

How to choose an auction house or platform

Match the entity to what you want to buy, then compare the bidding formats, the published buyer's premium and the payment terms before you register.

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Auctions look alike from the outside - a lot, some bids, a winner - but the entities behind them work very differently. Choosing well starts with knowing which kind of entity fits what you want to do, then comparing the published terms rather than the marketing.

Start with what you want to buy

Every listing on this directory carries categories for what the entity sells. A house that runs weekly estate sales is a different place from one that sells only classic cars or only government fleet vehicles. Browse the category that matches your interest - art and antiques, equipment and machinery, government surplus, wine, books and so on - and you will see the entities that actually handle that material. A specialist house usually knows its category's buyers better than a generalist, which matters whether you are bidding or consigning.

Know the four entity types

Listings label each entity with one type:

- **Live auction house** - a saleroom that sells from the rostrum, usually with online and absentee bidding on top. Christie's, Bonhams, Drouot and the many local houses mapped from OpenStreetMap are this type.
- **Online auction platform** - the bidding software and marketplace itself, such as HiBid, BidSpotter, Catawiki or GovDeals. The platform's terms govern the bid mechanics; the seller's terms govern the sale.
- **Government surplus program** - a public body's own sales channel, like GSA Auctions in the US, GCSurplus in Canada or VEBEG in Germany. Surplus, seized and confiscated property, usually sold as-is.
- **Auction aggregator** - a directory-and-bidding layer over many houses' sales, such as LiveAuctioneers, Invaluable and The Saleroom. Aggregators are where a search across hundreds of houses happens in one place.

Compare the terms that cost you money

Two listings can sell the same kind of goods and still differ a lot in what a purchase costs. The fields to compare:

- **Buyer's premium** - the percent added to the hammer price. Where a house publishes one, the listing shows the first-tier rate, and the details note shows the tiers. The comparison tool lines two or three houses up side by side.

- **Bidding formats** - live, online, absentee, phone or sealed bid. If you cannot attend a room, filter for online or absentee.
- **Shipping help** - some houses ship in-house, some hand you to partner carriers, and some expect you to collect. For heavy equipment this decides the real cost.
- **Registration and payment terms** - what it takes to be allowed to bid, and how fast you must pay after winning. Government programs and marketplaces are strictest about payment deadlines.

Check the source before you register

Every listing names where its facts came from: an OpenStreetMap record for the mapped houses, an official program page for government sales, or the house's own published terms. OpenStreetMap data is shared under the Open Database License; the row links back to the map element so you can see the raw record. Blank fields mean the fact is not stated anywhere the editor could cite - treat a blank premium as "ask the house", never as "free".

A short checklist

1. Does the entity sell what you want, in a place you can reach or a format you can join?
2. What does it publish for a buyer's premium, and what does your target price become after premium, tax and shipping?
3. Can you register in time, and can you pay inside its payment window?
4. Is the listing complete enough to trust - or is it a thin row that needs a phone call first?

Answer those four and the directory's filters have done their job.

Frequently asked questions

Is an online platform the same as an auction house?

Not quite. A platform supplies the bidding software; the selling house's own terms still apply to each sale. An aggregator such as LiveAuctioneers, Invaluable or The Saleroom posts many houses' sales in one place.

Which filter should I use first?

Start with the category - what the entity sells - then filter by the bidding format you can actually use, then compare the published buyer's premium.

What if a listing shows no premium or formats?

Blank means not published, not free. Open the house's own site and read its conditions of sale before you register.

Sources

[OpenStreetMap - Copyright and license](https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright) — <https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>

[LiveAuctioneers](https://www.liveauctioneers.com) — <https://www.liveauctioneers.com>

[Invaluable](https://www.invaluable.com) — <https://www.invaluable.com>

[The Saleroom](https://www.the-saleroom.com) — <https://www.the-saleroom.com>

[Drouot](https://www.drouot.com) — <https://www.drouot.com>