



Stanford eCorner

Auction for America: Teamwork at its Best

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Reedy talks about how the eBay team came to the rescue in September 2001. The team was given only three days to launch The Auction for America, which required 20 hours alone for coding and additional time for testing. One hundred people worked on this over the weekend and they had the product one hour before the deadline. No one said we can't do this, she says. The teams had to collaborate and work together to get this done.



Transcript

So I want to kind of use two examples to exemplify a few of these things quickly. The first one I want to use actually comes from September of 2001, when we had the 911 incident. And actually, Meg was actually talking to both the governor as well as the mayor of New York in New York City. And actually they had come up with a program called Auction for America, which was to actually have \$100 million in 100 days for the charities. And what had happened was that came up on a Thursday, September 13. And actually she was going to be in New York City on the 17th at noon, Eastern Standard Time, to launch the program. Well, us in Engineering had sized the effort of what we wanted to do because we had to add a new auction type, a charity type, on the 'Sell Your Item' page. We had to obviously put into search and listings the ability to browse for charities. We had to add it to the 'View Item'. And we had to hook to our payment processor, which at that point was not PayPal but Billpoint, the whole ability to be able to collect and process these fees to the correct charity.

So that effort was about, in just pure coding, 20 weeks of actual coding, let alone all of the integration testing, testing, rolling out to the site. And we had three days: one day to design it, two days to code and test it and get it live to the site. It took over 100 engineers to do that over that particular weekend. They obviously worked around the clock. And we got it done one hour before the time it was. And I won't go through all the "Oh my God, we might not make it," but what I want to talk about is we found a way where others might not. I mean, we have never done anything like that. Literally, that project would typically take us three months in total. And we found a way where others stop. We certainly had a can-do attitude.

When management came to us, we didn't say, "Oh my God, we don't think we can do it." We were actually jazzed and we wanted to do what would help, actually, in this particular case, our country as well as our business units. And we always embrace the end. We never say, "Well, OK, we can do that, but if we do that, we're not going to do this." We always look for new innovative ways to help our business. And that was a good example of that. Also, in that particular case, we made sure that we built just enough architecture, maybe in an effort to make it so, it wasn't quite enough. But we were under the gun and we wanted to make sure that we absolutely had it ready to go come 9 am on Monday morning. The other one was, we had to work collaboratively. We actually worked with the product management team, and they couldn't spend the typical weeks that they spend designing the pages. So they had about 8 hours to design the page. And after that, we took the high-level specs and the designers just sat with us as we iterated through the code.

So it was an extremely collaborative effort. And obviously, we felt pretty good when it won. Meg was there, and there was the newscast, and she said, "Anne is here," and we crossed our fingers and it came up and the program worked, and we had very few bugs on that. So it was a huge success, and it really shows what we in the engineering organization stand for. The

only downside of it is, remember that happened in September 2001, and to this day the business unit still says to me, "What do you mean, three months? Why can't you do it in two?" "Days." So the second point--so that is the downside. They'll never forget.