

Bidding for a Cause: Benefit Auctions Maximize Revenues for Nonprofits

J.J. De Simone
Special to USA Today Auction Showcase

Benefit auctioneers are helping nonprofit organizations maximize profits and build revenues while putting even more 'fun' into fundraising at charity events.

Benefit auctioneer Kathy Kingston, CAI, BAS, Hampton, N.H., said the choice to hire a professional auctioneer over a local celebrity should not be difficult for nonprofit organizations to make.

"We know how to consult with organizations to design the best fundraising event," Kingston said. "Why risk it? With so much riding on the success of a benefit auction, a professional auctioneer can make a huge impact on the bottom line."

Chris Longly, deputy director of the National Auctioneers Association, headquartered in Overland Park, Kan., said utilizing a professional auctioneer for a fundraising auction might mean the difference between success and failure.

"With the economy creating challenges for charities, the live auction component really stirs the pot of donors' money and creates added excitement to the event compared to what a silent auction or similar event generates,"

Longly said. "Professional auctioneers bring the 'fun' back to fundraising."

Hiring a professional auctioneer for a benefit event does cost money, but that shouldn't dissuade nonprofit groups from retaining an auctioneer's services, Kingston said.

"A professional fundraising auctioneer doesn't cost anything at the end because we more than make up the costs of retaining out services," Kingston said.

National Auctioneers Association president Christie King, CAI, AARE, BAS, Gadsden, Ala., said events range from black-tie formal dinners to 1950s-era swing parties.

Sometimes, the benefit auctioneer has to set up a silent auction, which may close before the live bidding begins. The auctioneer may also be walking around the room hosting various games. One thing that is the same at every benefit auction, King said, is the purpose.

"People are there to support the organization and to participate," King said. "So go planning

to spend lots of money to help the group."

Benefit auctions drastically differ from any other type of auction, King said. In traditional auctions, the consumer is interested in purchasing an item for as little money as possible. With benefit auctions, however, the purpose is for potential donors to have a fun experience and purchase items to support the cause.

Regardless of these differences, King said there are several tips that the attendee should know before navigating benefit auctions.

Prior to the event, guests should research what the auctioneer will be selling so they can attend with an idea of what they would like to bid on and purchase. Attendees should be prepared with the proper form of payment, as not all auctions accept credit cards. Perhaps most importantly, King said, guests should have fun and enjoy the experience.

To find a benefit auctioneer, or for more information about benefit auctions, visit NAAuction.com.

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