7 SECRETS to Securing More Items for Your Auction

Whether you are stepping up to run your auction for the first time or are a veteran, this guide should help you construct a plan for getting the job done.

Even experienced auction chairs can often use a refresher, as building a strong auction catalog is one of the most important things you will do to assure success.

Putting together a terrific item catalog for your auction often feels like a daunting task. The key is to make a plan and stick to it.

1. Give Yourself Enough Time
2. Set a Goal
3. Have an Item Brainstorm
4. Make an Item Plan
5. Run a Volunteer Training
6. Track Everything from Start to Finish
7. Thank Everyone, Then Thank Them Again

Having helped thousands of organizations run over 22,000 auctions, we have seen it all – the good, the bad, and the just plain ugly.

This list of 7 Secrets is the collected wisdom of all those auctions. The real secret isn't in any one of these steps, it's in making sure you do them all. The entire process will run more smoothly, feel less stressful, and yield a better, high-value catalog. So, let's dive in.

1. Give Yourself Enough Time

In a perfect world, you should assemble your item procurement team at least three months in advance.

Putting together an attractive, diverse, and high-value catalog will take at least that long.

If your goal is high, it can take even longer. The size of your team depends on the size of your auction, but generally, the more, the merrier. There's room for all personality types, too. Not everyone has to be an extrovert.

2. Set a Goal

Set a goal for your catalog value that is two times what you hope to raise in your auction. Remember, many items will sell for face value – gift cards for one – but most will sell for less than their retail value. One of the reasons auctions have worked for fundraisers for so long is that supporters love the combination of doing good and getting a good deal.

3. Have an Item Brainstorm

The best reasons to start with an item brainstorm are: 1. it's fun, 2. it builds team spirit, and 3. it generates a lot of great ideas!

If your organization has run an auction in the past, review what worked and what didn't. What sold best? What raised the most money? What got the most bids or generated the most buzz, even if it wasn't the highest dollar value item?

Don't forget to brainstorm some unique items - items with special appeal to your community or to potential new supporters. One of the things the thousands of bidders on BiddingForGood auctions tell us is that they love the unique items they find in our auctions.

There are many items to be found, often unique experiences, that they simply can't find anywhere else. Schools, theatre companies, and veteran's organizations do this especially well, but any organization has the potential to make high-value, high-community building items.

Schools always have teacher or principal items that bring in great revenue but also bubble up school spirit and community building.

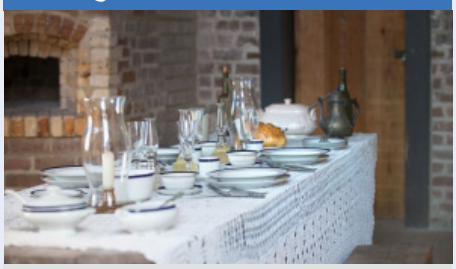
Item Ideas from BiddingForGood Auctions

Travel

Isla Vista Luxury Villa 7 night stay

Value: $10,000 / Highest Bid: $7,750

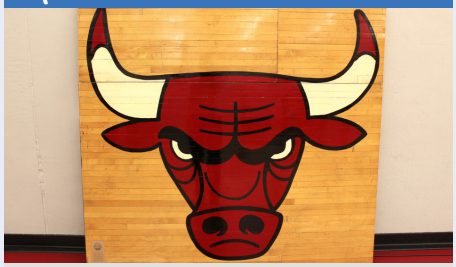
Dining



Dinner for 8 with Creighton Basketball Head Coach Greg McDermott & Wife Theresa

Value: Priceless / Highest Bid: $5,100

Sports



Chicago Stadium Official Game-Used Floor Piece

Value: Priceless / Highest Bid: $29,750

Fund a Need

Guide Dogs for the Blind: Newborn Puppy Sponsor

Buy Now Item: $1,000 (Sold 3)

Unique Experiences

Be a Private Guest at the Mansion of Sir Elton John and Sir David Furnish

Value: Priceless / Highest Bid: $30,000

Auto

U.S. Air Force Combat Controllers Tribute Motorcycle

Value: $50,000 / Highest Bid: $28,400

4. Make an Item Plan

Decide what items are must-haves for your catalog and which items are nice-to-haves, then divide and conquer your lists and tasks. Have an all-hands meeting to divvy up the list into individual lists that include a mix of past donors likely to donate again and new target organizations.

That way everyone is ensured of at least some success early on. Make sure that the people on your team who have relationships with local businesses are the ones asking for items or sponsorships.

Establish deadlines for contacting and following up with donors. Having deadlines to report on gives the whole committee clarity about expectations. It also gives you the opportunity to periodically review your lists or tactics and take corrective action where necessary.

Assign tasks like writing item descriptions, or uploading items into your online auction site for review. It's truly best to do these things as you start to get items and commitments rather than wait till the end. It's much easier and less overwhelming to write descriptions two, three, or four at a time than twenty or thirty at a time.

Not getting a jump on item descriptions is one of the most common mistakes we've seen auction committees make over the years and it's a big one.

5. Run a Volunteer Training Session

Before you send out your army of volunteers, make sure they're trained. It's great if you have experienced item solicitors to mentor and help new volunteers or staff. This is another occasion to have fun while tackling a serious job. Team building, encouraging volunteers to support each other, and instilling a little friendly competition all help you build a better auction catalog.

The most important things to include in your training are:

- Acknowledge that asking can be difficult
- Emphasize the importance of this work to the success of your organization
- Explain why donors give – this empowers your solicitors
- Repeat over and over that nobody should take getting "No" for an answer personally. It's bound to happen to everyone
- Distribute talking points that include the following information:
  - Why this is a worthy cause
  - How this will help the donor gain visibility with your community
  - The profile of your supporters - influential, large, local, passionate, etc.
  - How much you are marketing the auction, online, offline, at the event
  - How to ask for other references and why that's important
  - Never forget to say thank you for your time regardless of the outcome

6. Track Everything from Start to Finish

You'll never get caught off guard if you know where you stand on your efforts. Whatever you do, don't wait until two weeks before your auction to realize that you are only 60% of the way to your catalog goal. Identify shortfalls early.

Keeping track of items as they come in, facilitates creating fun and exciting item packages that will sell for more money.

At BiddingForGood, we think the best way to do this is on our online auction platform. The information is accessible by every team member, at any time, from any device. Volunteers can enter their updates, the chair can review the auction, and reports can be generated. It eliminates messy spreadsheets with all their inherent "version control" issues.

However you do it, keep track of where you are and the milestones you established when you made your plan. You'll be glad you did.

7. You Can't Thank People Enough

Of course you are going to thank everyone who donates items, services, or agrees to be a sponsor.

But make sure you thank them when they take your call, answer your email, or give you some of their time for a one-to-one meeting. Then thank them again when you acknowledge receipt of an item if applicable.

Then make sure to thank them after your event. It's even nicer if you can let them know that the item they donated sold and what their contribution means to your organization. Think of it as relationship stewardship.

One last group to shower with thanks is your item committee. They've done the heavy lifting of making your auction a success. So make sure to express your appreciation to them all one more time. With luck, they'll come back and help for your next auction.

The Secrets to the 7 Secrets

Any one of these things alone will not ensure success. The secret is in executing all seven. It may seem like a lot, but in fact, it will make your life easier. Innumerable studies have shown that getting organized at the beginning of a project can reduce the stress associated with managing it. Spend the time up front to get your strategy and all your tactics aligned, and you will have a more pleasurable experience building your best auction catalog ever.

Click here to schedule a call, or contact a salesperson directly at 866-621-0330.

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