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Company offers surplus solutions for schools, agencies



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The InterSchola website is an interface for school districts and other public agencies to auction off surplus equipment. More than \$815,000 in goods have been auctioned in the San Joaquin Valley since 2004.

Ben Keller – STAFF WRITER

Whether they are of kitchen utensils, musical instruments or school buses, surplus sales can be big business.

Since 2004, San Francisco-based InterSchola has been leading the way in the

surplus market, bringing in more than \$10 million to school districts and government agencies in California through online auctions of unneeded equipment.

Beginning its work with school districts,

InterSchola | 5

Valley another stroke

Hanna

Kaiser Permanente's new Stroke Center at the Accredited Stroke Center, the nation's host to Kaiser after its ability to significantly improve patients.

Kaiser joined in Fresno Primary Stroke Center priority design medical services for victims.

"I think it's a community unified hospital," Celia Ryan, Kaiser's Accredited



the company now caters to one-third of public schools in California besides having a strong foothold in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Florida.

The San Joaquin Valley has been a notable source of clients for some time now. Of the \$815,000-plus worth of items sold in the region since InterSchola's inception, 65 percent has come from Fresno County school districts and public agencies.

Clovis Unified School District has employed the firm's services for the past six years, clearing out their warehouses with 355 sales totaling more than \$165,000.

Kelly Avants, Clovis Unified's director of communications, said the relationship has allowed the district to reach a broader market for its unused inventory. Past sales range from a piano and a collating machine to a few pizza ovens and five old hospital beds. She added that InterSchola's services have also freed up an already strained administrative staff to focus solely on new purchases for the district's 43 schools.

"We would have to go through holding what would equate to a large yard sale," Avants said of the former method of shaking off old stuff, "and we have a very small staff in the purchasing office."

The 19-school Sanger Unified School District has moved a variety of items using InterSchola, including computer equipment, furniture, food service supplies and even a few vehicles.

Richard Sepulveda, purchasing director for Sanger Unified, said the process offers a number of benefits over how the district used to handle surplus, including expensive an-

nouncements in The Fresno Bee classified section.

Another advantage is in reducing clutter and opening up storage space for new surplus, he added. Many of the 115 items totaling \$40,000 sitting in Sanger Unified's warehouses are now more likely to reach new buyers.

"If I can sell it before I move it, then that's a benefit to me rather than things just sitting around collecting dust," Sepulveda said. "The longer it sits, it probably starts losing value."

InterSchola has arranged auctions for the Fresno and Merced County offices of education and also a few for California State University, Fresno. Besides bringing in extra cash for schools, the company has also worked with the cities of Fresno and San Joaquin.

Although a number of online sites such as Craigslist and uBid may be tapped, eBay is the platform of choice when it comes to public auctions, reaching public and private buyers all across the country for still usable goods.

Items for auction are broken down into various categories on the company's website, www.InterSchola.com, including vehicles, musical instruments, sporting goods, furnishings and portable buildings.

Past and present auction items can be located from the Merchandise tab, where clicking on specific equipment links to additional information, photos and the eBay page where folks can put in their bid.

According to InterSchola President and Founder Melissa Rich, the company's services take much of the workload off of school administrators charged with the rigmarole of regulations that require items to first be declared surplus and then committed to an auction that gives the public an



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Drill presses are among the items put up for auction by Sanger Unified School District through InterSchola.

opportunity to snatch them up.

"We believe school districts were sitting on so much stuff and they didn't really have the resources to find out how to monetize the assets in accordance with the regulations involved," she said. "In the process we're diverting millions of pounds a year of premature waste and disposal."

Rich founded the company after working for years at the investment division of Intel called Intel Capital, where she recommended emerging education companies for investment. After pitching her idea to executives at eBay, she took off with pilot auctions for Bay Area school districts that proved successful in getting rid of equipment that had been sitting idle in warehouses, some as long as two decades.

So far, 125 million registered users have bought items through InterSchola. The company serves 420 clients nationwide, 80 percent of which are public school districts while others include police and fire departments, sanitation and water districts and other public agencies.

In October, InterSchola struck up an agreement with the city of Fresno and recently submitted a proposal to Merced County to further its foothold in the San Joaquin Valley.

"The more inventory and the more we list in a geography, it enhances the sale and final prices among all the items in that area because we have a lot of buyers that like to buy more than one item at a time," Rich said.

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