

Auction Company Seeks Buyers, Lessees for Antenna Sites

BY DON BISHOP, EXEC. EDITOR, ASSOC. PUBLISHER, AGL MAGAZINE

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Cell At Auction's Blinick (Photo by Don Bishop)

Bud Blinick, the president of Cell at Auction, came to Connectivity Expo, looking for parties that may want to use his company's auction service to buy property and easements and obtain leases to use for placing commercial wireless communications network antennas. He said Cell At Auction mostly represents private real estate owners and municipalities with assets they want to sell or lease.

"We have created a centralized database of buyers," Blinick said. "When we have an opportunity, we put it out to bid competitively to make sure that we represent the seller to make sure they get the best price under the best terms. My first foray was with a rooftop management company 1997. We assembled 12,000 assets and sold them to SpectraSite in 2000."

Blinick said he and his partners had an epiphany six or seven years ago when they became aware that companies were buying easements and towers from owners that did not have a licensed broker or auctioneer representing them.

"When we have an opportunity to offer to buyers, we put it out to bid competitively to make sure that we represent the seller to make sure they get the best price under the best terms," Blinick said. "I'm looking at carriers trying to be aggressive in finding new sites. I represent a number of municipalities with water towers, police stations and fire stations that want to have more antennas on them. They are always looking for more revenue. The problem is that they don't know what they should be charging, which is why they hire

me and other companies like mine to help them negotiate. They are just looking to do more build out.”

Blinick said his company is active with small cells, too.

“We had an agreement with a large municipality near Chicago area and negotiated with the larger carriers on deployment and what they would pay to have equipment on certain light posts and lamp posts,” Blinick said. “The state governor stepped in and signed a mandate to limit how much the carriers would pay to be on these lamp posts and light posts, a limit that substantially hurts the municipalities. So, they became a little less excited about having these small cells, except that they realized that they needed to have them deployed just for the benefit of the residents in the neighborhood. But then the residents complained about having these new small cells in the middle of their block and how small cells will affect the kids and the people. They want the coverage, but they don’t want to see the boxes.”

Some of the property owners Cell At Auction represents, Blinick said, ask: “What’s this 5G? How is it going to affect my current leases? Are the wireless carriers expanding their current imprint on my property? What are they going to do with the antennas on my sites, and how does that affect the revenue on my lease?”

Blinick has ties in the real estate business, and he said he has observed that the same parties that lend money to shopping center owners have become interested in lending money to tower operators and other telecommunications businesses. “It is a better guarantee than bricks and sticks right now,” he said.

Blinick spoke at the Connectivity Expo session, “Investments, Partnerships and M&A in a Converged Edge/Tower Architecture.”

CAPTION:
Bud Blinick, president of Cell At Auction. Photo by Don Bishop