

TIPS FOR BETTER FUNDRAISING AUCTIONS

ESTABLISH THE NEED

Put a "face" on your event...make the impact of what you do and why very clear to attendees. Whether you've done it every year or not, be sure that a short, but impactful, presentation is made that illustrates where the money goes and the good that is done.

PRESENTATION OF THE EVENT

Don't be afraid to use the words "Fundraiser" and "Auction" in the name or subheading of each and every piece of publicity or printed item relative to the event. Event titles which include the words "Ball", "Gala", or "Night to Remember" are great for a class reunion, but don't convey to attendees that they need to bring the checkbook or credit card because they're attending a fundraiser.

THE CROWD

Having an event with 1,000 people who are in attendance because their corporation bought a table of tickets and passed them out as "perks" to staff will not generate income, unless the ticket prices have a built-in profit margin that is significant. Most of the people who fall into that category are going to spend more at the cash bar than they will in the auction. Selling corporate tables is fine, but don't give discounts. Give corporate table purchasers a little perk in the program or provide them a table sign for their company and charge more than the per-person rate for entire tables. The best attendees are friends of supporters of the cause who get personally invited to attend, and understand that they are being invited to a fundraiser. Are you having a "Friend-Raiser" or a "Fund-Raiser"?

ITEM PROCUREMENT

1. First and foremost, if you don't have a procurement form, make one. A half-page NCR form will do, and you can give the donor a copy for their records. Just a little professionalism in the asking of donations will illicit better items.
2. The procurement campaign should begin at least 90 days in advance of the event. Some large items, like airline travel and condominium stays may even take a year, given that those organizations have an annual budget meeting to approve donations. Have an auction committee meeting assigning volunteers a specific area or type of item to solicit. Two different volunteers contacting the same donor for an item is embarrassing and unprofessional and is chaotic. Print last year's list and divide it among procurement volunteers, then give them specific assignments for new donations.
3. Keep a list of donors. Send 'thank-you' notes to each of them AFTER the event, telling them how important their donation was to the 'wonderfully well-supported' cause. Review the performance of the donations relative to their Suggested Retail Price, and contact the best-performing donors earliest in the procurement campaign.

4. Don't let the donor dictate whether their item will be sold in the live or silent auction. We (the committee, the cause and the auctioneer) are all focused toward making each item sell for as much money as possible, and will work toward that end.
5. Memberships to spas, fitness centers, clubs, and child care facilities, as well as certificates for "credit" on a purchase of an item (hot tubs, jewelry, etc.) will flop...hard. Anyone who wishes to donate such a "discount" should receive the opportunity to just give a check instead and be listed as a sponsor. You'll absolutely net more money!

LIVE OR SILENT AUCTION?

This is simple: only those items for which there will be a bidding war should be sold in the live auction, and, for most events, 10-12 items is the max number for the live segment. There are exceptions, and there are events where 20-30 items are well-received by an active bidding crowd, but that isn't the norm.

SILENT AUCTION TIPS

When cataloguing silent auction items, use the following practices:

1. Don't allow "inflating" of the retail price by the donor or by auction committee members. You're insulting the intelligence of your crowd, and it won't work. It just looks shady.
2. Control the bidding increments in silent auction by pre-printing the bid sheets with the increments already on them. This eliminates the "\$1" bid raises on \$500 items that only make bidders angry. Make \$10 your minimum increment and go up from there on higher-value items.
3. Make the starting bids on items very reasonable. Fifty percent of the MSRP, or suggested retail, is too high. To encourage a bidding frenzy, let the bids start at twenty or thirty percent. The desirable items will take care of themselves. Any item that doesn't get a twenty-percent-of-retail starting bid is an item you can exclude next year.
4. "Free" and "Complimentary" should **never** be used in an auction description. Everything has a value! If it doesn't, you don't have anything to sell.
5. PACKAGE! PACKAGE! PACKAGE!!!!!!! Lesser-valued donations should be bundled into packages for silent auction. If you have ten, \$20 gift cards for restaurants in the area, put them in one, decorated basket and give it a package name with a \$50 starting bid. Or, if you have a half dozen sports-related items that are valued under \$30 or \$40 each, put them together and call it the Ultimate Sports Fan pack. It will bring just as much, if not more, money, and cause less confusion on the silent auction tables. There should be nothing with a starting bid of less than \$50.
6. An entire paragraph describing the item will not get read by the bidder. Keep silent auction item descriptions short and to the point.

Silent auction should close in sections. If you have less than thirty items or so, you can close in one section, sure. But if you have one hundred items, closing them all at once leaves money in the unsuccessful bidder's pocket. Giving them chance to bid in the "Gold" section,

after they were unsuccessful in the "Silver" section encourages more bidding. This can be done by value, or by type of item (travel, health and leisure, sports, etc.).

Leaving the silent auction open all night serves no purpose at all. Thinking that the crowd will become more alcohol soaked and recklessly bid more than ever on silent auction items is a myth. The more inebriated the crowd, the less concerned they are with supporting the cause. All silent auction sections should all be closed before dinner, with few, if any, exceptions.

LIVE AUCTION TIPS & COMMON MISTAKES

Live auction is where your highlight items should be. Consult your auctioneer for items that should and should not be sold live. The worst thing that can happen in live auction is that an item valued at \$5,000 (usually inappropriately), sells for \$500 and the donor is in the room. A benefit auction professional can help make those choices, and then you, as the auction chair, can blame him/her when the donor asks why their item wasn't included in the live auction!

1. Never have the live auction at the end of a long-winded program. A public-outcry auction takes advantage of momentum and enthusiasm. After a crowd has had a large dinner and been engaged for an hour and a half by well-meaning, but lacking presentational skills, speakers, the first thing they want to do is get up, go to the bathroom, engage in conversation or get another cocktail.
2. Have a professional PA for the live auction, as well as for other announcements throughout the evening. The house P.A. at the hotel is not good enough, **REPEAT, THE HOUSE P.A. AT THE HOTEL IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!!** (OK, there's *one* exception in Indiana, and that facility is almost new...). You'll gain your money back in increased revenue at the auction because people will be able to hear, and you'll have crowd control, essential for an effective live auction. The band may, emphasize may, be willing to let you use theirs, but most sound engineers for bands are very protective of their equipment.

FUND-A-CAUSE

If you don't know what this is, you're missing out on thousands of dollars every year!!! If you do know what this is, are you doing it right? Call Darin ...

THE REST...

1. Get an auction and event software package. You can spend as little or as much as you want, and you'll never make a better investment in your event's future. People won't have to wait in long, long, *really* long lines to check out and they'll come back next year.
2. Get a wireless credit card swipe/processor and be able to verify cards and print slips for credit card purchasers.
3. Sometimes, it's necessary to close the bar during the evening to get everyone's attention
4. Local "Celebrity" auctioneers are usually an embarrassment to the auction and to themselves, and make the attendees uncomfortable.

5. Don't ever, ever, ever, let anyone who is speaking to the crowd right before the live auction say, "Thank you for coming, and goodnight..." !!!!! You'll have to rush your auctioneer to the hospital immediately for heart restarting...

And there's more...but you need to call Darin for those details.

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