

Auction industry survival depends on going virtual

By [Joff van Reenen](#)

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Covid-19 has forever changed the traditional live auction model, forcing the industry to accept and adapt to an accelerated digital standard to keep their doors open.



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The past year has in fact seen a global fast-tracking of all forms of commerce to the digital realm and despite tough trading conditions, myriad new frontiers have opened heading into 2021 for those willing to innovate.

It's no different in the auction industry.

Live auctions have been around for thousands of years and with so much history, there will always be a place for them.

Industry-customised digital platforms

That said, if they haven't done so already, auction companies worldwide should be well into the research and budgeting phases of developing secure, industry-customised digital platforms that can launch this year and reach significantly broader audiences.

It's as important for small companies to invest in this virtual transition as it is for the big ones; perhaps even more so

because digital is the big leveller.

Now, for the first time, it's conceivable to imagine opportunities for collaboration between auction companies in different countries, especially the smaller ones with mutual interests because with digital reach they can expand their markets into new and lucrative territories they'd never have been able to reach without investment in virtual auction technology.

It's this message I've been conveying to auction associations around the world in a series of webinars in 2020 because the soft virtual conversion High Street Auctions began years ago came to a head when South Africa went into Level 5 lockdown and we were no longer able to conduct live auctions.

Covid-19 forced people to try virtual auctions

Covid-19 did for High Street what we'd been trying to achieve for a decade – it forced people to try virtual auctions. When we interview our buyers and sellers now, not one wants to move back to the old way of doing things and I don't see us ever returning to the exclusively live auction model that existed before.

It's up to each and every auction company to become versed in digital platforms rather than relying on others outside the industry to dictate what's needed. It's one thing having so much technology available, but another thing altogether understanding it and using it correctly.

For auction companies starting this digital conversion in 2021, future-proofing their businesses and the industry as a whole relies on understanding the technology needed to reach wider markets, and investing only in the specific tools and platforms necessary to work towards that goal.

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