
Playbook

Marketing Your Auction

Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Good Auction Design](#)

[Sourcing Good Items](#)

[Writing Compelling Descriptions](#)

[Developing Your Auction Mission Statement](#)

[Promotion Strategies](#)

[Tips for Creating Effective Communication Materials](#)

[Tips on Social Media Posts and Ads](#)

[Establishing a Fundraiser Promotion Schedule](#)

[Industry-Specific Marketing Tactics](#)

[For schools](#)

[For churches](#)

[Setting and Measuring Goals](#)

[Bidder Experience Features](#)

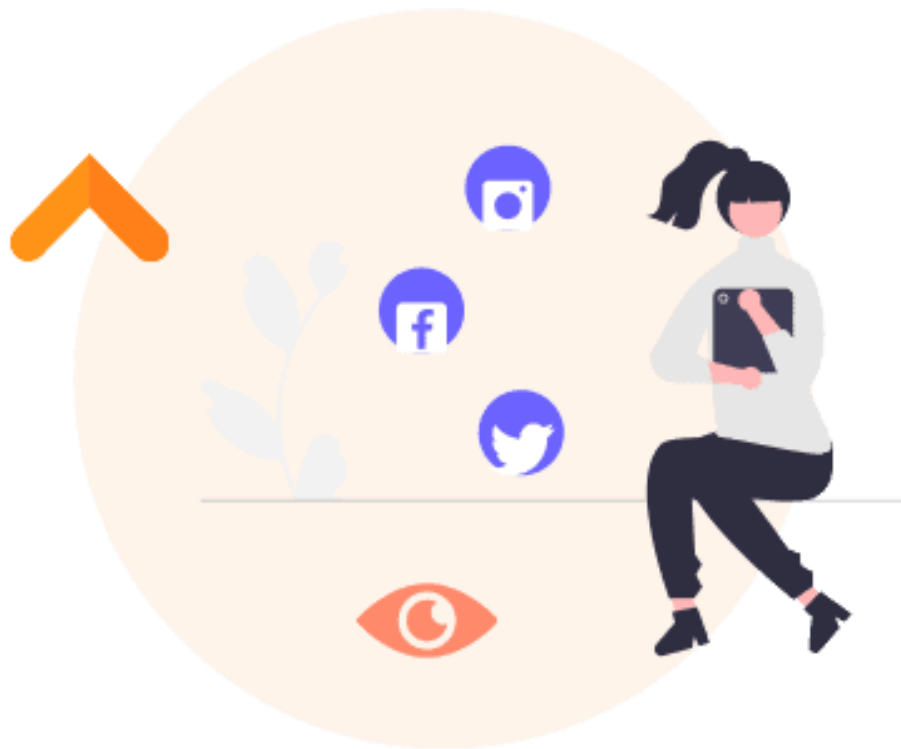
[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

So you've completed the 5 steps you need to set up your auction: what's next? We've put together this guide to help you ensure that all your bases are covered when it comes to promoting your fundraiser. From print to digital, we've got tips for every channel and medium. Spread the word about your auction as far as you can in order to gain attention, new donors, and of course, hit your fundraising goals.

Pro tip: Use the table of contents to navigate this document.

[Skip to the Promotion Strategies section.](#)



Good Auction Design

Building a successful auction is about more than just making sure you've uploaded your logo and a header image to our platform. What items will you be featuring in your auction? Do you know what they are and how to describe them (not everyone is an expert in vintage sports memorabilia, after all)? We can help you source items that people will want to bid on, and give you tips on writing attention-getting descriptions.

Sourcing Good Items

Create a Donor List: To create your list of potential donors, consider the owners of local businesses, community members, and anyone whom you think will be willing to contribute a product or service or even offer a cash donation. Make sure the list includes the prospect's phone number, mailing address, e-mail address, and other means of contact. The address is important because letters and thank you notes will be sent in the future.

Write a Solicitation Letter: The message should include a brief background of your organization, the organization's vision and objectives, the reason behind the solicitation, and why you are organizing an auction. You should also put the details of the event and whom to contact in case the recipient has questions. If you have a specific item that you are hoping the business or person will donate, you can include it in the message as well. Ask the head or chairperson of the auction to sign the letter.

[*Download our free donation request letter template*](#)

Send Letters: Some teams choose to have their donations volunteers send letters to their potential donors, letting them know that they'll be calling or stopping by to discuss a donation. Business owners like to know the person who is asking for donations so they can put a face to the name. You are more likely to get a donation in person than by sending a letter.

Follow-up with Phone Calls: After the letters are sent, call to see if they have received the letter and set an appointment with them. Or they might just tell you "yes" on the phone and to stop by to pick up the donation.

Send Thank-You Notes: Once you receive items for the auction, promptly send thank-you notes to the donors. And send a final thank-you note when the auction is over to share the success with them, highlighting how you couldn't have done it without them.

Writing Compelling Descriptions

Use the features-to-benefits method

Let's say you have a two-pound box of pistachio nuts to add to your auction. Like this box of Beulah Brand Organic Pistachios. Start with a bullet list of features:

- Organic
- 2 lbs. of salted, roasted, in-shell
- Packed in a collector's wooden box
- Grown in Santa Barbara, California
- Voted "Best California Pistachio Growers" three years in a row

The features alone aren't going to entice a bidder unless they have already decided to buy pistachios. So, take the list of features and turn them into benefits.

Features are facts or advantages about the item. Benefits are what the item can do for the user or what's in it for them. What is the unique value proposition? Benefits should be written to help the user envision enjoying the product, or to help them understand that the product "fixes" a problem or "pain point."

We wrote the following example product description by incorporating the benefits and the features.

Imagine two pounds of delicious organic pistachios, roasted and salted in the shell, and beautifully packaged in a wooden collector's box to keep them fresh until every last one is gone. And once they're gone, you've got the perfect box to upcycle or use for gifting.

Voted Best California Pistachio Growers by Organically Home Grown Magazine (three years in a row), you can trust Beulah's pistachios are fresh and delicious, with the health benefits of an organic, nutritious treat for the entire family.

A perfect gift for others—or can you visualize it on the coffee table in the family room where everyone will enjoy them? Place your bid now, someone will scoop this up quickly!

[Download more auction item description examples.](#)

Developing Your Auction Mission Statement

A well-written mission statement can help you attract donors, engage bidders, and ultimately raise more funds for your cause.

Why is an auction mission statement important?

Communicates Your Purpose and Values: An auction mission statement is a powerful way to communicate your organization's purpose and values to potential donors and bidders.

Establishes Trust: A well-written auction mission statement can help your auction look authoritative to potential donors: they should know immediately who you are and how their money will be spent.

Sets You Apart from Other Auctions/Causes: A mission statement can differentiate your organization and create a sense of purpose and identity for your auction.

Tips for writing an effective auction mission statement

Know Your Audience Before you start writing your mission statement, it's important to understand your audience. Who are you trying to attract to your auction? What values and beliefs do they hold?

Keep It Concise A mission statement should be short and to the point. Aim for a maximum of two sentences that clearly and succinctly communicate who you are and your auction's purpose.

Use Clear and Simple Language Avoid using jargon or complex language in your mission statement. Use simple and straightforward language that is easy for anyone to understand. This will ensure that your mission statement is accessible to a wide audience and effectively communicates your message.

Be Specific Your mission statement should be specific to your organization and its goals. Avoid using generic or vague statements that could apply to any auction. Instead, focus on what makes your auction unique and what you hope to achieve through it.

Make It Memorable A memorable mission statement is one that sticks in people's minds and resonates with them. If you can, appeal to your audience's emotions, or perhaps their sense of humor.

Get Feedback Before finalizing your mission statement, it's important to get feedback from others. Share your draft with members of your organization. This will help you refine your mission statement and ensure that it effectively communicates your organization's values and goals.

Mission Statement Examples

Template:

[Title of Charity Auction Event]

Mission Statement:

At [Event Name], we are driven by a single goal: [Main Goal of the Event]. Our mission is to [Specific Objective], by bringing together [Target Audience/Community], and raising funds through a curated auction of [Items/Experiences]. We believe in [Core Value 1], [Core Value 2], and [Core Value 3], and strive to create an event that not only celebrates these values but also tangibly supports [Beneficiary Cause/Organization].

Through this auction, we aim to [Specific Impact or Change You Want to Achieve], ensuring that every contribution makes a meaningful difference.

Example:

Art for Hearts Charity Auction

Mission Statement:

At Art for Hearts, we are driven by a single goal: to support the fight against childhood heart diseases. Our mission is to fund life-saving research and treatments, by bringing together art enthusiasts and philanthropists, and raising funds through a curated auction of exquisite artworks. We believe in compassion, community, and the transformative power of art, and strive to create an event that not only celebrates these values but also tangibly supports young heart patients and their families.

Through this auction, we aim to provide substantial funding for cutting-edge medical research and patient care, ensuring that every contribution makes a meaningful difference in a child's life.

Promotion Strategies

You're championing a cause you're passionate about. Now you need to actively market your event to get people to attend and raise funds. Here are a few ideas to promote your next silent auction:

Request Sponsorships from Media Outlets: Many media groups will provide free promotion for your event in exchange for sponsor recognition. You can guarantee that their logo will be placed on all promotional materials in exchange for an ad. Make sure they're present in social media posts when possible and include them in all follow-up materials, especially the ones that celebrate reaching your goal and funding your cause.

Send Out Press Releases: A press release is a detailed account of your event that presents important information in an objective rather than a promotional manner. It should include your story, some compelling images, and even an embedded video.

Leverage Social Media and Maximize Your Fundraising Profits

Tell Your Story: Stories foster empathy and help people connect to your cause. In a few sentences, summarize your story and post it on social media.

Post Shareable Content: Shareable posts increase your organization's visibility. Set privacy settings to "global" or "all" if you are sharing from a personal account so everyone can share your posts. Still, you need to give your followers a reason to want to share your content. For example, you could post about the cause, the event itself but also about who will be there or what special activities will take place.

Give a Call to Action: Tell your audience explicitly what you want them to do. (i.e., "Please support our school by sharing this on your timeline")

Create a Sense of Urgency: People act quickly when they know there's a deadline. When it comes to online auctions, you can encourage your followers with phrases such as: "Auction ends in two days." or "Don't miss out on this is a one-of-a-kind item."

[Read more about how to utilize social media platforms to boost your fundraiser \(with examples\).](#)

Tips for Creating Effective Communication Materials

Know Your Audience The first step in creating effective communication materials is to know your audience. Who are your donors? What are their demographics, interests, and motivations for giving? By understanding your audience, you can tailor your messaging and design to resonate with them and inspire them to give.

Tell a Compelling Story One of the most powerful ways to engage donors is through storytelling. Share the impact of your organization's work through real-life stories of those who have been helped by your cause. This will not only make your message more relatable and emotional, but it will also show donors the tangible results of their donations.

Use High-Quality Images As mentioned earlier, visual appeal is crucial in today's digital age. Be sure to use high-quality images in your communication materials to catch the eye of potential donors. These images should be relevant to your cause and help tell your story. You can use placeholder images such as landscapes, animals, or nature scenes to add visual interest to your materials.

Keep it Concise When it comes to written content, less is often more. Donors are busy and may not have the time or attention span to read lengthy communication materials. Keep your messaging concise and to the point, highlighting the most important information and impact of your organization's work.

Use a Clear Call to Action Your communication materials should always include a clear call to action. This could be a "Donate Now" button, a link to your donation page, or a phone number to call. Make it easy for donors to take action and give to your cause.

Utilize Different Formats Not all donors will respond to the same type of communication. Some may prefer email, while others may prefer direct mail or social media. Utilize different formats to reach a wider audience and increase the chances of engagement. You can use placeholder images such as a laptop, smartphone, or envelope to represent these different formats.

Incorporate Branding Consistent branding is important for any organization, and this also applies to fundraising communication materials. Be sure to incorporate your organization's branding, including logos, colors, and fonts, to create a cohesive and recognizable message.

Test and Refine Finally, it's important to test and refine your communication materials. This could involve A/B testing different versions of your materials to see which is more effective, or gathering feedback from donors and making adjustments accordingly. Continuously improving and refining your materials will lead to more effective communication and ultimately, more successful fundraising efforts.

Tips on Social Media Posts and Ads

Facebook Posts

- Every day, pop in and tell your friends what you've been up to. Start from the beginning of your journey. The minute you decide to do a fundraiser for a cause, tell your Facebook family about your plans.
- Post many times about your fundraiser. Facebook no longer shows posts in chronological order, so the more you post about a fundraiser or event, the more likely your audience is to see it. Start with a general announcement and then add details in successive posts, like spotlighting talent in your show, food vendors at your fair, or items added to your auction. Aim for a few posts per week.
- When you share your item, tag volunteers, vendors, and other participants. They can share your post on their own pages and spread the word.

Instagram Posts

- Share your story with beautiful and/or compelling images. One post a day or every other day is more than enough when using social media to boost your fundraising goals. It's okay to cross-post between Facebook and Instagram, too.
- Be sure to use hashtags to drive people (traffic) to your post. Choose a hashtag that is relevant to your item and then click in the home feed to see similar tags. Sample hashtags: #charityauction #auctionforcharity #dogood #bidforcharity #onlinecharity #fundraising #fundraiser
- As long as you know their social media handle, you can tag your friends, peers, and community leaders here too.
- Tag the person who donated the item (with a thank you), the auction house, and anyone who might share it or bid on the item. More than likely, the auction house will share it with their followers too.

X (Twitter) posts

- Twitter is best for fast-paced nonprofits with time-sensitive needs, as well as those dealing with ongoing current events or those that are simply in the public eye often. If your cause revolves around asking people to take immediate action—such as donating to emergency relief or calling on voters to call their representatives—you need to be on Twitter.
- Use hashtags. These keywords will help your post be found by the people who are interested in your cause. Some might be powerful hashtags that aren't necessarily unique to your cause, like #climatechange, or #GivingTuesday.

- Be engaging and engaged. Don't just post and run. Pop back in, like your replies, and give everyone a genuine response.
- Thank users and donors through their social media of choice. If a donor uses Twitter and donated funds publicly (not anonymously), then you can send a thank you tweet.
- Enlist the support of your network. Everyone has a network, you just have to find yours. It might be your granddaughter, a substitute teacher, or a school volunteer. Retweet their posts when they're relevant to your cause or concerns, and trust they'll do the same for you.

Specific Tips for Running Ads on the Big Three

Each social media platform makes it pretty simple to get your ads up and running. Here is some direction on the types of ads and formats you can run on each.

Facebook

To start, you need a Facebook business account in order to access the platform's ad platform. Facebook offers on-site donation ads that allow users to donate without ever leaving the platform: you can find a handy guide to Facebook donation ads [here](#). If you're just running a campaign to expand your reach, however, a more traditional Promoted Post format will work best. You can choose the geographic and demographic targeting, for example "women under 60 with pets within 30 miles of Chicago."

Instagram

In order to get started with ads on Instagram you'll need that aforementioned Facebook business account (remember that Facebook, or Meta, owns Instagram). You also need this simply to fundraise on the platform. You can create separate Instagram ads, or you can turn your posts into ads. If you have a shop whose proceeds go towards your mission, you can advertise that in its own clickable format, too.

X (Twitter)

Like Facebook and Instagram, X allows you to target ads to users with certain interests, demographics, and locations. It can help you reach people by topic, by followers, and by event, to hype people up in advance of your fundraiser, for example. Image and video formats are common ad options and can help grab attention on the constantly updating platform.

Best Practices for Nonprofit Social Media Ads

Choose the Best Platform(s) for You

- Facebook: The largest platform worldwide with more than 3 billion users, don't be fooled by the Gen Zers who say Facebook is just for Olds. This platform makes it simple to set up event pages, fundraising pages, and to utilize multiple formats including Stories and live-streaming.
- Instagram: Instagram is best for nonprofits that have visual storytelling down pat. If you find it difficult to create imagery and videos to tell your story, you might want to put Instagram on the backburner. If you already have a great library of material, though, Instagram can help you expand your reach and engagement.
- X (Twitter): If your organization focuses on crisis response you have to be on X. Ideal for sending out fast updates, X ads can help you reach more people during ongoing disaster response efforts.
- LinkedIn: LinkedIn has grown from a job search tool into a space where professionals and organizations look to make connections and establish authority in their field. You can reach potential donors and volunteers with in-feed ads as well as direct message appeals.
- TikTok: TikTok has fewer users but they tend to be younger. If this is your target audience, you need to be comfortable with creating short video content. TikTok allows users to donate in-app, making it super simple for donors to follow through as soon as you have their attention.

Utilize A/B Testing

A/B testing involves creating two versions of an ad with one key difference, such as a different image or CTA, and testing them to see which performs better.

Monitor and Adjust

It's important to monitor the performance of your ads and make adjustments as needed. If an ad is not performing well, try changing the visuals, messaging, or targeting to see if it makes a difference.

Establishing a Fundraiser Promotion Schedule

First, create a fundraising calendar to help you stay organized and on track with your promotion efforts.

3-6 months before the fundraiser: This is the ideal time to start promoting your fundraiser. It gives you enough time to create a buzz and build anticipation for the event. Plan to post and/or email about the event at least once per month in the 4-6 months leading up to it.

2-3 months before the fundraiser: By this time, you should have all the details of your fundraiser finalized, such as the date, location, and theme. This is the time to start promoting the event heavily and encouraging people to save the date. Consider posting weekly and emailing biweekly.

1-2 months before the fundraiser: At this point, you should have a solid number of attendees and donation goals. Use this time to continue promoting the event weekly or biweekly and reminding people to RSVP and/or donate.

1 week before the fundraiser: As the event draws near, ramp up your promotion efforts and create a sense of urgency. You might post daily and email every other day, depending on your audience. This is also a good time to send out a final reminder to those who have not yet RSVP'd or donated.

Day of the fundraiser: On the day of the fundraiser, continue promoting the event on social media and through any other channels you have available. This will help attract any last-minute attendees or donations.

Out of time? Every fundraising event is different: if you don't have months of advance notice to plan your communications, simply start promoting your auction as soon as possible. Then, continue to promote it frequently across all channels available to you.

Industry-Specific Marketing Tactics

For schools

Take Advantage of Every Channel Available to You Sure, you plan to email the school's email lists and post to the local parent groups on Facebook, but are there other channels you might have forgotten? It pays to cast a wide net when you're promoting fundraisers: not everyone will be paying attention to each type of communication they receive.

The School's Website If possible, see to it that your fundraiser gets a page on the school website. If it's possible, create a small website for the fundraiser and ask the school's web administrator to post the link to it on the school's homepage.

Fliers: Mailed, Sent Home, Posted Locally We're mentioning fliers early because they can help with other channels too. If you're designing a sharp looking flier, you'll also want to create some smaller, simpler versions that can be posted on social media. Try to make your flier both eye-catching and informative. Mail your fliers out, send them home in kids' backpacks, or hang them in local restaurants and businesses to drum up interest.

Social Media: Yours, the School's, the Community's Make sure you (or the admin in charge of the accounts) posts about your fundraiser on the school's social media channels. Additionally, ask teachers and parents (and perhaps students, depending on their age) to share the fundraising link on their pages as well. Don't forget community pages like parent or neighborhood groups.

Email Lists and/or the School Newsletter If it's allowed, send out emails to the faculty, staff, and families of all your students. If you aren't in a position to do so, ask if school administrators can include your fundraiser information in regular communications, like the school's newsletter or calendar.

In-School Announcements Even in this day of smartphones schools still make daily announcements over their PA systems. Ask to have a moment of the announcements time, or to have your fundraiser mentioned (early and regularly) by the person who does the announcements.

Local Papers, Radio, and TV The thought of appealing to local papers or stations can be intimidating, but they want to hear from you! Even if one doesn't decide to give you space or airtime for free, you might be able to ask for a discounted ad.

School Text Messaging Systems If your school is capable of sending mass texts to students and/or their families, ask if this is an option for your fundraiser. It might not be allowed, but it's

worth asking, especially if your fundraiser is for something that everyone in the school can use/needs (tablets, a new gym, or a new playground, etc).

For churches

Social Social media is a powerful tool in your fundraiser promotion kit, especially because it's free. Make sure you're posting to your accounts regularly so that when you post something you want people to come to, they will be more likely to see it. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram weigh posts and are more likely to show the posts of active accounts. See our social media section for more.

Digital Does your church have a website? Does your event have a page on your website? Having a website is nearly essential in our digital age. If you want to be found when someone Googles "churches near me" you'll be much more likely to be shown if you have a website that details your services, hours, address, and other details. You can also purchase Google Ads that serve only to people in your area.

If your site is old or hasn't been updated in a long time, see if you can find tech-savvy members of your congregation to help revive it. Search engines like Google are more likely to show your church's site to searchers if it's been updated recently and follows their guidelines. This can help you get found all year round, but it will help when you're trying to promote a fundraiser, too.

It's much easier to get the word out about your event if there is a link to it. Make sure that your event page answers all the When, Where, and Why questions without making people click around your site. You can share this link on social media, in email campaigns, and to local news sites and community pages.

Local Outlets Don't underestimate your local newspapers, radio, and TV stations. See if you can get a local reporter to write about your fundraiser, or give you some air time to talk about why you're raising funds.

Don't forget that printed fliers can be an effective way to get the word out around town. You can ask local businesses if you can hang your poster in their window. People in restaurants, grocery stores, salons, and more will be able to see your fundraiser and get the details. If you're concerned about the cost of printing fliers, ask if the printer offers discounts to nonprofits.

Word of Mouth Your network of congregants and their family and friends (as well as your own) are great resources in your mission to promote your event. Consider asking for volunteers to help hang, hand out, or mail out fliers. Ask them to share your fundraiser on their own social media and to invite their loved ones. Remind them frequently about how vital it is to get the word out

about your event. Make it easy for them to share your event with others, whether that's a link to tickets, an evite, or other formats.

Important information to Share

You want to make it easy for people to say "Yes!" to your event. When you're planning it, make sure you address barriers to entry and show invitees exactly how they'll be helping your church and community.

Address Accessibility Many congregations around the country have an aging population. Have you made sure that your event, or aspects of it, are accessible to older adults and homebound individuals? Maybe you can add a livestream version of the event, or perhaps there is a digital portion, like a fundraising silent auction, that can give everyone a way to be involved.

Make sure your venue, if you have one, is accessible to people using mobility devices. If the timing of your event is still flexible, ask yourself if you've set your fundraising event on a day and time that most people can attend. It won't do for a family-friendly event to take place on a school night, necessarily. Similarly, a fancier dance or dinner could offer attendees free childcare to make it easier for adults to attend.

Explain What You're Raising Money For Not everyone in your community might want to support your church: they might be of different faiths, for example. But they might be ready, willing, and able to help you with projects that will help the community as a whole. That's why it's important to explain clearly why you're raising funds. If you can, show how past events have impacted people's lives.

Give Them Reasons to Attend Especially if you want to encourage people outside your congregation to attend, your event should offer them a reason to attend. While the satisfaction of raising money for a cause you believe in might be enough for you, drawing in the general public will require some effort on your part.

If your church fundraiser is a fun one—like a carnival, craft faire, or concert—gathering attendees probably won't be terribly difficult. On the other hand, if you're tackling a big community works project, like cleaning up a local lake, or asking people to give their time to making and distributing meals to hungry neighbors, you might need to make more of a pitch.

Explain exactly how their dollars and/or time will help people in your community. Even if your church fundraiser is simply a way of keeping the lights on for your small congregation, try to tell the stories of those people. Show why your church is an important part of their lives, and detail what your community accomplishes together.

Setting and Measuring Goals

Understand Your Fundraiser's Purpose Before setting a goal, it is essential to understand the purpose of your fundraiser. Is it to raise money for a specific cause or organization? Is it to raise awareness for a particular issue? Understanding the purpose will help you determine the appropriate goal for your fundraiser.

Consider Your Fundraising Strategies The strategies you plan to use for your fundraiser can also influence your goal. For example, if you plan to host a fundraising event, your goal may be to sell a certain number of tickets or raise a specific amount of money through ticket sales. If you plan to do a crowdfunding campaign, your goal may be to reach a certain number of donors or raise a specific amount of money within a set timeframe.

Set a Realistic Goal It is crucial to set a realistic goal for your fundraiser. Setting a goal that is too high may discourage participants and donors, while setting a goal that is too low may not provide enough motivation. Consider your fundraising history, the size of your network, and the resources available when setting your goal.

Make Your Goal Specific and Measurable A specific and measurable goal is easier to track and achieve. For example, instead of setting a goal to "raise as much money as possible," set a specific amount, such as \$10,000. This will give you a clear target to work towards and allow you to measure your progress.

Set a Deadline Setting a deadline for your fundraiser goal can create a sense of urgency and motivate participants and donors to take action. It also provides a timeframe for you to track your progress and make adjustments if necessary.

Consider Stretch Goals A stretch goal is an additional goal that is set above and beyond the initial goal. It can provide an extra challenge and motivation for participants and donors. However, it is essential to ensure that your initial goal is achievable before setting a stretch goal.

Communicate Your Goal Once you have set your fundraiser goal, it is crucial to communicate it to your team, participants, and potential donors. This will help create a sense of purpose and motivate everyone to work towards the same goal.

Examples of Effective Fundraiser Goals

Raising a Specific Amount of Money One of the most common goals for a fundraiser is to raise a specific amount of money. This could be for a specific cause, organization, or project. For example, a fundraiser may have a goal of raising \$10,000 to build a new playground for a local school.

Reaching a Certain Number of Donors This could be a way to measure the success of a crowdfunding campaign or a fundraising event. For example, a fundraiser may have a goal of reaching 500 donors for their annual charity auction.

Increasing Participation This could be to engage more people in a cause or to attract new donors. For example, a fundraiser may have a goal of increasing participation by 20% compared to the previous year.

Achieving a Specific Outcome Some fundraisers may have a goal of achieving a specific outcome, such as passing a new law or implementing a new program. This type of goal may require a combination of fundraising efforts and advocacy work. For example, a fundraiser may have a goal of raising \$50,000 to support a campaign for a new environmental policy.



Bidder Experience Features

CharityAuctionsToday offers a number of features that make auctions as smooth as possible not just for you but for your bidders as well.

- Bidder Dashboard – Each bidder can create a bidder profile. They will be able to bid and watch the items they are interested in.
- Pre-Registration – Have your bidders register for your auction, and they will be texted a link to your auction. Less hassle means more time for bidding.
- Custom Categories – Creating categories for your auction helps bidders find the items they're most interested in more quickly.
- Auto or Proxy Bidding – Allows your guests to enter their high bid and only be notified when that limit has been reached.
- Shipping Options – If enabled, shipping will be calculated and charged automatically at checkout. So people from anywhere in the world can bid in your auction.
- Auction Goal Amount – Your guests can see the amount you are trying to raise so they know how they can help.
- Donation Button – Bidders can donate to your cause directly from your auction page, helping you reach your goal even if they don't win an item.

Conclusion

Promoting your auction can help you achieve your fundraising goals. It might seem like a daunting task, especially if your organization is small (or even, just you). The steps we've outlined here can be scaled up or down depending on your bandwidth. Start with a solid auction design, then choose the channels and messages that you know will work best for you, your audience, and your timeline. Count on us for help every step way, from uploading images to sending out invoices, our Auction Success Managers are ready to help you provide the best possible experience to your donors.



Want to Talk Now? Call or Email Us

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