



Fund Raising with Silent and Live Auctions

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Getting Started

Introduction

Coordinating and holding a fund raising event can be both a challenging and rewarding undertaking. The author of this paper has been coordinating and running auction based fund raising events over a decade with numerous organizations. This paper is intended to serve as a guide for those who have never held an auction based fund raising event and perhaps as a source of new or different ideas for those who have.

Organizing Volunteers

Well organized volunteers are one of the keys to a successful event.

Leveraging talent

People have different talents and motivations. Not everyone is good at soliciting donations. There are other important roles your volunteers can play for your event. The following are recommended roles and teams for a successful event. Ask your volunteers to sign up on one or more of the teams and find appropriate leaders who can champion the team.

Donations Team

Ideally all your volunteers will solicit and secure donations for your event. The donations chair is responsible for monitoring your progress on donations and for motivating volunteers to get more donations.

Motivating Volunteers

Asking merchants for donations is not easy – especially when there are many other organizations that are running similar events and merchants are constantly solicited. You will likely find that a few of your volunteers are really good at this and most are not. Fostering competition in a positive way and publically rewarding the people who are successful at getting donations is a good way to improve the motivation and number of donations. A couple suggestions on ways to motivate volunteers include:

- Hold a weekly meeting where you highlight the top 3 or 5 volunteers by donation value and/or number of donations secured.
- Give away raffle tickets for items in your event. These are basically free to you and provide the recipient an opportunity to win items at the event.

Soliciting Donations

When soliciting donations it is very important to make sure the same merchant is not solicited by multiple volunteers. This is not only embarrassing to your organization, but it is frustrating to the merchant and may cause them to not contribute to your cause in the future. Having a well organized database system where you can assign or associate volunteers with donors, and through which volunteers can check before soliciting donations is an excellent idea.

You may also find that some volunteers have personal relationships with certain merchants. Clearly a personal relationship with a merchant increases the likelihood that you will secure a donation from that

merchant. Again, having a system where volunteers can claim merchants as their responsibility will help eliminate duplicate requests and increase your level of success at securing donations.

Think out of the box

Unfortunately merchants are often inundated with requests to donate to a variety of worthy causes which makes securing donations even harder. You may find however that there are many untapped possibilities for donations. Think about items that cannot be purchased and offer unique opportunities – these often yield the best results. It's good to think out-of-the-box such as:

- **Private Dinners** – Perhaps one of your volunteers is an excellent chef. Have them donate a personally prepared dinner perhaps for two in a romantic spot or for a group of 8-10.
- **Dinner with a VIP** – Offer a private dinner with your school Principal, town mayor, Police Chief, or local celebrity. Often these people are happy to donate their time to a good cause and these kinds of items can raise hundreds if not thousands of dollars.
- **Ride to School in a Squad Card or on a Fire Truck** – Reach out to your local police or firefighters to offer a ride to school for a child. This costs them virtually nothing, is great PR and can raise hundreds of dollars for your event.
- **Fire Marshall or Principal for the Day** – Every kid has looked at a fire alarm and wondered what it would be like to pull it. All schools by law have to have fire drills – typically once a month. Combine these two and auction off the position of Fire Marshall for the Day for a lucky kid. Principal for the day is a similar concept.
- **One Month of Bedtime Stories by a Favorite Teacher** – a favorite teacher at your school may be willing to come once a week and read bedtime stories to your child.
- **Timeshares** – Many people own timeshares these days. Often these go unused. See if any of your volunteers own or know people who own a timeshare and would be willing to donate a week in their timeshare to your cause.
- **Vacation Homes / Condos** – Same as above – see if anyone has a vacation home they might be willing to donate.
- **Manual Labor** – Check with your local Boy Scouts, High School Sports team or your volunteers to get a commitment for a day of labor – yard clean-up, window washing, car washing, etc.
- **Scenic Flights** – Perhaps there are pilots in your organization that might be willing to take people flying as a scenic tour. Check at your local airport flight school to see if they might donate a scenic flight around your area. This is good advertising for them anyway.
- **Seasonal Vegetables** – Perhaps someone in your group has a great garden. Ask them to donate a basket of vegetables a week for a month or two during the growing season.
- **Boat Rides / Quad Rides** – Maybe someone has a nice boat or Quad runners and would take people out for a scenic river, lake or woods tour.
- **Other Unique Ideas:**
 - **Dessert Dash** – For events holding a sit-down dinner, allow tables to bid for position in the dessert line. The highest bidding table gets first choice of desserts and so on. This also spaces out the run on the dessert table.

- **Goat Auction** – I have to credit another organization for sharing this idea with me... The concept was this: A live goat donated by a local rancher was put up for auction at the event with the following twists:
 - **1.** The bid winner could “give” the goat to any other attendee and that attendee could not refuse the gift of the goat.
 - **2.** If the attendee receiving the “gift” did not want the goat, they could pay a pre-set amount to have the goat put back up for auction.
 - **3.** Prior to the goat auction, a limited number of “Goat Insurance Policies” were offered to attendees to insure against them being given the goat.
 - It would be important in this example to have a few attendees who would be willing to keep the goat so that the goat auction would eventually end.

There are many more examples of donations that don’t impact local merchants. Sit down and brain-storm with your team to see what you can come up with. You might be surprised at how many opportunities there are.

Collecting and inventorying donations

It is important to efficiently collect and inventory donations. Missing or misplaced donations on your auction day wreak havoc on the overall process and increase the level of stress on a generally stressful day. The more you can do to collect, clearly mark and inventory donations before the day of the event the better off you will be. Ideally each donation should be uniquely numbered and inventoried in a computer system. While this can be accomplished on paper or by using a standard spreadsheet such as MS Excel, systems such as Silent Auction Pro that hold the information in a database are much more flexible and easier to work with. Multi-user systems that can be accessed by more than one person at a time are also extremely useful in spreading the workload of entering and managing donations. Silent Auction Pro is also a multi-user internet based system.

Whatever system you use, it is also helpful to include a donation status such as:

- Requested
- Committed
- Received by Volunteer
- Received at Donation Warehouse
- Missing

This way you and all your volunteers can more accurately track their donations and eliminate confusion about the status of the donation.

Promotion Team

The Promotions Team is responsible for getting the word out about your event and getting people to the event. Assuming the primary source of funds for your event will be from the auction items, it is not only important to get people to the event, but to get people who have and will spend money at your event. Packing the house with people who are not bidding will hurt your event by making it more crowded. If possible focus on groups who will spend money at your event rather than just the general public.

The Promotions team is ultimately responsible for:

- Advertising the event
- Ticket Sales
- Working with the Auction Team to create promotional material for the auction items.

At your event it is important to promote the non-physical items such as vacations, services, dining, etc., as these are typically presented as just a piece of paper and therefore are often missed by your attendees. The Promotions Team should be in charge of creating material to highlight these items at the event. This might include:

- Table-top displays with pictures or additional information.
- Images or video presented on a large screen at the venue highlighting certain auction items.
- Announcements by the Master of Ceremonies about special items or perhaps about items that have received few bids.

More visible items get more bids. A sheet of paper sitting on a table with a short description often gets over looked. Task the promotions team with promoting items at the auction as well.

Venue Team

The venue team is responsible for handling the details related to where you are going to hold your event. This includes:

- Negotiating the contract with the venue
- Decorating
- Coordinating catering or food and drink vendors
- Ensuring other services such as an Internet connection is available the night of the event.

Auction Team

The Auction Team is responsible for all the pre-work with respect to creating the auction items and printed material for your auction – excluding promotional material. This includes

- Creating Auction Items (Bundling)
- Packaging – Physically combining items
- Creating and Printing Printed Material
- Set-up of the auction items at the venue

Creating Auction Items (Bundling)

Often you can make individual donations more interesting and valuable by combining one or more donations into a “package”. This is also useful should you find yourself with many smaller donations and limited room at your venue.

A typical example of a bundle might be combining a dinner, movie tickets and a limo ride and calling it “A Night on the Town!”.

It is best to have all your donations inventoried and numbered before performing the bundling process. This provides the best opportunity to make smart combinations that will maximize your profits and minimize last minute changes or missed opportunities.

The time it takes to perform the bundling process depends on the number of items you have and the space available at your venue. Many items will stand alone as individual auction items though you will find that some naturally go together.

Before starting the bundling process have the following:

1. A list of all donations with donation numbers and titles.
2. A spreadsheet or piece of paper with the following headings: Auction Item, Donations, Title, Table Number.

Now you can start the paper bundling. Let's assume you have the following donations you want to bundle together:

D8 – A Three Hour Limo Ride Courtesy of Luxury Limos

D24 – Dinner for Two at the River House

D123 – Two Tickets to the IMAX Theater

Perform the bundling first on paper by writing down an auction number – A1 for instance and then writing down the donation numbers contained in A1; D8, D123 and D24. Next come up with an appropriate title such as “A Night on the Town” and assign a table or section number to the item.

Next cross off donations D8, D24 and D123 as being bundled and move on to the next item. It is a good idea to assign Auction Item numbers to all items during this process regardless if the item contains multiple donations or just a single donation. This way you can assign appropriate titles to items and table numbers.

After you have done this on paper, if you have a computer based system such as Silent Auction Pro you can enter the data into the system and it will automatically create bid sheets for you.

Packaging

Packaging is the physical process of combining donations based on the results of the bundling. Auction Item numbers should be placed on all Donations as per the bundling. It is likely that many auction items consist entirely of one or more gift certificates. In this case, for each auction item, collect the gift certificate for each donation and place them in an envelope with the Auction Item number written on the outside of the envelope. (Don't place real gift certificates out on the tables during the bidding process. It is too easy for them to get lost or stolen.) Place the envelopes in a safe place where they can be claimed after the bidding has completed.

Bidding Formats

Online and mobile bidding is becoming very popular and offer several advantages. If you are considering online and mobile bidding, please our document on Mobile and Online Bidding Best Practices.

Printed Material

If you are holding a traditional paper-based auction, once the bundling phase of your auction has been completed you can create all the printed material for your event. This includes:

- The Auction Program
- Bid Sheets
- Display Sheets
- Sold Sheets

Auction Program

The most important function for the Auction Program is not to individually list each item, but to recognize and thank your donors, sponsors and volunteers. Realize that 99% of the auction programs end up in the trash and most people attending your event will not be pouring over the program guide to find auction items but will instead be walking around physically looking at the items.

If you aren't offering online bidding, consider generating an Online Program Guide that attendees may peruse BEFORE your event to familiarize themselves with the items that will be up for bid. Forgo the listing of the individual silent auction items in the Program Guide and again focus on:

1. Recognizing Donors with Logos, mentions and perhaps even coupons.
2. Recognizing Sponsors and Volunteers
3. Listing Live Auction Items as these may have details or restrictions that may not be obvious or easy to display.

You may also be able to sell advertising in your auction program.

Bid Sheets


Bid Sheets are what your attendees will use to bid on each item. There is one bid sheet per item. Bid sheets should contain at a minimum the following information:

- The auction item title.
- A description of the auction item.
- A list of the donations included in the auction item.
- The total value of the item.
- The starting bid.
- The bid increment.
- A place for bidders to place their bids.

Letting bidders write their own bid amounts and names on the bid sheets is the easiest but often leads to problems. Many times people will either unintentionally or intentionally ignore the bid increment or minimum bid amount. For instance, if the bid increment is \$5 and the last bid was \$25. People will write down \$26 as the next bid. This requires Table Monitors to watch for and correct these broken bids. Another problem created by people writing their names on the bid sheets is that often names are illegible leaving you guessing who got the item – especially if they left before the bidding was complete.

An alternative is to pre-populate the bid sheet with bids conforming to the minimum bid and bid increment and provide a space before the bid amount where the bidder can write their name or ideally a bidder number. Figure 1 is an example of a bid sheet created automatically by Silent Auction Pro that

does exactly this:



Swim with Mouse Ears!

Presented by:
Demo Group
Demo Event!

Auction Item: A1
Total Value: \$333

<u>Donation ID:</u>	<u>Donated by:</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Value</u>
D1	Disney	3 Swimming lessons from world famous duck. Lessons include floating, paddling, and diving for fish. Donald will come to your pond. <i>Restrictions: Pond must not be frozen. Please schedule at least 1 season in advance.</i>	\$325
D5	Disney	One pair of Micky Mouse ears, size small. These are the standard of all mouse ears and can be worn almost anywhere. Though you can't hear better with them, they make you look good. <i>Restrictions: Not responsible for accidents in reptile zoos or for any side effects from laboratory experiments.</i>	\$8

Buy It Now For: \$266

Minimum Bid: \$150		Bid Increment: \$6	
<u>Bidder #</u>	<u>Bid Amount</u>	<u>Bidder #</u>	<u>Bid Amount</u>
_____	\$150	_____	\$210
_____	\$156	_____	\$216
_____	\$162	_____	\$222
_____	\$168	_____	\$228
_____	\$174	_____	\$234
_____	\$180	_____	\$240
_____	\$186	_____	\$246
_____	\$192	_____	\$252
_____	\$198	_____	\$258
_____	\$204	_____	\$264

Enter your Bidder Number to **Buy It Now** for \$266: _____

Signature: _____

Silent Auction Pro™

Figure 1 – A bid sheet containing pre-populated bid amounts.

Display Sheets

Display sheets are primarily for non-tangible auction items such as vacation homes, experiences, dinners, etc. Display sheets are typically presented in some form of a stand-up display and help to highlight that item rather than simply having a bid sheet laying flat on the table.

Sold Sheets

To increase bidding and excitement you may want to offer a “Buy-It-Now” price for each item. Depending on the item this price may be set above or below the true value of the item. Most fund raising events get 50-60% return on each item, so setting a Buy-It-Now price above this level on items should help improve your overall return. For some classes of items the Buy-It-Now price should be set above the value. This includes Dining, Wine, Rounds of Golf and other items you know will be popular.

If you do offer a Buy-It-Now feature, then you should also create “Sold” sheets to let your attendees know when an item has already been bought. This will also increase excitement and bidding as attendees see more and more items “gone” from the bidding. Figure 2 is an example of a “Sold” sheet printed by Silent Auction Pro.



Swim with Mouse Ears!

Presented by:
Demo Group
Demo Event!

Auction Item: A1

Total Value: \$333

<u>Donation ID:</u>	<u>Donated by:</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Value</u>
D1	Disney	3 Swimming lessons from world famous duck. Lessons include floating, paddling, and diving for fish. Donald will come to your pond. <i>Restrictions: Pond must not be frozen. Please schedule at least 1 season in advance.</i>	\$325
D5	Disney	One pair of Micky Mouse ears, size small. These are the standard of all mouse ears and can be worn almost anywhere. Though you can't hear better with them, they make you look good. <i>Restrictions: Not responsible for accidents in reptile zoos or for any side effects from laboratory experiments.</i>	\$8

Sorry, This item

SOLD

For \$266

Through BUY IT NOW!

Figure 2 – Sold Sheet

Set-up

The Auction Team should also be responsible for setting up all the auction items on auction day. This provides consistency since the same team created the auction items and printed the bid sheets.

Auction Day Team

The Auction Day Team has multiple duties and should be subdivided accordingly. Following is a list of typical roles on Auction Day:

- Auction Assistants
- Cashiers
- Table Monitors
- Runners

Auction Assistants / Check-in & Check-out

If you are using a computer system to help you with your auction you will need people with good computer skills to work the Check-in and Check-out stations.

Cashiers

You will need people to handle the money or credit cards if you are accepting credit cards. For obvious reasons the people directly handling the money and credit cards should be well known and trusted.

Table Monitors

Table Monitors are out on the auction floor monitoring the bidding progress and helping attendees if there are any questions regarding the bidding process. They can also keep watch over items so they are not stolen or lost. Table Monitors:

- Monitor bidding
- Collect bid sheets
- Security for smaller items

When the bidding is over and a section closes, table monitors along with the runners should pick up all the bid sheets and take them to the Auction Assistants for processing.

Be aware of the fact that often bidders will try to wait until the absolute last second to place a bid on an item to guarantee that they win that item. Sometimes this will happen after the section has been closed and you are trying to pick up the bid sheets. It is best to have enough table monitors and runners to quickly pick up all the bid sheets to avoid conflicts between bidders who may be trying to sneak in a last second bid.

Runners

Runners are often high-school students or younger volunteers who help in many general ways with your auction. Runners help by:

- Taking bid sheets to the check-out area after a section closes.

- Moving auction items to the redemption area
- Doing other general purpose tasks.

Tear-down

The Auction Day Team should also be responsible for break-down and clean-up after your event.

Training

Leave enough time in your schedule to do some training and coaching with your volunteers. Make sure you train people on the following topics:

- Entering Donations
- Putting numbers on Donations
- Check-in / Check-out process
- Monitoring the Bidding Process
- Expectations during check-out (how do people get their items?)

Timeline

The following is a recommended timeline for an event. It is often very difficult to get people motivated to work on the event until it becomes urgent. Publishing a schedule and having regular meetings with status updates is a way to keep people focused on your event. With the exception of booking the venue which depending on the location may need to be done 6 months to a year before your event, you should give yourself about 3 months to collect donations and prepare for Auction Day. All times below are prior to “Auction Day”.

- Select and Book the Venue – 6 Months to 1 Year
- Begin Soliciting Donations – 3 Months
- Print Tickets and Distribute Tickets¹ – 2 Months
- Stop Accepting Donations² – 2 Weeks
- Bundling – 10 days
- Print Program – 8 days
- Packaging – 5 days
- Print Bid Sheets – 1 day
- Auction Day
- Post Auction Review + 1 week
- Mail Thank You Letters + 2 weeks

¹ Tickets should include a detachable stub that can be returned to you that includes the person’s name, phone number and email address. This allows you to get an accurate count how many people and who is attending your event. This information can then be used to help you market your next event.

² Try to put an end date on when you will accept donations and stick to it. This forces your volunteers to get donations in and reduces last minute changes. If you have no end date people will be bringing in donations even the day of the auction.

You can download an Excel Spreadsheet from the Silent Auction Pro website that will automatically calculate the above dates given your auction date. The file is available at:

<http://www.silentauctionpro.com/resources/keydates.xls>

Event Venue

There are several things to consider when choosing a venue for your event. These include:

- Cost
- Capacity (People)
- Capacity (Auction Items)
- Location
- Internet Connection
- Food Service
- Alcohol
- Flow

Each of these considerations is covered below.

Cost

There may be many options for your venue in your local area. Most will likely charge for the use of their facilities though you may be able to negotiate a better rate or possibly even free use. Look at your options, narrow the list based on the facilities and amenities that you need, and then task your best negotiator (hopefully an ex timeshare sales person) to negotiate the best deal. Here are some types of locations to consider:

- Hotel Ballrooms
- Churches
- School Gymnasiums / Multi-use rooms
- Convention Centers
- Boys & Girls Clubs Multi-use rooms
- Sports Facilities
- Airplane Hangars

Capacity (People)

Make sure the venue you choose can handle the number of people you expect to attend. If you are serving food, will you need table seating? If you don't have a sit-down dinner definitely plan for a place where people can sit and relax a bit.

Capacity (Auction Items)

Estimate the number of auction items you think you will have. You will need enough table space on which to place the items. If you have larger items such as furniture, make sure you have room for them.

Location

Clearly a convenient location for your attendees is important. Don't forget parking. If parking is a problem, consider hiring a valet company or asking them for a donation to help with your event.

Internet Connection

Depending on the system you use an Internet Connection may or may not be important. If you are running credit cards you will at least need a phone line. You can also process credit cards through an internet connection.

Food Service

If you plan on serving food make sure you negotiate this with the venue manager. Some facilities allow outside food vendors, some do not. One popular way of getting food at your event is to ask local restaurants to come in and prepare sample size items for your attendees. You can even have attendees vote for the best restaurant at the event to add a little excitement and to provide additional incentive for restaurants to attend.

Alcohol

Allowing alcohol at your event will likely lead to more bidding and more profits though it also has its drawbacks. Make sure you are not taking on liability by serving alcohol and that it is done within your state laws.

Staging Auction Items

Making sure your event attendees can easily view all the auction items is very important. Some items might be better displayed against a wall – such as Art while others can simply be placed on a table. There are many philosophies with respect to how to arrange items. Sometimes space dictates on what table or in what section you will place items. Following are a couple examples of different ways to group your items and some of the trade-offs.

By Category of Item

When group auction items by category you would place all the Wine in one section, Tools in another section, and Sporting Goods in another, etc.

Advantages

The main advantage of arranging things this way is that people who are interested in a particular class of item – Golf items for instance can simply go to that one section and see all the items related.

Disadvantages

People may only go to a section in which they are interested and miss items in another section that might catch their interest if they saw it.

Mix

Mixing item on your tables is another way to organize your auction items. This way you encourage your attendees to walk through all the auction tables to see all the auction items in hopes that they may find other items on which to bid.

Consider putting items you think will be popular on tables that close later in the evening to help boost profits.

Advantages

Disadvantages

Flow

Check-in / Check-out

Display of Auction Items

Auction Item Redemption Area

Food and Drink

You will probably want to provide food and drinks at your event. There are many options ranging from full sit-down dinners, buffets to having multiple vendor booths with samples of their food and / or wine.

The latter is probably the least expensive though this probably takes the most coordination and may take away from attendees bidding on your silent auction items if they are standing in lines trying to get food or drinks.

Having a formal sit-down dinner can also shorten the time your attendees have to bid on silent auction items. Understand and discuss the trade-offs before deciding on what you want to do with your event.

Auction Phases

A typical auction based event has four phases:

- Donation Acquisition
- Pre-Auction Prep
- Auction Day
- Post Auction

Donation Acquisition

As covered in the previous event timeline, you should ideally allow two to three months to acquire donations for your event. The more time you allow the more donations you will likely get.

Tracking Donations

It's important to track your donations as they are committed, received and inventoried. A computer based system will greatly help not only in this phase but in all phases of your event.

As you receive each donation, assign a unique number to that item and apply a sticker (that won't fall off) with the donation number on it like D1, D2, etc. This will help you track donations and know what each donation is.

Gift Certificates versus Physical Donations

Many merchants may prefer to give you a gift certificate for their store rather than a physical item. Often the reason behind this for the merchant is that it will get a person into their store and hopefully allow them to sell them something more expensive. The downside to gift certificates is that they don't present well at a silent auction and therefore often return a lower percentage than a physical item that is attractive and desirable. Try to get physical items if possible.

Trading

Consider trading donated items with other organizations in other locations where you might be able to get a higher percentage return by trading. For instance, say you live in a popular vacation area and local hotels typically donate lodging to your event. It is likely that your attendees live in your area and are therefore not that interested in bidding on local lodging. You might be able to trade lodging in your area with another vacation spot and create a win-win solution for both your event and an event in another area! Silent Auction Pro can help you broker these trades

Pre-Auction Prep

Pre-Auction Prep includes Bundling, Packaging and creating all the printed material including the Auction Program Guide, Bid Sheets, Gift Certificates, Signage / Advertising and any other material you need for your event. This phase begins roughly 10 days prior to Auction Day. Ideally you should stop accepting donations during this phase and focus on inventorying donations, creating auction items and printing auction material. In practice, you will likely find that donations will still trickle in and you will have to handle them on a one-by-one basis.

Auction Day!

Auction Day is when all your hard works comes together! Auction Day has its own timeline and challenges as covered below.

Timeline

Depending on the size of your event and the number of auction items, give yourself up to half a day to set up for the event. It's better to be well prepared and have a few hours before your attendees arrive than to be scrambling at the last minute. Following is a typical timeline for an event with a few hundred auction items 300+ attendees:

Set-up: 10am – 3pm

Train Check-in / Check-out Workers: 3:30pm – 4pm

Start of the Event! – 5pm

Close Section 1 – 7pm

Close Section 2 – 7:20pm

Close Section 3 – 7:40pm

Close Section 4 – 8pm

Live Auction: 8pm – 8:30pm

Check-out Opens / Claim Auction Items: 8:45pm

End of the Event

Set-up

The more organized you are the easier the set-up phase will go. It helps tremendously to have inventoried and numbered all donations with the same colored label dots using donation numbers preceded by a D: D1, D2, D2, etc.. Don't use sticky notes, these will fall off. Once items have been bundled into auction items use a different colored label / dot to identify the auction item. A1, A2, A3, etc.

Staging Auction Items

Your Promotions Team should have created appropriate advertising for the non-physical items such as gift certificates, vacations, etc. Set-up is the time to put the advertising together with the bid-sheets on the tables for your event.

Tweaks

Expect last minutes changes. Typical last minute changes are caused by missing donations, adjustments to the value of items, etc. Make sure you have the ability to handle last minute changes at your event venue.

Creating Excitement

There are several things that you can do to increase excitement during your event and improve your bottom line. Here are a few examples:

Progressively Close Sections

Progressively close sections or tables of silent auction items. This helps you focus attention on each section as they close and removes items from the bidding.

Count-Down Timer

Project a count-down timer on a wall where attendees can see when sections will close. This creates a sense of urgency for the bidding as well as adds excitement to your event.

Announcements

Have your MC announce how much time is left for the closing section as well as highlight desirable items that have few bids. Note: Often it is difficult for attendees to hear the MC due to poor acoustics at the event so don't rely solely on the MC.

Buy-It-Now

Offer a Buy-It-Now feature on items and pull the bid-sheets as soon as items are bought by the Buy-It-Now. Bidders will see that items on which they were bidding removed from the bidding and will consider buying other things through the Buy-It-Now. Make sure you set the Buy-It-Now prices high enough and by item class. Some item classes will command a higher price than others. Dining and good wine typically return 100% or more.

Closing Silent Auction Sections

As mentioned previously, it can be helpful to progressively close silent auction sections. This helps to focus attendees on items as the sections close and gives you more time to process bid sheets. Bid sheets from closed sections should be immediately taken up to the check-out area for processing into your system to minimize the wait for attendees wanting to check-out.

Who Won What

Once a section closes, bidders want to immediately know if they won any items. It is best to set expectations for when bidders will know what they have won. Depending on the system you use it may take several minutes to hours to process the results of the bidding. It is possible to use a spreadsheet such as MS Excel to tally up the winning bids, though any system where there is just one computer used to do the data entry will be significantly slower than systems where you can do data entry using multiple computers. Silent Auction Pro allows you to perform data entry with an unlimited number of computers. Typical events using Silent Auction Pro have 3-5 computers doing the data entry and can process 40-50 bid sheets in 15 minutes or less.

Once you have tallied the results. Print out the results and distribute them to the attendees or possibly use a computer to project the results on a wall where attendees can check the results.

Check-out

A smooth hassle free check-out adds significantly to the enjoyment level for your event. Minimizing the wait time and lines at check-out should be one of your primary goals to make sure attendees come back in subsequent years.

One of the best things you can do is **Set Expectations** as to when people can start the check-out process. If you are using a computer based system such as Silent Auction Pro, you should be able to start to check-out attendees 15-20 minutes after the last section closes. If you are holding a Live Auction, this is typically done at the end of your event. People not bidding on any Live items will want to check-out during the Live Auction. Make sure you ask people if they are bidding on any Live items before tallying up the final bill.

Generating Invoices

Ideally you should have a system (like Silent Auction Pro) that can automatically generate invoices for each bid winner. If not, you will need some way of calculating the total amount due by each bidder.

Tax

Most States require that you pay sales tax on items sold at your event. Not all items are taxable. Generally, gift certificates should not be taxed as the merchant will charge sales tax when the gift certificate is redeemed. Other classes of items may also not be taxable. Check with your local Board of Equalization to find out what you need to do to comply with local tax codes.

If you do not charge your bid winners' tax then you will be responsible for paying the tax out of the proceeds of the event. This can represent a hit of 7% or more depending on your local sales tax rate.

Receipts

Bid winners may want a receipt for the goods that they purchased for tax purposes. Though money spent on items purchased at charity auctions is generally not tax deductible it is best to not point this out to your attendees and simply provide a receipt.

Resolving Issues

No matter how careful you are with your event, there will always be issues with the bidding, who won what, etc. Have a system that will allow you to quickly retrieve bid sheets to show who won an item. Typically these issues arise from either a data entry problem or names or numbers illegibly written on the bid sheet. Either way, make sure that the bid sheets are organized and accessible.

Back-up Plan

If you are using a computer based system it is important to have a back-up system in case the system goes down for any reason. This can include:

- Loss of Electricity
- Computer Crash / Spill of liquid on the machine / Dropped machine
- Loss of Internet Connection
- Printer Malfunction
- Other Reasons

Each type of system has its advantages and disadvantages.

Paper Based Systems

A paper based system is undoubtedly the cheapest and most reliable. Unfortunately it is also the most cumbersome, slowest and most error prone. If you have more than 50 or so donations strongly consider going to a computer based system.

Standalone Computer System

Standalone computer systems include those based on spreadsheets, Access databases and other more sophisticated systems that run on a single computer.

Following is a list of advantages and disadvantages to these types of systems:

Advantages

- Greater control over the data since generally one person is responsible for all data entry.
- No internet connection required

Disadvantages

- Data entry done on a single system is a huge bottle neck.
- One person doing all the data entry is prone to burn-out.
- If that one computer crashes you lose everything.
- Only one person can monitor the results.
- You have to install software on your computer.
- Updates to the system are generally not included or are costly.

Internet Based System

Advantages

- Multi-user system spreads the workload across multiple people.
- Data entry is much faster.
- Data is stored on a secure server and backed up so if any one computer crashes the data is not lost.
- All team members / volunteers can monitor results and progress during the donations entry phase.

- The software can be constantly improved and updated without you having to install new software on your computer.

Disadvantages

- An Internet connection is required for all data entry including at the event.
- You may have to go back and correct spelling and mistakes made by those entering information.

Live Auction

Most silent auction fund raisers also include a smaller live auction for the high dollar items. This is not only fun for your attendees but generally returns a higher percentage for those items in the live auction – especially with a good auctioneer. Try to keep the live auction 10 or fewer items. This keeps the live auction part shorter and will better hold the attention of your attendees.

Spotters

Make sure you have spotters who will write down the bidder number of who wins each live auction item. It is best to have more than one spotter writing down the winning bidder in case one of the spotters misses the winning bid or the winning bids are not written legibly by one of the spotters.

Fund-A-Need

If you are not doing a Fund-A-Need as part of your live auction you are missing out on a potential wind-fall of money. Not everyone who attends your event will win an auction item or find an item they want. Most are there to support your cause and have money to give if you simply ask.

The Fund-A-Need is a reverse auction where an auctioneer asks the crowd to give a cash donation at pre-defined levels appropriate for your audience. For example, the first giving level might be \$5000 and the auctioneer will ask who would be willing to donate \$5000 to your organization. (At the highest level you should have pre-arranged with a large donor to make the donation at that time to get the ball rolling). The auctioneer will then ask for donors at the \$2500 level, \$1500, \$1000, \$500, etc. Typically the last ask level is \$100 or \$50 again depending on your audience.

These pledges are captured on a tracking sheet and can be quickly entered into Silent Auction Pro so that the donation amount shows up on the bidder's invoice. You can even project how much has been raised and the names of all those who have made a donation.

Tickets

Most organizations sell tickets to their event to help cover the cost of the venue and to raise additional money for the cause. Depending on the area and affluence of the attendees ticket prices range from as low as \$15 to over \$150 or more. Obviously determining the ticket price is a balancing act between attracting the greatest number of people and making the most from ticket sales.

You may also want to offer different ticket levels, sponsorship tickets that include multiple admission tickets, etc.

Information to collect

We strongly suggest that you collect as much information about your attendees when selling tickets. Have a detachable ticket stub that the attendee returns before the event that includes the following information:

- Name
- Address
- Phone Number
- Email Address

This will allow you to pre-register attendees in your auction system who have prepaid for their tickets and significantly shorten the check-in lines. Preprint their bidder numbers and attach them to the program guide and set them on a separate table where the prepaid attendees can simply pick up their packet and go on into the event.

Getting more out of your donations

You will spend a significant amount of time soliciting donations for your event. It is important to do everything that you can to get the highest return from each item. Our experience shows that organizations typically achieve returns of 50% or so on average. Anything you can do to increase the percent return above 50% is money in your pocket. Following are a few suggestions on how to do this:

Pre-written bid amounts

Creating bid sheets with prewritten bid amounts rather than allowing attendees to write their own bid amounts will help increase your returns by avoiding broken bids. A broken bid is where a bidder ignores the set bid increment and writes a bid that is lower than allowed. For instance, let's say the bid increment is \$10 and the previous bid was \$50. Obviously the next legal bid is \$60. Without prewritten bid amounts you will find that many attendees will make up their own bids and write down something like \$51. Assuming the bid increments are reasonable, most bidders will pay the extra few dollars to purchase an item if they really want it and you will make more money.

Buy it now

As discussed previously, Buy It Now increases your return by allowing attendees to purchase items at a higher percentage than the typical return. This also removes items from the bidding process and creates a sense of panic / excitement as more and more items are bought by Buy It Now.

Announce interesting items with low or no bids.

If you have an announcer at your event, have him or her walk around your auction and find items people might be interested in and might have missed. The announcer can then tell the attendees about the great deal on the item and encourage people to come bid on that item.

Boost Bidding

Every bid that is placed increases your return regardless if that is the winning bid or not. If you can identify items that seem to have active bidding you may want to have a member of your organization slip in a few boost bids to increase the return on that item. This is basically an invalid bidder number that is

written down in hopes that others will bid above it. If the boost bid wins the item it will be recognized as invalid during the bid entry into the system and the previous high bidder will win the item.

You may consider boost bidding unscrupulous and choose not to do this. Another way to boost bid more legitimately is to simply encourage your members to bid on things they might want – especially where the item seems to be popular.

Post Auction

Unfortunately, after your event your work is not through. There are several tasks that will need to be completed to truly finalize the event.

Reconciling

Make sure you keep a copy of the invoice from each attendee showing that they paid for the item and that they picked the item up. Using these invoices you should be able to reconcile the invoice against the auction items to help you know what items were paid for and which were not.

Follow up

There will be several follow-up tasks that will need to be completed including:

- Contacting winning bidders who failed to pay for or pick up their item.
- Handling items that received no bids.
- Perhaps finding missing items.

Having a good system that can generate reports about who bought what, what was paid for and what was not, and contact information for each attendee will make this process go much more quickly.

Thank your donors!

Make sure you send out timely thank you letters to all your donors for their donation. Consider making certificates that they can post on their wall that shows that they supported their community through their donation to your organization.

Analyzing Results

It is also important to analyze the results of your event. Sit down with the people who worked the auction and review what went well and what didn't.

With a system such as Silent Auction Pro you will also have detailed reports on how well each class of item did with respect to percent return, which groups of people spent the most money and what items were sold by Buy It Now. Understanding this information and using it to influence how you do your next event should lead to even higher returns and profits for each subsequent event.

Typical Problems

No event goes perfectly. Having a good computer based system with a simple user interface will help you avoid or quickly resolve most issues. Following are some of the typical problems that arise during silent and live auction events:

Illegible bids on bid sheets

This is typically associated with bid sheets where bidders write their name and / or the bid amount on the bid sheet. It is especially bad where bidders are required to write their name. Avoid this at all costs by assigning bidder numbers to each bidder. Most people write numbers more clearly than letters. Having a system that pre-prints the bid amounts will also help eliminate problems.

No, I got that!

Inevitably you will have bidders who are sure that they won an item and come to the check-out area to contest a win. Following are typical examples where this might happen:

1. An item was bought by Buy-It-Now but was entered incorrectly in the system. If you are using a Buy-It-Now feature make sure you train the people entering information into your system to look first for the Buy-It-Now bid.
2. The winning bidder number was invalid or illegible. In this case the winning bid is typically assigned to the next highest bidder. Determine ahead of time how you want to handle these types of issues. Suppose a bidder simply transposed his bid number on the bid sheet and had been bidding on that item throughout the night. Do you accept the “invalid bid” and assign the win to the person who wrote it wrong or do you give it to the next highest bidder?

Check-in Lines

No one likes to wait in lines. Do whatever you can to speed up the check-in process. Following are some ideas on how to do this:

1. Pre-register attendees – especially those who have pre-paid and have their bidder numbers printed out ahead of time.
2. If you are using a computer based system, use one that is a multi-user system where you can have multiple stations to enter information.
3. Allow attendees to enter without bidder numbers and tell them to come back and get a bidder number if they want to bid on items.

Check-out Lines

There are several things you can do to reduce check-out lines and check-out frustration:

Set Expectations

Tell your attendees when they can start to check out and don't open the check out before that. This will give you time to do all the data and be ready to start printing invoices.

Establish a check-out line

It is best to funnel people through a line and have multiple computers and printers to quickly find and print invoices for your bid winners.

High Speed Printers

Make sure you have at least two or three high speed printers and have the printers distributed between the different computers. Ideally you should have one high speed printer for each computer.

Credit Card Processing

Assuming you will be accepting credit cards, make sure you have enough credit card processing stations and staff to ensure this part of the check-out process is not a bottleneck.

Redeeming Items

Make sure you have a well defined process for how people pick up their items. There are a couple ways this is typically done:

Pick-up Area

Some organizations move all the auction items from the display tables to a central secure location where the items can be redeemed after they have been paid for. If this is your plan make sure you have staff to move the items to the area after each section closes.

To distribute items you will need a couple people to work the counter and three or four as runners to locate items and bring them up to the counter.

At the Auction Table

Some organizations choose to leave the auction items on the tables and cordon off the tables from the attendees after each section closes. In this case the items stay in place but you will need to have security in place to make sure that items do not disappear throughout the evening.

This also required bid winners to walk around your event to different locations to pick up their items and is probably a bit less convenient that moving items to a central location.