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Your spring guide to a blossoming auction & event season

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In today's competitive fundraising landscape, donors are bombarded with organizations vying for their attention, positioning memorable experiences as an essential part of any fundraising strategy!

Auctions help create these experiences, engaging attendees, helping build community, and maximize giving in a single day.

Nearly one-quarter of nonprofit donors give through online auctions.

When paired with an engaging and dynamic fundraising event, auctions can be a reliable source of revenue, inspiring a sense of friendly competition and urgency amongst donors. Beyond raising money, auctions also represent community, connection and storytelling as they give supporters a glimpse into your organization's mission and values.

In this guide, we'll explore how your organization can integrate auctions into your events strategy to amplify fundraising impact. You'll learn why auctions pair so effectively with a broader events strategy, how to plan an impactful and measurable auction, and how BetterWorld helps you manage, host, and measure the success of your auction in minutes.

Part 1: Why a successful events strategy needs to include auctions

Picture this: It's a Saturday evening. More than 200 supporters of your organization are gathered at your event venue, enjoying appetizers and sharing stories of the impact your mission has on their organization. A small crowd gathers toward the stage, eager to take part in the main event – the live auction. Chatter spreads throughout the crowd, with excited murmurs inquiring about the prizes and the event itself.

Auctions turn **passive event attendees into active participants** by encouraging real-time participation and friendly competition with their peers. This live back-and-forth creates a memorable experience for donors.

* *Think of auctions as a high-impact add-on to your fundraising event.*

Auctions also naturally break up the content of the event like speeches and presentations. Auctions encourage audience participation, versus simply demanding their attention with no direct engagement. The energy auctions can bring to an event can help increase dollars raised the night of, and leave a lasting impression on supporters.

Auctions are a perfect match to any fundraising event strategy. The communal and lively atmosphere of an event engages supporters, tapping into their excitement, and driving them to participate in a fun and memorable experience!



Emotional resonance: How auctions drive giving through experience & storytelling

Another reason auctions make so much sense as part of a broader events strategy is that whether the event is an in-person gala, online fundraiser or even a silent auction – excitement drives action.

One study found that **57% of people** who watch a nonprofit's videos go on to make a donation—that's more than half of video watchers!

Most nonprofit videos include things like impact updates and heartwarming stories of how donor contributions have gone on to make a difference in their organization and the lives of those they support.

Auctions tap into this same energy, drawing on supporters' excitement who can be inspired in the moment to make a contribution. Even online auctions leverage the power of human emotions to raise money. Seeing others bid or participate in a community effort inspires attendees to take their own action and participate more frequently.

3 key benefits of integrating auctions into events

01. Increased donor participation and excitement

By integrating auctions into in-person or online events, organizations can tap into the excitement of attendees to engage and contribute the day of the event. Auctions encourage a sense of community and action through friendly competition, storytelling, and the goal of winning a coveted prize.

02. Diversified revenue streams

Integrating auctions into fundraising events diversifies a nonprofit's revenue stream by adding a new income channel beyond traditional donations like ticket sales and sponsorships. Auctions generate funds through competitive bidding on high-value items, experiences, or services, maximizing financial contributions from attendees.

03. Opportunities for donor recognition and stewardship

Auctions that take place within a broader event are a great opportunity for organizations to publicly recognize and thank high bidders. It boosts stewardship efforts by creating memorable experiences, fostering authentic relationships, and building a sense of community amongst supporters.

Part 2: Planning your event with auctions

Now that it's clear how impactful it can be to incorporate auctions into your fundraising event strategy, it's time to plan your auction. Here is a step-by-step approach:

Step 1: Choose the right type of event

As a fundraiser, you know how daunting it can be to determine what type of event to host. You have to weigh factors like budget, time of year, and primary audience to make sure you're striking the right note with potential donors and hitting your fundraising goals.

To determine how and when to incorporate an auction into an upcoming event, evaluate different event format options and how well suited they are (or aren't) for auctions.

- *Here are a few types of fundraising events that are a natural fit for auctions:*
 - **Charity galas:** Charity galas are formal events with high-profile (and high potential) donors. These events are perfect for live and silent auctions that feature premium items to bid on.
 - **Virtual or hybrid events:** A successfully integrated auction isn't limited to in-person events. Online auctions extend reach beyond physical attendees, empowering a geographically diverse donor base to participate.
 - **Golf tournaments:** Golf tournaments offer a casual yet competitive atmosphere, perfect for silent or online auctions targeting sports and travel enthusiasts.
 - **Community festivals or fairs:** For a more family-friendly event alternative, consider a community festival. You can incorporate silent or online auctions that engage a broad audience, offering auction items that appeal to both parents and children.
 - **Themed dinners:** Food and wine pairings, chef showcases, or cooking competitions can include auctions for dining experiences or rare wines. These events are ideal for attracting high-capacity supporters passionate about your cause.



Step 2: Select the best auction format

Now that you have selected the type of event to host, it's time to determine the right auction format to fit the event. Just like when considering the event type, the auction format should align with audience preferences and fundraising goals. Each auction format offers its own unique benefits and drawbacks.

- Here's an overview of the main formats and when to use them:

Live auctions: high-energy & competitive bidding

Live auctions bring a dynamic, theatrical element to your event. With a skilled auctioneer at the helm, the energy in the room can become electric as attendees compete for high-value items in real time. This format works especially well at formal events like charity galas or benefit concerts, where the excitement of live bidding can enhance the overall experience.

BENEFITS OF LIVE AUCTIONS:

- Creates a sense of urgency and competition
- Allows for direct engagement with bidders
- Builds emotional momentum, often leading to higher bids

TOP USE CASE: High-ticket or exclusive items, such as luxury vacations, VIP experiences, or one-of-a-kind memorabilia.



Silent auctions: Discreet & interactive

Silent auctions offer a more low-key but equally engaging experience, where attendees can browse and bid at their own pace. Traditionally done with bid sheets, many organizations now leverage mobile bidding apps like BetterWorld, allowing participants to bid directly from their smartphones. This modern twist increases accessibility and keeps the bidding process engaging throughout the event.

BENEFITS OF SILENT AUCTIONS:

- Allows attendees to bid without interrupting the event's flow
- Mobile apps can notify participants of competing bids, driving up final prices
- Creates opportunities for multiple, simultaneous bids

TOP USE CASE: Mid-range items or packages, such as gift baskets, dining experiences, or tickets to local events.

Online auctions: Expanding reach to remote participants

Online auctions have grown in popularity, especially with the rise of virtual events. This format allows nonprofits to engage a broader audience by removing geographical barriers. Bidders can participate from anywhere, which not only increases revenue potential but also strengthens your organization's connection with supporters outside your local area.

BENEFITS OF ONLINE AUCTIONS:

- Increases accessibility and participation beyond event attendees
- Allows for a longer bidding window, often resulting in higher bids
- Provides valuable donor data through digital platforms

TOP USE CASE: Reaching supporters who cannot attend the event in person, or when offering items with broad appeal, such as travel packages or digital services.

Hybrid auctions: Maximum flexibility & engagement

Hybrid auctions combine elements of live, silent, and online formats to create a comprehensive and flexible experience. For example, you might run a live auction for marquee items during the event while hosting a silent or online auction for other items before and after the event. This approach caters to both in-person and remote audiences, maximizing participation and revenue.

BENEFITS OF HYBRID AUCTIONS:

- Combines the strengths of multiple formats
- Engages both in-person and virtual attendees
- Provides a seamless experience for a diverse donor base

TOP USE CASE: Large-scale events aiming for broad reach and maximum impact, or organizations looking to experiment with different engagement strategies.





Step 2: Select the best auction format

Once you've selected your auction format, it's time to put together your auction items that will be offered for bidding. The right mix of items not only drives bidding but also enhances the overall donor experience. When attendees resonate with the items because they align with their interests, values and lifestyles, they're more likely to engage enthusiastically with your auction.

■ How to source unique and high-value items

In order to offer enticing auction items, you have to find them first! One way to source high-quality auction items is to leverage your network. Your organization's supporters, board members, and volunteers are valuable resources for sourcing items.

Reach out to them for contributions or connections to businesses and individuals who may be willing to donate. For example, a board member might have access to luxury vacation homes, exclusive event tickets, or connections with local businesses willing to contribute high-value items.

Another way to source bid items that will attract donors is by partnering with local businesses and sponsors. This is a win-win: the businesses gain exposure, and you get access to quality items or experiences for your auction. Ask for gift certificates, merchandise, or services that would appeal to your audience.

You can also offer sponsorship packages that include recognition in exchange for auction donations. One example of acquiring auction items by partnering with a local business is tapping a local, top-tier restaurant to donate a chef's table experience.

■ Match items to your audience's interests and demographics

Another factor in securing high-quality auction items that will effectively drive bidding on the day of is making sure your offerings align with your audiences' interests and demographics.

Stay updated on what's popular and relevant to your donor base. Whether it's high-demand tech gadgets, artisanal products, or trending travel destinations, aligning auction items with current interests can boost engagement.



Here are 7 ways to tailor your auction offerings to resonate with your audience:

1. Understand your audience by analyzing donor data. Identify their preferences, interests, age group, and demographics. For example, do they have children? Maybe they'd love a family getaway. Are they near any popular spots you could offer gift cards to?
2. Use past event data to understand what worked and what didn't. What products were most popular in your last auction? Keep a list and add to it as you find new items people love.
3. Ask them directly! As you build excitement for the event, reach out with surveys asking for their input on what types of items or experiences they'd be most excited to bid on.
4. Provide a range of offering categories to capture all interests. For example, include an option for thrill seekers like an outdoor excursion package, as well as a movie night gift basket for families.
5. Include mission-related items for donors deeply invested in your cause. These types of items strengthen donors' emotional ties to your mission and showcase the tangible impact of their support.
6. Curate unique experiences specific to your audience's interests, like a VIP concert experience or local celebrity meet and greet. Not only does it draw attention during the auction, but it creates a lasting memory your donor will treasure for years to come.
7. Use colorful language and storytelling to build up excitement around the items. Paint a picture in your donor's minds to build excitement and draw bids.

By carefully aligning auction items with your audience's interests and demographics, you can create a more engaging and competitive auction, ultimately leading to higher bids and greater fundraising success!

Part 3: Engaging attendees through auctions

Congratulations! You've selected your event and auction formats, and curated some exciting and high-quality auction items. Now, it's time to build out your auction strategy, including pre-event promotion, ways to boost participation during the event, and how to follow up with attendees after it's over.

Two proven pre-event strategies

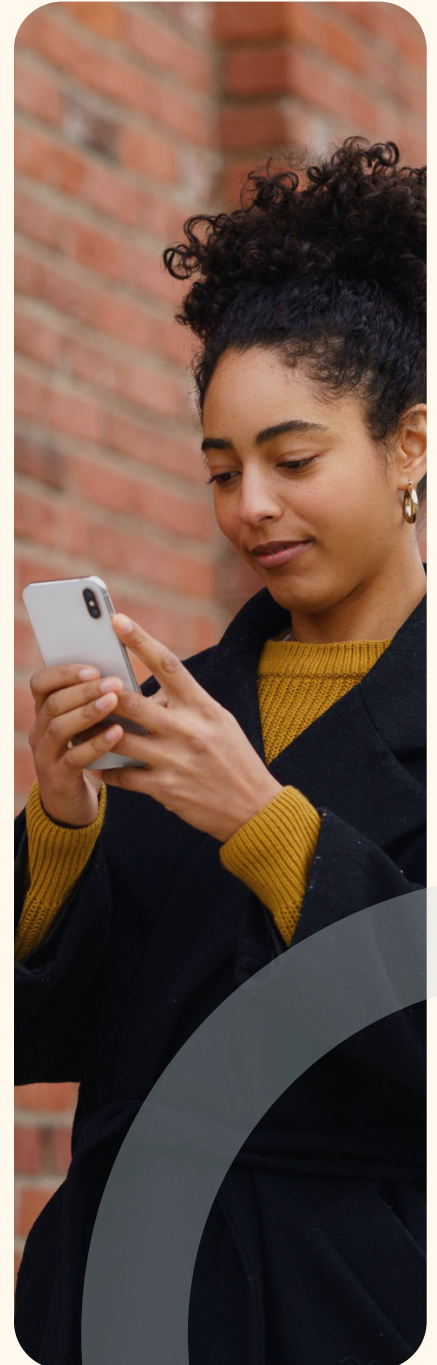
01. Promote auction items ahead of the event

Donors can't get excited about something they're not aware of! Build anticipation by showcasing your auction items before the event. Use social media, email campaigns, and your [online event page](#) to highlight key items, sharing high-quality photos, compelling descriptions, and stories behind the items. Creating a sense of exclusivity and excitement will encourage attendees to participate.

02. Open early-access bidding

People love to feel like they're getting an exclusive offer that no one else has. Consider opening your auction for early bidding a few days before the event to let attendees explore items at their leisure and begin placing bids, generating early momentum and competition. Early bidding can be especially effective for silent and online auctions, giving you a head start on fundraising before the event even begins.

PRO TIP: Use a [mobile auction platform like BetterWorld](#) that notifies users when they've been outbid, keeping them engaged and encouraging higher bids.



Ways to maximize participation during the event

Event day is here! It's finally time to see your hard work play out during the auction. Here are a few ways to boost participation during the event:

- **Bid challenges:** Set challenges like “Match the highest bid” or “Bid within the next 5 minutes to win a bonus prize.”
- **Emotional storytelling:** Share impactful stories about how the funds will be used, creating an emotional connection and motivating attendees to bid generously.
- **Engaging emcee:** Drive up bids by hiring a charismatic and engaging auctioneer to create urgency and foster friendly competition.
- **Using technology:** Streamline bidding with mobile bidding apps, QR codes, and event platforms where guests can seamlessly bid and you can measure results afterward.

The auction is over. What's next?

Just because the auction is over doesn't mean your work is done. Oftentimes the follow-up to a fundraising event is just as important as the event itself.

PRO TIP: First time donors who receive a personal thank-you message within two days of a gift are four times more likely to give a second time.



■ Here's what to do when following up with attendees after an auction:

Announce auction winners and celebrate their success

Recognize their support publicly, whether through a live announcement at the event, a follow-up email, or a social media post.

Express gratitude to bidders and donors

Send personalized thank-you messages to all participants, including those who didn't win but placed bids. Acknowledge their support and emphasize the impact their contributions will have on your organization's mission.

Send a post-event wrap-up

Include a summary of the event's success, such as the total amount raised and specific goals that will be funded.

Offer unsold items in post-event online auctions

This provides an additional opportunity to raise funds and keep the momentum going. It also allows those who couldn't attend the event to participate.

Part 4: Leveraging BetterWorld for impactful auctions

Any robust auction event plan needs the right platform to power it.

BetterWorld is a 100% free, easy-to-use online fundraising platform for nonprofits, schools and other fundraising organizations.

How does it work?

BetterWorld's online, in-person, and hybrid auction software lets organizations and charities raise more money, and reach a lot of donors, at a low cost.

It's a practical and easy way to rally your base of supporters anytime, anywhere.

Online bidding is set up for online and in-person bidding in real-time so that people can bid by phone, computer, and table (regardless of where they are). This is similar to an online "silent auction," but it's even more seamless and automated.



Powerful features for effective, easy and free online auctions

Here are a few ways BetterWorld makes creating and executing your auction a breeze:

Image gallery

Feature multiple images of each product to showcase your items.

“You might also like” feature

Give donors an Amazon-esque experience and increase engagement by serving up related auction items they might be interested in based on the page they’re currently viewing.

Text message notifications

Contact bidders directly through text messages to keep them engaged. Give donors the ability to win auctions through text message outbid notifications.

Copyable items

Take note of your most successful auction items and use them again for your next fundraiser. Save time by copying pictures and descriptions, then add them to other online auctions.

Pre-set auto-bidding

Users can select an option to bid on their behalf until it reaches a pre-set maximum bid. If bidding exceeds the maximum, they receive a text notification with an option to continue bidding beyond the maximum.

“Buy now” option

Give donors the option to buy an auction item outright with pre-set pricing.

Printable QR code table cards

For hybrid or in-person auctions, the easy, one-click print QR code lets attendees easily scan and bid on each item, ensuring all bidding information is stored securely on your online platform.

Smart bidding

Smart rules for bidding increments are based on BetterWorld data and best practices. Set a unique bid amount for a starting point to any item.

Automated receipts

Automatic receipts get sent to each bidder for confirmation and seamless donation experience.

Bid reporting

See what items have not been bid on to allow you to lower the price of the item or promote a sale.

Getting started: Take your events into a new era with streamlined auctions

Standing out and creating memorable donor experiences is essential for staying top of mind with your valued supporters. Online, in-person, and hybrid auctions all offer a unique opportunity to engage supporters, foster community, and maximize donations.

To reach fundraising outcomes, organizations should adapt their events strategy to include well-integrated, engaging auctions through things like BetterWorld's auction and event platform.

With BetterWorld's free, user-friendly platform, managing auctions becomes seamless, allowing you to focus on what matters most: building lasting connections with your supporters and achieving your fundraising goals.

Sign up for free today and start fundraising!

Contact us today to **get a demo** or simply **sign up!**

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