

Raise Money Now with a Virtual Live Auction

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About this Edition

This is the first edition of this whitepaper. We're releasing it on April 3rd, 2020. We know we will be publishing a second edition very soon, when we can show you the new enhancements we are adding to the software to help customers run Virtual Live Auctions. And we expect to make more updates as the year goes on and we collect more feedback from customers and fellow industry pros. You can sign up to be alerted whenever we release a new version, at:

<http://www.schoolauction.net/resources/school-auction-guide/online-auctions-with-a-virtual-live-auction/>

Introduction

If you are involved in the nonprofit and school fundraising world, we don't have to tell you these are challenging and uncertain times. Many nonprofits and schools have canceled their upcoming events due to the COVID-19 crisis. Others are postponing, still hoping to host an in-person gala event a few months from now, or later this fall. If you've already completed procurement for a gala auction, you may feel you have nothing to lose by delaying.

The truth is none of us can predict whether organizations will be able to hold in-person events two months or even six months out. The end of physical distancing won't happen all at once. It's likely to happen region by region over time. Subsequent Stay at Home orders are highly probable.

Squeezing postponed galas into a tight time frame later this summer or fall will make for a live auction traffic jam. Organizations will be battling each other for ticket sales, sponsorships and precious donor contributions. And there's no guarantee that these events won't need to be postponed again and again during the next year.

All of this means it's time to develop a back-up plan. Rather than cancel or postpone, your organization can pivot to a Virtual "Live" Auction, and raise money now.

Yes, You Can Still Fundraise

Many businesses and individuals are taking a financial hit as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, and some organizations fear they won't be able to raise money in the current climate. But nonprofits are taking a hit too—and at a time when they need funds more than ever. The services nonprofits provide are in higher demand in this economic downturn. If giving declines, some nonprofits are likely to go under.

Nonprofits are employers, too. In fact, they employ more than 10% of the country's workforce. Saving these jobs and protecting the services these employees provide is critical to the economic health of the nation.

We encourage you to reach out to your donor base—but do it sensitively. This doesn't mean reminding them of the difficult time they are having right now. It does mean reworking the traditional procurement approach. Now is the time to edit your procurement letter to make it really stand out. You are competing for increasingly limited donor contributions, so your ask must tell your story in an attention-getting, inspiring way.

Tell your supporters how your organization is being affected by the crisis, and what you need to fulfill your mission. Schools need technology (laptops, tablets, etc) so their students can learn online, and they need funds to train teachers to provide this online curriculum. Churches and other nonprofits need funds to ramp up their benevolent, community-based work, which is needed now more than ever.

Make sure your supporters—item donors, sponsors, and potential bidders—really understand your mission. Transparency about how much funding you need to meet those goals is key. Any time you can be specific, you should be:

- \$X buys tablets for 10 students
- \$Y buys 2 weeks of food for 2 shelter pets
- \$Z stocks our community food pantry for 1 week

Individual giving tends to rise after major events. Now is the time to reach out directly to individual donors. Make a personal ask. Connect one-on-one. A lot of people are working alone at home right now, and many will appreciate the sense of connection a phone call brings. Use this time to pick up the phone and call your potential donors and make stronger connections. Tell them you are still raising money and why, and tell them exactly how they can help. Kristin Smith of Event Savvy suggests, "Remember to ask how they

are doing and how this has affected them personally and professionally. This is the time to make those genuine connections.” If they can’t give now, they may be able to down the road. are doing and how this has affected them personally and professionally. This is the time to make those genuine connections.” If they can’t give now, they may be able to down the road.

Fundraising Options

The non-profit gala back-up plan can include a number of different options:

- Online giving campaigns
- Peer-to-peer giving
- Direct solicitation
- Online Silent Auctions
- Virtual Live Auctions

Most nonprofits already understand how to implement the first four, and have probably been doing them for a while. But Virtual Live Auctions are a new animal. One that we’re all figuring out as we go.

This White Paper sets out some initial best practices for running a Virtual Live Auction. We’ll be updating it as we learn more by doing more.

Virtual Live Auctions

A Virtual Live Auction is not an Online Silent Auction, though that can and should to be a big part of any nonprofit’s fundraising plan.

In addition to having an online auction that lasts a set amount of time, you can also produce a **Virtual Live Auction**—a webcast of your auctioneer and emcee hyping the live auction items, while bidders at home watch the stream and place bids through fundraising auction software.

Gala fundraising auctions are philanthropy as a spectator sport—bids go higher because there is a crowd cheering on the bidders (especially in the live auction), because there is head-to-head competition within a short time frame, and because the guests at your event are feeling relaxed and happy about celebrating your organization. At many of these events, alcoholic beverages are served. Which definitely helps your guests decide to make one more impulse bid on that class project, signed basketball, or bottle of rare Pinot Noir.

Traditional online auctions have a very different feel for bidders. It's very easy for them to get distracted away from the auction; it's NOT a very social event, and the bidders are as likely to be drinking a Diet Dr Pepper as a microbrewed beer.

So the question becomes: how can you emulate the best elements of a live event online? Doing that starts with the help of a seasoned auctioneer, enthusiastic emcee, AV professionals, a quality fundraising auction software package, and a well-written and executed program.

The auctioneer and emcee are filmed at a broadcast studio, or event space with reliable, tested, high-speed internet service, in real time. (With the proper technology, which many auctioneers have, the broadcast can even be filmed from multiple locations, if people are quarantined.) The AV experts provide professional sound and lighting, and produce the broadcast, making sure that transitions from one broadcast element to the next take place smoothly.

What it Looks Like

A Virtual Live Auction offers a condensed, webcast version of a live gala auction. It differs from a Live Gala event in that it features only a handful of select items, starts with a paddle raise (aka Special Appeal) up front, and relies on viewers at home to bid using fundraising auction software.

Bidders use two screens (a phone and a laptop, or maybe a tablet) or have two windows open on the same device. One window or device shows the real-time simulcast of the event. The other window or device shows them the auction software, where they place their bids.

The auctioneer uses three screens or windows: one where they can see the real-time broadcast as the bidders are seeing it, one where they can see their script notes, and one with the auction software, so that they can monitor bids. (It can be very helpful if a production assistant offstage is also monitoring the auction software and feeding important information to the auctioneer.)

In a typical live gala, there are 8–10 bids per item, and a professional auctioneer sells each item in 2–2.5 minutes. But in a virtual live auction latency (the delay inherent in any broadcast) increases the sale time per item by up to 3 times that. Bidders don't experience this latency—they see and hear the auctioneer and emcee in what to them feels like real time, and they

can see right away if they are the high bidder or they've been outbid. But the auctioneer does experience latency, and must be prepared to fill this time with meaningful content.

While a virtual live event can't replicate the exact community experience of a live gala, in these times it's the next best thing. An upside is that it allows you to cast a wider fundraising net. You can encourage your supporters to invite friends and extended family to participate—particularly in the special appeal portion of the event. And it can provide a chance for your community to come together the only way people can right now—online—to support a common cause.

How to Make it Happen

The Where: Location, Location, Location

Location is challenging these days. Ideally, your virtual live event will be produced and broadcast from a production studio space, using professional sound, lighting, and camera equipment, and tried and tested high-speed internet service.

When evaluating studio space, make sure there's enough room for the people involved to be six feet apart. If you plan to have an auctioneer and an emcee working together, they'll need a stage where they can stand six feet apart. (Mark their spots with tape, to reassure viewers that everyone is following safe distancing guidelines.) The camera person must be able to do their work at least 6 feet away. The sound technician is typically in a booth, so their physical distance is easy to manage.

If you're a school with an excellent AV department, you may be able to make use of free space at your facility and tap into the expertise of the AV instructor and students.

If a studio isn't a possibility, you can have an AV team come to you at another location, but bear in mind this means they'll need to bring lights, cameras, sound equipment, etc, and that you'll need to test your on-site internet connectivity to make sure you have the capacity to stream your event live from your chosen location.

The Who: A Qualified Team

Like gala auctions, virtual live auctions are collaborative efforts. In addition to your usual auction committee, you'll need to fill the following roles:

Professional Benefit Auctioneer

We do mean a professional. This is no time to skimp and rely on a volunteer, regardless of their talents and good intentions. You need someone who can create a live auction vibe (or something really close to it) in an online gathering where folks can't see and talk to one another. A seasoned auctioneer understands the psychology of giving and can influence bidder behavior. The auctioneer is the public face of your virtual event. They provide the juice that powers the bidding.

If you have an auctioneer you traditionally use, talk to them about their experience with virtual live auctions, and make sure they are skilled in the format. All live auctioneering involves a degree of performing. But virtual events demand even more of this skill. There's no live audience for the auctioneer to feed off of, so their enthusiasm, energy, and the fun they project onstage must come from within. It can be a challenge for even a seasoned professional.

Remember, bidders are easily distracted. We've all been conditioned to have an extremely low tolerance for boredom online. As soon as people lose interest, they'll click away to something else. A professional auctioneer can keep your bidders engaged longer, and the longer they watch, the more money you'll raise.

Finally, you want to do everything you can to avoid a potentially disastrous viral moment. What happens online can stay online for a very long time. An amateur auctioneer who flubs spectacularly isn't really the first result you want popping up when people search your organization online.

Emcee

Your auctioneer can recommend professional emcees, who have tremendous experience hosting benefits. Ask for recommendations of emcees they've enjoyed working with in the past.

An emcee introduces your event, your auctioneer, and helps talk up items. They serve as the "mission ambassador" for your organization during your live event. Which means they need a thorough understanding of your mission and fundraising goals. They and the auctioneer must communicate

ahead of time and assess their chemistry, because they'll need to have a great on-stage rapport.

Another option is to use a virtual emcee to describe each of your items in 1–2 minute videos. Extra points if you can include item photos in the background and provide details not available in written description.

Having a live emcee gives your virtual event a lot more oomph. There are two real, live people for the camera to focus on, rather than just one. This takes some of the performance pressure off the auctioneer. It also allows the camera to cut back and forth between the auctioneer and emcee, which can help maintain viewer interest.

Professional Production Assistant

Your auctioneer is going to be juggling *a lot* during your virtual live auction. They'll be monitoring the bidding screen, monitoring the live stream, and referring to their own notes/script on yet a third screen. So dedicate a seasoned event professional to assist with monitoring the bidding. This person should be extremely familiar with your bidding software. They can keep tabs on the paddle raise totals and the bidding status of items and feed information to the auctioneer.

Bid Tracking Assistant

Choose a member of your auction planning team—someone very familiar with the software—to assist with bid tracking. This person will manually close items or bidding groups when the auctioneer signals that it's time.

Professional AV Production Team

Excellent sound and video quality are key to a successful virtual live auction. Again, bidders will click away if the feed is difficult to see or hear, or if the webstream feels glitchy. So, unless you're a school with a really stellar cadre of AV students and an in-school studio space, investing in a professional AV production team is well worth the cost.

A professional AV team knows how to support your auctioneer and make their job easier with properly placed monitors, and the right lighting, microphone and camera equipment. They offer reliable and strong internet connectivity, so that your webcast transmits smoothly to your audience. And they can seamlessly add pre-recorded video to your livestream and display item photos and bidding instructions at appropriate times.

They also have the expertise to broadcast picture-in-picture screens, so that bidders can see the item photo and the auctioneer or emcee at the same time. And they can switch camera angles periodically to add visual interest to your feed. As Brian Lehmann of The AV Department notes, this “live switching makes your virtual live auction feel like a television broadcast.” Which is essentially what it is.

If you have a sound and lighting team you’ve worked with on past galas, ask them if they’ve produced virtual auction livestreams before. (If not, proceed with caution: you only get one shot at your live webcast, so go with experience.) What lessons have they learned that you can apply to your event? Can their studio accommodate your physical distancing requirements?

Videographer(s)

Short videos can enhance your virtual event. A brief welcome from the CEO, Principal, or Head of School can set the tone for the event. Another video can instruct bidders on how to use the bidding software. You may also want to introduce your Paddle Raise and certain items with brief video clips.

If one of your supporters has video production experience, see if they’ll volunteer to produce some short video clips for your auction. And if you can’t find a supporter with experience, talk to your AV team or auctioneer about whether they can provide this service.

Last, but certainly not least, these days almost everyone has the ability to film short videos on their phones. Once you’ve captured your video clips, send them to your AV team for incorporation into your webcast.

The more clips you have, the better. They give your virtual live auction team the ability to cut away from the auctioneer and emcee—breaks that allow them to take a breath, or to gather the latest bidding update or paddle raise tally.

Help Line Monitor

Dedicate a staff member or volunteer who understands the bidding process, your fundraising auction software, and how to troubleshoot login problems, to answer a Help Line phone number. Publish the number in your Pre-Game video, and scroll it across the bottom of your screen during bidding.

Chat Monitor

If you're going to enable the chat feature of your webstream, you'll want a dedicated staff person or volunteer to monitor it. This person should thoroughly understand the bidding software and how to place and check bids, so that they can answer any bidding questions that appear in the chat.

Your chat monitor should also have some pre-scripted messages on hand that they can use to generate interest just before and during the event. "Super excited to see how much we can raise tonight for GREAT CAUSE!!!" "What are you planning to bid on tonight?" etc.

Social Media Guru

If your organization already has a strong media presence, now is the time to amp it up even more. If you're not utilizing social media, this is the time to start. Really drive home your mission and the work you're doing to achieve it. Talk about your upcoming fundraiser and how folks can contribute. Use social media to seed enthusiasm for your upcoming event and your organization as a whole. Social Media is the best platform to reach your donor base right now. Use it!

Professional Event Planner(s)

Think of professional event planners as the utility players on your team. They can be used to fill a number of different support staff needs. Their assistance can be invaluable in pulling off a Virtual event. These professionals already know how to pivot and make a successful auction happen, use them to fill any gaps you have in your team. From pre-event production planning to managing the run-of-show event night, they have the experience to handle all of your event needs.

Live Musician

This is, of course, a completely optional role to fill. But consider how much depth and interest live music could add to your webcast. Some piano as the Thank You video is running, interspersed with the auctioneer and emcee banter, or to introduce and close out your event can add to the viewer experience.

If you plan to use live music, you'll most likely pre-record it. This takes an extra body out of the studio during your broadcast. Make sure your musician understands exactly what type of music you want them to provide.

A note of caution: be careful about using music you pull off the internet or from other streaming sources. Most virtual live auctions are streamed on platforms like YouTube or Vimeo. Bots “patrol” these platforms looking for the use of unlicensed musical content. They’ll kill your virtual event instantly if they find it in your livestream.

The How: Quality Bidding Software

If you already have a fundraising software package that you like, that’s great. Contact them about how you can use it as part of a virtual live event, and then skip ahead to the next section: Before the Show.

If you’re using SchoolAuction.net or Tofino Auctions software, you’ll want to read the rest of this section.

We’re hard at work on a new version of the software that offers specific virtual bidding features, and we’ll be rolling these features out as soon as we can. But you don’t have to wait to use your site to run a virtual live auction. You can run a virtual event right now.

Here’s how to do it:

Pick Your Format

There are many ways to run a virtual live auction. The two most effective are TV-style Bidding and Real-time Virtual Bidding.

TV-style selling is essentially the tried-and-true television sales model you’ve seen for years on stations like QVC. A charismatic sales team talks up the wonders of the item for sale, and sales are live for a limited time. Replace sales with bidding and you’ve got TV-style Bidding. Items are set to close at scheduled times, and both the bidders and the auctioneer know the closing times. Before the first item closes, the auctioneer and emcee can start talking up the next item. And they can intersperse the selling of one item with updates on how bidding is going on the previous item.

Real Time Virtual Bidding is standard live auction bidding, but online. The auctioneer monitors bids as they come in and sells the item and the organization’s mission until that item closes. In this model, the bid tracking assistant manually closes the item at a signal from the auctioneer. The upside of this format is that it has more potential for capturing last-minute high bids. But this model comes with a downside: latency. (Again, this is the delay between when a given moment is filmed for the livestream and the

time the viewer sees it. This delay can be up to 20–40 seconds with high-latency video streaming services.) Latency means the auctioneer doesn't see bids exactly in real time. They're performing constantly during the bidding to juice up enthusiasm and bidding energy among bidders they can't see. And they can't start selling the next item or group until the current item or group closes.

Decision Point: Talk with your auctioneer to decide in advance which model you plan to use for your virtual live auction. Depending on which model you choose, you may organize and assign your bidding groups differently.

Pick Your Format

It's quickly becoming best practice to sell items in groups, with no more than 4–5 groupings per broadcast.

If you've chosen the TV-Style Bidding format, you'll want to [create a separate bidding group](#) for each of your live items. Keep their opening times the same (say, the start of your broadcast event or slightly earlier) and stagger closing times by 5–10 minute intervals. Give your bidding groups names that correspond with or match your Live item names.

If you've chosen Real Time Virtual Bidding, you can either stagger the closing times of your Live items, or, if you plan to have your auctioneer signal their manual closing, assign them to bidding groups with closing times set later than your broadcast ends. The auctioneer will signal the close of these groups, one-by-one, prior to the end of your event, and the bid tracking assistant will manually close them.

Enter Your Live Items

You'll [add your items to your catalog](#) just as you always have. But, even though they are selling as Live items, you'll need to give them type=Silent, to enable them to be sold online.

Select Bidding Style = Online/Mobile bidding, and assign the item to its appropriate bidding group. Make sure the item is Visible to Public. And upload at least one great photo.

If you like, you can [create a Category](#) called Live Auction Items and bulk edit your items to that category. This will help your bidders easily navigate to those items in your catalog.

Double-check and Edit Your Online Auction Settings

Go to Admin > Site Settings > Online Auction/Mobile Bidding

> Signup and Invitations.

Is the *Make Online/Mobile Elements Visible to Public* box checked?
If not, no one can see your public catalog.

Is *Display Sign Up Button and Links* checked?
If not, your supporters will only be able to bid if you invite them to do so.

Go to Admin > Site Settings > Online Auction/Mobile Bidding > Bidding Settings.

Are the opening and closing times of your bidding group(s) correct?

Make sure you've selected Quick Bids as your bidding style. If you want to use Max bids during your Silent Online auction, that's great. You'll just need to make sure you edit this setting to Quick Bids before your Live auction opens.

Have you enabled Automatic Closeout? If not, items will not be placed in their winners' carts automatically—you will have to manually award them. If your auctioneer will be manually awarding items, turn this feature OFF at the start of your Virtual Live Auction.

Is [Extended Bidding](#) enabled? Extended bidding is optional, but it can help you capture last minute bids on competitive Silent Auction items. If your auctioneer will be manually awarding items, there's no reason to enable extended bidding. But if items will be closing automatically at a scheduled time, discuss this feature with your auctioneer to decide if you want it on or off during your Live auction.

Are you [restricting bidding](#) to any groups, say people who bought a ticket, or people already on your Users list? If not, make sure your settings reflect that.

Go to Admin > Site Settings > Online Auction/Mobile Bidding > Payment Settings.

Is your default payment setting correct?

If you are allowing custom payments, have you set up your [Custom Payment instructions](#)?

If you plan to send Daily Payment Reminders, are they turned on?

Go to Admin > Site Settings > Online Auction/Mobile Bidding > Email & Text Notifications.

Make sure outbid notifications are turned on.

Plus/Premium subscribers should also make sure [text notifications](#) are turned on.

If you plan Send an Email Notification to Winning Bidders (more on this choice below) make sure that feature is turned on.

Go to Admin > Site Settings > Communications > Email Templates.

Edit your Invitation to Bid and Follow-up Invitation to Bid, Outbid Notification, Daily Payment Reminder, and Winning Bid Notification templates. These templates can all be sent as-is. Editing them is entirely optional, but can add some nice personalization to your event.

Get Your Supporters Bidding

Check your site for duplicate users to make sure your invited bidders can log in. [Merge any duplicate users.](#)

[Invite your supporters to bid.](#) Send your Invitation to Bid to get them bidding on your Silent Auction. Use your follow-up invitation to bid to re-invite them to bid in your Live Auction.

If your organization is new to the software and/or you haven't used it for mobile bidding during a previous event, you'll want to take a little time to make sure your potential bidders know how to sign up to bid, and how to place a bid. Make sure your auctioneer is up to speed on this, too, so they can explain it periodically throughout your virtual event.

[Troubleshooting](#) Log In Issues: If someone is having trouble accessing bidding, the best way to get them started is to send them an invitation to bid. They should check their spam folder if the email doesn't appear in their inbox

Track Bids Received/Award Items

Your Auctioneer and/or production assistant and bid tracking assistant can [track high bids](#) at:

Admin > View Reports > View Summary Reports > Online/Mobile Auction: High Bids.

You can sort this report by the Updated column (click TWICE on the column header) to see the most recent bids. **Refresh the screen regularly to update.**

You can also view the high bidder for any item by clicking the Show Bid History button on the item tile.

Premium Subscribers can Close and Award bidding groups on their [Mobile Dashboard](#). Standard and Plus subscribers need to award the items from each individual item detail screen. (Be sure to access the item detail screen via the admin view of your catalog. The Award Item button does not display on the public view items tiles.)

Notify Winners and Collect Payment

You can set your site to send an email notification for each item won, or, you can consolidate your communications and make things a little easier for your winners by turning off your Winning Bid Notification Email and instead send everyone an Invitation to Self Check-out.

The Invitation to Self Check-Out contains a personalized link that allows buyers to review their purchases and pay for them online.

Premium subscribers can send this Invite from their Mobile Dashboard at the end of the event. Plus and Standard Subscribers can [send it from the Orders Page](#).

Before The Show

Curate Your Items

A gala auction often has as many as 15 live items, including a paddle raise or special appeal. But a gala auction also has a room full of people talking to each other, watching the show together and feeding off not just the energy generated by the auctioneer and emcee, but the energy generated by the crowd. In order to sustain and benefit from even close to that level of bidding energy, your virtual live event needs to be quick and short—probably no more than half an hour from when the bidding starts until your grand finale. Every minute past the half hour mark, regardless of the quality of your webcast, will see a dramatic drop off in potential bidders.

So curate a limited slate of 4 to 5 live auction items, tops. If you have a traditional live item that sells well and appeals to a broad swath of your demographic, say that prime parking place near the front of the building, be sure to include it.

Travel packages and experiences (but not cruises, at the moment) still sell and make excellent virtual live auction items. They offer great visuals, and your auctioneer and emcee will find them easier to riff about than something static. As soon as restrictions lift, people will be yearning to travel. But ask the donor or consignment vendor for an extended window on package component expirations, if possible. One consignment vendor we know well is offering 5-year windows (the norm is 1 year) to use their packages right now.

Recruit Sponsors

Just because you're not holding a gala doesn't mean you shouldn't solicit sponsorships. Focus on providing sponsors recognition rather than event tickets. And let them sponsor expenses related directly to producing your event: professional videography, live music, even your paddle raise can be sponsored. Be sure to provide recognition for these sponsors in your bidding software and in a thank-you video that will run during the pre-game portion of your event.

Provide your auctioneer and emcee a list of your sponsors. They can intersperse sponsor recognition with item sales. Filling the lag time with sponsor shout outs is a great way to recognize those key partners again.

Even better: ask your sponsors to provide fun, 15-second video vignettes that you can play between live items.

Produce Videos

As we noted above, if at all feasible, you'll want to have lots of pre-recorded video clips on hand. These can include:

- Your pre-game video scroll (more on this below)
- A welcome message
- Sign up and bidding instructions, with screenshots of the bidding software views
- An intro to your paddle raise
- Thank you to sponsors
- Thank you to your auction committee members
- Teasers or intros for your Live items
- Humorous "Commercial" breaks so that folks can refill their drinks
- Brief musical performances
- Organization beneficiaries thanking your audience for their support

Script the Event

You can't afford to wing it during your virtual live event. A detailed script is essential to the success of your event. And as Misty Marquam of Marquam Auction Agency notes, scripting is "not for the novice." In order to be prepared for the latency effect, your auctioneer and team need to script out:

- All cues for the AV team to run video or switch backgrounds.
- Welcome and Introductions of the auctioneer and emcee.
- Numerous ways to talk about the mission of your organization. Your

- auctioneer should know your mission backwards and forwards and be able to tell your story in multiple ways.
- Auctioneer/Emcee banter to get the show started and to introduce each item.
 - How to sign up to bid, how to place a bid, how to make a paddle raise donation. Your auctioneer and emcee should understand exactly what button bidders need to push and when.
 - Paddle raise introduction and how supporters can donate.
 - Introduction to each item, riffs on item selling points, how to bid on each item.
 - Transitions that bridge the viewer from what they just saw (say, bidding on Item 1) to what they'll see next (a brief video describing Item 2, for instance). Every transition should be planned and scripted to keep viewers on track and fully engaged in what they're seeing on screen.
 - Closing the Auction: final thank yous, tally of funds raised, grand finale.

Run Of Show

The week before your event your principal team members, including your auctioneer, emcee and AV technicians need to intentionally craft what's called a run-of-show.

The run-of-show takes everyone through the draft script, beat by beat. This is an opportunity for your team to identify and brainstorm solutions to possible problems, refine verbiage, add creative flair to your event, and clarify any points of confusion.

Most importantly: your run-of-show makes sure everyone is on the same page regarding the plan for how your event will be executed. It explicitly spells out not just what people will say and when, but what people will do and when: with action cues for your AV team and your auctioneer and emcee.

The run-of-show maps out everything: when each video will be shown, when each item will be bid on, which photos/videos will display when, and which videos could be cued up if an unexpected break is needed for your live presenters.

Show Time! The Event Itself

Pre-game Video Scroll

Don't wait until your official starting time to thank sponsors and committee members and let people know how to sign up to bid. You want to save all of your valuable live-stream time for what really matters: raising money.

About 30–45 minutes before your event starts, begin rolling your pre-game video. This is a looping video that should include thank-yous to sponsors, committee members and volunteers. It can include inspirational photos of the population you serve and the work your organization does. You can also include photos of your live items and reminders of the virtual live auction starting time. And, most importantly and repeatedly, your pre-game video should tell people how to bid on items.

Of course your auctioneer will re-iterate your bidding instructions during your live event, but it's always a good idea to give people a head start.

Welcome Message

Ideally, this is a BRIEF and focused pre-recorded message. It can come from your principal or head of school, from your development director, or from a student or recipient of your services. It should be short and inspirational. The goal is not to run through a list of thank you's to the parties involved. (Your pre-game video just did this and you can do it again at the close of your Virtual Live Auction.) You don't want to lose people right off the bat. You want to thank them for tuning in, fire them up for your cause, and get them excited to bid. All in three minutes or less, please.

Introductions of the Auctioneer and Emcee

The auctioneer and emcee introduce themselves and welcome everyone to the event. Theirs are the first live faces your bidders will see. They'll establish their rapport and get everyone revved up and ready to raise money, starting with a Special Appeal. They'll want to chat for several minutes in order to give viewers time to sign up to bid.

Paddle Raise/Special Appeal

This is the highest value portion of a gala event. Because viewership falls off as the virtual event proceeds, doing the Paddle Raise up front is essential. That's when most bidders are watching. Introduce this segment of your event with a brief, inspirational video.

As usual your organization should prep pre-committed large donors to give early and make sure they understand how to make their donation.

At the conclusion of your paddle raise, let your viewers know how much they've raised. Make the announcement a celebratory moment.

Bidding

At last! The moment everyone has been waiting for: a chance to bid on your exciting and well-curated live items!

Your auctioneer should take a minute or two to:

- Remind people to get ready to bid (with screenshots displaying)
- Let people know how to get assistance if they're having trouble signing up to bid
- Explain the latency effect and how it makes your virtual live auction different than a "regular" live auction
- Explain how they will be announcing item closings
- Encourage people not to delay bidding

This last point is especially critical. A virtual live auction isn't like a regular live auction, where a bidder can swoop in at the last minute with a high bid and win. In a virtual event, you snooze, you lose. The webcast your bidders are watching is actually being filmed about 30 seconds before they see it, so the auctioneer may be closing an item sooner than bidders anticipate. Make sure your bidders understand they need to get their bids in early so they don't miss out.

Wrap Up and Grand Finale

This is the moment to thank your sponsors—ideally, in a creative and fun way. While the thank you video is running, the bid tracking assistant can tally the funds raised during the evening. This is the result of everyone's hard work and generosity, so announcing your total raised should be done with tremendous celebratory spirit.

After your big announcement, why not cap off the event with something fun and lighthearted? Cut away to a community member dancing or performing your school fight song, to a zoom chat of your supporters wearing funny hats or all raising a toast.

After the Curtain Falls

You did it! And while you definitely deserve to rest on your laurels, there are a few more tasks to take care of before you're completely finished.

Gratitude

Thank everyone. Your item donors, your sponsors, your auction committee, your board, your staff, your great professional auction team. Let them all know how much you raised and that you couldn't have done without their generous assistance.

Put a note on your website encouraging your community to support your local item donors and give them specific ideas about how. For instance: "The following restaurants offer curbside take-out and gave generously to our auction. Take a break from cooking and order out tonight!"

Officially Notify Winners and Collect Payments

You've probably already done this using your auction software, but if not, don't delay. And if you have, check to see if some orders remain unpaid. You'll want to charge vaulted credit cards and send folks who haven't paid a new invitation to self check-out.

Debrief

It may be tempting to put this off, but memory is a fickle thing. You won't regret scheduling a virtual debrief session with your team for the week after your event when the details are still fresh in your mind.

- Discuss what worked well and what didn't.
- Which items sold better than expected? Make a note and plan to reach out to those donors again.
- What changes might translate well to a gala event?

We will return to those someday!

But until that day comes, you can bring your community "together" and raise lots of money for your organization by pivoting to a Virtual Live Auction.

About Us

This whitepaper is a collaboration between 4 companies—we all have a LOT of experience helping nonprofits plan, manage, and run fundraising auctions. We invite you to use the links below to find out more.



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