

How tech can add value in an auction room



Richard Auterac, chairman, Acuitus

Auctions should be one of the areas of the property business most amenable to utilising technological advances and embracing the proptech revolution.

Online bidding has made buying property 'live' through the internet possible for some time now – well before the proptech movement really gained momentum.

However, we are now seeing a whole host of new online platforms seeking to bring together people with property, and the auctions sector is going to have to ensure that it can provide the same quality of tools and interface.

Online real estate investment platform BrickVest, which focuses primarily on investment-grade assets in Germany but is now looking to enter the UK market, has just exited its first fund, and enjoyed considerable success. CBRE has launched in the UK its US online listing platform Deal Flow for all investment property and portfolio sales.

While some platforms are genuinely new and innovative, others have been around for some time and have now simply found a tech label on which to piggy-back. Suffice to say, being able to co-opt the fashion of the day does not necessarily make an innovation useful or ultimately successful.

Of course, these digital developments might appear, to the casual observer, light years ahead of the traditional auction method of people gathering in a room to bid for lots through an auctioneer.

There is still every indication that a substantial proportion of investors in the commercial property auction space still want that 'human' interface that the auction room provides. Auctions were a 'chat room' long before that phrase was most closely associated with some-



Online bidding has been possible for some time

MODE/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

“

The central point is not whether the physical commercial auction room will die (it won't) – it is about what we can do with digital tools and online platforms to encourage more investors into our sector”

thing that exists in cyberspace.

Acuitus was trialling online bidding as long ago as 2000, but ultimately we found that client demand brings forward innovation, rather than a perceived solution simply looking around for a problem.

Somewhat worryingly at present, there is an atmosphere that you're either in the "tech tent" or outside. It is actually something of a redundant concept because people or businesses will only use a tool – be it physical or digital – if it is of any use.

It's quite interesting to note that the new advertisements promoting the Hive app – which enables you to remotely control your lights and heating at home – gives the scenario of someone who is going on holiday and has forgotten to set the lights to come on at dusk. If that's perceived by the promoters to be one of the key uses for the app, it hardly smacks of something that you're going to be using on a regular basis. I may be doing an injustice to Hive, but the point I'm trying to illustrate is that tech is only relevant if it has a

regular, value-adding, efficiency which makes its application worthwhile.

I am certainly not a 21st-century Luddite – Acuitus has been one of the most enthusiastic and early adopters of digital communication. But in our sector, the central point is not whether the physical commercial property auction room will die (it won't) – it's about what more can we do with digital tools and online platforms to encourage more investors into our sector and make investing in real estate accessible and convenient to all.

Providing our clients – both on the buying and selling side – with the highest level of professional service is Acuitus's core aim, and a lot of that process hinges on the quality of information that is given and how that information is packaged in a relevant way.

We have just launched a new website that provides a much higher level of functionality, plus the opportunity for users to tailor their interaction with the site in accordance with their investment criteria.

There is also enhanced knowledge content on the site, which both helps investors invest precisely and gives insight on the assets which flow through the investment market place.

Providing effective digital platforms is essential to the 21st-century auction business, but we should not underestimate the benefits of the auction room as a place to meet like-minded investors, enjoy the atmosphere and feel the pulse of the market.

Join the TechTalk competition

EG and Pi Labs have teamed up to launch the TechTalk Academy, a competition for proptech entrepreneurs.

To find out how you could get up to £150,000 of investment, visit www.egi.co.uk/news/techtalkacademy

