

StoryTelling: Evolution of an Elementary School Auction



Auction at Carnival Base Year

Here's the auction evolution of an elementary school in sunny Florida. To preserve privacy let's just call the school Sunny Elementary. For many years, Sunny Elementary held a carnival with lots of activities, food and games. During the carnival, Sunny Elementary would also hold a silent auction. Sunny Elementary PTO did a great job in collecting donations for the auction, lots of pretty baskets filled with goodies, local and national chain gift certificates and sports and entertainment tickets and memorabilia. At the end of the carnival, Sunny Elementary PTO closed the auction and awarded the goods to the most recent and highest bidders.

After analyzing the results, they found final bids were only at a fraction of the retail values.

They thought: "There has to be a better way."

Auction at the carnival yielded \$1,200. This is ok but we can do better!

How do we improve? How can we get higher bids?

Year #1

Stand Alone Auction Gala

Auction type: Live, & Silent at a stand alone event

Answers: Need more bidders and need the bidders to stick around and rebid on more items.

Solution Implemented:

The answer to both of these questions resulted in isolating the silent auction from the carnival and making the auction a stand-alone event. Carnival remained a carnival only. Auction took its rightful place as a featured event. The auction team¹ took charge, found lots of volunteers² and branded the event. At that moment, Sunny Elementary's annual auction, *Bids for Kids*, blossomed.

Interesting to note, procurement³ was much easier this time around. With a branded event, a formalized donation request letter and an interactive website dedicated to *Bids for Kids*, auction items streamed in.

The evening of *Bids for Kids*, bidders were energized with food and drink. The bidding soared!

Tip: Have an emcee that is lively! Provide the emcee with an agenda, scripted information that is relevant to the group, and pertinent information on key individuals (principals, president's co-chairs, etc.).

Success! The vehicle of a live and silent auction event turned an ordinary carnival auction into an annual event.

Results:

Year 1 stand alone event

Year 1 yield \$9,000

Increase of 9-fold. This is great but we can do better!

¹ Auctria has defined [auction team roles and tasks](#) for a quick jumpstart

² Auctria article titled "[Finding and Keeping Volunteers](#)" can help

³ Auctria has done the procurement research already! Check out our [Pinterest boards](#) to links to over 350 donation request pages.

How do we improve? How can we get higher bids?

Year #2

Working Smarter

Approximately 100 parents and staff attended *Bids for Kids*. Those that attended were full of energy and the spending spirit was high.

How do we improve? Need more bidders. Need more offerings and marketing prior to the event.

Answers: Pre-marketing, Raffle tickets, Pre-registration were some answers.

Solution Implemented:

Pre-marketing with a save the date notice was sent out early and frequently. Promote *Bids for Kids* website⁴ VERY early to encourage both donors to send in auction items but also secure potential bidders to window shop prior to the event.

Earlybird discount gala tickets⁵ were sold in advance with an at-the-door premium. The presale engaged bidders to again window shop and upsell the tickets being sold with raffle tickets and beverage tickets.

Raffle sales were offered prior to the event as a tangible sales instrument. Displaying raffle items, selling raffle tickets with the knowledge that raffle ticket winners will be announced at *Bids for Kids*. *Raffle engaged the 'customer' and as a result* pre-sale auction gala sales increased.

Save the date notices are nice but preview catalogs are better. A preview auction catalog⁶ was and distributed in advance, boosting the attendance figures.

Tip: To bring bidders to auction, promotion prior to the event is imperative. Engagement and participation unlock the bidding wars. If your group is determined to get the highest bids, then you NEED lots of pledged bidders.

Success! Early and frequent promotion brought in more bidders and higher bids.

Results

Year #2 stand alone event

10% additional bidders attended.

Year 2 yield \$12,000. This is great but we can do better!

⁴ Auctria provides each auction with its own [exclusive website](#).

⁵ Pre-sell [gala tickets](#) online with Auctria

⁶ Auctria makes [auction catalog](#) easy to customize and create.

How do we improve? How can we get higher bids?

Year #3

Reaching Out with Social Media

How do we improve?

Need more donations

Need more bidders

Need more offerings prior to the event

Solution Implemented:

Using our own Auctria data⁷, streamlined the procurement process. We knew who to ask for donations. It was just as vital to determine where to not spend our time asking. Donations soared, to the point that we had more donations than bidders and that resulted in bit of a glut.

To encourage more families to attend the *Bids for Kids* event we utilized the online catalog and linked the online catalog to emails and our FB and Twitter⁸ sites. We partnered (or rather bartered) with our local feeder schools to provide an avenue to publicize our upcoming event. They promoted our auction and we in turn promoted one of their events.

Tip: Communication is the key to any relationship. Publicize on facebook and twitter. Disseminate unique messages and links each time to keep the message fresh.

SUCCESS! Streamlined procurement and social feeds engaged more bidders.

Year #3 stand alone event

Year #3 yield \$15,000

30% increase income from prior year. This is great but we can do better!

⁷ Auctria retains all data in our cloud. Use your data to streamline the procurement process by knowing which donors will donate.

⁸ Facebook and Twitter quick links are fully integrated into Auctria, a quick tap lets users share the auction information or their favorite individual auction items

How do we improve? How can we get higher bids?

Year #4

Online Auction

How do we improve? Need more bidders and higher bids. Reducing expenses will increase the bottom line.

Answers:

Eliminate the gala and conduct the entire auction online. This was a decision that was not taken lightly. In reviewing the overall supporters throughout the year only a small fraction (10%) were actual recurring bidders in the past years. The goal is to regain past bidders and engage new ones.

Additional benefits to online auction: less volunteers, less expenses.

Solution Implemented:

Online bidding⁹ removed the barrier-to-entry (the gala event) and potentially increase the number of bidders. Pre-marketing was frequent and consistent with early website promotion. Raffles were again used to promote and foster engagement in the auction.

Tip: Online bidding can be an appetizer to the gala live and silent auction OR online bidding can be the auction in its entirety.

SUCCESS! Number of bidders doubled.

Year #4 Online auction only

Year #4 yield \$18,000

20% increase from the prior year

⁹ Online bidding with Auctria is one of the [major features](#) offered.

Moral of the story

The moral of the story is never stop improving.

Auctions require multiples bidder to bid up donated items. If there are too few bidders auction items will remain at low bids. More bidders equates to more sharing, more support, more donations and more fundraising.

More Bidders = Higher Final Bids

Successful auctions start before the auction does with promotion and marketing. Evaluate retrospectively and use that information to make different and hopefully better decisions, resulting in subsequent success.