

Special Events

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MONTHLY IDEAS FOR THOSE WHO PLAN, ORGANIZE AND MANAGE EVENTS OF ALL KINDS

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Seek Auction Donations of Items Combined With Service

Special Events Made Easier Through Technology

By Megan Venzin

Technology has undoubtedly made it easier to connect with donors and supporters in a more consistent and efficient manner. Nowadays, new tools are constantly introduced to aid in building donor relations and streamlining special events. Lynne Wester, independent founder and principal of Donor Relations Guru, has worked with nonprofits the past 15 years and has witnessed firsthand how technology can be used to improve and elevate the effectiveness of fundraising events. She's also seen how the lack of technology can be a hindrance to gaining funds.

"Our base is in the modern world, but many of our nonprofit

WHAT'S TRENDING

SILENT AUCTIONS

Eight Ways to Get Higher Silent Auction Bids

Organizing a successful silent auction takes effort and planning. Sherry Truhlar, founder of Red Apple Auctions (Arlington, VA), says there is a lot to know about silent auctions and using the right techniques will result in a higher return on investments.

Truhlar suggests following these seven guidelines:

1. **Use preprinted increments:** Don't let people write their own bids. Have the starting bid and increasing amounts printed on the bid sheet.
2. **Assign bid numbers and/or stickers instead of names:** If people know who they are bidding against, they are more likely to stop bidding. "I've heard people say, 'They have more money than me; I'll never win anyway,' or, 'I'll let her have it; I don't really need it,'" Truhlar says.
3. **Have a guaranteed purchase option:** Allow bidders the opportunity to buy the item outright. List the purchase price at 150 to 200 percent of the value of the item. "Some people think putting a cap on items will result in not raising as much money as possible, but statistics have proven that if you correctly use a guaranteed bid it does result in higher revenue," Truhlar says.
4. **Don't have too many items:** Your number of items should be no more than half of the number of buying units. For example; if your event has 300 attendees and many of the attendees come as a couple, you then have 150 buying units. Divide that number by 2, which means you should have no more than 75 items. If your event is typically not an event for couples, then divide the number of guests by 2. "Ideally you want at least two buying units bidding on each item," says Truhlar.
5. **Don't be "silent":** Bring a wireless microphone system and have someone advertise the items throughout the event. "Don't use the hotel sound system. It's not designed for an auction setting. Also, consider having volunteers highlight and direct attendees to the auction items," Truhlar suggests.
6. **Close the auction by individual item:** Don't have every item close at once. Instead, make your way down the list of items one by one and say, "Item ABC is now closed, but items DEF and GHI are still open for bidding." "All events are different, but generally 90 minutes is a good length for a silent auction to last," Truhlar says.
7. **Make it look like a boutique:** Arrange items with plenty of space between each and use a jewelry tree to display earrings, necklaces, and so on. "It's a psychological element. If your items are all jumbled up in a pile, it gives the feel that this is more like a rummage sale where people expect to get things for cheap. If you display your items as if they are in a boutique, it feels like a more expensive buying experience," Truhlar says.
8. **Be picky:** Avoid matters of personal taste, such as art, furniture, tax services and so on. Instead, offer trips, restaurant gift cards and hotel stays. Don't be afraid to say, "No," to a donation that does not fit your guidelines, and be specific when asking for them. Set-up time and space is valuable — make sure the items you offer are worth it. "If you ask for any donations, you will end up with everything from nice things to junk. After your auction, look at your return on investment. If you're selling an item for less than 50 percent of its value, don't bother with it the following year," Truhlar says.

Source: Sherry Truhlar, Founder, Red Apple Auctions, Arlington, VA. Phone (888) 474-0838. E-mail: info@redappleauctions.com. Website: www.redappleauctions.com

Watch the Pennies: Creating an Event Budget

When creating a budget for your next event, follow this checklist for properly accounting for and tracking expenses:

- Work closely with your caterer to determine food and beverage costs. Don't forget to build in the cost of gratuity of the wait staff, which can be up to 20 percent above and beyond the caterer's total.
- If your event will require equipment rental, note all fees and build a cushion for cost of breakage and late fees.
- Itemize cost of gifts for guests, staff and/or volunteers. No matter how economical the gift, costs can add up due to number of items purchased.
- Calculate cost of transportation to include shuttles that may be provided to guests, as well as driver tips.
- When choosing the event site, obtain a bid from at least three potential sites to determine the best value. Build in extra for costs associated with early set up and tear down of the event.
- If you're holding your event outdoors, account for tent, table, chair and toileting facility rental.
- Allow for a contingency fund. Estimate approximately 10 to 20 percent of your total to a slush fund that allows for extras that were overlooked.
- Summarize your costs and review them again. Look meticulously for areas in which you can pare back to save expense without compromising on guest comfort or on the quality of your event.

Winning Event Tip

- To make your event affordable to different income levels, sell three levels of tickets that each have their own perks — valet parking, special seating, etc.

Event Meetings Advice

- Designate event planning meetings as "negative free." Instruct participants to limit discussion to positive-based talk only.