currently trading on OFEX).

Corsellis Montford Ltd was involved in online auction information as early as 1994 and in December 1997 the group registered the URL icollector.com and the site soon followed.

The company has a strong reputation for the auction of antiques online, and is described by the New York Observer as 'The Granddaddy of Internet Auction Sites'. The site provides a range of additional services and is divided into three channels: commercial; reference and entertainment. The commercial channel comprises online auctions and auction catalogues for over 650 auctioneers, dealers and galleries. Online auctions are only from recognised dealers and auctioneers, and no person-to-person auctions are available on the site. In addition there is a reasonably sized mall for the purchase of items at a fixed price from iCollector's dealers.

The reference channel allows the user to view archived sales catalogue, compare prices of items in price records of over one million items sold and find more about dealers, galleries, associations and publications for the antique market.

In May 2000, iCollector announced a partnership with Phillip's Auctions, the world's third largest auctioneer (see profile). Under the deal iCollector created and hosted an online

catalogue for a high-profile impressionist sale, both on icollector.com and phillips-auctions.com, while allowing registered users to submit advanced bids. Following the success of the venture, iCollector now provides online catalogues and advanced bidding for the majority of Phillip's auctions

iCollector was voted Number 4 in the Top 25 e-businesses in the UK by Management Today and Bain & Co. iCollector was also voted Number 1 in categories for concept, innovation and execution. The company was capitalised at £37.6m on OFEX at the end of April 2000.

icollector.com

Product range:

Antiquities, Asian Ceramics & Works of Art, Automobilia, Books, Manuscripts Prints & Maps, Cigars & Smoking Accessories, Clocks, Watches & Scientific Instruments, Collectors Items, Decorative Arts & Furniture, European Ceramics, Glass & Crystal, Film, Rock & Pop Memorabilia, Modern & Contemporary Art, Paintings & Drawings, Sculpture & Works of Art, Silver, Gold & Jewellery, Sporting Antiques & Memorabilia, Textile Art, Tribal Art, Wine, Port & Champagne

Payment:

Payment for items purchased through the online auction is settled between buyer and seller. Items purchased in the mall can be bought online with a credit card.

Insurance

iCollector operates a scheme called iGuarantee, which insures all products sold through the site for up to US\$50,000. In addition the guarantee covers items received that failed to match their description on the site, in which case iCollector will pay up to \$500 towards return shipping costs, as well as refunding the buyer.

Key features

The site is divided into three channels: commercial, reference and entertainment. Commercial includes online auctions; a mall where items can be bought at a fixed price; and a decent sized collection of forthcoming 'real-world' auction catalogues. Registered users of iCollector can submit email pre-bids for most of the auction catalogues viewable on the site.

The online auctions includes a proxy bidding feature called Autobid, and a 'Lot Tracker' which tracks the status of a registered user's bids.

The mall offers a greater range of items than the online auctions, and can be browsed by dealer or category. Items in the mall can be added to a shopping basket, and purchased online when browsing is complete. As each of the items are taken from iCollector's dealer networks, each item listed is accompanied with information about the company selling it and their sales policies.

The reference section provides price guides (with references to over 1 million items sold at auction) and information on trade associations, publications, galleries and antique related companies.

Entertainment provides an online community and slide-show presentations of exhibitions from around the world.

Fulfilment

Shipping is arranged between buyer and seller, although iCollector offers insurance of up to US\$50,000 on all products shipped, in the event of any seller failing offer such guarantees.

Guarantee

iCollector takes no payments and plays no part in the transactions secured through the site, and in doing so limits their liability in such areas. In order to provide users with a sense of security in using the site, iCollector offers a service called iGuarantee, which is effectively a combined insurance and privacy policy. iCollector is an approved member of Trust-E and meets their privacy standards.

Terms and conditions

Each seller has its own terms and conditions which buyers must agree to before advancing with a purchase. iCollector is not a party to any transactions that take place between buyer and seller, and as such, accepts no liability regarding any transaction or sale that takes place (other than iGuarantee - see Insurance).

Bids made by users are contractually binding under the terms of the agreement users agree to when registering. iCollector will not withdraw bids under any circumstances, although will consider allowing alterations in the 'clear' event of a typing error.

It is the user's responsibility to settle VAT payment as well as other import taxes or duties

Review of icollector.com

iCollector is a refreshingly clean and attractive site, benefiting from large amounts of white space, no banner adverts and an organised and logical layout. Some improvements to structure would enhance functionality further: moving between one category and another required numerous clicks on the 'back' button, when it would be easy to offer such options through a pop-up menu. The search facility was not always operational, and a search was not immediately available on the front page.

Individual pages for lots in the auctions are well laid out, although this section suffers from a lack of lots. Many sections had no lots available while most only had between 5 and 10.

The auction catalogue section was more comprehensive, with a large number of auctions listed in a wide range of categories. Presale bidding is a welcome feature and the number of auctions it is available on appears ever growing.

One of the best features is the art price guide, where users can enter the name of an artist and view a history of the prices fetched at auction for all of their works. There is over one million items listed in this catalogue, and with iCollector's purchase of Mayer International Auctions and Records and the Book Auction Record series this will only increase.

Customer support is good, although contact details other than an email address are hard to find. Help guides are extensive, appearing throughout the site's numerous sections, while company information is extensive. The company's iGuarantee service shows that iCollector is offering the user more than it is technically required to, as iCollector is not a party to any of the transactions conducted through the site.

Outlook

iCollector has developed strategic partnerships and co-branded content environments with ft.com, bloomberg.com, phillips-auction.com, cnn.com and Excite. Such a portfolio should target the generally higher income potential buyers who use such sites and are more likely to buy antiques and collectibles online.

By not offering person-to-person auctions critics may suggest iCollector is missing out on a large slice of the market. However given the aggressive competition faced by person-to-person auction sites, the strategy may be a wise one. In only offering goods and services from recognised and established dealers and auctioneers, iCollector can offer guarantees on quality, accurate on-screen representation and shipping that many other sites cannot. Creating such quality-assurance will greatly benefit the company's brand and reputation, and

encourage repeat use, especially over other sites where one bad experience with a person-to-person auction could put a user off all auctions on that site.

The purchase in March 2000 of the Mayer International Auctions and Records and the Book Auction Record series, should see the company's auction history and pricing information become a strong value proposition for trade use of the site, especially as access to this records is currently free.

Having focussed on creating a vertically integrated antique and collectibles portal and worked to provide a consistently high standard of service iCollector is in a strong position. The site's collection of auction catalogues and archived auction information is impressive, although the number of auctions available online is quite small. The dealer networks and preview catalogues should eventually provide supplementary revenue. To ensure continued growth the company will need to increase the number of items available for online auction at any one time,

gavelnet.com

gavelnet.com

*http://www.gavelnet.com launched in October-99
Gavelnet.com Inc was founded in August- 99*

**Gavelnet.com Inc /
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Email:
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CEO
Michael Haynes

**President of Tangible
Asset Galleries**
Silvano DiGenova

Target market: Professionals, and young busy people with high-disposable
Price range: US\$125 - US\$50,000

gavelnet.com ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4.5/5	Ease of use - 8.5/10	85.4%
Customer support - 9/10	Feature Set- 9/10	Range of products - 8.75/10	Total - 51.25/60	

Gavelnet.com Inc / Tangible Asset Galleries

Gavelnet was launched on October 15th, 1999 by George Noceti, former senior executive for Butterfield and Butterfield, where he had developed the auction house's Internet strategy. The site is unique in offering online auctions, live, real-time auctions and a mall of fixed price items from a network of dealers. In April 2000, Gavelnet announced the purchase of UK based Antiques Portfolio. Antiques Portfolio was founded in October 1999 by Peter Shoobridge, and brought to Gavelnet over 200 affiliated UK and European art and antique dealers. These dealers' products now appear in the Gavelnet Emporium, and are backed up by Gavelnet's door-to-door shipping program and insurance of up to US\$1m.

On June 22nd 2000, Tangible Asset Galleries purchased Gavelnet.com Inc for an undisclosed figure. Tangible is one of the world's leading dealers in the rare coins, art nouveau and art deco categories, and has sold in excess of an estimated US\$4bn during its 15 years of operations. Tangible and Gavelnet had previously co-operated on live auctions, including the Elite Live Fine Art and Antique auction in June 2000, and the Elite format auction prior to that in February 2000. Tangible's revenues in the first quarter of 2000 rose 46% from the previous year. The company intends to raise an additional US\$15m in equity funding to support both Internet expansion and physical auction sales. The combined inventory on the Gavelnet.com site is expected to reach a value of US\$25m by autumn 2000 when all channels are fully integrated. CEO Silvano DiGenova intends to cut Gavelnet's operating costs, and a week before the take-over was announced, Gavelnet announced the closure of its London office and the suspension of UK operations. At time of writing, no information was forthcoming as to when or if at all these would be reinstated.

The site's marketing campaign has been boosted in the US through the purchase of a five minute slot on prime-time cable television. The Premier Collector segment on the 'Treasures In Your Home' programme sees a Gavelnet expert describe a segment of the market, before inviting viewers to log onto the Gavelnet site.

Gavelnet.com offers a very high standard of lots, ranging from Pete Townsend's Gibson guitar and original Ralph Steadman drawings to Old Masters and works by Cézanne. The commission of 10% has more in common with 'real-world' auctioneers than online auction sites, but is justified by site-wide guarantee of authenticity on all products, insurance of up to US\$1m and door-to-door shipping.

The site offers a range of purchase alternatives. Users can buy items at a flat-rate in the Emporium sector, with items typically in the \$600 to \$2,000 range. The site claims that the collection of antique items on offer in the Emporium is the largest on the Internet, although provides no substantiated evidence to support this. Gavelnet also offers both live and fixed-length auctions, with a new live auction approximately once each month. The standard auction typically lasts 10-14 days, and includes plenty of lots in each category listed (although the list of categories does not cover every possible sector). The site also regularly offers 'Special Auctions' such as Asian art or Hollywood collections, which operate in the same way as the other fixed-length auctions.

Additional content is provided through the Connoisseur magazine, which includes articles on building collections and antique and art history.

gavelnet.com

Product range:

Fine Art: Paintings/Sculpture; Prints/Drawings, Decorative Arts: Ceramics; Glass, Premium Collectibles: Books; Maps, Special Collections: Cinco De Mayo; Master Works, Jewellery/ Watches, Memorabilia: Entertainment, Asian/Cultural Art.

Payment:

Buyer submits credit card details upon registering, Gavelnet then bill the card of the winning bidder. Alternative payment methods can be arranged through the customer care team.

Insurance

After the auction closes, the winning bidder's credit card is charged and the auctioned item is picked up from the dealer, packed and shipped by Gavelnet.com's SafeShip Program, a service that aims to guarantee door to door delivery anywhere in the world. The Transaction Guarantee Program then allows the buyer five days to inspect the item and verify that it is as it was represented on the auction site. At the end of the five-day period, the funds are released to the dealer and the transaction is complete.

If, during this five-day period, the buyer finds cause for concern, s/he may file a claim with Gavelnet.com, which will engage certified appraisal services to inspect and verify the claim. If the inspection supports the buyer's claim, the buyer's money is refunded in full. Sellers are protected under the program as well, as they are assured timely payment and are covered against losses resulting from buyer fraud (in which a buyer returns a lesser item than the one that was shipped to him).

The Transaction Guarantee program is guaranteed by Gavelnet.com and insured by certain underwriters at Lloyd's of London, providing up to \$1 million of coverage for every transaction conducted on the auction site.

Key features

Gavelnet offers extensive Customer Care features, including door-to-door shipping and insurance cover up to US\$1m.

In addition to online auctions, Gavelnet Emporium acts as a dealer gateway, and Gavelnet Live provides live bidding technology.

'Value-added' content is provided through the Connoisseur magazine which includes informed articles on sectors of the market, such as 'Urbanisation and the Woodblock Print in Edo Period Japan'.

The search functions are considerably advanced with the option to search by artist, work, date, make or period; as well as sort an auction category by pricing or bidding activity. This allows users to find suitable lots more quickly.

Each lot is displayed clearly and attractively with full information, including high/low estimates for price (designated by the dealer).

All items listed include an 'ask a question' facility whereby prospective buyers can ask dealers for further information about a lot. Other users are able to view all questions and answers for each lot.

Buyers can use proxy bidding by setting a maximum bid, although if this figure is less than the reserve of the lot, the server automatically defaults to this maximum bid.

An AuctionWatch feature is included called My Portfolio, whereby users can follow the sale of any lots of interest without making a commitment to buy.

Unlike most online auction sites, Gavelnet is directly involved in each transaction, and bills the successful bidder's credit card at the end of an auction. This gives the seller the guarantee of payment, whilst any buyer concerns regarding online payment and fraudulent use of credit cards are diluted by Gavelnet's security guarantees.

Fulfilment

The auctioned item is picked up from the dealer, packed and shipped by Gavelnet.com's SafeShip Program and delivered within 1-2 weeks (size & distance depending) to the buyer's address.

Guarantee

The guarantee is covered by the insurance policy

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply. Successful bids are not retractable, breaches concerning payment or submission of false information are subject to temporary/permanent suspension or termination of the account. Gavelnet does not allow the general public to list items and sellers must have at least 2 years experience in the industry and be able to back up that experience with the appropriate documentation. Non US buyers or sellers must apply to local US state laws and standard indemnification processes apply.

Purchase Terms - The winning bidder, whilst abiding by the Transaction Guarantee Program, must pay a buyer's premium equal to 10% of the winning bid. In addition, the bidder will be charged for applicable taxes, shipping and insurance. Sales tax within the United States will be charged where applicable (currently the state of CA). International taxes and VAT will be charged where applicable. The winning bidder's credit card will be charged as soon as the item is shipped and the funds will be held until the transaction is completed.

Shipping - Within two business days following Gavelnet's receipt of the purchase price they will arrange to have purchased items packed, insured and forwarded at the request and expense of the purchaser. They assume no responsibility for any breakage, cases of mis-delivery or omissions in this shipping process by themselves or by the shippers whether or not they were recommended. Also, the shipper can charge an admin fee so Gavelnet encourage the buyer to check the shipping arrangements themselves. In the case of any mistakes in the delivery process the buyer has 5 days from the time of delivery to dispute the purchase but must pay initially to reship the item back to Gavelnet who will, at their sole

discretion, choose an independent appraiser. According to the appraiser's findings the party at fault is liable to pay the full amount for the item, shipping costs and appraiser's fees.

Review of gavelnet.com

Gavelnet.com is a sophisticated and broad site with very strong feature-set, excellent product range and exemplary customer care. The main let-down is the level of bidding activity, which was very low at time of review.

For a graphically complex site, containing complete colour listings of each item, the site is reasonably fast to load. The layout is logical and consistent, although slightly wider than available screen space on standard 14" monitors, causing some right-margin cut-off. With a black and grey background, Gavelnet sets itself apart from the majority of similar sites, giving a serious and sophisticated look and feel.

By offering fixed price items, online auctions and live-auctions, Gavelnet has a sufficient range of purchase methods to appeal to most types of buyer and seller. Likewise, the breadth and standard of lots is excellent: ranging from popular items such as rock and film memorabilia to Old Masters, Persian carpets and antique jewellery. It is unfortunate that so many of these lots lack bidding activity, but given the youth of the site this is perhaps to be expected. In the near-term, Gavelnet might do better to offer more lower-priced lots, or to feature items of great interest on the front page.

On customer service, Gavelnet stands far ahead of much of the competition, taking responsibility of shipping, payment transactions and insurance. Every item offered comes with unequivocal guarantee of authenticity. The company also offers users a free-phone number for telephone support and provides a range of service guarantees.

The Connoisseur magazine is half filled with promotional information about successful auctions. The remainder of the 'magazine' includes well-written and suitably intelligent articles that stand out from other such 'value-added' content on competing sites.

A particularly useful feature is the 'ask a question' box at the bottom of all online auction lot descriptions, allowing the buyer to directly ask the seller about the item in question

Overall Gavelnet.com stands far ahead of the large majority of online antiques sites in terms of design, customer service, range of products and features and user experience.

Outlook

The take-over of Gavelnet.com by Tangible Asset Galleries creates a formidable 'clicks and bricks' fine art and antiques operation. The combination of live and fixed length online auctions, dealer galleries, original content, and hassle-free features such as shipping, insurance, guarantee and online payment, creates one of the strongest vertical antique eCommerce sites on the Internet. Furthermore, the standard of the lots and the sophistication of design is more than sufficient to attract high-income buyers.

Bidding activity on the site is low, and the company will need to address this if it is to continue to attract sellers of high-profile items. However, the company claims that its live auctions have been very successful, and considering that it was only founded at the end of 1999, bidding activity is likely to increase as the company's reputation grows.

Gavelnet's former President, Chris Efird, has indicated that live auctions - as opposed to fixed-time Web auctions - will be essential to the company's future growth. The argument is compelling, given that wealthy bidders are less likely to be able to spare the time to track an auction over a seven day period than over an hour or two.

The company's future would then appear to be dependent on increasing the number of live auctions and encouraging bidding activity to its fixed length auctions. Gavelnet has also announced plans to launch Gavelnet TV, a live interactive US-based TV network.

While the closure of the London office suggests further cutbacks at the site, the combined management expertise of Silvano DiGenova and Michael Haynes, president of Gavelnet, should ensure swift profitability for the combined companies.

bonhams.com

bonhams.com

http://www.bonhams.com launched in 1995
onhams Aucitoneers was founded in 1793

Bonhams.com, Inc.,
 Montpelier St.,
 Knightsbridge,
 London,
 England,
 SW7 1HH

Telephone:
 +44 (0) 207 393 3900

Fax:
 +44 (0) 207 393 3905

Email:
 contact@bonhams.com

CEO
 Christopher Elwes

Target market: Professional dealers and personal collectors.
Price range: US\$100 - US\$2.5m

bonhams.com ratings				
Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 1/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2.5/5	Ease of use - 4.5/10	57.5%
Customer support - 6/10	Feature Set- 5/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 34.5/60	

Bonhams.com, Inc.

Bonhams has had a web presence since 1995, making it a veritable industry veteran by Internet standards. The website is used to provide information about forthcoming sales. It also offers occasional online auctions, though no catalogues or information were available of these at time of review. Bonhams is the only Georgian auction house founded in London still under private ownership by the founding family, and as such offers no company information on the site beyond a map detailing the auction locations.

bonhams.com

Product range:

Furniture & Decorative Arts: Furniture & works of art; Carpets & rugs; Architectural & Sculpture; The Chelsea View; Ceramics; Decorative Arts; Contemporary Ceramics; Modern Design; Sporting: Sporting Guns; Arms & Armour; Fishing; Golf; Football. Asian Art: Tribal Art; Oriental & Works of Art; Islamic Art. Paintings & Drawings: Old Masters; 19th Century; 20th Century; Watercolours; Marine; Fountain Pens; Cats & Dogs in Art; Portrait Miniatures.

Collectibles: Rock & Pop; Toys, Dolls & Teddy Bears; Coins & Medals; Scientific Instruments; Textiles; Wine. General: Books Maps & Manuscripts; Jewellery; Silver & Vertu; Clocks & Watches; Antiquities; Musical Instruments.

Payment:

Only offers a few items for online auction. For these Bonhams' standard payment conditions apply:

Most payments are subject to a 15% 'Buyers Premium' and exclude VAT with a few exceptions that are relative to prices over a certain level and some where the VAT and the premium varies from the norm e.g. Wines - 10%. Bonhams accept cash, switch, delta with no surcharge added, AMEX (3% surcharge). Bonhams also accepts Visa, MasterCard and Access but charges a 1.5% surcharge for each. Bonhams also accept bank transfers (from overseas buyers) and Eurocheque up to £700.00 (surcharge of 1.5% exceeding £700.00).

Insurance

Only offers a few items for online auction. For these Bonhams' standard insurance conditions apply:

Bonhams are responsible for the condition of an item until it passes into the possession of a shipping company or of the buyer. They are responsible for the authenticity of the item up to a year after the sale. They will reimburse the buyer (who must state the forgery in writing to Bonhams) provided that they have a receipt of sale, knows the date of the auction, can prove that the item is the one bought from Bonhams and return the item with lot number attached.

Key features

The main function of the Bonham's website is to provide catalogue listings for forthcoming auctions, some of which are available for online bidding. Catalogues can be searched either by title, category, location or keyword. Registered users are able to track lots already made, auction status, and submit commission bids for Bonhams staff to bid up to during an auction. During the occasional online auctions, of which no details were available despite the imminence of an advertised sale.

As well as this, the site offers contact details for each showroom; a catalogue of sales results; information about insurance, probate and valuation services; information about sales in each collecting department; and a map giving directions to each auction house.

Information is also provided about buying and selling, commission rates, and auction terminology.

Fulfilment

Shipping or delivery arrangements must be made on the point of credit card authorisation. Written instructions including a receipt must then be provided by the buyer prior to courier or carrier receiving the item for delivery. Tracking services and insurance of the item during shipping must be arranged between buyer and shipping company. All arranged collections must be made within a week of the sale, thereafter Bonhams will arrange package and send the item after debiting the cost from the buyer's credit card.

Guarantee

Bonhams experts provide free detailed condition reports for items over the phone, by email or by fax for items on an imminent auction list. No explicit, forthright guarantee was provided concerning authenticity or condition of an item although a visual record of an item's condition can be referred to in the auction catalogue.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply with Bonhams taking great pains to limit liability and denying responsibility for an item (barring authenticity claims) as soon as it releases it to buyer or courier.

Review of bonhams.com

Bonhams.com is a clumsy, awkward and illogically designed site.

The site is reasonably fast, although the inclusion of five separate animations on the front page slows down loading. The use of so many animations almost amounts to overkill, giving the 'look and feel' of a consumer eCommerce site rather than that of a reputable auctioneers.

Graphically the site is smart and consistent in font usage, text boxes and spacing, though again a dependence on rollovers and animated gifs cheapens the image somewhat. Little effort has been made to create a site that stands out aesthetically beyond animations, favouring more straightforward functionality. The online catalogues are well laid out but are frequently without a photograph or item description.

The largest problem with the site is its structure, offering the user 14 different sub-categories when first arriving at the site. Each category is colour coded, though the relevance of each coloured category is not immediately discernible. More categories could be grouped together, presenting the user with fewer options when first approaching the site.

Such structural problems, coupled with the absence of a site map and an excessive variety of searching options cripples site navigation and usability. To find many basic pieces of information requires considerable experimentation, and far more clicks than any modern website should offer. The largest client of the site's designers, Fernhart New Media, is Domino's Pizza, a fact which perhaps explains bonhams.com's lack of the appropriate sophistication fitting a company of such pedigree.

Customer support suffers similar confusion, lacking basic options such as a help page or list of FAQs. Likewise there is a complete absence of company information beyond address and map, with neither a press release file, management structure overview or even a basic 'about us' page detailing Bonhams' history. The sellers' and buyers' guides are reasonable, albeit brief and with little effort to clarify or explain the complex terms and conditions. Telephone support is offered, which is welcome.

The only useful function of the site, beyond viewing the forthcoming auction schedule, is the viewing of online catalogues, with the option of submitting a commission bid. Bonhams does now claim to offer online auctions, though no information or help is provided about these. A imminent online wine auction was advertised on the front page, yet appeared without a catalogue of lots, or an idea of product and price range. Beyond this there are no 'value added' content, interactive or community elements.

The range of auctions offered is obviously impressive, though - as far as can be judged - the variety of online auctions is scarce.

Outlook

It is regrettable that an auctioneer of Bonhams' standing should produce such an unimaginative and poorly managed site. Given the company's five-year web experience and the fact the site was relaunched in April 2000, it is also surprising. Work is clearly needed to refine Bonhams.com's information hierarchy, with the provision of greater help files. Beyond this the inclusion of company information, related content and community elements is the least the company can do to remain competitive.

christies.com

christies.com

http://www.christies.com launched in January-95
Christie's, Inc. was founded in 1766

Christie's, Inc.,
 8 King's St.,
 St. James,
 London,
 England,
 SW1Y 6QT

Telephone:
 +44 (0) 207 839 9060

Fax:
 +44 (0) 207 839 1611

Email:
 info@christies.com

CEO
 Edward Dolman

Chairman NY
 Stephen s Lash

Target market: Professional dealers and personal collectors.

Price range: US\$1000 - US\$82.5m

christies.com ratings				
Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4.5/5	Ease of use - 7.25/10	77.1%
Customer support - 8.5/10	Feature Set- 5.5/10	Range of products - 9/10	Total - 46.25/60	

Christie's, Inc.

Christie's was founded in London in 1766 by James Christie and has grown to become the second largest auctioneer in the world. Arriving on the web early in 1995, the company has used its site to promote its real world auctions and display catalogues. To date no announcement has been made from Christie's regarding the launch of online or online-live auctions. It is known that Christie's plans to launch a large web-based photo and image bank towards the latter part of 2000, suggesting a shift in strategy for web ventures. The image bank will allow users access to Christie's large collection of images of art and antiques, allowing fee-based usage.

Besides this, the company has offered a few live auctions through The Auction Channel, whereby users could bid through a touch-tone phone or through the Internet.

christies.com

Product range:

Asian art: Chinese Art; Indian & Southeast Asian Art; Islamic Art; Japanese Art; Korean Art; Southeast Asian Pictures, Books & manuscripts, Collectibles: Animation Art; Coins and Banknotes; Musical Instruments; Pop and Film Memorabilia; Sports Memorabilia; 19th and 20th Century Posters; Cameras and Optical Toys; Costumes, Textiles, and Fans; Corkscrews; Dolls and Toys; Maritime Art; Mechanical Music; Medals and Militaria; Postage Stamps and Postal History; Scientific Instruments and Engineering Models; Teddy Bears, Fine art: 20th Century Art; American Art; British & Irish Art; Contemporary Art;

Impressionist & 19th Century Art; Latin American Art; Old Master Drawings; Old Master Paintings; Photographs; Prints; Australian Art; Greek Art; Swiss Art; Topographical Art; Wildlife Art, Furniture & decorative arts: 19th Century Furniture; Sculpture & Works of Art; 20th Century Decorative Arts: Art Deco; Art Nouveau; Arts & Crafts; American Furniture & Decorative Arts; Antiquities; European Furniture & Decorative Objects; Silver & Objects of Vertu; American Indian Art; Arms & Armour; European Ceramics & Glass; Rugs & Carpets; Russian Works of Art & Fabergé; Tribal Art, Jewellery, Watches, Wristwatches & Small Clocks, Motor cars, Wine, Vintage cigars.

Payment:

Does not auction items online.

Insurance

Does not auction items online

Key features

Christies.com provides extensive information about the company, its services and forthcoming auctions. The site is arranged as follows:

- About Christie's - Provides information about the history of the company, available jobs, buying and selling guides, complete salesroom listings and information about Christie's training programmes.
- Sale Information - Lists a complete auction calendar and auction results. The auction results are listed in full, with a table detailing how much each recent auction totalled on the FrontPage. Clicking on a previous sale brings up full pricing for each lot. All sales listed in the catalogue provide links to the full catalogue for that sale. In addition, this section promotes auctions that are open to the public to submit items; a press release file; an review of the year; and a facility to view webcasts live from New York (though no information was provided as to the frequency or timing of these webcasts).

The catalogues for each sale vary from a tabular listing of lots, to mini-sites with a unique colour and design scheme. At time of review, the sale catalogue for contemporary art was displayed as a Flash movie with elaborate animation and styling befitting the contemporary work on offer.

- Sale Categories - This section allows the user to browse catalogues, auction listings and press releases by sales category (Asian Art, Wine, etc). Each category listed links to further subcategories, with information about the relevant buying department at Christie's.
- Services - This provides information about the range of additional services on offer. These include Christie's Images, a large databank of images of art sold through the auctioneer, with sample images and brochure request forms. The company intends to offer full access to this database shortly. Christie's Great Estates lists various high-value real estate auctions on offer, with photographs and contact information. The Publications sub-category lists all Christie's periodicals, recommended books and current and recent catalogues for purchase. In addition services details quite extensively Christie's valuation and appraisals team, museum services and security solutions.
- In addition Christies.com provides a site-wide search function, FAQs, site map and full contact details.

Fulfilment

Does not auction items online

Guarantee

Does not auction items online

Terms and conditions

Because Christie's do not conduct online auctions, the terms and conditions relate purely to the use of the web site, and as such cover standard issues such as misuse, viruses and spamming. Unlike most terms and conditions however, Christie's supplies the name of their copyright agent and contact details to reach her regarding a copyright infringement claim or for information.

Review of christies.com

The Christies.com site is a well designed and attractive showpiece for the auctioneer. Full of information and extensive sales catalogues, the otherwise first-rate site is let down by an absence of extended interactive features or online bidding facilities.

Swift to load, the use of a three page frameset speeds navigation even further, though limiting the space for the main site content. Structurally the site is decently designed, neither offering too many options to the user at first, nor using confusing category names. Some sections, such as the online version of the Christie's magazine, Living With Art, would benefit from a better position in the navigation bar.

Aesthetically the site is very strong, showing excellent continuity of fonts, colours and navigation motifs. Page layout is without fault and utilises consistent margins and columns, surrounded by plenty of white space. Attention to detail is good, with areas such as the Living With Art magazine and the interactive sales catalogues showing very good understanding of design for the web. The only possible weakness is the three page frameset, which pushes the bulk of useful content into an unnecessarily small pane in the centre of the screen, undoubtedly causing problems for users with small monitors.

The range of features is broad, yet offering little beyond detailed information about Christie's and its auctions. The Living With Art magazine has a range of well written and researched articles, though many first-time visitors to the site would struggle to find it. Perhaps most disappointing was the failure to fully utilise the web's interactive benefits. For example, it is possible to place an absentee bid through the site, but this requires the user to fill out a form online, print it from their computer and fax it to the relevant department at Christie's. Such a process is unnecessarily time-consuming for both end-user and Christie's, while being outdated in relation to modern practices. The absence of any form of dealer network, online auctions, live-bidding facility, message board or chatroom suggest the company has some way to catch up to make the site a central portal.

Needless to say the range of product is exceptional, while the 'signature' display of key sales as Flash animations, such as one of an Impressionist art, presents the lots in a more appropriate manner than a simple table.

Customer support is good, with a full range of guides, FAQs, contact details and a site map. The search function - Lot Finder is excellent, displaying successful results in neat tables with pictures and descriptions where applicable.

Overall, a well designed and appealing site that serves the function of promoting Christie's well. However in terms of attracting new customers and generating additional revenue, the site has some way left to go.

Outlook

If Christie's online strategy is to provide a professional and comprehensive website offering clients and potential clients further information about the company, then they are wholly successful. However, if like Sotheby's they intend to use the Internet to expand the reach of

their auctions and introduce new customers, then more work is needed. While the site is impressive on many levels, there is little here to attract new users, or those unused to real-world auctions. The live webcasts go some way towards remedying this, but either a dealer network, online auction or live-online auction function would be needed for a first-time Christie's user to come to associate the site and company with a fruitful trading experience.

doylenewyork.com

doylenewyork.com

*http://doylenewyork.com launched in December-96
William Doyle Galleries was founded in 1963*

**William Doyle
Galleries,**
175 East 87th St,
New York,
NY,
10128,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 212 427 2730

Fax:
+1 212 369 0892

Email:
info@doylenewyork.com

CEO
Rodney Lang

Chairman
Kathleen M Doyle

Target market: Professional dealers and personal collectors.

Price range: US\$500 - US\$500,000

doylenewyork.com ratings

Speed - 6/10	Design (functionality) - 0.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 2.5/5	Ease of use - 7/10	57.5%
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 4.5/10	Range of products - 7/10	Total - 34.5/60	

William Doyle Galleries

William Doyle Galleries was founded in New York in 1963, and is still privately held. Previously operating as doylegalleries.com from late 1996, the company rebranded and launched the website as doylenewyork.com at the end of 1999. In recent years, the company has initiated partnerships with international auctioneers. This began in January 1998 with Bonhams in London, and was followed in spring 2000 by extending to a three-way partnership with Boisgirard in Paris. The relationship allows for cross marketing, co-hosted previews and appraisals, and joint sales.

As a privately held company, Doyle New York does not issue financial or corporate information.

doylenewyork.com

Product range:

At time of review, Doylenewyork.com was announcing 2 auctions. The first covered: Jewellery, Coins, Silverware and Watches. The second covered: Fine furniture, Paintings, Prints, Porcelain, Silver and Rugs.

Payment:

Whilst at the time of review the site did not contain any information regarding accepted payment methods it did mention in detail the buyer's premiums, minimum bids for telephone

bidding and internet based absentee bidding (US\$1,500 min.). Bids under US\$50,000 are subject to a buyer's premium of 15%, over US\$50,000 that premium is lowered to 10%. In addition all successful bids are also subject to, post buyer's premium, sales tax.

Key features

Doylenewyork.com is a straightforward promotional site for the auctioneer with the added functionality to place absentee bids online.

The site is divided into six main sections: schedule; catalogues; sales results; buying and selling; specialists; and events; alongside contact details, historical information and a small links page.

The schedule details an overview of forthcoming auctions, although does not provide a link between each listing and their respective catalogue. At time of review only one catalogue was available for viewing online, and even this did not include the 'digital colour photographs' and 'detailed descriptions' promised elsewhere on the site, and was simply a list of lot names. Absentee bids can be placed in response to any items listed in the catalogue, though without photographs, it is unlikely many bids will be made this way.

The sales results section lists the results of all recent auctions, although a number of those tested resulted in both 'ASP script errors' and server time outs.

Buying and Selling provides a reasonably sized guide to using Doyles New York, while the Specialist section gives short biographies of senior specialists. Again, some of the links provided in this section resulted in errors. The Events category lists forthcoming open appraisals sessions and the Antiques Roadshow tour.

Fulfilment

The company will only provide information on reputable international shipping organisations. Items must be collected within 48 hours of the successful bid.

Guarantee

None given.

Terms and conditions

Typical terms and conditions apply. Items are sold "as, is", and the company is not initially liable in any sense concerning authenticity or condition.

Review of doylenewyork.com

The number of errors, quirks, server time-outs and bugs endured during review opens the question as to whether this site is indeed intended for public use. For a site that mainly serves to promote Doyle's physical auctions to a wider audience, its unreliability and failure to deliver may well discourage potential buyers. Added to this is an absence of any unique or stand-out features, services or information.

Said bugs in the site makes its speed erratic, varying from suitably fast through to lengths of over two minutes to load a simple page. The time limits set in the site's Active Server Page (ASP) administration tools is too low, meaning that pages dependent on scripts frequently time out during loading, either displaying raw HTML or error messages, either of which would confuse a user. Such faults, which should have been remedied during the beta-test stage of the site, are the influencing factor behind the Design Functionality and Ease of Use scores.

Besides these problems, the structure and information hierarchy of the site is decent, albeit somewhat crude. The user is not offered too many immediate options, yet through good use of sub categories most items can be found within one or two clicks. Sub-categories appear as a list of links, which in turn connect to anchors (or shortcuts), meaning that an entire section often appears on one page. While this is perhaps a speedier way of displaying the information, it is not necessarily the neatest.

Aesthetically the site is a little messy. While the green and yellow colour scheme is successfully exploited throughout the site, pagination and framesets are less exact, with the site alternating between one, two and three page frames sets. The font used for buttons mimics that of an early print press which, while novel, upon translation to the web gives the unintended impression of poorly drawn text. The Bonhams logo in the main navigation bar appears to have been attached as an afterthought, with it's background navy clashing with Doyle's racing green, and text poorly prepared for the web.

The feature set is nothing more than information about Doyle's auctions, though given the number of broken links and errors, it is questionable how many of Doyle's regular clients would use even this functionality. The ability to leave absentee bids online does put the site ahead of Christie's in that respect, though without complete online catalogues it is unlikely that this feature would be used.

Range of products offered appears to be good, though without pictorial or descriptive listing of lots, this is something that is hard to gauge.

Customer service and support is adequate with full contact details, and complete historical information alongside buying and selling guides.

Outlook

To release a site with so many bugs and errors is potentially crippling for a company's reputation as it can give a user the impression of incompetent or out of touch management.

Once these problems are ironed out, Doyle's needs to work to get complete online catalogue listings, as opposed to the one available at time of review. Likewise, each listing needs to include photographs and more detailed descriptions to even approach being a useful feature.

Such work, which will undoubtedly cost time and money is unlikely to present real returns beyond making the company appear more professional. Far greater further investment and/or partnerships would be needed before Doyle's online strategy could extend the reach of its physical auctions, or actually deliver a revenue stream. Failing this, it could become a take-over target for one of the large online auction companies.

phillips-auctions.com

phillips-auctions.com

*http://phillips-auctions.com launched in
Phillips Auctioneers was founded in 1796*

Phillips Auctioneers, Telephone:

101 New Bond St., +44 (0) 207 629 6602

London,

England,

W1Y 0AS

Fax:

+44 (0) 207 629 8876

Email:

info@philmark.demon.co.uk

CEO

Chris Thompson

Chairman

Lord Powell of
Bayswater

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

Price range: £1,000 - £10m

phillips-auctions.com ratings

Speed - 8/10

Design (functionality) - 2/5

Design (aesthetic) - 2/5

Ease of use - 5.75/10

Customer support -
7.5/10

Feature Set- 5/10

Range of products -
8.5/10

Total - 38.75/60

64.6%

Phillips Auctioneers

Founded in 1796 by Harry Phillips, Philips Auctions is owned by LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. Holding over 800 auctions each year, in 1999 the company represented over 80,000 unique vendors. Philips-auctions.com is a straightforward promotional site, offering company and sales information, overview of services and online sales catalogues. In May 2000, the company announced a tie-up with iCollector.com, offering an exclusive partnership for the online viewing of catalogues and online pre-bidding. The partnership began with a high-profile Impressionist and Modern Art sale, with lot estimates upwards of US\$8m. Following the success of this sale, iCollector now provides the online catalogues and advance bid technology for almost all Phillips UK auctions.

phillips-auctions.com

Product range:

20th century Paintings and Drawings, 20th Century Design, Books Manuscripts & Barometers, Collectibles, Frames, Jewellery, Old Master Drawings and Paintings, Oriental, Pictures (general), Prints and Posters, Rugs and Carpets, Sculpture, Silver and Plated Items, Sports and Hobbies, Stamps Cigarette & Postcards, Toys & Dolls, Watercolours and Miniatures, Works of Art.

Payment:

Does not auction items online.

Insurance

Does not auction items online

Key features

The site is fronted with a splash page offering users the choice between London, New York, Sydney and Zurich versions of the site. Each section differs in colour, though contact details and currency usage are generally the same across each version.

The site has thirteen main categories. These include historical information about the company, contact details and a search function. Detailed buying and selling guides are offered, along with a feedback forms. Through the collaboration with iCollector, most of Phillips auctions can be previewed as online categories, approximately half of which are illustrated. Users can submit an online advanced bid by registering with iCollector. The auction calendar is organised by department rather than month, allowing users to see a list of sales in an area of interest.

Catalogues and subscriptions can be ordered by printing out and filling in by hand an order form, before faxing or posting to Phillip's. It is not possible to fill in the form online and submit electronically, or even fill out online before printing. In the valuation section, however, users can fill out online a valuation information form to get a Phillip's representative to contact them.

Other sections of the site include information about wine auctions, Phillips-Selkirk, sales results, news, previews and reviews. One novel feature is an interactive demonstration of correct wine provenance and usage levels for wines of different ages.

Fulfilment

Does not auction items online

Guarantee

Does not auction items online

Terms and conditions

Because Phillips does not conduct online auctions, their terms and conditions concern use of the website only. However, advanced bids may be submitted online by registering with iCollector who provide the online catalogues for the site. In this case the bidder should refer to iCollector's terms and conditions.

Review of phillips-auctions.com

Phillips-auctions.com is a somewhat gloomy and bloated site offering the user many options, yet little in the way of features or functionality beyond the tie-up with iCollector.

Reasonably quick to load, the site uses a three-page frame-set. Of particular concern is the presence of some conflict in the page's coding that caused Internet Explorer to crash on two separate occasions. This is the sort of problem that would deter many users from visiting the site again.

Graphically the site is smart and professional though quite dark and unappealing. With very dark background colours, links and text are often lost within a page's layout when they are displayed in black. Times New Roman is the most common font on the site, though this occasionally switches to a sans serif font. Page layout, margins and formatting also vary throughout the site, though the frameset gives the navigational structure consistency.

Structurally the site is logical, though offers the user far too many choices by dividing information into thirteen categories. These categories are then often divided further, though the navigational design does not allow for subcategory labelling, meaning the users must rely upon the Browser back button to move between one subsection and another. This makes the site's ease of use more complex than necessary.

The range of features and functionality is rather poor. The online sales catalogues provided by iCollector are the most useful feature, though the graphical integration is messy. This may divert phillips-auctions.com users to the iCollector site where the catalogue listings would appear cleaner and more integrated across the page.

No facility is provided to purchase catalogues online, rather the site provides a form to be printed out and filled by hand. At the very least an Acrobat format file or Java form should be given so that users can fill in the form before printing out.

Customer support is decent, providing full contact details and a detailed buying and selling guide. The section labelled 'email Phillips' actually turns out to be an online survey, and provides no explanation as to why the user should submit their personal details.

In summation, phillips-auctions.com provides sufficient information to be of use to its clients, while the online catalogues available through iCollector are a useful feature. Beyond this, however, the site is limited in its value, with a design and feature set unlikely to win over any new clients.

Outlook

Phillips appears to have allocated little investment or thought to its Internet strategy, presenting a site of limited function beyond sale and company information. The partnership with iCollector is the Phillip's strongest hope to maintain a reasonable online presence, though offering online advanced bidding is still some way behind the online auctions of Sotheby's and live auctions of The Auction Channel.

However before this is considered, a clean-up and redesign of phillips-auctions.com is long overdue, with basic features such as online purchase of catalogues, a site map and cleaner design.

auctioneer

tajan.com

<http://www.tajan.com>

Etude Tajan,
37 rue des Mathurins,
75008,
Paris,
France,

Telephone:
+33 (1) 53 30 30 30

Fax:
+33 1 53 30 30 31

Email:
tajan@worldnet.fr

CEO
Jacques Tajan

International Relations
Julia Sheid

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.
Price range: US\$50 - US\$14.2m

tajan.com ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3/5	Ease of use - 8.5/10
Customer support - 6.5/10	Feature Set- 6/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 43.5/60

72.5%

Etude Tajan

Tajan is France's largest auction house, and one of the largest in the world. The smartly designed website is available in both English and French language versions, detailing a wide range of information about the company. The company is a member of International Auctioneers, the global association of auction houses that includes Butterfield.

tajan.com

Product range:

Old Master Paintings and Drawings, Engravings of the XVIth, XVIIth, XVIIIth and early XIXth centuries

Antique and Modern Prints, Furniture and Decorative Art of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, Ceramics, Frames, Middle Age and Renaissance Art, Modern Art, XIXth century Paintings and Sculptures, Abstract and Contemporary Art, Islamic Art, Oriental Paintings, Judaïca, Far Eastern Art, Tribal Art, Art Nouveau and Art Deco, Jewellery, Silver, Objects of Virtue, Wine and Spirits, Antiquities, Stamps and Coins, Arms and Armour, Antique and Modern Fabrics, Fashion, Antique Toys, Antique and Modern Books, Livres d'Artistes, Manuscripts, Autographs, Photographs of the XIXth and XXth Centuries, Comics, Musical Instruments.

Payment:

Does not auction online

Insurance

Does not auction online

Key features

The site is divided firstly into English and French language versions, before being split into four further sections:

- How to Sell - As well as a guide to selling, this section details Etude Tajan's valuations and estimates services.
- How to Buy - Provides a buyer's guide, information about the Tajan guarantee and pricing and codes for ordering catalogues (although these cannot be purchased through the site).
- L'Etude - Details the company's history and gives information about the International Auctioneers. This section also lists each department with contact information and related sales.
- Next Sales - Gives information about each of the forthcoming sales, either by date or by category. It also lists sales results and allows users to download sales catalogues as PDF files.

Fulfilment

Does not auction items online

Guarantee

Does not auction items online

Terms and conditions

None given

Review of tajan.com

An informative and well-structured site, short on features and lacking design finesse, yet a welcome supplement for any of Tajan's regular clients.

The site is quick to load, and utilises a refreshingly straight-forward navigational system. While no site map is provided, none is needed as each most areas can be reached within a few clicks.

From a design perspective, the site is a little haphazard. The splash pages for each section are an attractive entry point, but the sub-menus with animated gavels cheapen the tone. Likewise, the text is always Times New Roman and frequently appears with inadequate margins in a multitude of colours, showing a lack of sophistication in layout.

In terms of features, the site provides all the information a Tajan user would wish for, though nothing in the way of interactive functions such as online advanced bidding, webcasts or online live-bidding.

Customer support and information is adequate.

Outlook

The Tajan site is arguably due for a relaunch, with some added functionality. As it stands now, there is at least a wide range of information available, either as live web pages or PDF files to be downloaded. By it's association with the International Auctioneers (IA), some Tajan property has been sold online through IA's partnership with ibidlive.com. If these prove

successful, it could be expected that a relaunch of tajan.com will bring with it some such a feature.

antiquet.com

antiquet.com / .co.uk / butcollectibles.com / collecting books.com / sloansauction.com

http://www.antiquet.com launched in 1996
Antique Networking, Inc. was founded in 1992

Antique Networking, Inc.,
1350 W. Fifth Avenue,
Suite 300,
Columbus,
Ohio,
USA,
43212

Telephone:
+1 614 481 5750

Fax:
+1 614 481 5751

Email:
info@antiquet.com

CEO
Kathy Kamnikar

Senior Executive Officer
John Habbert

Target market: Personal collectors
Price range: US\$50 - US\$10,000

antiquet.com			
Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 8.5/10
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 5.75/10	Range of products - 8.5/10	Total - 46.25/60
77.1%			

Antique Networking, Inc.

Antique Networking, Inc. was founded in 1992 by current President and CEO Kathy Kamnikar. A legal researcher who shopped for antiques in her lunch hour, Kamnikar realised that computer-based browsing of antiques could save a lot of time. Antiquet.com began as a bulletin board in 1992, and in October 1995, Kamnikar registered the antiquet.com domain name, launching the company fully on the web in early 1996.

The website is now a gateway to more than 5,000 dealers, both directly and through antique centres from ten countries with over 50,000 items available daily through the site.

Company headquarters are in Columbus Ohio, though the company has been quick to expand, often through partnerships and joint-ventures to minimise costs. Shortly after launch Antiquet partnered with New York City Antiques News, sharing a New York office and classified advertising. Another partnership with ChannelSpace Entertainment, parent of CollectingChannel.com, soon followed, and the two sites continuing to closely recommend each other. Antiquet operates offices in the UK, France, Italy, Spain and Germany.

In July 1999, Antique Networking began a European aggressive with the licensing of its proprietary technology and server solutions to Arx in France for an undisclosed amount. Through the deal, Arx provides Antiquet's network of dealers to SparkFrance's GoSpark and SparkCollector sites. At the same time the company announced a partnership with Intersites Ltd in the UK, who provide management and marketing of the Antiquet's UK operations - antiquet.co.uk.

On December 21st, 1999, Antique Networking shareholders voted to merge the company with Sloan's Auction Galleries, the second oldest and sixth largest American fine art and

antique auctioneer. Under the deal, Antique Networking, Inc and Sloan's Auction Galleries remain separate organisations controlled by a parent company, Antiqnet.com, Inc. The SloansAuction.com site was redeveloped by Antiqnet, and now offers enhanced functionality and online auctions.

Antique Networking also operates BuyCollectibles.com, a site which uses Antiqnet technology to sell collectible items. On January 31st, 2000, the company joined forces with JR's Books to launch CollectingBooks.com, a site that allows antique centre operators and dealers to sell reference books through their websites. Dealers with websites can link to a co-branded page on the CollectingBooks site where their users can purchase reference books, for which the dealer will get a percentage of the revenue generated.

Through the deals with SparkFrance and Channel Space, as well as further affiliate deals, dealers and antique centres listed on Antiqnet also appear on Collectorspark.com, Gospark.com, RubyLane.com and CollectingChannel.com.

Antiqnet demographics display an audience with far higher disposable income, education, age and proportion of women than the Internet average. 78% of users have income over \$50,000 with 31% over \$100,000, while a further 92% of users have attended college, with 34% having a post-graduate education. 65% of users are 36-55 years old, and a total 61% of users are female. In terms of spending on antiques, 44% of users spend over \$5,000 annually on antiques, with 11% spending over \$25,000.

antiqnet.com

Product range:

Advertising Memorabilia, Antiquities, Archeology, Architectural, Arms and Armour, Art, Auction Catalogues, Automobiles/Cars, Bakelite, Banks, Black Memorabilia, Books, Bronzes, Canes/Walking Sticks, Carpets, Clocks, Coat Of Arms, Decorative Arts, Desk Accessories, Dolls, Drawings, Ephemera, Ethnography, Figurines, Frames, Furniture, Furniture Accessories, Games, Glass, Hunting/Fishing, Icons, Ivories, Jewellery - Antique, Jewellery - Estate, Lighters/Smoking Items, Lighting Devices, Maps, Militaria/War Memorabilia, Miniatures, Misc. Antiques, Misc. Collectibles, Music-Related, Musical Instruments, Nautical, Numismatics, Objects of Vertu, Orientalia, Paintings, Pens/Writing Instruments, Perfumes, Photography/Photographic, Political Memorabilia, Porcelain/Pottery/Ceramics, Postcards, Quilts, Reference Books, Religious Items, Scientific/Medical Instruments, Scripophily, Sculpture, Silver/Silverware, Sports, Stamps, Tapestries, Textiles, Toys, Vintage Apparel, Vintage Posters, Watches, Wine

Payment:

Antiqnet has developed an e-commerce solution that allows the buyer to purchase directly from any of their dealers (provided said dealer has an eCommerce account). Once the buyer adds an item to his/her 'basket' a link is set to the dealer's sales policy and if the user wishes to purchase more than one item and more than one dealer is listed, Antiqnet advises the buyer to read each of the sales policies to see what method of payment each dealer accepts and what their shipping and return policies are.

Insurance

Antiqnet requests that the buyer read the Buyer Agreement before proceeding to the secure order system to fill in shipping and billing information. A feature of the e-commerce system is that the dealer will not see the buyer's credit card number unless the order is accepted. The only information the dealer sees is the item the buyer has requested to purchase until the transaction is successfully completed. The company is also closely associated with The Antiques and Collectibles Dealer Association and The Insurance Centre to represent the needs of their dealers and buyers.

Key features

As is standard with gateway sites, the two main features of Antiqnet is the directory of members, and the database of their collective inventory. The majority of items listed are available for online purchase, and through Antiqnet's Shopping Basket software, thousands of items from the majority of dealers listed can be accumulated and purchased in one online transaction.

Antiqnet's members can be searched in the following categories

- DEALERS
- ANTIQUE CENTERS
- SHOWS
- PUBLICATIONS
- AUCTIONS
- ESTATE SALES
- APPRAISERS
- ASSOCIATIONS
- RESTORATION & CONSERVATION
- ANTIQUE TOURS
- LECTURERS
- INSURANCE
- WHOLESALEERS
- MATCHING SERVICES
- SHIPPING
- ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Each member listing provides a short description and a link either to a subsite on Antiqnet (with URL <http://www.antiqnet.com/membername>), a unique URL for a subsite of Antiqnet (ie addressed <http://www.membername.com>, but still designed and hosted by Antiqnet), or a remote site. The member categories with the most listings are 'Dealers' and 'Antique Centres', both of which can be searched by name, keyword, region or country. A number of antique centres have had custom sites designed for them by Antiqnet, creating mini virtual malls.

Antique dealers can join the service through a choice of Silver, Gold or Platinum packages. The costs include a US\$199 enrolment fee, and US\$49 - US\$95 monthly charge, dependent on whether items are listed on Antiqnet.com, BuyCollectibles.com or both, and also whether the website is custom designed. The basic price includes a one page sub-site, search engine submission, and unlimited online inventory with up to four photographs per item. For an additional US\$10 per month antique dealers get an eCommerce solution to allow online purchases, and usage statistics.

Antique centres can offer products from a number of dealers with prices starting from US \$79.95 to US\$139.95, depending on the package taken out and the number of dealers in the centre.

Pricing for other categories is generally on an ad hoc basis, although start at US\$49.95 enrolment fee and US\$20 monthly subscription thereafter.

For buyers, the collective inventory of dealers is available for searching either by category or keyword. Through an advanced search, users can also search for items added within a specified time frame (ie two weeks, or two months). Items are listed with photographs, description, and links to the dealer's home page. The majority of items are available for online purchase through the 'add to basket' button, which adds desired items to a virtual shopping trolley. When a user has completed their shop, they 'proceed to checkout' to submit credit card details. Items listed without eCommerce capabilities include contact details for the buyer to purchase directly from the dealer.

Antiqnet.com also provides listings of online antique resources, including reference booksellers, video retailers, education, catalogues and display specialists.

Fulfilment

Antiqnet are affiliated with A & A Haulage and Craters & Freighters to fulfil their users' shipping requirements. The first handles UK and European couriers and worldwide haulage; the second deals with US haulage only. Either company will collect, pack, insure and ship the buyer's item and

Both companies have over 10 years of shipping experience. However, fulfilment is usually arranged between buyer and dealer who may use a different shipping company than those affiliated with Antiqnet.

Guarantee

Guarantees are dependent on individual dealers' sales policies

Terms and conditions

At time of review, no terms and conditions were given relating to either the website or the company. Buyers should refer to the sales policy of the dealer selling the item.

Review of antiqnet.com

Antiqnet is a smart, cleanly designed site with a logical user interface and an excellent directory of members.

The site loads quickly, and benefits from a simple navigation bar with few bulky graphics. Search response time is also good.

Structurally the site is well laid out, although a first time user may be a little confused by the quantity of hyperlinks on the front page and the lack of indication as to their function without clicking them through. Besides this, the database elements integrate seamlessly with static content, while the photo galleries of items on offer display each image at comfortable size for browsing.

The site design is clean, smart and consistent, with plenty of white space and sans serif fonts to aid onscreen reading. While the front page is a little cluttered with banners and links, most sections of the site are not. The tabular layout keeps all content neatly aligned, while the navigation bar is sensibly divided into sections and sub-sections.

In terms of features, while the directory of dealers, centres, antiques-related companies and resources is better than most found on the web, there is no-value added content. In this respect, Antiqnet is a well sized antiques directory and mall, but not a vertical antiques market portal.

The range of products is very good, and the search features strong also. Because dealers must pay to be listed, the site is largely free of inappropriate or miss-catalogued items.

Customer service and support is reasonable. No guarantee, insurance or shipping is provided, although online payment is offered from those dealers paying the extra \$10 per month. The help section is a little lacklustre, covering only one page, although company information is more in-depth. Particularly welcome is an animated Flash 'virtual tour' of the site, which introduces first time users to features such as the search engine. Company contact details with telephone number is given, although it is quite hard to find.

As one of the largest antique gateways on the Internet, Antiqnet is a well designed and functional site, with just a few shortcomings in customer support and feature set that prevent an otherwise excellent site from being the best.

Outlook

While Antiqnet.com has given few indications to its future plans, the merger with Sloan's Auctions shows that the company is looking to move into online and real auctions. With overseas expansion underway and a very solid revenue model, Antiqnet.com looks set to continue growth for some time yet. Furthermore, a database dependent site such Antiqnet, which is a useful resource by virtue of the number of companies listed, should successfully translate to upcoming web technologies such as WAP and XML.

With the combination of mall, directory, online auctions and overseas partnerships, Antiqnet could also become a vertical portal through extend content partnerships, or a further take-over/merger.

antiqueresources.com

antiqueresources.com

http://www.antiqueresources.com launched in 1998
Antique Resources Corporation was founded in 1998

Antique Resources Corporation,
7399 North
Shadeland Avenue,
Suite 314,
Indianapolis,
IN,
USA,
46250

Telephone:
Not given

Fax:
Not given

Email:
info@antiqueresources.com

CEO
Not given

Target market: Online antique enthusiasts at the middle and lower end of the market.

antiqueresources.com ratings				
Speed - 8.25/10	Design (functionality) - 2.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 1.25/5	Ease of use - 7/10	54.6%
Customer support - 2/10	Feature Set- 6.75/10	Range of products - 5/10	Total - 32.75/60	

Antique Resources Corporation

Antique Resources is a content driven site filled with information about the antique trade, collecting, restoration and care. Launched in 1998, the site boasts 2.5 million unique users each month, although this figure appears a little unrealistic. No corporate, management or press information is provided.

antiqueresources.com

Product range:

At time of review, antiqueresources only advertised upcoming auctions on a monthly basis. Examples of those listed include: Ceramics, Antique Shoes and a Zippo case auction.

Payment:

The site does not conduct its own online auction but acts as a resource for the online antiques market.

Insurance

None given

Key features

The site provides information in a wide range of categories. These include:

- Restoration - a collection of articles from the Vice President of The Antique Restorers Association.
- Upcoming auctions and events - a small event listings service.
- Book reviews
- Online Mall - providing links to antiques sites (that have paid a fee) on the Internet.
- Classifieds - lists one free-ad
- Subscriptions - allows the user to subscribe to email newsletters from a variety of sites.
- Featured Museums - an excellent database of US-based museums with information about each one.
- Antiques Resources Awards - related sites can apply for an antiques resources award.
- The Antiques Doctor - an 'agony aunt' answering antique-related questions submitted by the site's users.
- Discussion Forum - a well used discussion forum opening debate on a range of topics related to valuation, collecting and restoration.
- Weekly columns - a database of a large number of articles relating to the topic. None have been added since December 1999.

Fulfilment

None given

Guarantee

None given

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply for a site that acts purely as a resource for the online antiques market. It takes particular pains to protect the trademarks of the corporation and to limit liability to claims made against it concerning the information it provides. In these cases it states that the information has been provided by a third party. The State of Indiana will govern any legal action brought by or against the corporation.

Review of antiqueresources.com

Antique Resources is quick to load. The site is jammed with advertising banners, which, coupled with a careless layout, creates a haphazard and disorganised user experience. The standard and range of the articles is decent, and has clearly been adequate in attracting the (claimed) high number of unique visitors. Overall a badly designed yet informative website.

Outlook

If the usage statistics provided by Antiques Collector are to be believed, then its near-term future should be assured. In order to remain competitive in the face of a high-profile, big budget sites offering similar and better services, Antiques Resources will need to both redesign the site and increase the range of products offered.

antiques-world.com

antiques-world.com

http://www.antiques-world.com launched in January-97
Antiques-World Belgium was founded in 1996

**Antiques-World
Belgium,**
 2 Rue Ernest Allard,
 1000 Brussels,
 Belgium,

Telephone:
 +32 (2) 511 31 61

Fax:
 +32 2 503 08 26

Email:
 world@pophost.eunet.be

CEO
 Patrick Van Der
 Stichelen Rogier

Partner
 Jimmy Muzira

Target market: At time of review, the European antiques market.

antiques-world.com ratings				
Speed - 6/10	Design (functionality) - 1/5	Design (aesthetic) - 0.5/5	Ease of use - 6/10	51.3%
Customer support - 4.5/10	Feature Set- 5.75/10	Range of products - 7/10	Total - 30.75/60	

Antiques-World Belgium

Antiques-world is a bi-lingual Belgium gateway site providing antique-related news, information and a directory of dealers, auctioneers and exhibitions. It was launched on January 1st 1997 by dealer Patrick Van Der Stichelen Rogier and IT specialist Jimmy Muzira. Though privately held, the company has declared that it is profitable.

Launched with 15 dealers and 3 auctioneers the company now lists 13 auctioneers and over 350 dealers (each with personalised sub-sites). The company claimed to receive over 400,000 'hits' in October 1999, the last date site usage statistics were available. More than half of these viewers were from the US. The company is run by Van Der Stichelen, Muziro and their two wives from an office above one of Van Der Stichlen's shops. Dealers are charged 40,000BF (US\$1,100) to get a listing and personal web-page, while auctioneers negotiate monthly fees on an individual basis. A three-month classified advertisement costs 4,000BF (US\$110) for each picture.

antiques-world.com

Product range:

Antiques-world does not list specific antique genre sectors but act as a gateway to current auctions and dealers in various countries.

Payment:

Does not auction online

Insurance

Does not auction online

Key features

The site is viewable in French and English, with some areas also in Flemish. The main menu provides links to auctioneers and antique dealers listed on the site. In addition, partnerships with Antwerp Antiques Dealers Association and Antiques Dealers of Gent provides further listings of dealers who are members of these organisations.

The site also provides a database of stolen works of art, a links pages, classified advertisements, information about transport and business travel to the region, and listings of fairs, markets and exhibitions in the region.

The sub-hosted pages for dealers are typically one page, and include a number of photographs. The auctioneers' pages are five pages or more.

Fulfilment

Antiques-World is not involved with any fulfilment of items bought through the dealers it promotes but the site devotes two pages to a recommended shipping company called G Farin.

Guarantee

None given.

Terms and conditions

Although the company does not lay out terms and conditions for the website, each page is copyrighted.

Review of antiques-world.com

Antiques-world.com is a very badly designed site that has nevertheless capitalised upon its speed to market to currently boast a wide range of companies listed.

Site speed is reasonable, though the navigational structure requires that users return to the home page to move from one section to another, thus slowing browsing.

Structurally the site is very confused, listing hundreds of companies in some sections, and only one in others. The site links to pages that aren't yet completed, and the English version occasionally links to French-language only sections.

Aesthetically the site represents the worst in web design. A disarray of colours, three-dimensional text, advertising banners, fonts, background images, animations, bulky tables and poorly arranged images greets the user. Navigation is awkward and confusing, while viewing requires forced concentration on the part of the user.

The range of features is adequate, while the database of stolen artefacts is of particular worth. Where the site excels is in the number of dealers that have agreed to sign up to the service. No dynamic or interactive content is provided.

Customer support is absent, beyond a contact email address.

Outlook

Antiques-world has served as a gateway for Belgium's antiques market for over three years, making it one of the longer running European gateways on the Internet. This is reflected by the company's strong portfolio of dealers and auctioneers, and by the company's claim that it makes a profit.

However in an increasingly competitive marketplace, it is questionable how much longer such dealers and auctioneers will pay to be listed on such an unprofessional looking website. With a stronger hold on the market than any other Belgian web company, Antiques-world could possibly become a take-over target from a gateway site looking to expand into the region.

antiques.co.uk

antiques.co.uk

*http://www.antiques.co.uk launched in May-00
Antiques On The Internet, Ltd. was founded in 2000*

Antiques On The Internet, Ltd.,
Third Floor,
180-182 Tottenham
Court Road,
London,
England,
W1P 9LE

Telephone:
+44 (0) 207 323 5797

Fax:
+44 (0) 207 323 1021

Email:
Info@antiques.co.uk

CEO
Simon Holmes

Target market: Professional dealers and personal collectors
Price range: £100 - £50,000

Antiques.co.uk ratings				
Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4.75/5	Ease of use - 8/10	77.5%
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 7.25/10	Range of products - 7/10	Total - 46.5/60	

Antiques On The Internet, Ltd.

Antiques.co.uk was launched by a group led by Simon Holmes looking to move into the online antiques sector. After failing to purchase the domain name antiques.co.uk from a Kings Road dealer who had registered it years before, the group and dealer decided to pool resources, knowledge and capital to launch the site in Spring 2000. This strategy has enabled the privately held company to proceed without external investment, and thus keep complete control.

The site lists over a thousand items, with the majority priced above £1,000. The company offers insurance from Lloyd's of London, and allows full eCommerce purchases through the site.

antiques.co.uk

Product range:

Antiquities, Arms & Armour, Art Nouveau, Bronzes, Clocks & Watches, Fireplaces, Furniture, Glass, Lighting, Miscellaneous, Oriental, Paintings, Pottery & Porcelain, Prints, Rugs & Carpets, Scientific, Sculpture, Silver, Sporting Memorabilia, Tapestries & Textiles, Toys.

Payment:

Antiques.com accept credit card payments over a secure server. They also accept cheques in Sterling, US dollars and Euros and wire transfers.

Insurance

Antiques.com provides full insurance through association with certain underwriters at Lloyds of London. Items must be returned up to 7 working days after receipt in order to receive a circumstance dependant refund. The return shipping insurance is also covered under the companies policy but Antiques.com reserve the right ask the buyer to pay the return shipment costs.

Key features

The central feature of the site is the Showroom where users can browse by category, or select any of the 'featured' items on display. Each category lists items as a gallery of thumbnails, many of which have been 'cut out' to blend seamlessly into the background. Each item listings offer registered users the choice of arranging a private viewing, purchasing directly online, or adding to a 'portfolio'. The Portfolio features works in the same way as an eCommerce shopping basket, allowing users to purchase a number of items without entering payment details each time.

Other features include:

News and Reviews. Offers a decently sized archive of articles and features about different periods, styles and events. No information is given as to the source of the features or the regularity of updates, though they are of high standard and from a range of authors.

Events. Lists forthcoming and current exhibitions and antique fairs in eleven countries.

Advanced Search. Users can search by period, price range, keyword, category, origin, date of inclusion or any combination of these parameters.

The site also provides contact information, and details of the company and guarantee.

Fulfilment

Buyers have the option to arrange for a purchased item to be shipped by themselves or by Antiques.co.uk. If Antiques.co.uk are selected, the item will be delivered within 14 days if within mainland Britain and longer (no time specified) if elsewhere. Also, bank or credit card paid items will be delivered to the bank's address and not the cardholder's. As with the insurance, buyers who ship the items themselves will not get the free cover that the company provides in its association with Lloyds of London underwriters, whether the item is being received or being returned to the company.

Guarantee

Apart from outlining their insurance and shipping services and their returns and private policies, the guarantee section also outlines a viewing service whereby a prospective buyer puts down a deposit on a piece in order to make the decision to buy or not (at the mutual convenience of both parties). If not, the deposit is returned in full.

Terms and conditions

The company's terms and conditions state in straight forward and explicit detail what is outlined in the guarantee section, as well as minimum age for site use and its non liable status concerning contractual disputes between buyer and seller.

Review of antiques.co.uk

Antiques.co.uk is a very smartly designed site with excellent functionality and a modestly sized, yet high-standard, range of products.

Site speed is generally very good, although the scrolling news headline Applet slows down the loading of the News and Reviews section. Search response time is good.

Structurally the site is very intuitive, with consistent interface and self-explanatory category headings. The database integration is seamless, with the only unnecessary quirk being that news articles open in a new window in the browser.

The design is similarly professional, managing to offer a unique look and feel without overwhelming the user with clutter or excessive images. Attention to detail is excellent, while the colour scheme and consistent minimalist layout and design succeeds in giving the impression of sophistication. Font usage and pagination are likewise consistent, giving plenty of clear space between information, and clear, easy-to-read text. These combine to make a site that is largely very easy to use. The only fault with the design is that some of the buttons are a little small and can be missed by the mouse.

The feature set is decent, with full guarantees and insurance on items, and complete eCommerce capabilities. The ability to arrange a viewing of an item through the site is very useful. The feature articles are well written, detailed in content and broad in range of areas covered. The event calendar is useful as guide to exhibitions worldwide.

The product range, while not huge, at least has items in each category, while items are generally of a very good standard. A search of items added in the week prior to revue showed the number listed doubling, suggesting that the relatively young site is rapidly expanding its product range.

Customer support is a little lacklustre, with no help guides to online purchases. However, full contact details are given, and the inclusion of insurance and a guarantee shows good attention to customer service. The company is registered with ePublicEye as a 'safer shopping site'.

Outlook

Antiques.co.uk has the immediate benefit of an instantly memorable name, which will also secure better search engine positioning and a good proportion of speculative visits. This is boosted by near faultless design and a management team with a good eye for strong products. While the number of items on offer (over 1,000) shows much room for growth, given the youth of the site it is not necessarily a problem at this stage. The main area for attention is customer information. At the least, a basic FAQ would probably increase the number of purchases and onsite registrations.

Although antiques.co.uk is coming late into an already crowded market, the combination of a highly memorable name with a design well suited to the target market, could allow it to swiftly grow in position and recognition.

antiquesweb.co.uk

antiquesweb.co.uk

*http://www.antiquesweb.co.uk launched in June-99
Antiquesweb Ltd. was founded in February-99*

Antiquesweb Ltd.,
Northampton House,
Poplar Road,
Solihull,
England,
B91 3AP

Telephone:
+44 (0) 121 685 7775

Fax:
(0) 208 546 0432

Email:
info@antiquesweb.co.uk

CEO
Ian Harvey

Sales
Lee Robinson

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.
Price range: £50 - £20,000

antiquesweb.co.uk ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 3/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3.5/5	Ease of use - 7/10
Customer support - 5.5/10	Feature Set- 6/10	Range of products - 7.25/10	Total - 39.75/60

66.3%

Antiquesweb Ltd.

Antiquesweb Ltd was founded in February 1999, launching its website in June. The site is a gateway for UK antiques dealers who both advertise their products and - through uniquely designed subsites - themselves.

The corporate strategy is to allow users to browse products in a range of categories online, before contacting the relevant dealer to view the item in person. Antiquesweb offers no online sales, and has no current plans to do so. According to company sources, Antiquesweb has over 300 dealers subscribing to the network at a cost of between £35 and £100 per month, with each dealer displaying an average of 20 items for sale. Based on these figures the site lists over 6,000 items with full colour images.

In addition, the site provides antiques news, exhaustive events, auctions and fairs listings, and links to restorers, appraisers and shipping companies.

antiquesweb.co.uk

Product range:

C20th Design, antiquities, architectural, arms&armour, art, art deco, art nouveau, arts & crafts, barometers, bears & dolls, books, boxes, carpets, ceramics, clocks, clothing, coins, collectibles, ephemera, furniture, glass, ivory, jewellery, lighting, linen, memorabilia, metalwork, militaria, mirrors, objets d'art, oriental, ormolu, maps, prints, sculpture, silver, toys, treen, watches, wine.

Payment:

Although Antiquesweb lists items for sale, buyers access the web site of the dealer to make a purchase. In this way, Antiquesweb do not handle transactions and act as a gateway to dealers.

Insurance

Buyers must contact the dealer selling the item for insurance information. The website has an 'Insurers' section but which, at time of review, contained no details.

Key features

For potential buyers, the site lists items for sale in a wide range of categories, the majority of which include a range of items. Items are displayed four-to-a-page with large colour photographs, a brief description, and contact details for the dealer.

All subscribing dealers are listed, although it is not possible to search for these by name. Instead, users click on the desired county from a map of the UK. With over 300 dealers listed, most counties contain some listing.

The auction guide and antique fairs categories have substantial listings of UK events and auction, with many dates (selected by clicking on a small map) detailing over 30 events.

Items Wanted allows users to post a small advertisement (for free) describing a desired object or artefact. Antiquesweb reportedly makes some attempt to link up such requests with dealers subscribing to the service.

The news section lists recent antiques news taken both from site subscribers and standard news releases. The stolen and recovered, services and search features had still not launched at time of review.

Fulfilment

Buyers must negotiate shipping requirements with the dealer that advertised the item. The site contained a 'Shipping & Packing' section but which, at time of review, contained no information.

Guarantee

The site offers no guarantees, buyers should contact the dealer involved.

Terms and conditions

The only terms and conditions available concern dealer subscriptions and are in plain English. They lay out the rules for minimum contract length, payment details, that all prices exclude VAT and describing the required format for item photographs. There was no terms and conditions concerning site use, and neither copyright nor disclaimer.

Review of antiquesweb.co.uk

A smart and professional website with an impressive range of dealers and items on display, let down by an absence of customer support, unique features and a sensible usability.

The website is fronted with a splash page displaying a logo that appears to serve no purpose beyond logging site visits. This page eventually redirects the user to the main site, which is adequately fast. The use of a three-page frame set should speed things up further, yet often makes things more complicated as frames become nested within frames, sending scrollbars across the screen. A link on the front page ends up dividing the screen into five mini-windows with the result that very little is legible without further scrolling.

This aside, the site is structurally sound, with most information viewable within three clicks. However, the inclusion of items on the navigation bar that are not yet ready or included is frustrating and quite unnecessary. Perhaps the biggest problem is with the listings of items for sale. While each item is displayed very well, user browsing is not aided by the fact that no suggestions are given as to the number of items available in each category. Furthermore, given that the majority of items listed are offered by companies whose web pages are designed, hosted and listed by Antiquesweb, it is illogical that the item description does not provide a link to these pages. This means that a user interested in an item from a particular dealer must go to a different part of the site and browse through every county listing before said user can find out more about them.

Graphically the site is very basic, while the navigation bar is a little outdate. However, item listings and the dealers' personal pages are generally very neatly designed and laid out.

Beyond the news, which is a little unstructured, and the 'items wanted' section, the site offers no added functionality or features. Customer service is rather lacking, giving no basic information about the site, what it offers, how to make a sale, who the company is, and who the relevant management team are. A contact telephone number is provided, but a company that is trying to persuade antique dealers to use the web to promote themselves, should really lead by example by offering more detailed help and information.

Outlook

By offering dealers a venue to promote their 'real world' show-rooms, rather than persuade an often reticent industry to sell items online, Antiquesweb has succeeded in attracting a good range of dealers to the service. However, by focusing on getting subscribers - for this is where Antiquesweb makes its money - the company has arguably ignored the central function of the service; attracting potential buyers to browse the listings. With an often clumsy navigational structure (see above) and the absence of a help or support section to the site, it is unlikely that the site in its current form would sufficiently lure such buyers.

Gospark.com

Gospark.com / collectorspark.com / pegasos-antiques.com

*http://gospark.com launched in October-98
SparkFrance was founded in 1997*

Spark France
48-58 rue Alfred
Dequeant,
92000 Nanterre,
France,

Telephone:
+33 (1) 56 05 83 06

Fax:
+33 (1) 56 05 83 87

Email:
info@gospark.com

CEO
Pietro Srepos

Co-Founder
Carlo Valerio

Target market:
Price range: US\$100 - US\$10,000

gospark.com ratings

Speed - 6.5/10	Design (functionality) - 3/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 6/10
Customer support - 3.75/10	Feature Set- 7/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 38.25/60

63.8%

SparkFrance

In 1997, SparkFrance founder and CEO Pietro Sterpos began work on a website for the international art, antiques and collectibles market. In October 1998 pegasos-antiques.com, the result of his efforts, was launched. The privately held company is based in Luxembourg, with offices in France, Italy and Switzerland.

In mid-1999, the company announced a collaboration with Antique Networking Inc, the company behind antiqnet.com. Under the deal, SparkFrance paid an undisclosed license fee to Antiqnet for their proprietary eCommerce technology, coupled with access to their network of some 2,000 dealers and over 38,000 items for sale. Also through the deal, both companies display small banner advertisements to each other, and share all new customers gained.

The first site released through the partnership was collectorspark.com, which, while it continues to be updated, offers an almost direct translation of antiqnet.com's design and interface. A few months after the launch of collectorspark in mid-1999, SparkFrance launched Gospark.com, offering the same technology, but with a unique interface and design.

All three sites are kept up-to-date, though it is Gospark.com that receives the bulk of SparkFrance's advertising budget.

gospark.com

Product range:

Antiquities, Archeology, Architectural, Arms & Armour, Art, Automobiles, Bakelite, Books, Bronzes, Canes/Walking Sticks, Carpets & Rugs, Clocks, Coats of Arms, Decorative Arts, Dolls, Drawings, Ephemera, Ethnography, Figurines, Frames, Furniture, Games, Glass, Hunting/Fishing, Icons, Ivories, Jewellery, Smoking Items, Maps, Medals, Militaria, Miniatures, Musical Instruments, Objets de Vertu, Orientalia, Paintings, Writing Instruments, Photography, Political Memorabilia, Porcelain/Pottery/Ceramics, Postcards, Prints, Quilts, Reference Books, Religious Items, Scientific/Medical Instruments, Scripophily, Sculpture, Sculpture, Silverware, Sports, Stamps, tapestries, Textiles, Tools, Toys, Watches, Wine.

Payment:

The payment methods are the same as those of their affiliate, Antiqnet because all sales go through that website.

Insurance

See insurance section of Antiqnet profile.

Key features

GoSpark is available in English, Italian and French. Besides company and contact information, the site has four main functions: Search, Buy - access to the catalogue of items for sale; Visit Our Members - details of 2,000 dealers; Events - information about fairs and auctions; and Read, Learn - features and auction results. Each section breaks down as follows:

Search, Buy - allows users to search some 38,000 items on offer. Each item can be purchased through an eCommerce 'shopping basket', which is described in greater detail in the Antiqnet review. Slightly confusingly, GoSpark offers two types of searches: a search of Antiqnet's products and dealers, and a search of Pegasos' dealer networks. Masterpieces details the work of dealers offering items of 'museum quality' while Show Window features a number high-value items each day. Through the Antiqnet partnership, GoSpark offers a selection of classified advertisements, and an email alert find service to notify the user of items of interest (though only available in Italian).

Visit Our Members - again through Antiqnet, GoSpark allows the user to search for dealers, auctioneers, and antique centres. GoSpark also offers links and listings of show promoters and industry organisations and directories.

Events - provides listings of mainly European auctions, shows and exhibitions.

Read, Learn - this includes Feature Articles, which are added to the site approximately once a fortnight; Auction Results, describing recent auctions with pictures and commentary; and press review, which appears to publish press releases from the art and antique world.

Fulfilment

See fulfilment section of Antiqnet profile.

Guarantee

As with Antiqnet, guarantees are dependent on individual dealers' sales policies.

Terms and conditions

See Antiqnet

Review of gospark.com

GoSpark.com is a smart yet somewhat unintuitive site dependent on its association with Antiquenet.com to offer anything of real value to the end user.

The site is surprisingly slow, given the simplicity of the graphics and page layouts. These fact becomes particularly frustrating given a navigation structure that depends on the user clicking their browser back to move from a subcategory to the parent category. Navigation is unnecessarily awkward on the site, and though a completely logical and ordered structure is used, the absence of any consistent navigation elements slows browsing.

Aesthetically the site's designers have aimed for a minimalist and subtle sophistication, which largely works; although is possibly wasted somewhat given the number of banners and loose layout of the front page.

The range of features is the bare minimum for a gateway site of this site, though the ability to purchase items directly (through Antiquenet) is a very useful function. Searching items on offer is more complex than needed with the provision of two different search engines, and no clear description as to the difference between them.

The range of products is excellent, again as a result of the involvement of Antiquenet. Items are well displayed and detailed, while the items on offer through Gospark's own network of dealers includes higher value European items.

Customer service is let down by poorly translated English, and the absence of any well-labelled help functions or a site map. Although guides to buying and selling are available, they can only be found by attempting to purchase an item.

Outlook

Judging by the presence of large advertisements in the trade press, this privately held company has presumably secured a significant amount of capital to fund its expansion. It should be noted, however, that without the Antiquenet partnership, the site's value would be greatly depreciated, as the large majority of dealers, products and features offered are a result of it.

Provided the association between the two companies is maintained, GoSpark should enjoy success in Europe given the site's more 'high-brow' look and feel than Antiquenet's. However, while the long term advantage of the two companies' association is presumably to offer Antiquenet services in a variety of languages; the standard of translation on the site, and the inconsistency in languages used may well deter regular users, particular once the English-language users fathom that exactly the same range of products is available directly from Antiquenet.com.

premierfind.com

Premierfind.com

*http://www.premierfind.com launched in Sept-99
Premierfind.com, Ltd. was founded in Sept-99*

**Premierfind.com,
Ltd.,**
9 Cork Street,
Mayfair,
London,
England,
W1X 1PD

Telephone:
None given

Fax:
None given

Email:
info@premierfind.com

CEO
Not given

Public Relations
Caroline Neville

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

Price range: £250 - £20,000

premierfind.com ratings

Speed - 8.75/10	Design (functionality) - 3.75/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 7.5/10	71.3%
Customer support - 4/10	Feature Set- 7.25/10	Range of products - 7.5/10	Total - 42.75/60	

Premierfind.com, Ltd.

Premierfind.com Ltd is a privately held company registered in London in September 1999 with the backing of a number of undisclosed private investors. The website at time of review was a beta test version, and as such did not include eCommerce facilities. Despite this all other areas of the site were functional, and customers wishing to purchase could do so by posting a cheque or through wire transfer. No indication was provided on the site as to when it plans to hard launch.

The gateway site does not appear to directly represent dealers, but rather offers a selection of items from a variety of dealers for online browsing. Despite being in a test stage, Premierfind.com has already secured an impressive range of items for sale, with the majority of categories listing antiques and art.

The company provides no corporate or press information, and little in the way of customer help. It is likely that the Beta test site is largely being used to encourage the sign up of further dealers to the service, and possibly to secure the next round of investment.

premierfind.com

Product range:

Fine Art, Contemporary Art, Furniture, Rugs and Carpets, Clocks, Ceramics & Glass, Silver & Metalwork, Lighting & Mirrors, Textiles & Tapestries, Antiquities and Tribal Art.

Payment:

At time of review, Premierfind were still developing their credit card payment systems and only accepted wire transfers and cheques.

Insurance

The only information relates to shipping insurance but Premierfind will receive claims based on condition and material difference. In these cases they must be notified within three working days of receipt of the item if the buyer wishes to return the item.

Key features

The site has four main sections:

- Collections: A frequently-changing showcase of 'outstanding' objects for sale, each personally selected by Premierfind staff. These are often aligned with exhibitions occurring concurrently offline.
- Gallery: The gallery presents the full range of objects currently available online through Premierfind dealer and designer partners.
- PremierSource: A free sourcing service which allows the customer to request a particular object of their choice if it is not currently shown in our online gallery. Premierfind promises to personally try and find an item matching the user's request.
- Metropolitan: an online magazine, which will eventually cover an 'array of topical and useful information—whether it be articles about the artists and objects on our site, or the surrounding art and design community at large'. At time of review there was one article about forthcoming auctions in London.

Fulfilment

All shipments are handled through FedEx within the UK and Interlink for international deliveries. Items that require specialist packing are handled by separate arts shipping companies. The company also arranges the shipping insurance of all items, the total of which must be agreed upon by the buyer.

Guarantee

Premierfind provides a guarantee based on the reputation and industry accreditation of its dealers. For example, their British dealer partners must all be members of BADA (the British Antique Dealers association).

Terms and conditions

None given.

Review of premierfind.com

Although claiming to still be in a beta-test stage, Premierfind is an impressive, well-designed and functional site offering a large array of products for purchase.

The site succeeds in giving an impression of design sophistication, while keeping graphics and file sizes to a minimum. This makes the site quick to load and navigate, while also being one of the rare examples of frameset usage both speeding navigation and giving a cleaner page layout.

Structurally the site is completely intuitive, although the difference between Collections and GallerySearch may confuse the first time user. Particularly welcome is that categories where no lots are available are listed amongst the other categories headings, but in a different

colour and not as links. The only problem with the structure would be that because of the number of subcategories for each category, it takes four or five clicks to actually view an item from first entering the site.

Aesthetically, PremierFind's designers have done a very good job to create a subtle and sophisticated interface that is neither confusing or slow to download. Colour and font usage are consistently used throughout the site, and display a good understanding of the fundamental rules governing both print and interactive design.

At time of review, the feature set displayed by Premierfind is smaller than the company intends. The Metropolitan magazine lists only one article, and there are no facilities to purchase online. However, given the number of gateway sites that provide neither additional content or eCommerce facilities, the absence is not glaring. The PremierSearch feature is useful, and better than competing sites' wanted adds, which guarantee no attempt on the part of the site to match buyer to seller.

For a company that is still wooing dealers, the range of items on offer is very impressive, with at least 80% of the plethora of categories listing lots. At time of review these included pencil signed Picasso prints from £5,000.

The company lets itself down on customer service, providing no contact telephone number, or exhaustive help functions. Even a feedback form, allowing users to contact the management through the site would be welcome.

Outlook

PremierFind.com promises much when it finally completes its beta testing and allows users to purchase through the site. While the absence of corporate or financial information prevents an adequate forecast for the company, given the range and standard of products already on offer, coupled with an appropriate and well designed interface, Premierfind - if supported by a good marketing budget - could well succeed.

tias.com

tias.com

http://www.tias.com launched in April-95
Tias.com, Inc. was founded in April-95

Tias.com, Inc.,
 PO BOX 837,
 Palm Harbour,
 FL,
 34682-0837,
 USA,

Telephone:
 +1 888 653 78833

Fax:
 Not given

Email:
 info@tias.com

CEO
 Not given

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

Price range: US\$1 - US\$25,000

tias.com ratings				
Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 3.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3/5	Ease of use - 7.25/10	75.0%
Customer support - 6.75/10	Feature Set- 7.25/10	Range of products - 9.25/10	Total - 45/60	

Tias.com, Inc.

Tias (The Internet Antique Service) claims to be the Internet's largest antique and collectibles catalogue. The site provides online malls for thousands of antique dealers, and offers some 230,000 items in 1,300 categories from their collected inventory. Antique and collectibles dealers can establish a shopping mall with eCommerce capabilities on a fee-free commission-only basis. For greater personalisation and customer support, Tias will also custom-design a site for a set-fee and offers a range of pricing options for companies wishing to sell with lower commission than the 10% Tias standard charge.

A particular unique feature is that products listed on Tias are submitted to over 2,000 websites offering classified advertisements. These include Yahoo! Classifieds, Excite Classifieds2000, WebCrawler, InfoSpace.com, BuySellBid.com. In addition, items already catalogued can be submitted to Amazon or eBay auctions for an additional 1% commission fee.

The website was launched early in the Web's lifecycle in April 1995, and currently boasts over one million visitors per month.

tias.com

Product range:

Advertising, American Indian, Antiquities, Architectural Antiques, Art, Art Deco, Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts Era, Books, Breweriana, China and Dinnerware, Clocks and Watches, Coin Operated Machines

Coins and Currency, Comics, Cottages and Buildings mini, Disneyana, Dolls, Figurines, Furniture and Accessories, Glass, Holiday and Seasonal, Jewellery, Kitchen Collectibles, Knives, Lamps and Lighting,

Limited Edition Plates, Lunchboxes, Memorabilia, Metalware, Militaria, Miscellaneous, Music Related,

Orientalia and Asian, Paper and Ephemera, Pens and Pencils, Photo and Electronics, Photographica,

Porcelain and Pottery, Primitives, Religious, Resources and Supplies, Scientific Instruments, Silver,

Sports, Stamps, Steins Jugs Mugs, Textiles, Tobacciana, Tools, Toys, Transportation, Vintage Clothing,

Vintage Electronics, Vintage Sewing, Worlds Fairs and Expos.

Payment:

Although items can be bought through the site or direct from the dealer, payment options vary with each dealer but most accept the major credit cards.

Insurance

Insurance is dealt with on a buyer - dealer basis.

Key features

The website is divided as follows:

- **SHOP.** A large group of antique and collectible cybershops unique to Tias, from the United States, Europe, Canada and South America. The listings include pictures, text and complete on-line catalogues. Users can browse both by category and alphabetically, or perform a site wide search.
- **SHOWCASE** is a pictorial gallery of all items from the network of dealers onsite. The Showcase feature only includes items that have photographs, so to access the full directory, users must perform a site search. Showcase also lists several hundred 'featured' auctions.
- **SELL** provides information about opening an 'online mall'. There are a number of methods provided:

Make a Shop is a proprietary auto-site creation system. There are no set-up costs or monthly fees, but Tias charge 10% on all completed sales - either online, by email, or even by telephone if the customer received the contact details through the Tias site.

Custom site. For a US\$700 set-up fee, users get a site designed with 10 hours of telephone support and training. With this method, users are still charged 10%. Alternatively, users can opt not to pay commission by paying \$50 per month for each megabyte of website stored on Tias's servers.

In addition Tias offers ad-hoc hosting, design, domain name registration, and an option for magazine sites of US\$300 set-up and \$3 for each paid subscription sourced from the site.

- **TALK** is a bulletin board.
- **DISCOVER** lists links, mailing lists of interest, an events calendar and links to further resources on the Tias site.
- **NEWS** details items recently added to the Tias database. It also lists all dealers opening malls over the previous week.

- FEEDBACK is a form where users can propose a question to either Tias staff or a dealer.
- The site also provides help information, a bookshop of almost 1,000 related titles, and a 'Magazine Rack' giving information about a number of online and print antiques and collectibles publications.

Fulfilment

Shipping and shipping insurance instructions are given with each item displayed.

Guarantee

None given

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply and, as with many US sites, much energy is spent on ensuring that the item descriptions contain nothing of an offensive nature. Interestingly, Tias state that they are not liable for any damages exceeding US\$1, there being no possible occasion for that to occur.

Review of tias.com

Tias offers access to a fantastic range and quantity of dealers, with one of the largest inventories on the Internet. Feature-set is reasonable, and design a little outdated, but with new dealers joining almost daily Tias is a very useful gateway.

With very few graphics and a basic layout, site speed is good, and the site search responds swiftly. Structurally the site is consistent and reasonably intuitive, although some areas, such as the book shop and magazine section, are a little hard to locate. However, given the size of Tias' database, the majority of desired information can be found in three clicks or less.

Aesthetically the site uses a two-tone design theme that while lacking variety creates a sense of continuity. The personal pages of the dealers, built with the Make A Site function, are generally both basic and unappealing. A clean sans-serif font is used consistently throughout the site, though often at such a size to confuse and disrupt layout. Layout in general is a little messy, with much of it automated from a database. The front page, however, is well structured and designed, providing numerous starting points for browsing.

There is a decent set of features, although the interest-specific categories in the Discover section are actually just a promotional email list. The bulletin board has a large number of categories though, and appears well used. As mentioned, the quantity of products on offer is amongst the biggest on the Web. Items are of low-to-medium value, with few prestige sales, but plenty in each category of interest. The majority of items are listed with photographs, and item description layout is fair.

Customer service is reasonable, although the bulk of help information is for dealers looking to open 'malls'. A toll-free phone number is provided, as well as feedback forms which can be directed to either Tias staff or a specific dealer.

Outlook

With five years of online trading, Tias has long-term Internet trading experience, and has clearly used its time to build up a huge network of dealers and products. As a privately held company, Tias do not publish financial results or corporate information. However, the company did not complete its first round of funding until August 1999 (an undisclosed investment from DTR Ventures II), suggesting that it had earned sufficient revenues during the previous four years to be self-supporting. Certainly the Tias business model has numerous revenue sources, while traffic of over three million pages views each month should see considerable income from advertising space.

Though the site would benefit from a redesign and further functionality, Tias.com is in a very strong position given the vast number of dealer 'malls' it hosts. New dealer malls appear at rate of five to ten each week, a rate of growth that could assure market leadership. To stay competitive, Tias management will need to focus on attracting potential buyers to the site and turning eyeballs to purchases.

worldbookdelaers.com

worldbookdelaers.com

http://www.worldbookdealers.com launched in July-99
WorldBookDealers.com Ltd. was founded in Sept-99

WorldBookDealers.com Ltd.,
 York House,
 Seagrove Road,
 London,
 England,
 SW6 1RP

Telephone:
 Not given

Fax:
 Not given

Email:
 jill@worldbookdealers.com

CEO
 Not given

Target market:
Price range: US\$250 - \$20,000

worldbookdelaers.com ratings

Speed - 8.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4.5/5	Ease of use - 8.25/10	77.9%
Customer support - 5/10	Feature Set- 7.25/10	Range of products - 8.75/10	Total - 46.75/60	

WorldBookDealers.com Ltd.

Antiquebookdealers.com launched in autumn 1999 as an Anglo-American venture to provide a dealer-led and dealer-owned portal for the purchase of antiquarian books. The brainchild of dealers Hugh Pagan in London and The BookPress in Pennsylvania, the site initially launched with 23 founder dealers, all of whom are members of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers. The site is operated by Worldbookdealers.com Ltd, a UK registered company, jointly owned by the founding UK and US dealers, and The Other Media - the web design and consultancy company responsible for the site. Over 200,000 books are available through the site, in more than 40 different categories spanning five centuries.

The founding dealers were:

In the USA: The Book Block, The Bookpress Limited, Bromer Booksellers, Jonathan A Hill Bookseller Inc., H.P. Kraus Inc., George S. MacManus Company, Martayan Lan Inc., Bruce McKittrick Rare Books, William Reese Company, B & L Rootenberg, E K Schreiber, Peter L Stern & Co., Ursus Rare Books, John Windle, and Charles B Wood III.

In the UK: Maggs Bros Limited, Marlborough Rare Books Ltd., Hugh Pagan Limited, Bertram Rota Limited, Bernard J Shapero Rare Books, Sims Reed Ltd., William Patrick Watson Antiquarian Books and Ximenes Rare Books Inc.

Since initial launch, the company has added A Gerits & Son, of Amsterdam, Heritage Book Shop, Inc. of Los Angeles, USA, Simon Finch Rare Books Limited of London, UK, Hordern House from Potts Point, Australia, Helen R Kahn of Montreal, Canada, Aleph-bet Books, Black Sun Books, Brick Row Bookshop, Bromer Booksellers, Bennett Gilbert, Phillip J. Pirages, The Quill & Brush, Richard C. Ramer, Erasmushaus - Haus der Bucher of

Switzerland, Libreria Antiquaria Mediolanum of Italy, Dawsons Books, Golden Legend, Priscilla Juvelis, Edward J. Lefkowicz and Howard S. Mott.

The company is aiming to have approximately 100 dealers signed up to the service.

worldbookdealers.com

Product range:

Worldbookdealers.com specialise in rare editions of books in the following Specialist areas:

Agriculture, Americana, Architecture & Design, Art, Autographs & Manuscripts, Bibliography, British Topography, Children's Books, Classics, Early Books, Economics & Social History, Europe - Travel & Topography, Filmed Literature, First Editions, Gardening, Gastronomy, History, Humanities, Illustrated Books, Illuminated Manuscripts, Incunabula, Islamic World, law, Literature, Manuscripts, Maps & Atlases, Medicine, Military History, Miniature books, Natural History, Performing Arts, Politics, Philosophy, Photography, Prints, Private Press & Printing History, Science, Sporting, Technology & Engineering, Theology & Church History, Travel & Voyages, Wine.

Payment:

Payment varies with each dealer.

Insurance

None given, dealers may have different insurance policies.

Key features

Worldbookdealers.com follows the standard gateway formula of home page with links to help and company information, search facility for books on site, dealer information, event listings, and related features and articles.

The search engine offers searches by author, title, keyword, date or dealer. Results are displayed in full with description and pricing. Alternatively, users can utilise the book browse, and look through the catalogue alphabetically.

Likewise, dealers can be searched for alphabetically or by area of specialisation. The recent catalogues category displays the most recent book catalogues to be loaded up onto the server. New catalogues appear to be uploaded approximately on a weekly basis.

The events section lists upcoming book fairs, and the collecting category details recent news, features and book reviews.

To purchase a book, users must register with the site in order to submit a book request. No guides to selling or buying are provided on the site, but it is presumed that after a request is made, the relevant dealer will contact the interested party.

Fulfilment

None given, shipping should be taken up with the dealer.

Guarantee

None given.

Terms and conditions

This comes in the form of a disclaimer that limits liability, does not provide guarantees, make any warranties or take any responsibility for any dealers associated with the site.

Review of worldbookdealers.com

Worldbookdealers.com is a very well designed site with an excellent range of products, but let down by lacklustre customer support and information.

Design company The Other Media have done an exemplary job on worldbookdealers.com creating a site that is both graphically striking and quick to load. Most impressive is the HTML powering the page which dictates that the site fill the whole computer screen regardless of the size of the monitor used to view it.

Structurally, the site is very sensibly arranged, with subcategories and categories appearing closely enough together on the page to indicate a relationship. Graphical symbols represent common links such as help and account details. The consistency of the navigation bar across the entire site makes browsing intuitive, which coupled with the speed of the server, helps increase the stickiness of the user experience.

From a design perspective, font usage, layout, colours, spacing and text-weight are expertly used, combining the best of print and web based design technique. Attention to detail is also excellent.

This combination of server speed, sensible information architecture and fluid graphical design make the site very easy to use.

The range of books on offer - well in excess of 200,000 - contains plenty of antiquarian titles of interest. They are generally very well described and detailed, although some may benefit from a photograph as well, especially for titles where condition is of greater importance.

The feature-set is in keeping with other gateway sites. The listings of book fairs is rather lacklustre but the articles and book reviews are somewhat more informative.

Customer service is the site's largest weakness. Although help guides are available to aide searching, no information is provided regarding purchase and payment methods, insurance, fulfilment and guarantee. No contact telephone number is provided, and the only way to contact the management is through a feedback form on the site. While fuller purchase information is no doubt available after complete registration, many users may be deterred about giving their personal details before learning how the site works.

Outlook

Worldbookdealers.com appears likely to become a market leader for antiquarian books given the combination of a large collection of dealer memberships and excellent design and user-friendliness. However, preventing this from happening at present is the absence of customer support information, FAQs and a telephone support number. An increase in the quantity of original content and value-added features would also aid a swifter take-up.

auctionwatch.com

auctionwatch.com

http://www.auctionwatch.com launched in July 1998
AuctionWatch.com Inc was founded in Jan-1999

AuctionWatch.com Inc,
851 Traeger Avenue,
Suite 100,
San Bruno,
California,
94066,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 650 808 5800

Fax:
+1 650 875 0915

Email:
partners@auctionwatch.com

CEO
Rodrigo R Sales

Co-Founder & President of Product Development
Mark W Dodd

Target market: bulk sellers, auctioneers and regular collectors

auctionwatch.com ratings

Speed - 7.5/10	Design (functionality) - 4.5/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 8.5/10
Customer support - 9/10	Feature Set- 9/10	Range of products - 8/10	Total - 50.5/60

84.2%

AuctionWatch.com Inc

AuctionWatch.com began as a message board in July 1998 on the homepage of founder Mark Dodd, an experienced collector. Within a few months, the forum had gained thousands of users, and Dodd teamed up with Rodrigo Sales, a business strategist, to take the company forward. Incorporated in January 1999, the group raised just under \$1m from private investors. In August 1999, the company secured just under US\$10 million in backing. This second round funding was led by Sequoia Capital, who took a seat on the board, alongside @Venture (the VC arm of CMGI), Argus Capital, Angel Investors LP, Stanford University and a number of private investors. AuctionWatch has signified no intention to float.

AuctionWatch has rapidly grown to become the largest and most popular auction services site with over \$120m in transactions through the site for the first quarter of 2000. Usage for March 2000 was up 100% on February and 500% on December 1999, standing at 1.7 million unique users.

AuctionWatch offers buyers a universal search for eBay, Amazon and Yahoo auctions, as well as registration and listings for all three. In October 1999 eBay and AuctionWatch entered into a dispute over the Universal Search function. eBay demanded that AuctionWatch pay for searching its product categories, which AuctionWatch refused to do. The company's servers were denied access to eBay's servers for the period November 4th to January 19th when eBay allowed AuctionWatch access again.

auctionwatch.com

Product range:

African Works of Art, American Folk Art, Asian Works of Art, Clocks, Comic Books, Decorative Arts, Dolls (Pre-1950), Drawings and Pastels, Furniture, Garden Ornaments, Islamic Metalware and Ceramics, Lead Soldiers and Military Miniatures, Model Trains, Modernist Design (Post-1925 Furniture and Decorative Arts), Native American Art (Pre-1940), Oceanic Works of Art, Other, Paintings, Photographs, Pop Culture Dolls and Toys (1950 and Later), Pre-Columbian Art, Prints and Lithographs, Quilts, Rock and Roll Records, Rugs and Carpets, Sculpture, Silver, Sports Memorabilia, Toys (Pre-1950), Trading Cards, Vintage Clothing (Post-1900), Watches

Payment:

N/A - almost all functions are free

Insurance

AuctionWatch has affiliated with U-PIC to offer insurance savings of 10-20% on single-item shipments, and up to 87% on bulk shipments.

Key features

AuctionWatch offers a wide range of auction related information and services. These include a universal search of large auction sites such as eBay, Yahoo and Amazon auctions; Auction Manager Pro, a proprietary auction listing software allowing users to list categories and automatically submit to eBay, Yahoo and Amazon; tracking, shipping and insurance services; a 3-day appraisals service for \$19.95; extensive daily news, features, facts and statistics; a large and popular message centre (over 186,000 posts regarding eBay); universal registration; and free email.

Fulfilment

AuctionWatch offers a range of affiliated services to aid shipping for users of all auction sites. These include an affiliation with Stamps.com offering sellers the ability to print bulk quantities of postage from their PC; and an affiliation with iShip.com offering comprehensive shipping and item-tracking. Such functions allow sellers to advertise shipping prices as part of their bid, and offers guarantees to buyers regarding cost, delivery time and reliability.

Guarantee

As AuctionWatch does not directly sell or offer items for auction it does not offer any direct guarantees to seller or buyer. However, services such as shipping and insurance affiliations offer users of all auction sites the opportunity to secure their bid or sale further.

Terms and conditions

Terms and conditions are standard for content and information based sites and cover:

- The right for AuctionWatch to refuse services;
- An agreement not to be defamatory, libellous, obscene or fraudulent in either message centre postings or image hosting;
- Liability is limited in all cases to the greater of (a) the amount of fees paid in the 12 months prior to the action and (b) \$100

Review of auctionwatch.com

AuctionWatch.com offers an excellent range of information and services supported by clean, logical design and first-rate customer support and information.

Despite not taking a prime position on the front page, the news and features are comprehensive, including daily news, interviews, in-depth features and comparison statistics between leading auction sites across pricing, bidding, inventory, usage and customer support. The community sections are popular with almost 200,000 posts relating to eBay alone. Universal search features work well, and although only offering search facilities for Amazon, Yahoo and eBay, the quantity of products offered by each of these makes it a very useful feature. The Auction Manager Pro software, which is available as a free download (although not to Mac, Linux, NT or Windows 2000 users), offers an easy solution for submitting large quantities of goods to a variety of sites at the same time.

For a site that is trying to appeal to both buyers and sellers at all levels of the market, the design is remarkably logical and easy-to-use. The main sections are divided into numerous sub-sections, with the 'value-added' benefit of often finding more information than expected. Aesthetically the clean and consistent design is appealing, while appearing impartial and unbiased.

Customer support is exemplary, with FAQs on almost every page, detailed company information, press-release archives and constant channels for feedback.

Outlook

With 500% growth in unique users and US\$120m in transactions through the site in the first quarter of 2000, AuctionWatch.com is strongly positioned to remain as market leader in the Auction information and services sector. Although not directly targeting the art, antiques and collectibles market, AuctionWatch provides a useful range of features and information for any auction user. The leading potential limiting factor on growth is the number of auctions offered for universal search, listing and registration. Although eBay, Yahoo and Amazon auctions are three of the biggest, AuctionWatch needs to expand its reach, particularly amongst localised international sites to remain competitive. If AuctionWatch continues its impressive rate of growth and gets a majority of the leading global auction sites searchable through its services, its future position will be assured.

collectingchannel.com

collectingchannel.com

*http://www.collectingchannel.com launched in Nov-98
ChannelSpace Entertainment, Inc. was founded in Oct-98*

**ChannelSpace
Entertainment, Inc.,**
808 Live Oak Drive,
Chesapeake,
VA,
23320,
USA,

Telephone:
+1 757 321 1510

Fax:
Not given

Email:
customercare@collectingch
annel.com

CEO
Steve Sanford

Co-Founder
Barry Friedman

Target market: Personal collectors.
Price range: US\$10 - US\$20,000

collectingchannel.com ratings

Speed - 7.75/10

Design (functionality) -
3.5/5

Design (aesthetic) -
3.75/5

Ease of use - 7/10

Customer support -
8.5/10

Feature Set- 8.5/10

Range of products -
8.25/10

Total - 47.25/60

78.8%

ChannelSpace Entertainment, Inc.

Collectingchannel.com is the flagship website of ChannelSpace Entertainment Inc, a provider of affinity portals and niche-based programming. Founded in October 1998 by Steve Sanford, founder of Blink Media, and Barry Friedman, founder and President of International Computer Group, ChannelSpace creates channels appealing to niche areas of interest (such as collecting) as a platform to aggregate content and extend the 'value added' content of shopping malls.

Collectingchannel.com launched in November 1998 supported by content deals with a range of antique and collecting publishers, including Antique Trader Publications, Tuff Stuff Publications, beans! Magazine, Landmark Speciality Books, Collector's Super Mall Online and Amos Publishing. The site serves as a gateway to the internet for collectors with appraisals, a shopping mall, daily content, regular video feeds, news, and channels of interest.

In June 1999, the company announced a content deal with eBay through which the Collecting Channel provides collecting articles for each of eBay's main channels

In July 1999, the company raised US\$8m in private finance over a two week offering that was 50% over-subscribed. A further US\$5m was secured at the time in return for 5% of the company's stock. Part of the capital raised was used in the purchase of CollectorsWeb.com in August 1999. A further round of financing in February 2000 raised US\$5m.

collectingchannel.com

Product range:

Antiques, Entertainment, Jewellery/Gems, Stamps/Coins, Collectibles, Glass/Pottery/Sports, Toys/Dolls.

Payment:

Payment options vary with each dealer but most accept Visa, MasterCard or AMEX

Insurance

The site protects credit card information with an industry standard secure network but is not involved with shipping insurance, condition or authenticity.

Key features

The site offers a number of collecting channels for information about particular areas of interest, an online shop of over 800,000 items, an online appraisals service, a broadcast video environment, news, features and a large links directory.

Each of the main eight channels (Antiques, Collectibles, Entertainment, Glass/Pottery, Jewellery/Gems, Sports, Stamps/Coins, Toys/Dolls) play host to large amount of features and articles, often through many further subcategories. Articles usually appear with links to related stories, items for sale, and interactivity (such as a related topic in a chat room or user-vote).

Other sections include:

Broadcast - through a deal with Yahoo's Broadcast.com, CollectingChannel offers a 24-hour continuous video feed of collecting related stories and programming.

Shop - direct access to a mall of over 800,000 items, largely based on modern collectibles (ie beanie babies, action figures, etc)

Appraisals - for \$19.95, users can get an online appraisal of an item by completing an online form and forward photographs of it. No information is given about the appraisal team.

Services - details the Collecting Channel's affiliate programme, Palm Pilot (mobile) products, and Collectors Directory - a list of over 26,000 collector related websites.

The site also provides general news, a trivia quiz, message board and chatroom.

Fulfilment

Shipping and shipping insurance is arranged between buyer and seller.

Guarantee

None given.

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply for a site that acts solely as a forum for individuals to buy and sell items. It takes no responsibility for the condition, authenticity or even the actual existence of items displayed, is not involved in the shipping process and is most concerned with preventing offensive material being placed on the site. A large portion of the terms and conditions relates to the site's appraisal service, in this it limits liability in all areas by maintaining that their appraisers are only acting upon their best judgement.

Review of collectingchannel.com

The Collecting Channel is a vast, content-packed site. While the tone may be too popular for many serious collectors or dealers, it is unique in offering 24-hour Internet based video feeds on the subject.

The site loads and searches swiftly, with the obvious exception of the live video streaming. Structurally it is reasonably well laid out, although the individual collecting channels (antiques, stamps, etc) don't get their own button in the main navigation bar which slightly confuses navigation. Other than this navigation is swift and logical, although often each page is a little too filled with links and buttons.

Stylistically, the site is bright and colourful, with a clear attempt to target the more mainstream side of the collectibles market. Different sections are colour coded, aiding browsing and also providing a varied user experience. Page layout is often quite haphazard, which, given the amount of information and links the designers put on each page, can make it trickier to find desired information.

The range of features is excellent. The articles and features, while often suffering from oversimplification, are varied and cover a vast range of topics. The 24-hour video feed is a truly exceptional feature, and will grow in value as broadband Internet connections become more widespread. The 'mall' is disappointing - offering only a collection of pencils in the Antiques category, for instance. The appraisal, chatroom and message boards are also useful.

Customer service is very strong with complete help information, FAQs, feedback and walkthrough-tutorials. The site also provides extensive company information.

Overall an impressive site with strong feature set, though it is unlikely to attract serious art or antiques enthusiasts or encourage much online trading.

Outlook

As a content based site for the collectibles market, the Collecting Channel is very strong, with an excellent range of filmed and written features and articles. The company is well prepared for future developments of the Internet: offering wireless access to information through Palm Pilots; and encouraging broadband usage through the 24-hour video feed.

Hard to fathom is the company's revenue model. While a large amount of content will always generate a good amount of advertising revenue, it is unlikely that this alone will pay for the range of services on offer. The Ask The Appraiser section should generate some income, although given the time involved in valuing rarer items, profit margins could be slim. Furthermore, the eCommerce mall doesn't offer strong value incentive, offering neither anything unique to the site, or at a 'must-have' price.

Still, as broadband becomes more widespread, CollectingChannel will probably position itself as more of a cable-style channel. A tie-up with a live-auction provider such as The Auction Channel could create more solid revenue sources, while adding value to the news service.

invaluable.com

invaluable.com / thesaurus.co.uk

Invaluable Ltd was founded in 1989 (under different name)

Invaluable Ltd,
Catherine House,
76 Gloucester Place,
London,
England,
W1H 4DQ

Telephone:
+44 (0) 207 487 3401

Fax:
+44 (0) 207 487 4211

Email:
sales@invaluable.com

CEO
Jon Dooley

Human Resources
Howard Bolton

Target market: Personal collectors and professional dealers.

invaluable.com ratings				
Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 3/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3.25/5	Ease of use - 6.5/10	77.5%
Customer support - 7.5/10	Feature Set- 8.75/10	Range of products - 9.5/10	Total - 46.5/60	

Invaluable Ltd

The company currently trading as Invaluable was founded as Tapvan in 1989. Since then the company has built up a database of over 13 million auction results, increasing at a rate of some 20,000 records a day, taken from the results of over 450 UK and 120 US auction houses. Two years after formation, Tapvan renamed itself Thesaurus. In 1996, Thesaurus purchased Trace magazine, a printed monthly publication for the art and antiques market specialising in the recovery of lost or stolen items. Thesaurus.co.uk grew to become a central art and antiques information website, and in early 2000 relaunched itself as an antiques and collectibles portal with a company-wide re-branding as Invaluable.com.

Besides the free content on the site, users can currently search the Invaluable Finder database for free. Company sources indicate that this free-access model will become pay-per-use by the end of 2000. Professional dealers and regular collectors can subscribe to Invaluable's main service, offering keyword searches of over 750 international auctioneers. The company has 'thousands' of subscribers, with prices starting at £99 p.a. for a three keyword search, with results of related upcoming auctions emailed nightly.

The company's mission is twofold. Firstly, to help industry professionals and collectors locate those items in which they are interested by automating the process of searching through thousands of auction catalogues. Secondly, to help protect private and public collections with a range of services that significantly increases the chance of recovering items in the event that they are stolen.

In addition the Invaluable sites provides community features, channels of interest such as Fine Art and Automobiles, dealer and auctioneer databases, an exhaustive auction calendar and valuation and protection services.

invaluable.com / thesaurus.co.uk

Product range:

The results of over 13 million auctions.

Payment:

Cannot currently be done through the site

Insurance

None given

Key features

Invaluable.com has a large number of categories and services:

- **Protect** - details Invaluable's anti-theft services. Users can log information and photographs of an item of value on the Invaluable database. In the event that it is stolen, Invaluable will search every auction at 650 international auctioneers over a ten year period for £299 for 20 items or £399 for 40 items. In addition the item will appear in the Invaluable magazine (formerly Trace) and will get the support of the company's police liaison team.
- **Valuer** - a valuation service based on the company's database of auction results. Invaluable Appraiser is a pay-per-use telephone based valuation service which can return results by email or fax within an agreed time scale. Invaluable Appraiser Professional is a subscription based service providing 24-hour Internet access to the complete database under license.
- **Event Diary** - a database of auctions around the world. This includes all auctions from the 'big four' auctioneers, and numbers between forty and sixty auctions daily.
- **Subscribe** - provides access to Invaluable's main service - cross auction services. Subscribers can, for an annual fee, submit several keywords (ie Dali, Baroque or 14th Century) to an Invaluable database, and receive daily notification of related upcoming auctions by email. Prices start from £99 for three keywords with results sent by email and increase for more keywords and post-paid responses.
- **Talk** - the site's community element, offering both a message board and a chat room.
- **Links** - links to key professional bodies.
- **News & features** - includes daily news and weekly features.
- **Channels** - these are themed environments covering a range of collecting interests. Each channel provides features, news, forthcoming sales and auctions in the related area, and a catalogue of past sales results. Channels available cover automobiles, ceramics, furniture, gardening, fine art, music and exhibitions.

In addition, users can search for auction houses, dealers, loss adjusters, restorers and valuers through the front page, as well as enter a keyword search of forthcoming auctions of potential interest. News and features are also available in an archive, and can be printed out in a printer friendly version or emailed.

Fulfilment

N/A

Guarantee

None given.

Terms and conditions

The terms and conditions are well structured and extensive but are largely standard. They cover the following areas: Use & Registration, Fees, Services, Material on the site, Termination, Notice, General & Governing Law. It limits responsibility for the accuracy of the information it provides and states that users must be over 18 to use it.

Review of invaluable.com

Invaluable.com is packed with useful features, and backed up by the largest databases of auction results available online. Navigation, site design and site help are main shortcomings, potentially confusing any first-time user.

Site-speed is not a problem, with the bulk of graphics on each page being advertisements and hence loading after the important content has appeared. The search facilities are particularly responsive.

Structurally the site is a little muddled, given the range of options and services available. More effort could be made to separate those categories advertising Invaluable pay-services, and those offering immediate online functionality. More categories could be grouped together, and the collecting channels given high prominence. That said, navigation controls are consistent throughout the site, and while not intuitive, structure is logical.

The site design attempts to package a lot of information onto each page, resulting in an often cluttered interface. This problem is not helped by the range of colours, design motifs and banner advertisements used throughout the site. Aside from this, design is generally professional and consistent, with areas such as the search results well laid out to benefit user-friendliness.

The range of features offered is excellent, although some of these are only in part online (such as the emailing of forthcoming auctions of interest). Effort has clearly been made to combine community, content and commerce to create a vertical antiques and collecting portal. Likewise the size of Invaluable's database and the number of auction houses whose results are pooled puts it far ahead of other such sites.

Customer service is lacking, and, despite the provision of contact telephone numbers, nothing is provided in the form of help pages, site map or FAQs. While many areas are self-explanatory, a broad site aiming to offer such a large range of products would benefit from an interactive tour, or a more useful 'welcome' page. This combined with the aforementioned structural problems, affects the site's ease of use. Telephone support, through a free-phone number, was very friendly and helpful, though a little over-keen to make a sale.

Outlook

As a privately held company, Invaluable publishes no financial or corporate information. However with numerous worldwide offices and claims of 'thousands' of paying subscribers, the company is likely to be enjoying strong margins.

With one of the largest auction databases in the world, Invaluable, will generate interest regardless of the standard of its website. However, despite shortcomings in user-friendliness, the site is on the whole excellent with a broad feature set and decent search capabilities. In the company's mission to become both the largest auction database and a leading portal for the antique and auction industries, a lot of the groundwork has been laid, although there is still much more to be done.

The Auction Channel

The Auction Channel

http://www.theauctionchannel.com launched in March-97
The Auction Channel was founded in 1996

The Auction Channel c/o Brilliant Digital Entertainment Inc.,
 PO Box 85,
 Uxbridge,
 Middlesex,
 England,
 UB9 5QW

Telephone:
 +44 (0) 17 639 4780

Fax:
 +44 (0) 1 895 833312

Email:
 kdorazewski@theauctionchannel.com

CEO
 Ron Chaimowitz

Founder
 Jason Gleave

Target market: commercial, TV orientated amateurs.
Price range: US\$400 - US\$20,000

The Auction Channel (.com) ratings

Speed - 8/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 3.5/5	Ease of use - 7/10
Customer support - 8/10	Feature Set- 8.5/10	Range of products - 7/10	Total - 46/60

76.7%

The Auction Channel c/o Brilliant Digital Entertainment Inc.

The Auction Channel was founded in 1996 by Jason Gleave through the incorporation of Trojan Television Limited. It offers interactive television and Internet based live coverage of auctions and auction-related programming. In July 1999 the company was acquired by US-based Brilliant Digital Entertainment, a creator of interactive 'multipath' movies and animations, in an exchange of shares.

The company has pioneered live auctions, and is the first company to gain a license from the UK's Independent Television Commission (ITC) to broadcast an auction based television channel.

The company developed and owns exclusively NetBidLive technology. Launching at Brooks' Europe sale of Classic Ferraris in Switzerland in December 1998, NetBidLive allows Internet based remote bidding in live auctions and was the first time such technology was available on the Internet.

In September 1998 the Pringles TCT Bidpop 98 charity auction became the first live transmitted auction on cable and satellite that allowed viewers of the UK Living broadcast to bid from home. One third of the 57 lots were secured by viewers bidding from home through their telephones while they watched the auction. Telephone bidding is achieved through the proprietary Interactive Bidding System, launched in December 1997, allowing remote buyers to bid through a touch-tone phone.

In March 1999, The Auction Channel began a series of monthly live interactive sporting auctions on BSkyB's Sky Sports. In the US, the company hosts a series of monthly appraisal

and collectibles segment on CBS's Early Morning Show, where viewers can send in digital photographs of items for review by The Auction Channel's collectibles specialists.

The Auction Channel's two interactive bidding systems have proved popular with users. In the first session of a March 2000 Brooks' Football Memorabilia auction, a total of 40% of lots were sold interactively, with 49% of all lots bid on interactively. Over 50% of the value of the total sale went to interactive (television and Internet) bidders.

The company works closely with leading auction companies for the sales. These include Christie's, Phillip's, Bonham's, RM Cars, Antiquorum, Morrell & Company, Mullock Madeley.

TheAuctionChannel.com

Product range:

Sectors covered depends on the auctions being carried out at the time. At time of review auctions include: A charity wedding dress auction; rock memorabilia and wild west memorabilia.

Payment:

All payments, ie, purchase price, shipping and insurance are made through The Auction Channel. Credit cards (non mentioned specifically), cashier's check, money order, or personal check are all acceptable.

Insurance

Under the terms and conditions, The Auction Channel are not responsible for any item's description, condition or authenticity but does not advise the buyer as to a course of action to take if dissatisfied. One must assume that claims should be taken up with the auction house itself.

Key features

The Auction Channel allows users to partake in auctions through two methods: NetBidLive for Internet-based bidding; and Interactive Bidding System for telephone based bidding, in response to a live television broadcast. To bid, users must first register with the auction house managing the sale, which can be done through the Auction Channel website. After registration, users are given a client number and PIN, which allows the allocation of paddle number prior to the auction. During the auction, users will see (and hear, if through television) the next bidding increment. To bid this value, users on the Internet click a bid button, and television viewers press the star key on their telephone.

The site also offers a members only chatroom, and several message boards with reasonable activity. Users can also view catalogues for forthcoming auctions and submit bids in advance.

In the news section of the site, there is a large range of articles and information. These fall into four categories: Behind the Scenes, for the latest news in the auction world; Around the House, a round up of sales room activities; The Expert, with tips, advice and insights into the auction industry and collecting guides; and Post Sale Reports, which details the results of complete auctions.

The company has also teamed up with AuctionWatch.com to offer an appraisals service, which is done entirely through AuctionWatch.

Fulfilment

The seller is responsible for shipping and all insurance and tracking processes are arranged with the buyer.

Guarantee

By agreeing to the terms and conditions the seller must provide a full refund directly to the buyer if the product cannot be shipped at the close of the sale. The seller must provide the refund no later than thirty days following the close of the sale. All disputes are handled between buyer and seller.

Terms and conditions

The terms and conditions mainly limit responsibility for a company that acts as an auction facilitator rather than online auction house. Similar to Ibidlive.com and Realbidder.com, The Auction Channel seeks to defer liability to the auction houses it represents.

Review of The Auction Channel (.com)

The Auction Channel website is fast and concise, with a good range of content and community elements.

The site uses a three-page frame-set which means that navigational elements do not have to reload with each new page. This makes the site reasonably fast and speeds navigation between different sections.

The site structure and information hierarchy is concise and practical with each location described at the top of the each page as a series of links from the home page.

Graphically, The Auction Channel offers little of merit, with pagination and colour usage a little messy, and fonts and spacing non-conducive to quick reading. The front page is particularly confused, and would not encourage frequent click-throughs.

The range of features offered is excellent, with the strong combination of content, community and functional elements. Content is well covered through the extensive range of articles, and the ability to rate an article or feature after reading is most welcome. An auction using community is encourage through both message boards and chatrooms. The message boards show decent activity, with a good quantity of replies and answers to questions posed.

The simulation of NetBidLive tested was excellent and offered greater interaction than a similar product offered by realbidder.

Auctions offered through the site tend to favour film and sports memorabilia and charity events. For June 2000, The Auction Channel offered auctions in celebrity wedding dresses, rock memorabilia and western memorabilia. During May, the company offered a range of property auctions.

Customer service is adequate, with plenty of information about the company and how to use the site. Most welcome is the ability to preview the live auction technology with simulated auctions. This enables first-time users to test a new and potentially confusing technology without risk.

Overall, a broad yet slightly bland website offering a good set of features and very strong live bidding technology.

Outlook

The acquisition of theauctionchannel.com by Brilliant Digital Entertainment has resulted in an increase in investment and a very strong management team. Ron Chaimowitz, the CEO, was founder and President of GT Interactive - the world's second largest interactive entertainment company. While his lack of experience in the antiques or auction industries may limit the company from being a serious antiques website, his interactive knowledge-base is certain to enhance the live-bidding experience. Indeed, the company is currently working on a major upgrade to its NetBidLive technology which will include a 'variety of unique and state of the art real time bidding facilities'.

The next major challenge for the company will be to fully utilise interactive television services, allowing remote-control based bidding directly through a television. Given the company's experience in both television-based and Internet-based they should be very well positioned to capitalise on this.

ibidlive.com

ibidlive.com

*http://www.ibidlive.com launched in September-99
Troostvijk Veilingen BV was founded in January-99*

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CEO
Peter Farid Faisal
General Manager
Maarten Noyons

Target market: auction clientele unable to get to auction house
Price range: £1,000 - £850,000

ibidlive.com ratings

Speed - 7/10	Design (functionality) - 4/5	Design (aesthetic) - 4/5	Ease of use - 7/10
Customer support - 7/10	Feature Set- 6/10	Range of products - 6/10	Total - 41/60

68.3%

Troostvijk Veilingen BV

Ibidlive BV (Benelux) is a 100% subsidiary of Ibidlive NV and offers auction houses the technology to broadcast auctions live across the Internet and television, and to enable telephone bidding. The company's intended reach is Belgium and Dutch auction houses, although a deal with The Essential Information Group in November 1999 saw the company expand its presence into the UK. Of five live auctions forthcoming at time of review, four were from the UK, including one at Bonhams, and one was from Switzerland.

In December 1999, European online auction site QXL.com announced the purchase of 50% equity in Ibidlive NV for £5.9m. In April 2000, QXL followed this up with an outright purchase of Idefi S.A. - a Luxembourg-based specialist in live Internet auction technologies, suggesting QXL's aims for Ibidlive may be in the area of television broadcasting of auctions. QXL used Ibidlive technology to broadcast two auctions on the UK's Sky Sports during the fourth quarter of 1999, and appears likely to expand usage of Ibidlive technology for future television and broadband based auctions.

While the site offers auctions at a rate of approximately three times per fortnight, the standard of auctions available is generally very high. The company has offered auctions for Christie's, Bonhams and, through International Auctioneers, eBay's Butterfield & Butterfield auction house. Likewise the standard of lots offered is impressive: for example, an International Auctioneers sale of Modern Art included work by Manet, Picasso, Renoir and Kandinsky.

Usage of Ibidlive technology is free to the remote bidder: the company generates its revenue from designing, licensing and installing the technology in auction houses at a fee.

Product range:

Antiques (1), Art (0), Collectibles (0), Wines (0), Apparels & Textiles (0), Automobiles (0), Bankruptcy (0), Estate Auctions (0), General (0), Government (0), Industrial (0), Modern Art (1), Ornaments (0), Real Estate (3)

Payment:

Payment settled between auctioneer and successful bidder

Insurance

Dependent upon individual auction house insurance conditions

Key features

The main feature of the ibidlive.com is the live bidding software. To have access to this to partake in an auction, users must first print out, sign and fax back the company's terms and conditions. On completion of this users are given an ID and pin number, which is operable for only one auction. Users then log into the site before the start of bidding and load-up the iBid page. This is divided into two, with a photo and description of the lot on the left hand side, with bidding activity, and current bid in a large box on the right hand side. Bids must be made in the currency of the country that the auction takes place in.

Beyond this, the site offers no features besides listings of forthcoming auctions, records of previous auctions and occasionally updated auction-related news.

Fulfilment

Dependent upon individual auction house insurance conditions

Guarantee

Dependent upon individual auction house insurance conditions

Terms and conditions

Standard terms and conditions apply regarding liability and indemnity. Ibidlive, living up to its status as auction channel rather than auction house, advises the user to refer to and abide by the terms and conditions of the individual auction houses represented.

Review of ibidlive.com

ibidlive.com's proprietary software appears well designed and easy to use. Although not tested in a 'real-world' situation, it seems to operate well.

Obviously, as providers of auction technology, as opposed to providers of auctions themselves, ibidlive.com is dependent upon existing auction houses to keep its site active. For this reason, at current frequency of auction (roughly one per week), the site is more likely to be used by people unable to attend a specific auction, than by people using the site to find an auction of interest.

The site itself is well designed and smart, with a consistent navigational hierarchy. Pages are reasonably quick to load, especially considering the graphical complexity.

Customer support is adequate, but the absence of guarantees over server uptime during an auction may deter potential users. The FAQs cover most queries, but could go further. However, the inclusion of telephone support is welcome, although the number is not clearly displayed.

Outlook

As the preferred technology of the International Auctioneers, ibidlive.com has gained access to some prestigious auctions, and by only serving reputable auction houses, provides a perceived guarantee of quality. The purchase by QXL.com of 50% of parent company Ibidlive NV, could see the company expand into consumer-to-consumer auctions. It should be noted, however, that in five months since purchase, neither QXL nor ibidlive.com have announced any form of joint venture or partnership. That QXL purchased another live bidding technology suggests Ibidlive may not be a core part of its strategy.

While the site is well-designed and operated, the dependence on auctions from the houses that utilise Ibidlive technology has created a large number of empty categories on the front page. It is clear that the site has been designed to cope with far more concurrent auctions than it currently offers, yet there is little indication that more auctions will soon appear.

As a site in its own right that surfers visit on the off-chance that there is something of interest, the outlook for ibidlive.com is not strong. This is worsened by the fact that a new user visiting the site could see an auction of interest starting in a few hours, but be unable to take part having not had time to print, sign and fax back the terms and conditions.

However, as an auction technology that enables traditional (ie offline) auction bidders the chance to participate in an auction that they are unable to attend, there is much potential. It is perhaps by association with auctioneers such as Bonhams and Christie's that ibidlive.com will gain most of its traffic: from regular users of those houses who are unable to make certain sales. As broadband Internet connections become standardised, video relays of the auctions themselves are sure to follow.