

The SchoolAuction.net Guide to Running a Fundraising Auction

...while maintaining your sanity

BY

Roger Devine
Delila Olsson
Kathryn Schwartz

Contents

- Introduction: How to Use this eBook 1
- Chapter 1: Designing Your Event 3
 - The Silent Auction 4
 - What Type of Group Uses Silent Auctions? 4
 - How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Silent Auction? 4
 - The Live (or Oral) Auction 5
 - What Type of Group Uses Live Auctions? 5
 - How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Live Auction? 5
 - Signup Parties 5
 - What Type of Group Uses Signup Parties? 6
 - How Much Can You Expect To Raise With Signup Parties? 6
 - Raffle & Games 6
 - Raffle Idea #1 – The Standard Raffle 6
 - Raffle Idea #2 – The Golden Ticket 7
 - Raffle Idea #3 – The Tricky Tray 8
 - Auction Game Idea #1 – Heads and Tails 9
 - Auction Game Idea #2 – Feeding Frenzy 10
 - Auction Game Idea #3 – Dessert Dash 11
 - Wine Wall 12
 - Paddle Raise 13
 - Paddle Raise Tips 15
 - What Type of Group Uses a Paddle Raise? 15
 - How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Paddle Raise? 15
- Chapter 2: Staffing Your Committee 16
 - The Key Positions (With Definitions) 17
 - Dream Team Position: Event Chair 19
 - A Note to the Current Auction Chair: 19
 - Choosing the Next Auction Chair 19
 - Dream Team Position: Event Co-Chair 20
 - Dream Team Position: Silent Auction Procurement Chair 20
 - Dream Team Position: Sign-up Party Procurement Chair 21
 - Dream Team Position: Ticket Sales Captain 22
 - Dream Team Position: Theme and Decorations Chair 23

Dream Team Position: Front Desk Manager	24
Dream Team Position: Software Lead.....	25
Volunteer Swaps	26
Conclusion.....	27
Chapter 3: Three Critical Tasks	28
Critical Task #1: Procurement	28
Procuring Items for the Silent Auction.....	28
Procuring Items for the Live Auction.....	30
Engage Your Community.....	32
A note on consignment items	32
A Few Words of Caution about Auction Consignment Items:.....	33
Procuring for Signup Parties	33
Critical Task #2: Planning The Party	34
Selecting the Venue	34
Event Venue Checklist.....	35
Hiring a Caterer	37
Themes, Themes, Themes	37
Critical Task #3: Getting Guests to the Event.....	38
Ticket Sale Strategies	39
Chapter 4: Ensuring Event Success.....	41
The Front Desk: Setup & Staffing.....	41
Placement	41
Computer Stations	41
The Silent Auction: Merchandising Your Items	43
Make the Most of Your Table Space	43
Tips on structuring silent auction sections, tables and displays.....	43
Color Coordinate the Silent Auction Closings.....	44
Color Coordinate Items and Packages.....	45
Silent Auction Set-up Takeaways.....	45
The Live Auction: Merchandising, Ordering Your Items	46
Arrange Your Live Auction Lots Carefully.....	46
Make It Visual	46
Ordering your Live Auction Items and Lots.....	46
Setting Up The Other Departments: Raffle, Games, Wine Wall, SuperSilent, Paddle Raise	47
Setting Up A Raffle.....	47

The Golden Ticket	48
Setting Up A Tricky Tray (aka Fishbowl Raffle).....	48
Setting Up Heads or Tails.....	49
Setting Up a Feeding Frenzy.....	50
Setting Up a Dessert Dash.....	50
Setting Up a Wine Wall	52
Item Pick-Up: Strategies, Setup, and Staffing.....	52
Option #1 – The Staffed Item Pick-Up Area	53
Option #2 – Self Service Pick-Up.....	54
Option #3 – Runners	54
Option #4 – Pick-Up Party.....	54
Essential Items: don't leave home without 'em!	54
Critical Information	55
Supplies.....	55
Organizational Strategies for Event Night.....	56
The Help Desk.....	56
Check-In/Check-Out Planning.....	56
Take Good Care of Your Volunteers!.....	57
In Case of Emergency.....	57
Chapter #5: Clean Up With an Online Auction	59
Chapter 6: Creating Institutional Memory	63
Debriefing.....	63
Passing the Baton... er, Binder	65
In closing... ..	67
Appendix A.....	68
Our Timeline for Planning a Fundraising Auction	68
The morning after	68
After this year's debriefing session.....	68
10 months before the event	69
Event week.....	74
Appendix B -The SchoolAuction.net Software	77
Overview	77
Promote Your Event	78
Sell Tickets.....	79
Track Guest Data and Item Donations	80

Print Bid Sheets and More... 81
Easy, Fast Check-In/Check-Out 82
Offer Mobile Bidding..... 83
Process Credit-Card Transactions 84
Run an Online Auction 85
Comprehensive Reporting 86
How To Get Started 87

Introduction: How to Use this eBook

Fundraising auctions are a common, and potentially lucrative, way to generate money for your school or non-profit organization. These kinds of events are more popular than ever due to declining school budgets.

However, organizers often don't have adequate resources to make an auction a smooth and profitable experience. That's why these events are notorious for being poorly planned and inefficiently executed.

As a group of volunteer dads we learned the hard way, working in the auction trenches, what can happen when good-hearted people don't have the support they need to create fundraising success. That's why we decided to develop a software product to help, and why we decided to publish this book.

This book is intended to provide you with an additional layer of support as you set out to create a successful fundraising event. Whether you're planning a large gala or something more intimate, or whether you're starting from scratch and launching a new initiative for your organization, it's vitally important to have a plan. This book offers a proven framework – a road map, if you will – to remove guesswork and help assure your success now and in the future.

Here's what you will find in the pages ahead:

In **Chapter 1 – Designing Your Event**, we discuss the various options you have for fundraising activities within your gala auction – including Live and Silent Auctions, Raffles & Games, Signup Parties, Wine Walls, and more. We'll help you figure out which of these makes the most sense for your event.

In **Chapter 2 – Staffing Your Committee**, we present an organizational structure for the auction team – one that divides the work up in order to help you spread out the work, and reduce volunteer burnout.

In **Chapter 3 – Three Critical Tasks**, we discuss strategies for tackling the main bulk of the work your team will be handling – Item Procurement, Ticket Sales, and Party Planning.

Chapter 4 – Ensuring Event Success is focused on auction-night operations and

logistics. Topics include merchandising your items effectively, managing sales of raffle tickets, signup parties, games, and the Wine Wall. This chapter is also where you find our battle-tested recommendations on how to set up check-in, check-out, and item pick-up.

With **Chapter 5 – Clean Up With an Online Auction**, we turn our attention away from the gala, and discuss models and tips for incorporating online bidding and sales into your fundraising strategy.

Chapter 6 – Creating Institutional Memory, is all about extending your success after the event into future events and further fundraising. Every auction chair goes through a substantial learning curve with every event they put on; it pays to have a system for passing those lessons learned on to the next chair.

At the end of the book are two Appendices. The first is our Timeline – the one we personally use when we chair a fundraising auction for our school, Rotary club, or one of the other non-profit groups we are involved with (as you might imagine, all of us get recruited pretty frequently within our community); and the other is information on the software we developed to help groups like yours manage fundraisers like the ones described herein. If you like this book, you'd probably also like our software, and we'd like to invite you to try it out – you can set up a trial version within a couple of minutes, at <http://my.schoolauction.net/signup>

To your success,

Roger, Delila, Kathryn, and the SchoolAuction.net Team

Chapter 1: Designing Your Event

My favorite analogy for a gala fundraising auction is this: it's just like a department store, only it only lasts for 5 hours, one day per year. You will have multiple areas within the event where your guests can spend their money, but instead of designer-label boutiques, your "departments" are some combination of the following Big Six auction-fundraising tactics: Silent Auction, Live Auction, Signup Parties, Raffle & Games, Wine Wall, & Paddle Raise. You might also have a Super Silent Auction, a Tricky Tray, Chicken Bingo, or other variants on the basics, but just about every type of fundraising tactic I've ever seen or heard of happening at a gala auction can be described as one of those six.

By utilizing multiple fundraising tactics at your event, you provide ways for your guests to tailor their participation to match their own style, interests, and budget. But how many should you use, and which ones? There is no universal answer, so let's start with a review of the Big Six, and why you might choose to include each of them.

The Silent Auction

Undoubtedly the most popular fundraising tactic for PTAs and small non-profits (and the second- or third- highest grossing section at most SchoolAuction.net customer events), the silent auction consists of a display of donated items, with paper bid sheets in front of each. Your guests have a set period of time (usually 1 to 1.5 hours) to wander around, look at the items, and write bids down on the sheets. When time is up, the winner of each item is the person who made the highest bid on that item.

In a silent auction, the bidding is asynchronous, competitive, and unmediated; the items for sale are generally valued between \$35 and \$350, and usually either physical goods, or gift certificates to local businesses.

Because of the amount of space needed to display the silent auction items and their bid sheets, this is almost always the largest, most visible portion of your event. Guests find them fun and popular; however, it is important that they not also be seen as a place to search for bargains – this is a fundraising event, not a garage sale.

They are also almost always over-procured – you won't really make enough money to make a silent auction worth your while unless you have a lot of competitive bidding – 5-9 bids per item – and you won't get that many bids unless there is some scarcity. If there are enough silent auction items for every guest to win one, then you will wind up with a large number of bid sheets with 1, 2, or 3 bids on them.

Should you decide to include a silent auction in your event, estimate the number of guests you will have, and set your procurement goal using this formula:

Number of guests, divided by 2; then multiplied by 35%

What Type of Group Uses Silent Auctions?

Almost all SchoolAuction.net customers – PTAs, Booster Clubs, County Political Parties, Rotary Clubs, Animal Shelters – this is the starting point for most small gala fundraising auctions.

How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Silent Auction?

This depends on the items you procure, and the number of guests you have, but most SchoolAuction.net customers raise between \$8,000 - \$22,000 in their silent auction.

The Live (or Oral) Auction

Live Auctions often feature 6-25 high-value items and experiences, and are conducted during a specific time of the evening, when you have closed all of your other departments, in order to focus your guest's attention on this tactic.

In a Live Auction, the bidding happens competitively, in real time, and is mediated by an auctioneer – preferably a certified Benefit Auction Specialist (See the [Auctioneer Registry](#) on our website for a list of auctioneers in the U.S.A.)

What Type of Group Uses Live Auctions?

Most SchoolAuction.net customers do at least a small live auction; but they can be intimidating, and so you should think about your potential guest list before deciding.

How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Live Auction?

Again, this depends on how many items you procure, how appealing they are, and the number of guests you have who are likely to bid in the high-dollar section of your event, but most SchoolAuction.net customers who do one raise between \$9,000 - \$30,000 in their live auction.

Signup Parties

Signup Parties are well-named; they are parties or experiences that your guests can sign up to attend. Each guest who does so pays a fixed amount to your group for each party they sign up for at check-out.

The parties are hosted by members of your community; in school communities, they often serve as “friend- raisers” as well as fundraisers.

Signup parties usually are sold during the silent auction portion of the evening, they are noncompetitive, and the sale is unmediated. It is common (and an excellent idea) to have 8-25 different parties, and for the signup fees for these to have a wide range – say 2 parties with signup costs of \$15 or less, two at \$20 or \$25, two at \$35, two at \$50, and perhaps one or two at \$100. When coupled with the fact that these are noncompetitive, a range of signup costs ensures that all segments of your attendee base can find a way to support your group.

What Type of Group Uses Signup Parties?

Ones whose supporter base generally lives in close proximity – these are superb for school- and church-based groups.

How Much Can You Expect To Raise With Signup Parties?

With this tactic, it's easier to start from the other direction – how much would you like to raise with signup parties? Figure out a range of price points that your community can support, and then you can create a plan like this one:

Party Name	Price Point	# of Signup Slots	Max Gross
Flip-Flops & Lemon Drops	\$25	20	\$500
Men's Poker Night	\$40	12	\$480
Pig Roast/Luau	\$35	40	\$1,400
Scotch Tasting	\$100	6	\$600
All-Night School Sleepover	\$10	200	\$2,000
Total			\$4,980

Raffle & Games

Another excellent way to include your entire attendee base, raffles and games of chance are probably the most popular fundraising tactic we see. Let's take a look at three popular raffle ideas you might choose to use, along with 3 very popular gala-auction games.

Raffle Idea #1 – The Standard Raffle

The first idea to explore is the standard raffle for an item that you might otherwise think about selling in the Silent Auctions. You have 1-3 prizes, and your guests purchase raffle tickets at a fixed price (you set that; I've seen a range from \$5 to \$50 each); you draw the winning ticket at a set point in the evening, and award the prize(s) to the purchaser of the winning ticket.

What should the prize be? iPads and other hot gadgets-of-the-moment are de rigueur,

but raffles are also an excellent way to ensure that you meet or exceed the Fair Market Value on an item that otherwise might not be the subject of a bidding frenzy. Here are two examples of how auction teams used their raffle to help them maximize the return on some less-exciting would-be silent auction items.

One of our local SchoolAuction.net customers used as their raffle prize a class visit from the local Mad Science team. Mad Science is a group that offers fun in-class, hands-on science presentations to local elementary schools. It's an item that the community is glad to see, but for some reason, never gets more than a handful of bids. By charging \$10/ticket for a chance to win the Mad Science In-Class Field Trip for any class the winner chose, they only had to sell a handful of tickets in order to cover the Fair Market Value of the item; they wound up selling many more than that, and maximized the proceeds on that item.

I used this idea myself a year later, when chairing the auction at my son's middle school. In our city, there are a dozen or so local attractions (museums and amusement parks) that are always generous with gift certificates that admit a family for a day to enjoy what they have to offer. So generous, in fact, that the community just takes them for granted sometimes; we're very lucky if the winning bid covers the face value of the gift certificate. But stick all of these into an envelope, add the 1-year membership from AAA (also a very easy donation to get), and you have "A Summer of Fun" – a joint item with a fair market value of \$800. We sold 120 \$10 raffle tickets for the chance to win this, and thus comfortably made 150% of FMV on the whole lot of items.

Raffle Idea #2 – The Golden Ticket

The Golden Ticket works much the same way as the standard raffle, with these key differences:

- The item is of much higher value – normally, it is the winner's choice of any item from the Live Auction (you may want to exclude items with a consignment fee)
- The number of tickets is limited – usually to 100, for an event with up to 300 guests. You want to sell this raffle as having a greater-than-normal chance of success.
- The ticket price is much higher; usually \$100 or greater.

- As a condition of the raffle, you set a minimum number of tickets that must be sold before the raffle is held – calculate this by taking the highest fair market value of any of the potential prizes the winner could choose, and divide that by your Golden Ticket price. If you don't sell that number of tickets, then you reserve the right to refund the ticket purchases and not hold the raffle (of course, you could decide to hold it anyway, if you are comfortable with how things might turn out.)

Pull the winning ticket right before your auctioneer starts selling the Live Auction items.

Raffle Idea #3 – The Tricky Tray

In this type of raffle, you have 8-25 different prizes, lined up on a table, with fishbowls in front of each. Your guests purchase raffle tickets by the yard (or in some other configuration that ensures they buy a LOT of them), writes their bid numbers on the back of the tickets, and distributes their tickets among the fishbowls; a winning ticket is pulled from each fishbowl, and that prize is awarded to the guest who purchased that ticket.

Some tips for making the most of your raffle:

In all of these variations, the item that the guest is purchasing is a raffle ticket – NOT the prize. When entering the sales into your auction software, remember to sell your guests tickets; and give the winner the prize (via a sale for \$0)

If allowed in your state, sell raffle tickets online (donation or ticket sales) as well as at event check-in. It's great to have a charismatic and well-dressed individual selling tickets at your event, writing bid numbers down on a sheet of paper that your data entry volunteers will use to enter the ticket sales.

Close the raffle ticket sales fairly early in the evening (before dinner if you're serving dinner, before the live auction if you're having a live auction) to give your data entry volunteers enough time to enter the sales.

A word of caution: check your state law to see if you need a permit to hold a raffle, and if online raffle sales are allowed.

Auction Game Idea #1 – Heads and Tails

Heads and Tails is a popular game which is fun and easy to play. Here's how it works:

- Have volunteers sell chances to play the game – most often, the guest is given a string of plastic Mardi Gras beads for each chance they purchase. Record the sales on a signup sheet.
- When the time comes, the auctioneer will direct the guests to stand up if they want to play. Players are directed to place a hand on either their head or tail.
- A coin is tossed and Auctioneer calls Heads or Tails.
- If Heads is called, every player with a hand on their tail will sit down (or take off one string of beads, if they have purchased more than one chance); likewise for Tails.
- Then the coin is tossed again and the results called out. This keeps going until there is one person left standing. (If you're allowed to buy multiple tickets, make sure everyone knows the rules and knows how many they can buy. Do not change the rules midstream. For example, if someone buys enough to "game" the system and insure victory, it's not a reason to limit the number of tickets mid-game so there is some suspense for everyone else.)

What this person wins is up to you. Popular prizes include gift certificates, tickets to a play or show, or even a percentage of the funds raised in the Heads and Tails game.

Heads and Tails Tech Tips

In your auction software, set up your organization as the donor for an Item - Heads or Tails - that is a raffle with a set price and plenty of quantity so that each guest can buy one. The sales get entered as bulk items.

If the winner gets to choose an existing item such as a silent auction item, enter it as a sale to the winner for \$0.

If the prize is a credit that can be used that night to pay for auction purchases, it can be acknowledged as a cash payment at check-out. (Make certain that if the prize is understood to be a credit toward purchase that no negative cash flow occurs through

volunteer missteps.)

If the prize is identified in advance, it should be entered normally so that the donor gets the credit. Use Heads or Tails in the Notes field and “sell” it to the winner for \$0.

Auction Game Idea #2 – Feeding Frenzy

Feeding Frenzy is one fun way to use “extra” donated gift certificates or vouchers (or ones that don’t fit into an auction package).

The Feeding Frenzy generally takes place early in the evening to get people raising their paddles in a fast and fun way. It’s a fun game that builds some enthusiasm for bidding. Here’s how it works:

The auctioneer sets the stage for the Feeding Frenzy by explaining that she is going to call out the name of a restaurant (or other business) from whom your auction has received a gift certificate or gift card, along with the amount of the gift certificate. She will then sell that gift card, at face value, to the first person to raise their paddle (or catch their eye, or make the most demonstrative display – they’ll have an opinion as to how they want to conduct it) The winner is either awarded the gift card on the spot or later, at pick-up time. Then the auctioneer moves on to the next gift card – Feeding Frenzy is usually done with between 5-10 gift cards.

Feeding Frenzy Tech Tips

Create an item called Feeding Frenzy as a live auction item that is priceless or has no value assigned to it. The description should explain the game and each of the vouchers in the same way you would with a lot. (In fact, if you’re reading this after having created a lot for a Feeding Frenzy, simply remove the items from the lot and leave the hollow lot as your Feeding Frenzy listing.)

Enter each of the individual credits gift cards as a donation item not visible to the public and then “sell” them to the winner for \$0. (You may find it useful to create a separate set of numbers or a table to put all the Feeding Frenzy vouchers so they won’t get lost in the shuffle.)

Work with your auctioneer to make sure that the spotters/recorders in the live auction and the volunteers entering data somewhere else have the same reference numbers and names so that the winners easily receive their certificates at the end of the evening (if you

are not awarding them on the spot).

Auction Game Idea #3 – Dessert Dash

A Dessert Dash is a fun way to re-energize your food-logged guests, while raising some additional money for your cause.

At each guest table, place a bid sheet where each of the guests at the table who wish to participate will write down their bidder number along with a dollar amount they are willing to contribute in toward the table's dessert. The highest (collective) table bid will select a dessert for their table first, with the next highest collective bid making the second dessert selection, and so on. Limit the amount of time each table has to pick their dessert to 30 seconds or so, in order to raise the fun quotient. Encourage the selectors to run to the table!

Dessert Dash Tech Tips

In your software, there are many ways to set up the Dessert Dash, but all of them involve having a single item with adequate quantity and are entered through the bulk sales screen on auction night. These variations only matter for tax purposes. Because we're not tax consultants, we don't advocate any of these over the others. The choices are:

1. Enter the item ("Dessert Dash Contribution") as a raffle. This will result in with a fixed price acknowledged on the receipt, but with no tax deductibility deduction as a chance game. Rationale: In this method, the Dessert Dash is a game of chance, with each guest is betting that his table will be the highest total.
2. Enter the item as a sellable item with an FMV calculated as the average cost per person of a dessert. The amount entered for each bid number is then applied against that FMV and anything above it is deductible. (Avoid the trap of thinking about cumulative table cost of dessert, donations, etc. as the table is irrelevant to taxes and your software.) Some guests benefit more, some less but this choice makes the argument that the total amount deductible is fairer to the tax payer and collector.
3. Enter the item as a paddle raise, so it's all deductible as a donation. The argument is that dessert was paid for with admission and any benefit from getting to choose a dessert in a different order is so nominal and diluted by

the cumulative table effect as to be negligible.

Enjoy your dessert.

Wine Wall

Few things are as common to auctions, or as universally enjoyed as donated wine. Wine donations provide an easy and affordable way for many people to contribute to the cause.

The challenge to auction organizers is how to distribute donated wine efficiently while raising money for the cause. One excellent solution is a Wine Wall.

How to Set Up a Wine Wall

Many variations exist on this theme, but the central idea is that the identity of the wine is not known to the guest until after he or she has made their purchase. Every bottle on the wine wall is the same price, and labels are not visible. Therefore, one guest may spend \$20 and end up with a \$7 bottle of table wine, while another may pay the same price for a \$35 bottle of vintage wine. If a rare bottle of higher value has been donated, this hidden treasure can be promoted to event attendees who hope score a great bottle of wine at a low price, which drives excitement and sales at the wine wall.

Wine Wall Tech Tips

In your software, enter the wine donations individually if you want donors to be thanked for specific bottles and get appropriate tax credit. Individual listings also allow for tracking a bottle and donor through the sales or award stage. If you don't need to track the individual wine contributions, you can also enter a single item ("Wine Wall Bottle") and set the quantity to however many bottles you procure.

You will also want to enter another item; this is the item you will actually sell to the guests on event night. You have two choices; one of which will potentially give the guests who participate a tax deduction.

1. The easiest, least-complicated way to go is to create a raffle item called "Wine Wall." Make the price of the item the amount you are going to charge for one bottle. This option will NOT result in any tax-deduction for your guests; you are treating it as a "game of chance" which by the rules of the IRS never

results in a tax deductible expense.

2. The alternative is to use the “Sellable Item” type – again, name it “Wine Wall,” and set the price to what you will charge for a single bottle of wine. In this case, you also need to enter an FMV, that is the average value of all the bottles. If the Price is higher than the FMV, then the guest will get a (potential) tax deduction of the difference between the two.

What Type of Group Uses Wine Walls?

Those that hold their events at venues that allow alcohol sales, and whose mission is consistent with the consumption of alcohol.

How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Wine Wall?

Most of our customers who run a Wine Wall find that the optimum number of bottles is about half the number of bid numbers you expect to have in the room; the price of a chance to select a bottle is usually \$15-\$25. This means that for an auction with 240 guests expected (120 bid numbers), your expected take would be between \$900 - \$1,500.

Paddle Raise

(aka Special Appeal, Direct Appeal, Direct Ask, or Fund-A-Need – among other names)

This can be the single most important fundraising department at your event. It is almost always conducted during an interim moment in your Live Auction, in order to focus your guest’s attention on this tactic. It can also be conducted as a stand-alone event, for groups that do not have a Live Auction.

In the Paddle Raise, the action is non-competitive, done in real time, and is mediated by an emcee or auctioneer – preferably a certified Benefit Auction Specialist (See the Auctioneer Registry in the Resources section of www.schoolauction.net for a list of auctioneers in the U.S.A.) There are no items or experiences that the guests who contribute get for their donation – other than the warm glow from having helped out a cause dear to their hearts, and the public acclaim of their peers in the room.

Key Takeaway: Paddle Raises generate, and rely on, public pressure on your guests to

be seen with their paddles in the air at some point – think about two dentists, sitting on opposite sides of the room. If one raises his paddle at the \$1,000 level, the other will naturally feel pressure to match that donation. This dynamic is extremely effective at raising money for your school or cause, and you should not shy away from it.

During the Paddle Raise, your emcee or auctioneer is asking your guests to make a public commitment to donate money to your organization (usually for a specific project), at specific levels. Here's a generic script for a standard Paddle Raise:

(Scene: At this point, the first 7 of a list of 12 Live Auction items have been sold, and the crowd is happy, and immersed in the moment of the Live Auction.)

AUCTIONEER: Okay, folks, now it is time for a very special item – one that everyone in the room can win, and one that I hope you all will. This is our Special Appeal – a moment where all of you have a chance to show your support for this fabulous organization. The way it works is very simple: in a moment, I am going to call out an amount, and if you are willing to contribute to {organization name} at that amount, hold your bid paddle up in the air, and keep it there until I call out your number. All of the money we raise in this appeal will go toward {project}, so please – give generously.

AUCTIONEER: I'm going to start out by asking – do we have anyone in the audience who can contribute \$5,000 to {project}?

(a bid paddle goes up)

AUCTIONEER: Yes! Bidder number 301 will donate \$5,000 to {project}! Thank you, sir! Is there anyone else who wishes to join this gentleman in contributing at the \$5,000 level?

(two more bid paddles go up)

AUCTIONEER: Thank you to bidder number 391 and 432, for contributing \$5,000 to this amazing project. Anyone else? No? Well then, let's give these bidders a big round of applause!

(much clapping ensues)

AUCTIONEER: Now, let's move on to the \$2,500 level. Is there anyone who is willing to donate \$2,500 to ensure

{benefits of the project}? (bid paddles go up)

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, numbers 354, 371, 416, and 329! Let's give them a big round of applause!

AUCTIONEER: Now, how about \$1,000? Who can donate \$1,000 to {project}? Numbers 328, 302, 451 – thank you, all of you!

(continue with \$500 and \$250 levels)

AUCTIONEER: Now we come to my favorite level. I want to see every number in the room for this one – this is the

\$100 donation level. Let's see those paddles, folks – who can donate \$100 to {project} THANK YOU! Numbers 431, 304, 357, 412...

(finish with \$50 and \$25 levels, if desired).

Paddle Raise Tips

Have at least two spotters, pointing out bid numbers to the auctioneer, and two recorders, who are each recording all of the pledges, on the Paddle Raise Recording Sheets generated by your SchoolAuction.net software.

Also, identify an anchor bidder before the event – someone who you know will make a high-dollar donation. Ask them what level they plan to donate, and then start your Paddle Raise there. There's nothing worse than starting at a high level, and having no bid numbers at all get raised.

What Type of Group Uses a Paddle Raise?

Everyone should – they are pure, effective fundraising. Realistically, however, it is tough to effectively conduct one without a trained benefit auctioneer (or an emcee experienced in conducting them). They are also most effective at events where you have a scripted moment where all of the guests are collected together and focused on a single part of your event (such as a Live Auction).

How Much Can You Expect To Raise With A Paddle Raise?

At least as much as you raise with your silent auction.

Chapter 2: Staffing Your Committee

Building the Dream Team

Key Question: who are the people in your community who have the dedication and leadership skills to carry the fundraising vision forward?

For several months leading up to event night, you'll work alongside a group of key people to make your school auction goals a reality. The team you put together will not only make or break the success of your fundraiser, but also will impact the level of enthusiasm (and charitable giving) within your school or organization.

In this section, we'll give you our best tips on how to staff your auction committee – tips we've culled from talking to hundreds of auction chairs and from chairing dozens of events ourselves. We'll start with some overall strategy and then move into describing a slate of positions that can help you delegate critical tasks effectively.

Strategies To Keep In Mind

Most people don't volunteer for committees for one primary reason: it sounds like a lot of work. Yet, the entire committee concept is based upon the old adage, many hands make light work. This adage is particularly useful as it relates to benefit auction planning.

Building the right kind of team is the critically important task, and it doesn't have to be burdensome if you have a structure in place.

Before we get to job descriptions, here are three tips that apply to the overall process of recruiting volunteers to help you:

1. *Start Small.* If you can't readily find someone to take over the top spots – Auction Chair, Co-Chair or Procurement Chair – focus your efforts on filling the smaller jobs. After all, who wouldn't rather take over a well-staffed organization than a startup? For instance, rather than scouting for a Procurement Chair, try asking for help executing a smaller, specific task, like “*Will you help support the auction by delivering this letter to these three businesses next week?*” or “*Will you help us in our planning by making follow-up calls to these businesses next week?*”
2. *Make It Personal* Rather than posting flyers or mailing a long list of tasks to

be accomplished, if you can make a personal ask of someone to do *one job* the odds of getting a volunteer commitment increase dramatically.

Teambuilding is all about relationships, so take the time to initiate personal conversations with people with whom you share a commitment to your school or organization and who you think would make good team members. Also, when you ask for a commitment be sure to point out the reasons you think the person would be a great fit for the team, such as their leadership skills, enthusiasm, teambuilding capacities, etc.

3. *Define the Roles* It's a lot easier to ask a volunteer to do a job that has a beginning and end, and a well-defined job description. In general, most auction teams don't clearly articulate the job descriptions, nor do they limit the responsibilities, of key positions. This often results in having three or four people doing 80% of the work, which very quickly leads to volunteer burnout.

Instead, we recommend that when you recruit someone to head up procurement for the silent auction or take the lead on ticket sales, *you don't ask them to do anything more than that.*

By clearly defining every key position, and never giving any one person more to do than they can reasonably accomplish (and keep their sanity), you'll recruit solid team members, pull off a successful event, and keep your volunteers coming back year after year.

Key Takeaway - Staffing Strategy: It's easier to find 10 people to take on well-defined, manageable jobs than it is to find two people who are willing to take on the whole thing. And you're less likely to burn people out.

The Key Positions (With Definitions)

Let's start with an organizational chart. By designing and implementing a clear organizational structure, volunteers can participate at their comfort level while making a meaningful contribution to the cause. In this section, we'll define roles and responsibilities by providing specific job descriptions so you can begin to get a big picture view of the fundraising process and maximize efficiency every step of the way.

Here's what our ideal org chart looks like:

Position	Reports To
Auction Chair	
Auction Co-Chair	Auction Chair
Silent Auction Procurement Chair	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Silent Auction Procurement Team Volunteers (3–4, or as needed)	<i>Silent Auction Procurement Chair</i>
Live Auction Procurement Chair	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Live Auction Procurement Team Volunteers (1–2, or as needed)	<i>Live Auction Procurement Chair</i>
Signup Party Procurement Chair	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Ticket Sales Chair	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Theme & Decorations Chair	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Event Night Decorations Team Volunteers (4–5, or as needed)	<i>Theme & Decorations Chair</i>
Front Desk Manager	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>
Check-In/Check-Out Clerks (3–6, or as needed)	<i>Front Desk Manager</i>
Bid Sheet Runners (2–3)	<i>Front Desk Manager</i>
Wine Wall Salesperson (1)	<i>Front Desk Manager</i>
Raffle Ticket Salespeople (2–4)	<i>Front Desk Manager</i>
Item Pick-Up Clerks (2–4)	<i>Front Desk Manager</i>
Software Lead	<i>Auction Chair (or Co-Chair)</i>

Dream Team Position: Event Chair

A Note to the Current Auction Chair:

Chairing an auction is a huge commitment and an even bigger job – you're a hero for stepping up! You took it on because you have a heart for the cause.

Your successor will take it on for the same reason; yet, despite the many intrinsic benefits of volunteerism, finding that right person can be a challenge. It's a bit of a Catch 22: few want to take on a leadership role without lots of help, but it takes leadership to get lots of help!

Fortunately, it's surprisingly easy to find willing volunteers for tasks that are well-defined and require limited time... which is the secret to recruiting next year's leader, and next year's team.

Choosing the Next Auction Chair

The auction chair is the event point person. Filling this key position may seem daunting at first but, if you adhere to the job description, you'll discover how the work of the auction team is shared evenly and with great results.

Think about people in your school or organization who have the kind of qualities that would naturally make him or her a good event chairperson. To be effective, an event chair takes a big picture view of the organization and its fundraising goals. This is a person who can remain connected to projected outcomes while also being fully present to the details of the moment. They understand how to delegate, and are flexible enough to allow for adjustments along the way.

Event chair responsibilities include:

- Recruitment, support and oversight of all committee chairs and managers
Motivating and inspiring committee chairs and members
- Troubleshooting anything that comes up
- Final decision-making power on event theme, decorations, menu and entertainment
Maintaining and updating all event-related documents and records

- Calling and/or corresponding with past and present donors and supporters
- Planning for a smooth succession by effectively mentoring and training the next “generation” of committee chairs and next year’s auction team

Dream Team Position: Event Co-Chair

The auction Co-Chair works in tandem with the event chair, acting as co-organizer and “First Lieutenant” to the auction chair. Ideally, and in many cases, the co-chair will cover the auction chair position for next year’s event.

Like the Event chair, the Co-Chair position calls for great people skills and the ability to work closely and effectively with a team of volunteers. The Co-Chair will assist the chair in handling some of the most important details leading up to event night, and will help support other committee members as needed.

Event Co-Chair responsibilities may include:

- Shadowing the Event Chair in order to learn what is required of the position
- Assisting in the creation of institutional memory; that is, keeping track of what is working well (or not) for the benefit of next year’s event
- Flexibility in picking up any additional tasks to support the event chair

Dream Team Position: Silent Auction Procurement Chair

The role of Silent Auction Procurement Chair is a critically important position in the org chart. This position is the most difficult position to recruit because, frankly, many people dislike asking others to donate. It’s also a deeply rewarding and fun position for someone who’s passionate about the cause, naturally social, and enjoys networking.

A great Silent Auction Procurement Chair is someone who:

- Is widely regarded as a team player with a strong commitment to community.
- Is outgoing and enjoys meeting, greeting, and networking with other people.
- Doesn’t mind asking for donations of goods and services to benefit your cause.

- Brings an attitude of positivity which will help inspire and motivate other committee members during procurement season.
- Possesses organizational skills to help:
- Oversee how and where Silent Auction items will be stored, grouped and arranged before event night
- Manage a postal mailing campaign, including receiving and organizing the replies
- Coordinate the pickup and delivery of auction items as needed

Procuring goods and services for the Silent Auction is a big job, which, like all fundraising tasks, works best as a team effort. Therefore, it is recommended that the Silent Auction Procurement Chair recruit a team of volunteers to help with procurement.

We hinted at this earlier, but the key to getting procurement volunteers is the same as the key to getting the bigger jobs filled – ask for a specific amount of work. Assign a group of 5-6 potential donors to one person, and ask them to visit/call/contact those donors within a specific amount of time (say, a week). Then follow up, and if they had some success and found it to be not-so-terribly-scary, give them another batch.

Dream Team Position: Sign-up Party Procurement Chair

This might be the best position of all in terms of sheer fun, so it shouldn't be difficult to find a social butterfly to take it on. It's a great position for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that Sign-up Parties are big community builders. Party themes tend to become social traditions that return year after year and that draw a consistent group of fun and generous buyers to your event.

The task of the Sign-up Party Procurement Chair is specific and measurable: Recruit seven to ten hosts (from within the community or organization) to throw themed parties. Then, work with each party host to determine a date, time and number of attendees. Prepare the information for the catalog and silent auction table, and you're set.

Sign-up Parties are popular events that sell really well in a Silent Auction as well as in an Online Auction because the attendee list is visible on the item description... which means guests can easily see who else is going to be there and decide to join in the fun!

Your Sign-up Party Procurement Captain should be someone who...

- Enjoys mingling and socializing with other members of your community
- Loves a good party – especially when it’s built around a unique and fun theme
- Is overflowing with creative ideas

Remember, with Sign-up Parties you’re building a perennial event. People will start buying tickets to your auction just so they can sign up to attend the annual “Martinis for Moms” or “Murder Mystery” event. Let’s get this party started!

Dream Team Position: Ticket Sales Captain

Auction items are procured, decorations are up, the band is at the ready... but without people in those seats, all the careful preparation is for naught.

You know you need lots of warm bodies and generous hearts on site on event night so you can meet your fundraising goals. The question is, what approaches will you use to fill those seats? For starters, you’ll need the right, enthusiastic person to head up the committee on Ticket Sales.

The Ticket Sales Captain is responsible for getting a certain number of people to attend the event. There are several ways they can do this, including direct sales to members of the school community or organization, and online sales via the auction site.

Ticket Sales Captain is a very gratifying position, especially when event night rolls around and the seats are filled with enthusiastic bidders. There’s definitely some promotion involved, so this person should have great social skills and lots of natural enthusiasm. He or she should be someone who...

- Is goal oriented and will be excited to start selling
- Is totally comfortable asking others to participate by purchasing tickets and/or tables
- Enjoys mingling and socializing with other members of your community

If every member of the auction team – and their respective committee members – does their job, then your event will have a perennial appeal from year to year. Your Ticket

Sales Captain can do a lot to keep that positive momentum going and growing.

Dream Team Position: Theme and Decorations Chair

The success of your fundraising event depends upon many things, not the least of which is creating an atmosphere in which people feel festive, friendly, and generous. This is where the role of Theme and Decorations Chair becomes vitally important.

Theme and Decorations Chair is a position for the party planner in your group – the one who’s everyone’s favorite hostess. This is a person who lights up at the thought of creating atmosphere, mood and fun with fanciful or exotic themes such as Monte Carlo Night, an Evening in Italy, Classic Hollywood Films, or Dancing with the Stars.

Regardless of your chosen theme, all marketing, ticket sales, and decorations will reflect this idea. The Theme and Decorations Chair is the spark who brings the theme to life. Therefore, it’s an important position to fill early in the planning process, so that the Chairperson can have input when choosing a venue, caterer, and menu for the event.

Here are the qualities and qualifications you’re looking for in your Theme and Decorations Chair:

- A team player who can work effectively and cooperatively with the people at the venue as well as with other committee members and volunteers
- An organized person and a good time manager. These are important skills, especially when organizing the preparation of centerpieces and decorations during event week
- A good supervisor who can easily delegate tasks during set-up and break-down of the auction event

On auction night, the Theme and Decorations Chair will work in tandem with the Front Desk Manager to oversee the event. While the Front Desk Manager is taking care of all the front desk logistics and item pick-up, the Theme and Decorations Chair will oversee the decorations, lighting, music, catering, seating and wine service.

Remember, running a successful event in which volunteers are happy to return year after year means limiting the scope of each position so no one person suffers burnout in the

process. Therefore, the Theme and Decorations Chairperson will only be responsible for this aspect of the event... and will not be expected to work on procurement or ticket sales or anything else related to the auction.

Creating the right tone and ambience for your event is what will leave attendees with a wonderful impression that will keep them coming back year after year. The Theme and Decorations Chair gets to help make that magic happen. Don't forget your party hat!

Dream Team Position: Front Desk Manager

The Front Desk Manager plays a pivotal role in making sure all the preparation pays off on Auction night. It's a big job, no doubt about it, but one that is very manageable when properly supported by the other team positions.

In our structure, Event Night responsibilities fall into two general categories:

The front-of-the-room “host” tasks such as overseeing catering, lighting, seating and wine service. We recommend that these responsibilities be handled primarily by the Theme and Decorations Chair.

Logistical tasks such as check-in, check-out, and item redemption, which is handled by the Front Desk Manager with a team of volunteers.

To be effective, the Front Desk Manager must:

- Be very comfortable with the auction software and event night functions (at SchoolAuction.net we offer training videos and written documentation to help develop this knowledge and expertise).
- Be actively engaged in and monitoring the event schedule and layout of the event venue.
- Be a capable leader and effective at delegating tasks. Flexibility proves critically important as event night unfolds and, as we've all experienced, some plans don't go as planned.

The Front Desk Manager will:

- Assemble volunteers to staff Front Desk and Auction Item Pick-up areas.

- **Oversee Guest Check-in and Check-out.** This works best with a team of three to five volunteers who will man the computers and enter details into the software as guests arrive and leave. The Front Desk Manager will oversee this process, stepping in to give breaks as needed to individual volunteers.
- **Oversee Auction Item Staging and Pick-up area.** This works best with another team of three or so volunteers who will move silent auction items and bid sheets to the staging area, group them by winning bid number, enter bid sheets and winning paddle numbers into the software, and assist guests in redeeming their items at the end of the evening. The Front Desk Manager will oversee this process, stepping in to give breaks as needed to individual volunteers.

If you're stepping into the role of Front Desk Manager, as you recruit volunteers to help during the event keep in mind that these are great jobs for people who can really only commit to helping out only on event night. For this reason, these can be really popular volunteer positions that are relatively easy to recruit.

Dream Team Position: Software Lead

Auction software is designed to help you run a successful fundraising event. At SchoolAuction.net, we've taken a lot of the guesswork out of the process, built in a lot of options to customize the software for your event, and made it incredibly user-friendly.

There are choices to be made as you set things up for your event with the software. In our experience, it works best when someone takes the lead on really learning how the software works, and on making the decisions about how it will be used most effectively. This is the Software Lead.

The good news is you don't need to be a technical geek with extensive IT experience to be an excellent Software Lead! We designed our software so that anyone who doesn't break out in a sweat at the thought of learning how to use a new software program (or a new app for their phone) has the technical skills to be the Software Lead.

The main responsibility of the Software Lead is to manage the overall data entry process for the entire team. He or she won't be entering all the data (that would be way too much work for one person!), but the lead will provide support and oversight for all team members who are entering data.

Software Lead is a great job for a big-picture, detail-oriented person who can get familiar with all the software features, understand how data in one area might be used in other areas, and advise other team members on how to enter data correctly into the system – from the start – to produce the right printed materials and smooth auction night transactions needed for a successful event.

A capable Software Lead will:

- Act as point person for all data entry team members
- Make it possible to spread the data entry work across more volunteers (since the Software Lead is paying attention to the big picture other volunteers can specialize, thus reducing training and time commitments)
- Improve efficiency of data entry by avoiding rework (because the lead has taken time to understand the entire process so data is entered only once to achieve the desired results)
- Be invaluable on Auction Night to manage a troubleshooting station when volunteers are helping with guest check-in and check-out

Volunteer Swaps

You know that you'll need volunteers for auction night; the same is true for every other school in the area that holds an auction. But you also want the parents, grandparents, teachers, etc. at your school to enjoy the auction you are putting on - and to bid! The key is to assemble a full volunteer team, with people for check-in, check-out and item pickup... and send them to work at another school's auction (on a different night of course). In return, arrange for the other school to send a team to work your auction.

TIP: Recruit 8-10 event night volunteers in a swap:

- 3-4 to work the front-desk
- 3-4 for item pick-up
- 1 to staff the Wine Wall
- 1-2 as runners/recorders

These will augment the auction team members who are working that night: the Front Desk Manager, Auction Chair/Co-Chair, Theme and Decorations Chair (who will probably need to recruit 3-4 people to help her; since this work happens before the event, those can more easily be filled from within the school community).

Implementing a Volunteer Swap means everyone gets to participate fully in the auction for their own school. It's a win-win!

Conclusion

Remember: *"Teamwork Makes Your Dream Work,"* and happy volunteers make all the difference in the world to your bottom line revenue.

You can get the most out of your volunteers and build goodwill around your event by clearly defining roles and job descriptions. For best results, choose your team wisely and draw good boundary lines around the key positions, limiting their responsibilities. Keep them happy, and they'll keep coming back.

Chapter 3: Three Critical Tasks

The work necessary to put on most school auctions can be organized in to three main areas: Procuring Auction Items, Planning the Party, and Selling Tickets. Now that you know how you're going to staff these areas, we want to give you some of our best tips for the work itself. We'll start with the one that probably causes more dread than any other: procurement.

Critical Task #1: Procurement

No doubt about it, getting businesses, parents and community members to donate items to your school auction is the one task that causes the most anxiety within school auction teams. Some schools are lucky enough to have someone who has no problem asking for donations, or someone with the skill to write a good procurement letter, or someone who has great ties into the community and knows where the likely donations are. The really lucky teams have all of the above, sometimes rolled into a single person.

In the best scenario, the procurement committee will enlist the help of others in the community to procure a great group of items and experiences that will add interest and increase your bottom line fundraising goals. Here are some important things to consider about procurement:

Procuring Items for the Silent Auction

How Many Items Should You Have?

Not as many as you might think. To an extent, each item in your silent auction that sells will increase the amount of money you raise. However, you can quickly get to a point where adding more items becomes counterproductive.

Why? There are two main reasons. The first is that generally, your guests will only spend 45 minutes to an hour actively looking at your silent auction items and bidding. During the time you've set aside for silent auction bidding, most guests will also socialize, stand in line for drinks, etc. It's all part of the mix, and so you should gauge how many items your guests will actually be able to look at and consider.

The second reason you get a decreasing return on adding more silent auction items after

a certain point is that regardless of how many items you put out, your active bidders will only bid on so many items. Our informal research suggests that most guests will actively bid on no more than 12 or so items – after that point, tracking what they have bid on becomes too difficult, and they will stop adding items to their mental “shopping cart.”

If you have a large number of silent auction items, you may still be able to get an opening bid on most or all of them. But you’ll have fewer items with truly competitive bidding – ones with seven or more bids that end up selling at or above their Fair Market Value (or FMV). These are the items where the return on your procurement team’s effort is the greatest, and where you make your money.

So How Many Items Are Too Many?

To figure that out, start with the number of bid numbers you expect to have in the room. If most of the guests attending your event come as couples, and most of those couples share a bid number, then divide your expected attendance by two, and that becomes your bid number count. (If you have kids attending your event, subtract the estimated number of kids before dividing by two.)

Then multiply the number of expected bid numbers by 35%, and that’s the “right” number of packages to feature in your silent auction.

You may be startled by this number. Many auction chairs argue this point, wanting instead to bring in 50%, 60%, or 70% as many items as they have bid numbers. And often, they have good reasons, such as their base of attendees is accustomed to a bigger silent auction, or they have a lot of item donors that contribute year over year.

Make no mistake – the 35% figure is just a guideline and not a law you must follow, but keep in mind the importance of making your bidders compete in the silent auction in order to make it a successful fundraiser. The most effective way to do that is to limit the number of items available.

What types of items are worth the work and what types aren’t?

Some types of items (art, jewelry) are very difficult to sell in a silent auction, because their value to a bidder relies heavily on personal taste. For example, some people like contemporary art, and others don’t. You want to maximize the audience appeal of any given item, rather than split your bidders into stylistic “camps.”

Gift certificates for personal services (personal organizing, massages, haircuts, etc.) usually sell for below the FMV, and often go completely unsold. The usual exceptions are for medical services: orthodontia, eye exams (especially if they come with credit that can be used toward glasses or contact lenses)... and (if appropriate for your community) vasectomies, which make for fun, and often-lucrative live auction items.

Gift cards for restaurants are generally worth procuring, but we don't recommend making these regular, competitive-bid, silent auction items. Instead, sell these during a "Feeding Frenzy", (we'll talk about that a little later, in our discussion of Raffles and Games) or on a "Buy It Now Board", where guests can sign up to purchase them for face value on a first-come, first-served basis.

Also: remember that your silent auction should not be mistaken for a garage sale; used items have limited appeal and seldom promote anything other than bargain-hunting behavior.

Tip: Finding National Donors

SchoolAuction.net's Ultimate Donor Database is a free database of national and regional companies that have publicly-posted donation addresses or web forms, plus descriptions of the items these companies may donate.

This database is a community-driven project which is provided free of charge to fundraising auction teams to use. Users have an opportunity to become contributors to the site by adding donors to the database.

Click this link (<http://pto.schoolauction.net/crowdsourcing>), and fill out the form there to register and gain access to the Ultimate Donation Database. Once registered, you can do any or all of the following:

- Download the Donor List (in spreadsheet format)
- Use the Mail Merge function to generate procurement letters
- Print Bid Sheets, Description Sheets, and Gift Certificates for any of the items in the database, and use them in your auction.

Procuring Items for the Live Auction

Live Auction items can fall into several categories, and here the sky is the limit. The most

popular Live Auction “items” are most often experiences. Bidders go nuts for real-life opportunities like lunch with a notable person, vacations, a “ride along” in a fire truck, or a chance to be “Principal-For-A-Day.” It’s hard to put a dollar value on experiences but, if properly promoted, they fetch a handsome price during your school auction event.

It makes sense to procure a variety of items to give bidders lots of ways to participate within their spending budget. Get creative and think outside the box! Here are some ideas, to kick off your brainstorming:

- Groupings of common (and affordable) items such as:
 - A case of fine wine
 - 10 lbs of gourmet coffee beans
 - A collection of exquisite dark chocolate
- A wheelbarrow filled with Gardening supplies
- Trips to exotic locations or beach getaways
- One of a kind piece of student-created art
- Dinner with a local celebrity
- Walk-on role in a movie
- Unique or custom-made Jewelry
- Hosted dinner for a group with an award-winning chef
- A pair of tickets (with great seats) to a concert of sporting event
- Two nights stay at a luxury hotel
- Signed jersey or other memorabilia from well-know pro athlete
- Private airplane ride
- Lunch with a famous person Flowers for a year
- Private concert with famous musician

- Broadway show or Opera tickets with backstage tour
- Tickets to be in the studio audience for a popular television show

Engage Your Community

Experiences generate enthusiastic bidding... and they sell.

Your key supporters make up the pool from which you can draw the most interesting and meaningful Live Auction donations. Focus on getting these folks to donate a week at their vacation home, a tour at their (interesting) place of work, or some other meaningful experience. For example, one school parent who worked as a commercial airline pilot donated an afternoon to hang out with him at the airport, complete with time in the cockpit of an airliner, in Flight Control and Operations, and in the Engine Shop. It was a hit!

One way to get the creative juices flowing as you think about procuring interesting Live Auction donations is to arrange a brainstorming session with members of your auction team, members of the community who are likely to be big bidders, and your auctioneer. Let these people know up front that you're looking to breathe some new life into your auction and are specifically collecting fun appealing ideas for Live Auction donations. This session can generate lots of great ideas, including what your big bidders want to purchase at the auction! If you procure an item suggested by one of these key supporters, they will feel a sense of obligation on auction night to bid on that item and to make it a success.

A note on consignment items

Offering consignment items in your Silent or Live Auction is one way to increase your auction results.

Consignment items are provided by a supplier for a specific cost, and then resold at auction for a price higher than the cost. This can be an effective strategy providing you can cover the cost of the items and receive a reasonable profit for your organization. Therefore, consignment items must be attractive enough to compel bidding. It's important to choose items that are likely to appeal to your community, at a price they would be willing to pay.

Some popular items available from auction consignment companies include:

[Winspire](#) offers adventure experiences for consignment. They can help your organization select the best kinds of experiences for your target audience. Every dollar raised (above the package price) goes directly to your organization.

[Geronimo.com](#) offers vacation rental packages in resort destinations for use as live or silent auction consignment items. Your organization keeps 50% of the winning bid amount.

[CharityWorks.net](#) offers travel & vacation packages, signed celebrity and sports memorabilia, fine art and prints, and more items for consignment.

A Few Words of Caution about Auction Consignment Items:

Pay close attention to the contract language regarding any items you take on consignment. Have a lawyer review the language if possible. Watch for hidden fees. Make sure that your organization will not be held responsible for any fees on items that don't sell.

Procuring for Signup Parties

As we mentioned previously, at many of our customers' events, the most popular auction "items" are actually Signup Parties. Buying stuff can be fun as well (there's a reason we have more of it than we need, after all). But at some point, most of us reach this conclusion: I don't need more stuff!

Sign-up parties are easy to procure, bring groups together in a fun and festive way, and create pure profit for your school or organization. Here are three popular Sign-up Party ideas:

- *Murder Mystery Party* - Dinner and beverages will be served for 10 adults along with a murderous plot. Find out who killed who where. Maybe it's you! Character invitations will be mailed before event.
- *Cocktail Mixer* - Learn how to make five different cocktails from a former professional bartender and have a kid-free night out. Each person brings a bottle of liquor. Snacks provided. Sampling optional!
- *Kid Fun and Parent's Night Out* - Bring your kids for an evening of pizza, games, a movie and kid fun. Drop the kids and go have fun with your spouse.

Want more ideas? Contact your SchoolAuction.net rep – we have lists of these that we collect.

Critical Task #2: Planning The Party

Selecting the Venue

You've probably heard this mantra, often used by real estate agents: *location, location, location.*

Location matters a great deal, whether you're buying a house or selecting a venue for your gala fundraiser. Therefore, it makes sense to invest some time and effort in selecting an ideal space for your needs. Equally important to finding the right venue is making sure it's available when you want to use it. It's advisable to start your research at least six months in advance (or even up to a year, depending on the community you live in) to make sure your ideal venue is available on your preferred date, and that the date itself doesn't conflict with any other major events taking place on the same night. You want to attract as many guests as possible!

In many cases, your organization (school, church or community center) may offer a useable space for your event. In other cases, a volunteer or board member may offer a space to accommodate the event. Keep in mind, even if the venue is offered free of charge, it may not be your very best choice.

With this in mind, here are some first steps in the location selection process:

- Identify a handful potential locations in your local area Estimate your space needs, including square footage
- Consider date possibilities (the more flexible and the further in advance you do this step, the more venue choices you will have)
- Start dialing!

You can get preliminary answers to most questions by phone, but before you pick up the phone be sure you have your checklist in hand. Once you've narrowed down the possibilities to a handful, you'll want to visit those sites. And you'll want to bring your checklist along on the site visits, as well.

Event Venue Checklist

You're not looking for the perfect answer to every item on the checklist, but collecting answers to these questions will really help you narrow things down and make the best location selection for your event.

Facility

- Is it easy to locate the venue?
- Is the venue in a central location for most of your guests?
- Is there ample room for parking, in a lot or on the street?
- Is there a sound system and is it adequate for your event needs? (Your auctioneer can weigh in on this question). Is there an additional charge to use the sound system, and does the venue provide event night support for any sound issues?
- Is there internet access available? (You'll need this to connect your event night check-in stations to your SchoolAuction.net software). Can you access it wirelessly? If not, will they allow you to run an Ethernet cable to the place you want to set up check-in?
- Is there access for wheelchairs or people with mobility issues?
- What is the availability and location of a loading area (will you be carrying auction items up flights of stairs)?
- Can you control access to the main room to make sure all guests are registered?
- Is there enough lighting (especially at the registration and check-out areas)? Can you easily control the lighting in the ballroom? Are there auxiliary lighting options to spotlight auction items?
- How many – and what size/style - chairs and tables are available for use?
- If you need more tables/chairs, can the venue arrange rentals?
- Are there storage areas and policies – will you be able to put boxes out of the way during the auction, and can you leave large items overnight for pick up the next

day?

- Does the ambiance fit with a theme you've already selected (for example, if you're planning a western theme, how will it work in a Victorian mansion)?
- Is there a place to hang coats? (Especially important if the event is during cold weather) How many restrooms are available? Where are they located?
- What are the rules about decorations (taping, stapling, etc.)?

Food and Beverage

- If you're considering a cash bar: what is bartender cost and minimum hours, cashier charges, drink prices?
- What can you expect to pay in tax, service charge and/or gratuities? Can you lock in the catering price at the time of contract?
- What are the food/beverage guarantee policies? Is a guarantee required (if so, what's the deadline?), and how many meals/desserts will be prepared beyond the guarantee?
- Does the venue allow you to select your own caterer? If you're required to choose from a list of preferred caterers, be sure to ask for that list.
- If you are restricted to one catering option get a copy of the menu with prices and ask: Is all table service equipment included in the cost?
- Will you be able to taste the food before you commit?
- Can you bring in donated beverages? If so, is there a corkage fee? How many bars will be set up?

Other

- Is the staff friendly and helpful?
- How much time will you have for move-in, set-up, tear-down and move-out – and what is the cost if you need more time?

- Do they have sample floor plans, preferably for a similar-sized auction? Get a copy of the contract and read it before you sign it
- What are your clean up responsibilities?

It takes a bit of legwork to find the ideal location for your event, but it's well worth the effort when auction night rolls around.

Hiring a Caterer

Selecting a caterer and determining menus, corkage, and other food-related costs are critically important decisions in the overall event planning. Since catering costs will be reflected in ticket pricing, it's imperative to choose a caterer who can deliver a menu and other related services that fit with your event theme as well as your budget.

Catering contracts will usually include the cost of wait staff and table/chair/table service rental. Hiring an experienced caterer will assure your guests get good service by people who understand the importance of attending to guest's needs, such as keep wine glasses full, while staying out of the way during special appeals and bidding frenzies.

What's the word on the street?

Take time to gather some additional info about catering whom you are considering for your event. Do they have references? Do you know other organizations that have used them, or can you get some feedback from people who've attended events where they provided the food?

Themes, Themes, Themes

The theme you choose sets the tone for your event, which makes it a critically important aspect of planning a successful gala auction. Your theme should be reflected in every aspect of your event including decorations, food and beverages, and marketing.

Therefore, be sure to select a theme that is catchy and memorable. Then have some fun with it.

Some things to consider as you discuss possible event themes:

- *Who will attend your event?* Demographic matters. If you know, for example, that the majority of attendees will be of a certain age (or range of ages) this

may impact decision-making about theme. Your theme should be relatable to the majority of those in attendance.

- *How much are you willing to spend on theme and decorations?* If you're like most schools and non-profits, unless you can get space and decorations donated, you'll want to keep costs as low as possible so that most of the money you raise will actually go to your cause.

Critical Task #3: Getting Guests to the Event

Auctions gain momentum and grow from year to year when guests have a great time while contributing to an organization or cause that matters to them. It's all about creating a sense of momentum and excitement from year to year. Therefore, promotion for next year's event begins the moment this year's event has ended.

There are a few proven ways to keep excitement high and increase attendance each year.

Choose the best possible date. When planning your event, make sure that the date you choose does not conflict with any other major event in your area. If your event is the best thing happening on that date, you're sure to get more guests in the seats.

Take advantage of all free advertising channels. Social engagement is powerful. Use Facebook to promote your gala by setting up an event's page that's easy to share. Share the event on other social channels as well, such as Google+. Newsletters are another great way to promote the event, and always remember to invite readers to share the newsletter with other friends and colleagues. Also, the majority of small community newspapers will happily post your event for free.

Share the ticket sales work. Many hands make light work. Use your community to promote the event. Offer tickets to any and all member of your community or organization, asking that each person just sell a few tickets to get sales rolling

Incentivize last year's VIPs to bring friends to the event. Pay attention to who spent the most at last year's event, then offer those people a couple of complimentary tickets to this year's event. This gives them a chance to share the cause (and a fun evening) with others who are likely supporters.

Ticket Sale Strategies

Early Bird Pricing is the practice of offering discounted tickets to your auction for a limited amount of time prior to the event (usually the period up to a month before the auction night). This can solve two common problems:

1. It's difficult to get guests to buy their tickets during the 10-14 day-period prior to the auction. We've all got too many things to think about; too many demands on our time; and, all too often, the auction team members are the only people thinking about the auction, until it's almost here. This can be a problem, since you need to know the guest count for your caterer, and to decide how many lots you want in your silent auction. Offering an incentive to purchase tickets early can motivate some guests to go ahead and commit early.
2. Most schools serve families in a range of financial situations, and often there's pressure to lower the standard ticket price so that all families can afford to come to the auction. But your ticket revenue (plus sponsorships) really should cover the "hard costs" of putting on the event, so that all the money raised at the auction can go toward the cause.

You can offer "Early Bird" options for all of your ticket types – single guest, couples, tables, VIPs.

It's not a good idea to let the "least able to pay" segment of your supporter base drive the ticket price. Instead, offer them discounted tickets if they buy early, and opportunities for free tickets if they volunteer to work the event (or better yet, the auction for a different school, with whom you have arranged a volunteer swap - this lets all of these volunteers attend and enjoy their own event).

Tables and Sponsorships also fall under the category of pre-event revenue, the revenue you need to cover those hard costs. Ask supporters who can spend a bit more on their tickets to buy into one of these options, instead of just buying single or couples tickets.

A table ticket can have 8 or 10 seats; feel free to sell 4-person "half-tables" too! These should come with some extra benefits - premium placement within the event venue; a distinctive look for the table (maybe a red tablecloth instead of white, or a premium centerpiece); signage recognizing the buyer on the table and in the program; perhaps a bottle or two of wine on the table.

Sponsorships should get a table of tickets (with the benefits you grant to the other table-ticket buyers), plus extra recognition - live recognition by the MC from the stage, in any video or slideshow you project during the event, on the guest receipts, and in signage around the event. You can have general event sponsors (Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze) and/or sponsors for specific areas within the event (the bar, the silent auction, the live auction, the Wine Wall, etc.)

Chapter 4: Ensuring Event Success

My favorite analogy for a gala fundraising auction is this: it's just like a department store, only it only lasts for 5 hours, one day per year. You will have multiple areas within the event where your guests can spend their money, but instead of designer-label boutiques, your "departments" are some combination of the following Big Six fundraiser types: Silent Auction, Live Auction, Signup Parties, Raffle & Games, Wine Wall, & Paddle Raise. You might also have a Super Silent Auction, a Tricky Tray, Chicken Bingo, or other variants on the basics, but just about every type of fundraising tactic I've ever seen or heard of happening at a gala auction can be described as one of those six.

The Front Desk: Setup & Staffing

On event night, the Front Desk is your Mission Control Center, your Information Hub, and your Customer Service Department. Setting it up correctly is critically important to producing a smoothly run event. Here are some guidelines for setting up your desk:

Placement

Obviously, you want to have the desk located in a place where your guests will pass it on their way into and out of your venue. But also consider:

- You will need good network access (either wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi) *in this location*
- It should be a large enough space for 4 people to work side by side
- It should be located far enough away from the silent-auction, live-auction, and item pick-up areas that guests hanging out in those areas do not disrupt your front-desk workers.

Computer Stations

Once your community has become used to the Self Check-In and Self Check-Out processes that are key features of SchoolAuction.net, your front-desk stations will become less necessary for check-in and check-out, but it is likely that you will need at least a couple stations staffed and ready for troubleshooting guest issues around check-in and check-out for a while. Plus, you will need them for the data entry during the night, so

let's review some best practices:

Our recommendation is that you use laptop computers, with regular keyboards and external mice, as your front-desk hardware. The SchoolAuction.net software is compatible with iPads and other tablets, but your volunteers will be doing a LOT of data entry on event-night – and that is much easier with a real keyboard and mouse.

For auctions using the SchoolAuction.net or Tofino Auctions software, we have no preference for operating system – it's fine to use Mac or PC laptops or Chromebooks - but we definitely do recommend that they be less than 3 years old, and have an up-to-date copy of Firefox, Chrome, or Safari installed. The default web browser on Windows (Internet Explorer) is not recommended – please download and install one of the browsers listed above (they are all free) before your event. (If you are using different software, make sure you know what type of system that runs on.)

If you will be using Self Check-In and Self Check-Out, plan to set up 2 full stations for auctions with up to 250 guests, and add one station for every 100 guests thereafter.

If you believe that most of your guests will still want to check in and out at the desk (rather than using the Self Check-In and Self Check-Out), then plan for 4 stations for auctions up to 250 guests, with an additional station for every 50 guests thereafter.

Each full station should also have an external mouse, and a compatible credit-card reader; if you are using SchoolAuction.net or Tofino Auctions, then order the latter from <http://nw.tofinoauctions.com/swipers/give>

With SchoolAuction.net, you can email receipts to your guests, and guests generally prefer an emailed receipt. This means that you can reduce the number of printers needed on event night, although don't try to do completely without a printer – there will always be reasons you'll be glad you had one ready.

Do make sure you have a supply box with plenty of pens, markers, printer paper, scissors, tape, paper clips and a stapler or two.

Be sure to bring a cash box, to place checks and cash in from your guests who would rather pay that way.

The Silent Auction: Merchandising Your Items

The day of your event can be stressful or easy depending on how much planning has gone into the set up of the Silent Auction.

Going back to the 5-hour department store analogy referenced earlier, the Silent Auction is a vitally important place to draw in as many customers (and sales) as possible in the allotted time. During auction hours, your “store” is filled with perfect customers and your goal is to make sure they are spending, spending, spending!

It’s all about getting the attention of the folks who came to spend money at your event, and presentation is vitally important. Silent Auction tables represent key pieces of retail space and therefore must be well thought out and strategically positioned.

Space design layout matters... a lot.

The way you set up your event space should naturally lead your guests to visit the Silent Auction tables. Avoid setting up the Silent Auction along the periphery of the room or outside walls, instead arranging tables in a central area your guests will naturally pass on their way to bar or dining tables.

Make the Most of Your Table Space

When merchandising your Silent Auction, it’s important to allow plenty of table space for showcasing your items. When guests are able to see and interact with your table displays, they are more likely to bid on the fabulous items and groupings you’ve made available for auction.

Allocating adequate table space for each item also allows for more than one person to be looking at a time... and this can sometimes result in a friendly little bidding war that drives up price and, ultimately, increases your profits!

Tips on structuring silent auction sections, tables and displays

- **Create clear signage for sections and tables.** We suggest making your signage clear and easily readable, and generic (no themes) so you can use them year after year. Use a simple, large font for easily readability. Hang section signs as high as possible above tables, so guest can easily find their way to the tables as closing time approaches.

- **Keep signage as simple as possible.** Rather than creating categories for your Silent Auction, consider signage that simply labels sections by color and number. This gives you lots of leeway about what items you place in which section, and gives you the flexibility to make last minute changes if necessary without changing any signs.
- **Go vertical for impact and attention.** Using stand-up frames (or mounting your description sheets on cardstock and attaching easel backs to them) for your displays maximizes use of space while also making your table signage more visible to more people who are passing by.
- **Save the boxes.** As silent auction items are unloaded from boxes, keep the boxes together so they can be reloaded later for guest to transport the item they have purchased.
- **Place a bid sheet in front of its corresponding silent auction display/item.** Place at least 2 pens with each bid sheet – guests tend to walk off with them.
- **Display items and lots in numerical order** (corresponding to catalog, if you have one, and bid sheets).
- **Make it beautiful.** Enhance silent auction displays with candles, centerpieces, greenery or other decorative touches.

A Note on Bid Sheets

We recommend printing your bid sheets on 3-part NCR sheets (the white/yellow/pink carbonless-copy sandwiches). These can be printed at most FedEx Office locations, as well as other print shops like Alphagraphics and LazerQuick.

Color Coordinate the Silent Auction Closings

The success of your Silent Auction depends upon its being well-organized and visually appealing. The key to pulling it off is being prepared.

You can save a lot of time and minimize stress by preparing Silent Auction closings ahead of time. You can use colored table linens, for example, to indicate which tables will be associated with each closing. Likewise, bid sheets should be numbered to coordinate with items on color-coordinated tables; for example: bid sheets numbered 100 – 200 are

for the items and packages that will be placed on the tables which will be closing first (let's say, green tables), while bid sheets numbered 300 – 400 are for items and packages on the tables which will be closing second (let's say, orange table).

Color Coordinate Items and Packages

Prior to Silent Auction set up, mark each item or package with a colored sticker with a number on it. The colors match the colors of the tables on which the item will be displayed; the numbers match the numbers on the bid sheets. Place each item/package behind its corresponding bid sheet.

Silent Auction Set-up Takeaways

- Use clear signage to direct guest to silent auction sections and tables.
- Set up Silent Auction tables so guests naturally pass by them on their way to the bar or dining area. Position your Silent Auction area near the center of the room, rather than on the outside walls, because in the middle is where your guests will be mingling and socializing.
- Allow plenty of space to showcase each of your Silent Auction items or groupings.
- Make sure there is enough space between Silent Auction displays for several people, to encourage some friendly bidding wars.
- Use candles, lighting, and table decorations to beautify silent auction tables. Color coordinate Silent Auction tables, closings, and bid sheets
- Print bid sheets on 3-part NCR sheets (the white/yellow/pink carbonless-copy sandwiches).

The Live Auction: Merchandising, Ordering Your Items *Arrange Your Live Auction Lots Carefully*

Live Auction lots and items are typically displayed near the stage. Display them numerically, preferably on tables which are decorated to showcase each item.

As in the Silent Auction, merchandise your Live Auction by allowing plenty of table space for showcasing your items. When guests are able to see and interact with your table displays, they are more likely to bid on the fabulous items and groupings you've made available for auction.

Make It Visual

Some of your Live Auction offerings won't be physical items you can display. For these, a poster with multiple color images, displayed on an easel, is a worthwhile investment. Guests need to visualize how happy they will be once they have purchased it!

For all items, we recommend using PowerPoint or a similar visual presentation tool to supplement the auctioneer's pitch when items are being sold. Each slide should feature 1-3 images, plus the item title, and a thank-you to the donor. Be judicious in the use of text on the slide; bullet points may seem necessary, but reading them will draw guest attention away from what the auctioneer is saying.

Ordering your Live Auction Items and Lots

Your auctioneer will play an invaluable role helping you put your live auction items in order. Make sure you make time in the final week to consult with him on the final order. But we have some thoughts on this, too. Here are our suggestions:

Make the first item something tangible, popular with many people (wine, chocolate, coffee) and not too expensive (relative to the rest of your live items). The idea is for your guests to start practicing bidding – to start having fun with it. At one auction I attended, the auctioneer started off by auctioning off a \$20 bill – he started the bidding at \$5 and it did take the audience a moment to bid even that. When the \$20 ended up going for \$25 – that set a good message for the event and that auction was quite successful.

Auction item values are usually arranged in a bell curve, with a steady climb in the first half of the live auction to the item with the highest value. Don't group like items, and don't let the item values bounce up and down too much. As much as possible, have a steady, graceful arc in the rise and fall of the bell which will allow bidders to gently

increase their bids toward the middle of the catalog and then slowly decrease their bids afterwards.

Often auctions will have one-of-a-kind items (student created art, dinner with a local celebrity, walk on role in a movie, etc.) in the second half of the live auction because these are the items most likely to keep your guests there.

Setting Up The Other Departments: Raffle, Games, Wine Wall, SuperSilent, Paddle Raise

Setting Up A Raffle

Raffles are an easy way to get everyone at your event involved; as a high-quantity, fixed-price item, you can make a ticket affordable to all guests. A standard raffle does not require much beyond a roll of tickets (available at most office-supply stores), and someone with the personality to sell them; and the setup in your auction software isn't much more difficult.

Start by understanding this key distinction: you will be selling raffle tickets, and giving away the raffle prize. So in your SchoolAuction.net event website, enter an item called "Raffle Ticket", with a quantity of 500 or so (or however many tickets you want to sell), and the Item Type "Raffle". Then enter a separate item for your prize, with a quantity of 1.

For event night, print a Raffle Sheet (there's a link to generate this on the Item Edit page for the Raffle Ticket item you just created), and put it on a clipboard with a pen. Designate a volunteer with an outgoing personality to wander the floor during the event with a strip of tickets and the clipboard; have your volunteer tell guests that you will charge the ticket price to their bid number before check-out.

NOTE: if as a condition of your raffle, guests must be present to win, then you don't have to record which guest purchased which ticket – this is a much easier way to go. If not, then you either need to record the ticket number along with the bid number on your Raffle Sheet, or use two-part raffle tickets, and have the guest write their name on one part, which they then will hand back to the seller.

Throughout the evening, have your seller deliver the Raffle Sheets to the front desk, so your volunteers there can record the raffle-ticket sales. When you pull the winning raffle

ticket, have your front desk staff “sell” the raffle prize to the winning bidder, for \$0.00. This will make sure it shows up on their receipt, which will help everyone remember to give them the actual prize at Item Pick-Up.

The Golden Ticket

As discussed earlier, the Golden Ticket is a raffle variation, where the prize is selected by the winner from the Live Auction item lineup (or some subset therein). There is no difference in the set-up; but here are a couple of tips:

If you are conducting both a standard raffle and a Golden Ticket, have separate salespeople for each.

It is strongly recommended that you set a requirement that a certain number of Golden Tickets be sold before the drawing; if you do not meet this threshold, you return the ticket purchase price to those who did buy, and cancel the drawing. This is in order to avoid a situation where you give away one of your valuable Live Auction items without having brought in enough money in Golden Ticket sales to justify it. What should this minimum be? Do the math. Set a price first for the Golden Tickets; as of 2014 the most common price is still \$100 per ticket, at least among our customers. Then look at the list of prizes that the winner will pick from. Take the highest Fair Market Value of any of these, and divide by \$100. The result will be the number of tickets you should sell before holding the drawing.

Example: In our Live Auction, the item with the highest FMV is a trip to Hawaii, worth \$5,000. If I divide \$5,000 by \$100, I get 50. As long as I sell 50 Golden Tickets, then I know I have at least covered the value of any item the winner might select.

It is common to exclude any consignment items from the list of items that the winner may pick from.

Setting Up A Tricky Tray (aka Fishbowl Raffle)

Since a Tricky Tray is basically a multi-prize raffle, the setup in the software is very similar to the standard raffle. You probably will have at least two variations on the raffle ticket item – one for a single ticket, and one for a multi-ticket purchase (e.g. Buy A Yard of Tickets for \$80). All of the prizes should be entered with the item type Silent, and you will “sell” them to the winner for \$0.00

For Tricky Trays, two-part raffle tickets are recommended; ask the guests to write their name and phone number on each of their tickets. This means you will need to have a lot of ballpoint pens, and places for people to write out their tickets; stand-up bistro tables work well for this.

You will also of course need receptacles for guests to deposit their tickets into; fishbowls are traditional, and Amazon sells a wide variety of plastic fish bowls – [here's link to one of them that would work well.](#)

Setting Up Heads or Tails

First of all, make sure your auctioneer or emcee knows the rules of the game, and how to conduct it:

1. Before each coin toss, guests are required to either put both of their hands on their head, or both of their hands on their (own!) tail, and leave them there until the auctioneer announces the results of the coin toss.
2. The auctioneer flips a coin, and announces the result.
3. Any guest whose hand is on the same body part as the announced result can stay in the game for another round.
4. Any guest whose hand is on the other body part is out – unless they had purchased more than one chance, in which case, they have used up one of those chances.
5. Repeat from step 2, until there is only one guest left standing. That guest is the winner.

Pretty simple, huh? Good news: the setup is as easy as the game itself. Here are the key points:

- Create an item in your SchoolAuction.net database named “Heads or Tails.” Set a high quantity, and give it the *Raffle* Item Type.
- Print Raffle Sheets for the sellers, and put them on clipboards with pens. Appoint a volunteer to walk the floor and sell chances during the event.
- Purchase strings of cheap plastic Mardi Gras beads – [here's a link to the ones I](#)

buy on Amazon. On event night, your sellers will give one string of beads to each guest for each chance that they purchase. Encourage the guests to wear the beads; they will remove a string of beads each time they choose incorrectly during the game.

- Set a policy for how many chances each guest may purchase. Heads or Tails tends to break down if you have a guest who decided to overwhelm the competition by buying say, 50 string of beads. You might think that it's fine as long as they are paying for it, but it tends to upset the other guests who decide to play.

Setting Up a Feeding Frenzy

Start by making sure your auctioneer or emcee understands the idea, and is enthusiastic about it.

The Feeding Frenzy is essentially a rapid series of straight sales at face value, usually of restaurant gift certificates. Most often, it serves a dual purpose – first, to help you get face value for a set of gift certificates that might otherwise sell for less in the Silent Auction, and second, as a warm-up exercise right before the Live Auction begins in earnest.

Prepare a list for the auctioneer, with the names and face value of the gift certificates that you have set aside for this purpose, and make a second copy of this list for the clerk who will be recording the bids. Enter the gift certificates into your SchoolAuction.net database as Live Auction items.

You may wish to include the list of restaurants and face value of the gift certificates in the program, or on a card on the table; I don't find this necessary, however.

Setting Up a Dessert Dash

As explained earlier, a Dessert Dash is a section of your Live Auction, where each table of guests submits a bid for dessert for their table. To be more precise, you are going to ask each guest at the table to record the amount that they wish to contribute toward the table's overall bid, along with their bid number.

Since this occurs during the Live Auction, make sure you discuss this with your auctioneer, and get her take on the setup. Here are some general instructions:

- Procure desserts! Don't overlook this; you want to use this as a way to harness

whatever amazing baking talents are lurking within your supporter base. You should have as many desserts as you have tables – BUT – two of these desserts should NOT be amazing fabulous hand-made creations. You want to give your tables plenty of incentive to make serious, substantial contributions, so I recommend that among the artisanal cakes, pies, and pastries, you also have a package of Oreo cookies from the supermarket, and a package of Marshmallow Peeps. These are the booby prizes – the desserts that wind up at the tables of the low bidders. Make sure all of the guests understand what awaits the cheapskates.

- Display the desserts on a long table near the front of the room (or wherever the auctioneer will be working), and put signage on the table explaining how the Dessert Dash will work.
- Print out one blank Signup Sheet for each table, write “Dessert Dash” at the top of each, and set it out, along with a couple of ballpoint pens.
- After your guests are seated, and before the auctioneer comes on stage, ask the emcee to announce that the Dessert Dash sheets will be picked up at the very beginning of the Live Auction.
- When the sheets are picked up, have a volunteer total the contributions on each sheet, and produce a list of the tables, in descending order by total bid. This list should be delivered to the auctioneer, who will use it to call out the tables to come select their desserts. The auctioneer does not need to know the total bid, only that Table 6 had the greatest total bid, followed by Table 19, followed by Table 12, etc.
- Have your volunteer then take the original signup sheets with the individual contributions out to the front desk, where they can be entered by the front desk staff into the SchoolAuction.net software.
- Have the auctioneer announce the Dessert Dash when you feel it is most appropriate. I like to do it in the first half of the Live Auction, so that the guests are still experiencing the sugar rush when the Paddle Raise happens.

Setting Up a Wine Wall

If your supporter base are true wine aficionados, and you can procure high-value bottles of wine, our advice is to sell those bottles as stand-alone items in your silent auction, or in small lots in your Live Auction. On the other hand, if your auction attendees are more like us, and just plain like drinking wine, as long as it isn't terrible, a Wine Wall can be a lot of fun.

The trick is to procure the right number of bottles. You'll probably need to experiment with this in your group, over several years, but we recommend starting with a goal of 1 bottle of wine for every 4 guests at the auction. If you sell out in the first 10 minutes, then next year, you'll know to procure a higher ratio of bottles to guests.

One procurement strategy that often works for school groups is to ask parents to bring a bottle of wine to donate to the auction wine wall when they come to PTA meetings throughout the year, or other parent gatherings. Have one person collect these in the parking lot of the school before or after the meeting, if your school doesn't allow you to bring alcohol into the building.

To setup the Wine Wall at your event, procure enough wine-bottle sized brown paper bags (Trader Joe's is a good source; ask them if they will donate a few dozen), and bag each bottle, tying it at the top with ribbon. Number each bag with a black marker, and display the bagged, be-ribboned bottles on a table near your silent auction. Recruit a volunteer to monitor the table, and give her a clipboard with a signup sheet on it. Guests write their bid number down, next to the number of the bottle they select. You can either hand the guest the bottle immediately, or take them to the Item Pick-Up area to sort along with the guests' other items.

Item Pick-Up: Strategies, Setup, and Staffing

At the end of the evening, many of your guests will have purchased physical stuff (and gift certificates) that they will want to take home with them. There are several common ways to make sure everyone goes home with the right items; we're going to describe the method we personally prefer first, and then describe three other popular options.

One note: in our Org Chart, we place the Item Pick-Up area under the management of the Front Desk Manager. But you can just as easily appoint a person to run this themselves; it is an excellent job for volunteers who can't give you a lot of time prior to

the event.

Option #1 – The Staffed Item Pick-Up Area

A month or so before the auction, recruit 3-4 volunteers to work this area on event night. It's an excellent way to use some of the volunteers you get in a volunteer swap with another school; they will be working steadily from the first silent auction closing until the last guest leaves, so these volunteers should not expect to be able to participate in the gala dinner, Live Auction, or Paddle Raise.

A few days before the event, send your Front Desk Manager to a local grocery store to get some standard brown-paper grocery bags – one for every bid number you expect to give out at the auction. Tell them the range of bid numbers you plan to hand out, and ask them to write one bid number on the outside of each grocery bag, in thick black marker. The number should be large enough to read from 4-5 feet away.

Plan a space for the item pick-up area within the venue. It should be:

- Close to where the silent auction tables are
- At least 15-20 yards away from the Front Desk area – you want guests to get out of the way of the check-out process once they have finished checking out themselves, and the best way to do that is to give them a completely separate place to go to get their stuff
- Large enough to open up and stand up each of the grocery bags, in such a way as it is easy to find and get to each one.

Once the first silent auction closes, your item pick-up crew should pick up the top copy of the bid sheet and take that to the Front Desk for data entry, then take the second copy of the bid sheet, along with the item (if it is on display) to the Item Pick-Up area. They should then put the item and the bid-sheet copy in the bag labeled with the bid number of the winning bidder. Repeat for all of the items from the silent auction.

We don't recommend displaying Gift Certificates – they often don't add much, and get lost really easily. Instead, we recommend that the Silent Auction Procurement Chair file them in an accordion file prior to the event, and deliver them directly to the Front Desk Manager to give to the Item Pick-Up Staff for distribution as the closings occur.

At check-out, once a guest has either a printed receipt, or one on their smartphone (if your team is using the Self Check-Out function), they proceed over to the Item Pick-Up area and show their receipt to one of the Item Pick-Up staff, who then retrieves the grocery bag with that guest's bid number on it (filled with the items they have won), and hands it to the guest.

Option #2 – Self Service Pick-Up

In this method, the silent auction items are left on the table, and once a guest has checked-out, they go to the tables, collect the items they won, and take them.

This option can work well at smaller auctions, and has the advantage of requiring fewer volunteers. But it is extra work for your guests, and correcting mistakes where the wrong guest takes an item before the right guest can get it can be difficult to resolve.

Option #3 – Runners

A cross between the first two options, this is an assisted self pick-up. Items are left in place, and guests are escorted/assisted by a volunteer while they collect their items. You can also have the volunteers collect the items for the guests.

Option #4 – Pick-Up Party

In this option, your guests do not collect their items before leaving; instead, you let them go home and bring all of the items to school or another central location for a pick-up party 2-3 days after the event. This requires more volunteer work, to move all of the items from the auction venue to the pick-up space, and to staff the pick-up party, but does have the advantage of getting all of the guests on their way home quickly after the auction. If you have a tight deadline to vacate the premises post-event, this might be worth considering.

Essential Items: don't leave home without 'em!

You've reached the culmination of months of procurement, meetings, piles of paperwork, and endless lists of details. You've tried to think of everything... and you probably have thought of everything, at least once. Event Night presents a unique challenge, in that you won't be at your home computer so you won't have all the auction-related info at your fingertips. That's why we email a handy checklist a few days before your event. But it seems important to recap here as well so you've got it handy.

Critical Information

Here are the most important pieces of information you'll want to have at arm's length on auction night. These are the details, which, in the heat of the moment, could make or break your results.

- Login and contact information for your merchant (credit-card) processing gateway. You'll want to test credit card processing on event night, before you need to process a credit card. If you have a problem, you'll want to have your merchant processing support number easily accessible.
- Know how to find the Event Night Support number for SchoolAuction.net. If something isn't working right, you need to know who to call to get it solved.
- Logins and passwords for all of your volunteers' accounts. This assures quick and easy check-in and check-out processes.
- Contact information for the person who set up the internet access, in case the router crashes and needs to be restarted. You'll also need all of the passwords to get back on the network, and keys to the room where the router is located.
- Contact information for the person who set up your merchant and gateway accounts, as well as the account numbers, logins and passwords.

Supplies

- Have these essential supplies on hand on event night:
- An extra ream of paper for the printers
- Sheets of 8.5 x 11" card stock paper, for emergency bid paddles At least 1 Sharpie marker
- Pens and staplers and scissors – a handful of each
- CELL PHONE CHARGER (we speak from experience...)
- Name tags

Organizational Strategies for Event Night

Following are some additional, important tips to help your auction event come off without a hitch:

The Help Desk

Set up a “Help” station, manned by a highly competent team member. In addition to your 3-5 check-in/check-out stations managed by team members, you’ll also want a troubleshooting table managed by someone who is authorized to make decisions about guest payments, returns, and disputed bids... and who knows the software well. When a situation arises that threatens to bog down the check-in or check-out line, refer the guest to the troubleshooting station. This way, guests don’t have to wait in long lines and volunteers aren’t stuck trying to help each other instead of helping guests.

Check-In/Check-Out Planning

Give Your Guests the Ability to Check Themselves In and Out

Built into the SchoolAuction.net software are features that let you use the software to email links to your guests to check themselves in for your event from home, and check themselves out after the event, from their smartphone. Take advantage of these features to cut down on the lines at the event, reduce credit-card handling by your volunteers, and eliminate the need for guests to get out of their seats before the live auction is over, in order to try to “beat the lines”.

Your ability to use the Self Check-In feature fully relies heavily on the quality of your guest data: you can only send check-in emails to guests whose names and email addresses are in the system, and assigned to a ticket.

On the other end, you also need emails for guests who you wish to invite to use the Self Check-Out feature. If this is something you want to do, then make sure you collect/confirm email addresses from all guests who go through the traditional Check-In process at the beginning of the event.

Discourage early checkout

This is the most common (and preventable) cause of checkout delays. To avoid early checkout chaos and confusion, clearly post signs stating “CHECKOUT WILL BEGIN AT 9:00.” If guests insist on early check-out, ask if they have vaulted a credit card at check-

in; if so, they can leave and you can email their receipts later. If not, you can quickly get their credit card info on the check-in screen. Both guests and volunteers will appreciate that the lines continue moving while every guest gets the attention they deserve.

Take Good Care of Your Volunteers!

On event night, your amazing team of volunteers will be working hard and dealing with a lot of different people and scenarios. It's important to have plenty of support at each stage of the evening. Here are some tips for maximizing volunteer productivity while minimizing event night glitches:

- When one group of volunteers is entering data on sales, make sure there is another volunteer available to answer inquiries from guests, so data entry folks can concentrate on their task.
- Always have someone on hand who has the authority to decide about returns, lost tickets, etc.
- If possible, recruit enough volunteers so that everybody gets a break – and perhaps a chance to do a little bidding.
- Consider a volunteer swap arrangement. Contact us to ask if we can connect you with another school or organization in your area that would be willing to swap volunteer squads for an evening. Your team would work their event and their team would work yours. This is a great way for your volunteers to be able to enjoy the fruits of their own labor by participating on event night.
- Feed them! Some hot food is a really nice perk for busy volunteers... and a glass of wine can do wonders as well.

In Case of Emergency

ICE stands for In Case of Emergency. Know where your ICE documents are located at all times. Our support team will point these out to you a few days before your event. They include:

- Guest List with space to record sales
- Auction Item List with space to record buyer or track inventory

- Phone number for software support
- Login credentials for your credit-card payment gateway

Here's a real life example of how being prepared with your ICE documents can avert an auction night disaster: One week before their gala event, one of our customers (a church auction team) sent out Self Check-In emails, and had a high percentage of their guests check-in from home prior to the event. A couple of days before the event, they printed the reports that Support recommends all auction chairs have on hand in case of emergency. At the event, they had a quick check-in, to get the remaining guests cards registered. This was a good thing, because...before the silent auction ended, the venue completely lost all power. No electricity for the computers, or even the lights!

Thankfully, auction organizers had candles on hand. The guests finished bidding by candlelight, and they continued with the evening as planned. The auction team collected the bid sheets, and organized them so that they would be ready to enter when the power returned. But the lights didn't come back on before the event ended, so they sent guests home after the event, entered the sales from home the next morning, checked everyone out remotely, and emailed them all receipts. Thanks to the preparedness of the auction team, guests were happy and the event was a success.

Takeaway: don't leave home without your ICE documents.

Chapter #5: Clean Up With an Online Auction

If there were an easy way, without much additional effort, to maximize the results of your live auction, would you do it? Of course you would! Online auctions are an easy, convenient way to raise money for your school or organization... but not all by themselves. The truth is that online auctions, all by themselves, are generally less effective than gala fundraisers because it's pretty hard to motivate people to go online and bid. Online auctions alone do not tend to make nearly as much money as live events.

However, online auctions can be used very effectively to maximize the results of your live event while engaging the support of even more donors; which is why we wholeheartedly recommend them.

Here's how...

An online auction is a great way to sell the remaining items left over on auction night.

Rather than losing money on the random items that didn't sell – including spaces in your popular Sign-up Parties – an online auction can provide a simple and convenient way for people to take advantage of great deals while supporting your organization.

Online auctions provide an easy and convenient way for key supporters who were unable to attend your gala event to participate.

Scheduling and other conflicts inevitably keep some of your biggest bidders from attending your live event, and it's important to give these folks a way to be involved. By sending links to your online auction, these folks can support your organization by purchasing left-over items or making a donation using the Special Appeal tab.

Our SchoolAuction.net software makes it easy to run an online auction following your event, with very little additional effort from your volunteers and with great results. The same event website you use to manage the gala is also used as the “venue” for your online auction - once you select the admin setting to “enable online bidding,” then guests can go register and bid on any items you've made available to them.

For best results, run your online auction after the event. Let your auction team in on the

plan, but don't let potential attendees know about the online auction until after the event – you don't want to give your guests an excuse not to buy a ticket for the gala.

On auction night, if you have items that do not get a minimum bid, hold onto them. These can be promoted in the online auction to follow. Your online auction will feature these items, any unsold spaces in Sign-up Parties, and any items that were donated too late to make it into your live auction catalog.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to use an online auction to expand your reach and maximize your results.

The Challenges of Online Auctions

It is tempting to define an online fundraising auction as a variation on a gala fundraising auction. After all, in each case your supporters are engaged in a fun competition to purchase donated items in order to support your cause.

However, the differences point the way toward several challenges that can undercut your chances at mounting an online auction as a successful fundraiser. Let's explore a few of these differences, and then I will offer some guidance on how to address them.

The first significant difference is that *participation in an online auction brings no immediate recognition to the guest*. Gala fundraising events are philanthropy-as-spectator-sport; your guests who make pledges or bid on live auction items are acknowledged for their generosity in the moment with applause and cheers; this recognition often spurs further participation and greater loyalty to your event and your group.

In an online auction, however, the only feedback a bidder is likely to receive is the click of their mouse and a visible note about their bid on the item page of the website. When they win an item, they get an automated email asking them to come back to the site and enter their credit-card information. This is nowhere as stimulating as the applause of the crowd.

Second, *participation in an online auction happens in the spaces in between other events in our life*. Gala auctions happen on Friday or Saturday night (okay, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes on a Thursday), but when a guest attends a gala fundraiser the main focus of their attention is that event. Not so in the online auction; it's just waiting

there, and your supporters fully plan to sit down and get to it soon, or after dinner, or before bedtime, or tomorrow morning before the kids get up, or...

You get the picture. It's hard to focus their attention on your organization, its needs, and your fundraiser. And when you do, the next distraction is only moments away.

Third, gala auctions often feature an auctioneer; a professional salesperson with practiced, polished, proven techniques for stimulating buying behaviors in your guests. In most online auctions, *there is no one prompting your bidders to take action and support your group and its cause*. Think back to galas you have attended; how often have you seen guests respond to the cajoling and encouragement of that auctioneer? How high do you think those guests would bid without that encouragement?

So, how do you plan for these challenges? Here are four suggestions, all of which revolve around one core concept: marketing the event to your supporters, in discrete, easily-absorbed pieces.

1. Group your auction items into multiple closings. When your guests come to the auction, they will only spend a few minutes browsing the items you've put in front of them. Work with that reality by prioritizing a group of 6-12 items at a time. Try to give each group 2-3 days in the spotlight, then move on to the next group.
2. Start your marketing communications by driving auction registration. Use your in-house email list (preferably assembled through an opt-in process) to announce the fundraiser to your supporters. You will likely want to send a "teaser" message to this list in the days leading up to the opening of the auction, and one or two more to it after you begin the bidding. Your call-to-action once bidding is open should be simple: please register at our online auction, so you can bid on wonderful items and support our cause. You can emphasize that registration is free, and entails no obligation to bid. At this point, you want to get them to "buy-in" to the event.

As part of the registration process, make sure you get specific permission to use your guests' email addresses for this fundraiser.

3. Next, promote the items. Once you have driven supporters to the auction site, and encouraged them to register, your marketing job has just begun. Now you

have to move on to driving those registered supporters to take the next step – placing bids.

Start by segmenting your list – use the institutional knowledge you have about individual supporters to create groups of bidders who will respond to specific items or categories you have procured. Then send out customized email messages to those groups with images and links to take the recipients directly to the page where they can bid on one item that you know will appeal to them.

4. Then, promote the bidding action. Once you have competitive bidding emerge on an appealing item, use your lists to alert other supporters to the fact that your event is generating excitement – and that they should get in on the action, too. Note the bidders who are participating, and use the item closing times to create a sense of urgency – “Bidder ablebakercharlie currently has the high bid on the fishing trip for 4 to Lost Creek at \$165.00 – and it closes in six hours! That means there’s not much time for you to get in and win this must-have experience, so click here and make your bid!”

After your first closing, make sure you close each promotional email with a thank-you section, calling out specific guests who have won items – and a progress report on the event – “As of today, this online auction has raised over \$6,000 to help fund our cause. We have a way to go to meet our \$15,000 goal, but if you join in with bidders like JimmyFox, karenjones and tommytuxedo, whose winning bids have helped us get this far, we know we will make it!”

The most common reasons why online auctions fail to raise the money their organizers hope they will is the lack of a robust marketing campaign that is focused on each intermediate step in the auction. Online supporters are less focused, and more easily distracted, than guests at a gala event, and thus the job of the online auction team is to repeatedly and gently guide them back to the task at hand – supporting the organization through participation in the fundraiser.

Chapter 6: Creating Institutional Memory

Okay, Auction Night is over, you've exceeded your revenue goals, and your volunteers are exhausted and (hopefully) proud of their efforts. Now it's time to start planning for next year's success... when impressions from this year are still fresh.

Too often, beginning the planning for next year's auction is a rocky process... but it doesn't have to be! Imagine what a difference it would make to go into next year's auction season with all the knowledge you gained through this year's experience, readily accessible to the next team?

Debriefing

Debriefing should happen within a week after the event, so that the details are still fresh in the minds of the volunteers. Done right, this will be the most important time you spend during the entire process because you will use it to build volunteer goodwill and increase enthusiasm, and success, year after year.

Here are some suggestions for making the most of the debriefing process:

Make it fun

Providing refreshments will make it a fun event, rather than just one more auction-related task. Debriefing can happen over wine and hors d'oeuvres, dinner or lunch; whatever you decide, make it a fun event that volunteers will want to attend.

Recognize Volunteers

Apart from the obvious goal of collecting insights and feedback about every aspect of the process, debriefing is a time to recognize and thank the volunteers upon whose dedicated efforts the success of the auction was built. Because your successors are almost certainly going to come from this group, do your best to make everyone feel really good about their accomplishments and contributions so they look forward to being part of the team again.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

- Which tasks generated the most/least revenue for the effort?
- Which three things most impressed you or your guests about the event? What will

you/they remember a year from now?

- What was your least favorite aspect of the event?
- What would you like to see done differently next year?
- Which piece/task/role would you be excited to help with in the future?

Allow Time for Open Sharing – and Take Notes

Sharing war stories and reminiscing on the triumphs, memes, and (hopefully averted) disasters builds esprit de corps among your team. Some people are great at making the time to write down their thoughts, but many more (most!) will not. The sharing time allows each team member to talk about what they felt went well, and to collect all the suggestions and feedback at one time. Note: be sure to assign a note-taker during the open sharing segment.

Pass out a Simple One-Page Checklist/Survey

Make sure there is space for comments, and ask your team to rate:

- the event facilities
- the auction mix (types of items, quantity etc) the check-in process
- the check-out process the food/beverages
- the music/entertainment
- anything else that seems important

Encourage Key Players to Put Their Feedback In Writing

Committee Chairs should be asked to jot down a couple pages of notes – no need for a detailed report – outlining what worked best and what could be improved upon. These people’s feedback will be critically important for future auction teams.

If some volunteers aren’t able to make it to the debriefing session, take time to reach out to them by phone or email to collect some feedback. Additional feedback can be requested from guests, perhaps included in a thank you note or email, such as: “Thank you again for all of your support. We’re already starting to think about next year’s auction

and we'd love to know what you liked best and what you'd like to see done differently. Please send us a message and share your thoughts!"

Finally, collect all these notes and surveys in one organized place – a binder works great – and clearly mark it in a way that next year's team will understand its importance.

Passing the Baton... er, Binder

A short pencil is better than a long memory

Volunteer burnout often begins early in the process, when too much time is spent digging through notes and binders to find the most important contacts and information. Taking the time to create institutional memory pays high dividends, but only if the information makes it into the hands of the people who need it: next year's auction team.

This section offers some guidelines about what are the most important pieces of information to pass along to next year's team; that is, what goes in the Binder and the Magic List.

It only takes a small amount of pre-planning to set things up right for next year's team. One of the best ways current auction teams can benefit future efforts is to catalog – and pass along in an organized format - key vendor contacts and account information.

The Magic List

Your list should include contact information, websites, logins, and passwords for key vendors such as:

- Auction software (here's our contact info, to get your list started: support@schoolauction.net; (503) 715- 1112.)
- Merchant Account/Gateways
- Event Liability Insurance Hardware rental
- Event Venue Printer Caterer
- Equipment rental: tables, dinnerware, sound system, etc.
- Auctioneer

When you put these key contacts into the hands of your successors, you're connecting

them with the people and products that will assure the long term success of your school fundraising efforts; which is, of course, why you downloaded this book.

The Binder

Guard the binder with your life; it is the single most important item in your auction arsenal because it contains what we keep referring to as institutional memory; that is, a record of what has (or has not) worked well in the past. If you've kept a good accounting, this binder will be invaluable to future auction teams.

Make sure your Institutional Memory Binder contains the following:

Volunteer feedback on the current year's auction

This feedback is generated from the debriefing session, in which team members offered general feedback about what worked well and what didn't, and answered these questions:

- Which tasks generated the most/least revenue for the effort?
- Which three things most impressed you or your guests about the event? What will you/they remember a year from now?
- What was your least favorite aspect of the event?
- What would you like to see done differently next year?
- Which piece/task/role would you be excited to help with in the future?

Results of this year's survey, rating:

- event facilities
- auction mix (types of items, quantity etc)
- check-in
- check-out
- food/beverages music/entertainment
- anything else that seems important

In closing...

Auctions are without a doubt a labor of love and require a significant amount of blood, sweat, and tears. They're also a great way to build rapport with your volunteers, your community, and your guests - not to mention your coffers. It's truly gratifying to see so many people come together to support a worthy cause they believe in. And a lot fun can be had along the way. We wish you great success in undertaking your own auction and trust that our guidelines have been helpful to you in making it as smooth and well organized as possible.

And remember to keep it all in perspective. Don't sweat the small stuff. It's all small stuff. When all else fails, laugh!

And have another glass of wine.

Appendix A

Our Timeline for Planning a Fundraising Auction

In this guide, we've (by and large) made suggestions, and tried to provide at least a couple of alternatives at every point, out of respect for the fact that there are hundreds of ways to plan an auction, almost all of them sane, reasonable, and effective.

That's not the goal for this section, however. Here, I'm going to tell you how to do things our way. Not the only way; if you want to skip this, feel free. But...

We're really good at this. In addition to running this company, developing the software and guiding other auction chairs through the process, we also serve as auction chairs ourselves, for several events each year. Naturally, we're especially good at taking advantage of every feature we've built into the SchoolAuction.net software to help you run a really smooth check-in and check-out. So there may be a few things in here that you may find worth reading.

Ready? Let's go. I'm going to start planning next year's auction on the morning after this year's auction:

The morning after

- If I liked the venue we held the auction at last night, I'm going to ask the booking manager there to reserve a spot for me next year; for the same weekend.
- If I liked the Benefit Auctioneer we used last night, I'm going to ask her to reserve a spot for me next year on her calendar; for the same weekend.
- I'm also going to write some thank-you notes to my team members, buttering them up and making sure they know they were a huge part of our success. I'll need them again.

After this year's debriefing session

- I'm going to call the top 10 spenders at the auction, and thank them for their participation. If they say that they enjoyed themselves, and love supporting my group, then I'll ask them if they would write a short testimonial I could use in marketing next year's event. If they were not part of the debriefing session, I'll also

ask them if there were any suggestions they would like to offer. I'm particularly interested in whether the live auction items were appealing to them – and if they can think of anything they really wish would have been in there.

10 months before the event

- Start securing commitments for my Dream Team leaders – including and especially the Auction Chair, if I won't/can't do the job again next year. Until they are on board, I'm going to do a little clean-up.
- Log in to <http://my.schoolauction.net/> and review:
 - The listed administrators on the account
 - The contact info for the group on the account page
 - The status of the group's subscription – renew if necessary
- Then, create a SchoolAuction.net event website for the coming auction.
- Migrate donors from last year, and the credit-card account information.

9 months before the event

- First Auction Team meeting. Make sure it is fun and relaxed, but also make sure that the procurement team knows that it is time to start working. Give the team the address for the event website and make sure they know how to login, and how to access the documentation.
- *Auction Chair*: Select new venues, auctioneer, and/or caterers if a change is desired.
- *Procurement Team*: Start drafting procurement letter for mailing/hand-delivering to local businesses..
- *Theme & Decorations Chair*: Start brainstorming themes.

8 months before the event

- Second Auction Team meeting. Agenda:

- Procurement team report – review draft procurement letter for silent auction items
- Decide on theme for event
- *Procurement Team*: finalize, mail first batch of silent auction procurement letters
- *Auction Chair (or co-chair)*: contact other major vendors (caterer, a/v provider, computer rental) and reserve their services.

6 months before the event

- *Procurement Team*: Brainstorm Signup Party ideas and hosts, begin contacting potential hosts
- *Procurement Team*: Conduct first Live Auction brainstorming party; led by your benefit auctioneer. Invite 4-8 major spenders from past auctions to help you brainstorm. After brainstorming party, start Live Auction procurement.
- *Procurement Team*: Review silent-auction procurement results to date; make sure each item has been entered properly into your SchoolAuction.net event website.

If you're struggling to fill all of your volunteer/team roles – break the jobs into smaller, concrete assignments. Investing 4 hours now will save you countless work later!! Few people will raise their hand to chair a committee; many will agree to contact a list of 5 businesses. Many people will shy away from committing to a “leadership” role, but many that agree to a single task will step up and go the extra yard once they see what needs to be done.

4 months before the event

- *Auction Chair*: Contact group's merchant processor and gateway company; confirm that your accounts are active (or re-activate them, if you closed them after last year's event). Confirm that the account number and API password are properly entered in your SchoolAuction.net software, and process a test transaction.
- Set ticket prices:

- Early-bird couple (available until 6 weeks before event) Early-bird single (available until 6 weeks before event)
 - Early-bird table (available until 6 weeks before event)
 - Regular couple (available from 6 weeks before event, to day before event)
 - Regular single (available from 6 weeks before event, to day before event)
 - Regular table (available from 6 weeks before event, to day before event)
 - Last-Minute couple (available day of event)
 - Last-Minute single (available day of event).
- Review progress of procurement team
 - *Ticket Sales Chair*: Set up ticket types in SchoolAuction.net event website. Activate and test online registration feature. Begin advertising ticket sales.

NOTE: if you want to maximize your ability to use the Self Check-In and Self Check-Out functions in SchoolAuction.net, drive your potential guests to buy their tickets online, at your SchoolAuction.net event website. This way, you are sure to have the critical information you'll need for each ticket buyer.

- Be sure your Receipt is set-up prior to beginning online ticket sales.
- *Theme & Decorations Chair*: begin sourcing materials for centerpieces, stage display, etc.
- *Auction Chair*: reserve credit-card readers at <http://nw.tofinoauctions.com/swipers/give>

3 Months before the event

- *Auction Chair*: Finalize plans for any raffles/games. Will you sell chances prior to the event? If so, how? Does the winner need to be present to win? For Golden Ticket raffles, will ticket buyers need to declare their prize choice ahead of time? Create appropriate catalog items for all tickets and prizes.
- *Auction Chair*: Contact caterer, A/V vendor, and computer-rental company to confirm your reservation, and provide an update on expectations.

2 Months before the event

- *Auction Co-Chair:* If other schools/organizations near you use the software, consider trading auction night volunteers. Call us if you need help finding a school to swap with.

6 Weeks before the event

- *Auction Chair:* Build excitement and momentum for your gala by offering your sign-up parties online prior to your event. Seeing what is possible often prompts others to offer to host a party too (while you still have time to add them. . .)

5 Weeks before the event

- *Auction Chair:* Plan the layout of the event space so there is space for all the elements: stage, bar, guest tables, display space for Live Auction items, bid tables for Silent Auction items, Wine Wall, the Front Desk (check-in and check-out), Item Pick-Up, etc.
- *Auction Chair:* Create a draft timeline for the evening. Be sure to include entertainment, the raffle announcement or auction games, Silent Auction table closing times, and any diversion after paddle raise to keep guests from running to leave.
- *Auction Chair:* Decide how many volunteers are needed, how their time is to be allocated, and who is responsible for volunteer wrangling. If you're still short on auction night volunteers, and your venue/liquor permits allow – approach the community service coordinator at a local High School.

4 Weeks before the event

- *Theme & Decorations Chair:* Procure all non-perishable decorations (banners, vases, table runners, etc.). With Auction Chair, write and design any necessary signage for venue; send to printer.
- *Auction Chair and Co-Chair:* Meet with auctioneer to discuss Live Auction items and event-night schedule.

3 Weeks before the event

- *Auction Chair*: If you'll be using Self Check-In, do yourself a favor and draft the email messages for the campaign and select your invitation settings now. These will be sent out in the final days prior to your event – and you'll be much busier then. . .

2 Weeks before the event

- Procurement Team & Auction Co-Chair: Create Lots from Silent Auction items
Procurement Team & Auction Co-Chair: Review silent auction item numbers and table placement/closings, reorder/renumber as needed.
- Ticket Sales Chair: Review ticket list. Link couples who should be linked, but aren't. Call ticket buyers who purchased unassigned tickets and try to get names and email addresses for these guests. Edit ticket orders to add any names and email addresses you do get. With Auction chair or co-chair, review and revise seating assignments (if you are using assigned seats).
- Front-Desk Manager: Go to your venue, and test the signal strength of their wi-fi connectivity, or arrange with venue manager to pull an Ethernet cable to your front-desk location.
- Auction Co-Chair: Confirm volunteer arrival times and assignments. Arrange food and drink for volunteers.

1 Week before the event

- *Auction Co-Chair*: Use SchoolAuction.net to generate the files for your bid sheets, description sheets, and gift certificates; send to local printer.
- *Auction Chair*: Check your email inbox for our Pre-event review (usually sent at least 7 days prior to your event). We review sites for data entries and settings that might cause hiccups or fluster your volunteers/staff during your event. Any issues we see and/or suggestions we have will be noted.
- *Auction Chair*: Assign Table/Seats if you wish.
- *Auction Chair*: Meet with Auctioneer and produce final order for Live Auction

items

- *Auction Chair*: Prepare PowerPoint presentation for event night (if using)

Event week

5 Days before the Event

- *Ticket Sales Chair*: Review ticket list. Link couples who should be linked, but aren't. Call ticket buyers who purchased unassigned tickets and try to get names and email addresses for these guests. Edit ticket orders to add any names and email addresses you do get. With Auction chair or co-chair, review and revise seating assignments (if you are using assigned seats). Yes, this is repeated from above. The harsh reality of many fundraising auctions is that ticket sales come fast and furious the last week or so before an event. Every day this week, you will need to be on top of the sales that come in the day before.
- *Front-Desk Manager*: Send training-video links and any additional instructions to front-desk volunteers.

4 Days before the Event

- *Front Desk Manager*: after checking with the Ticket Sales Chair and the Auction Chair, review Self Check-In email template in your SchoolAuction.net event website, and send first Self Check-In invitation, to all guests with assigned tickets, and who have email addresses entered in the system.

2 Days before the Event

- *Front Desk Manager*: revise Self Check-In email template in your SchoolAuction.net event website, to reflect the fact that this will be the second notice you will have sent out about Self Check-In. Then send your second Self Check-In invitation, to all guests with assigned tickets, and who have email addresses entered in the system, but who have NOT already checked-in.

1 Day before the Event

- *Theme & Decorations Chair*: Procure perishable decoration items (flowers, etc.)

Morning of the Event

- *Front Desk Manager*: revise Self Check-In email template in your SchoolAuction.net event website, to reflect the fact that this will be the third and final notice you will have sent out about Self Check-In.

Then send your last Self Check-In invitation, to all guests with assigned tickets, and who have email addresses entered in the system, but who have NOT already checked-in.

- *Front Desk Manager*: Set up Item Pick-Up area.
 - Paper bags, staplers and Sharpies for small objects.
 - File Folder box of gift certificates organized by item Number. Laptop or ready access to printout Will Call Report.
 - Space to stow consolidated orders waiting for guest pickup.
- *Front Desk Manager*: Set up Front Desk. Make sure everything is in place for a smooth front desk operation:
 - Extra paper for printer, pens, ICE printouts in case you lose connectivity and/or electricity, Number to call or process to restart router should internet-access fail (if you are using the venue's connection.)
 - Information (username/password) needed to access credit card gateway or phone number of person with access, in case credit-card processing issues arise.
 - Trouble station set up for problem cases so that the other stations can defer and keep going. Entry way to bidding area set up with any handouts and organized to take advantage of the fact that most guests will come having already checked in.
- *Theme & Decorations Chair*: Assemble, place all decorations and signage.
- *Auction Co-Chair* (with assistance from Silent Auction Procurement Chair): Place Silent Auction Items, bid sheets, and description sheets on tables.

- *Auction Chair*: Set up Live Auction item displays and signage.

Cheers to your success!

Roger and the School Auction.net Team

Appendix B -The SchoolAuction.net Software

Throughout this guide, we've tried to give you information that will help all auction chairs – regardless of whether they are using our software, or any software at all. We still want you to succeed, even if you aren't a customer of ours!

But... we do have an outstanding product. One that our customers love, and use year after year. We're pretty proud of it and what it can do, and in this appendix, we'd like to tell you about it. Should you decide that it is worth testing out, [you can start a free, no-strings-attached, 14-day trial account](#). Add some real data to it, and if you decide to become a subscriber, we'll just remove the (very few) trial restrictions, and you can continue using it for your auction.

Overview

SchoolAuction.net is web-based software that was designed to help volunteer auction chairs plan, manage, and run fundraising auctions – Live, Silent, Online, and Mobile. It helps you:

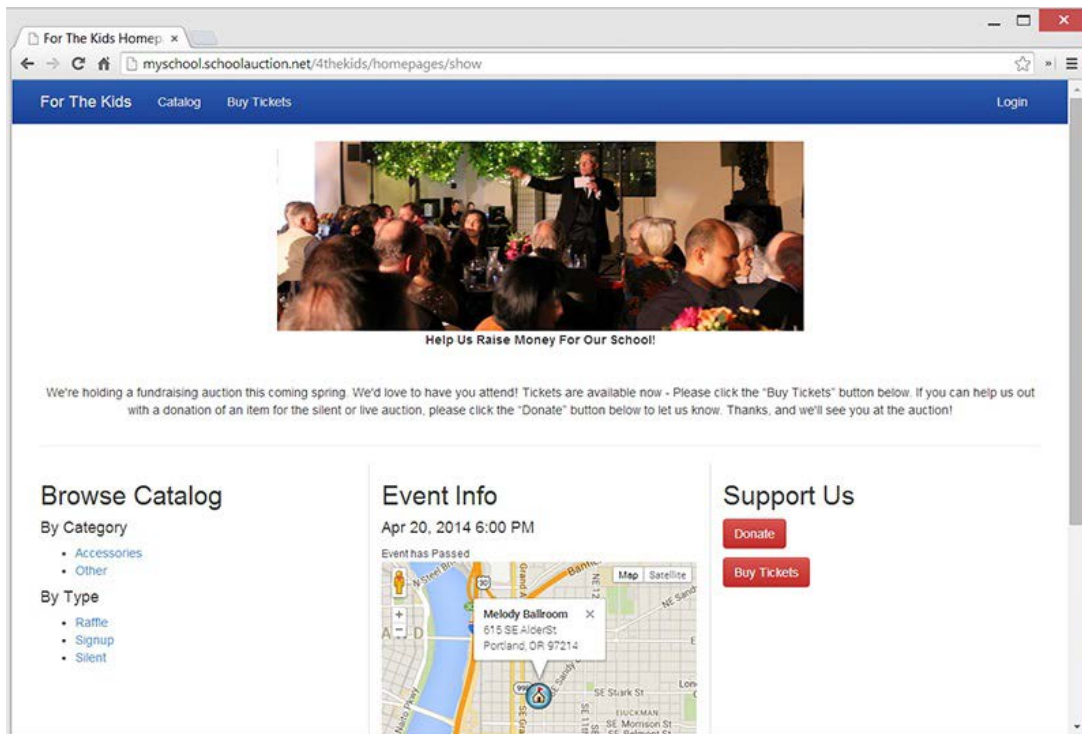
- Promote your event Sell tickets
- Track guest data & item donations
- Produce your bid sheets, gift certificates, catalog, and other print collateral Run a smooth, fast, check-in and check-out at your event
- Submit your guests' credit-card transactions, to the processor of your choice Offer online auctions and mobile bidding to your guests
- Produce comprehensive reports on your event

On the next few pages, I'll explain a bit more about how SchoolAuction.net can help you with each of these, but I also want to encourage you to call us at (503) 715-1112 (press 1 when you get the auto-receptionist) to discuss how you can best make the software work for your auction.

Promote Your Event

Every event you run with SchoolAuction.net gets its own event website – this is where your team will go to access the software and work on the auction. It is also a website you can promote to your guests – they can go to that site and:

- Purchase tickets to the event
- Peruse an online catalog of the items you have procured
- Bid on whatever subset of those items that you designate as available for online bidding See and read details about the event



You can link to your SchoolAuction.net website from your school or organization website easily, in order to help your guests find it.

Sell Tickets

For The Kids Catalog Buy Tickets Login

Online Registration

Sign up for our Auction Gala

Please indicate the quantity of each type of ticket below. Note that some ticket types may be used by more than one person (i.e. couple or table ticket).

Available Ticket Types

Please Choose the Quantity of Tickets Desired.

0 Ticket - Single \$25.00 (1 Guest)

0 Ticket - Couple \$50.00 (2 Guests with a shared bid number)

Add Tickets to Order >> Exit Ticket Sale

[Privacy Policy](#)

Powered by SchoolAuction.net - Software For Your Benefit

Online registration is built in to the SchoolAuction.net software – and costs nothing extra to use. Drive your guests to purchase their tickets from your SchoolAuction.net event website, and you will automatically collect up-to-date contact info from them, along with any custom information you want to ask about – including meal preferences, seating preferences, and more.

Track Guest Data and Item Donations

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://myschool.schoolauction.net/4thekids/catalog/new>. The page title is "New Donation Item" with a "Save" button. The form is divided into three main sections: "Item Information", "Sale Information", and "Item Images".

- Item Information:** Donor (Baskets 'R Us), Item Name (Fabulous Foodie Basket), Quantity (1), Category (Gift Basket), Status (Complete), Location (Debbie's basement), Solicitor (Cindy Crosby), and a "Ready for print?" checkbox.
- Sale Information:** Type (Silent), For sale at (Regular Auction checked, Online Auction unchecked), Live Closing Time (empty), and Price Information (Price to display: Default, Fair market value: 75, Min bid [\$30.00]: 30).
- Item Images:** A preview of the item image with a "Remove" button and an "Add Image" button.

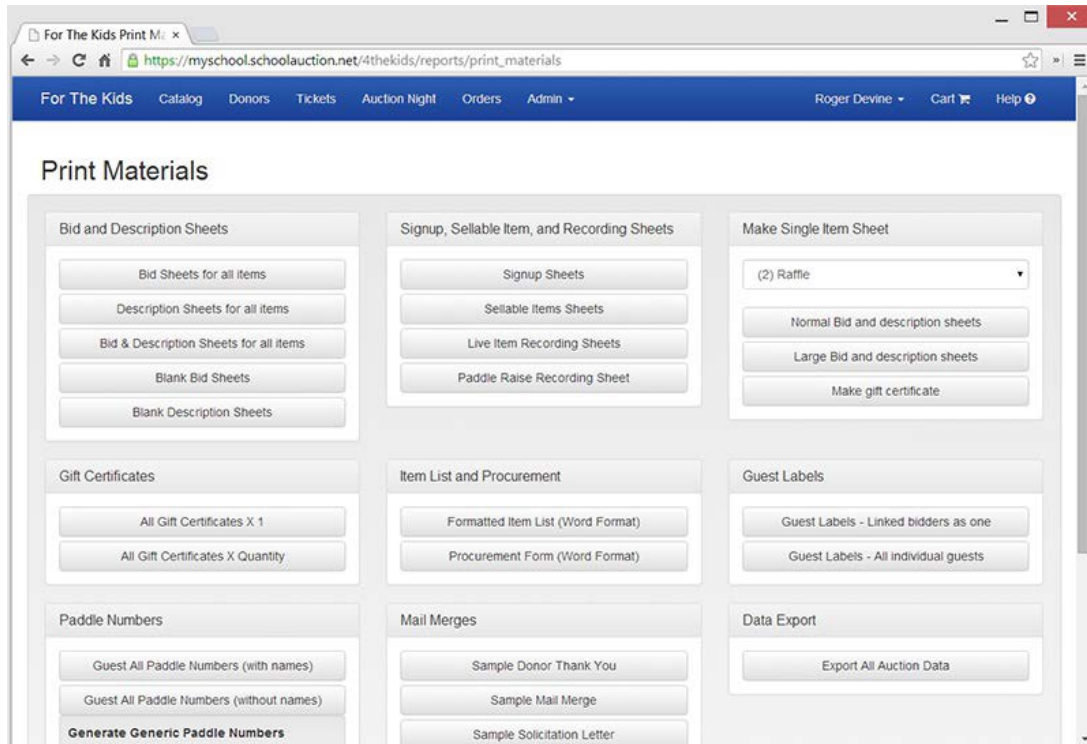
If you choose to also sell tickets in person, or using another process, you can (and should) use your SchoolAuction.net database to keep track of those sales as well.

And as item donations arrive, your procurement team volunteers can enter them into your SchoolAuction.net database directly, from their home, office, school, or favorite coffee shop. No more driving slips of paper over to the chair's house for her to enter.

This is a duplicate of the screenshot above, showing the same "New Donation Item" form with the same data entered: Donor (Baskets 'R Us), Item Name (Fabulous Foodie Basket), Quantity (1), Category (Gift Basket), Status (Complete), Location (Debbie's basement), Solicitor (Cindy Crosby), Type (Silent), For sale at (Regular Auction checked), Live Closing Time (empty), Price to display (Default), Fair market value (75), and Min bid (30).

Once you have entered an item, you can easily print or email a Donor Receipt to the donor.

Print Bid Sheets and More...



- Every sheet of paper you might need on event night, you can generate from within your SchoolAuction.net website, including:
- Bid Sheets for Silent Auction Items Signup Sheets for Signup Party Items
- Recording Sheets for Raffle Ticket sales, Live Auction Items and Paddle Raise donations Gift Certificates
- Item Catalogs
- Guest Labels (for bidder packets or name tags) Paddle Numbers
- Thank-You letters for Guests and Donors

Easy, Fast Check-In/Check-Out

At your auction, you need a quick, smooth process for getting guests checked in – giving them their bid number and storing their credit-card number (for faster check-out later that night). The traditional way has been to stop guests on their way in to the event, and make them stand in line while volunteers look them up, run their credit-card through a swiper, and hand them a bid number.

To make that work, you need a fast, easy-to-use system – one which allows for multiple check-in stations. SchoolAuction.net has that, and for years our customers have praised the extent to which our software has improved their check-in process.

However, even with the best on-premises check-in process, guests will still have to stop at the desk. And when they do, even with the most well-trained volunteers, there will occasionally be a line. Maybe it's only 2 or 3 guests, but that's still a line.

And we really don't like lines. Guests in lines aren't bidding.

So recently, we introduced a feature designed to do away with those lines once and for all – Advance Check-In. The idea is borrowed from the airlines – ask your guests to check-in for your auction before they ever leave the house. Get them to enter their own credit-card number, and send them a bid number they can print at home.

For The Kids Catalog Buy Tickets Login Sign Up

Self Check-In

Guest Information

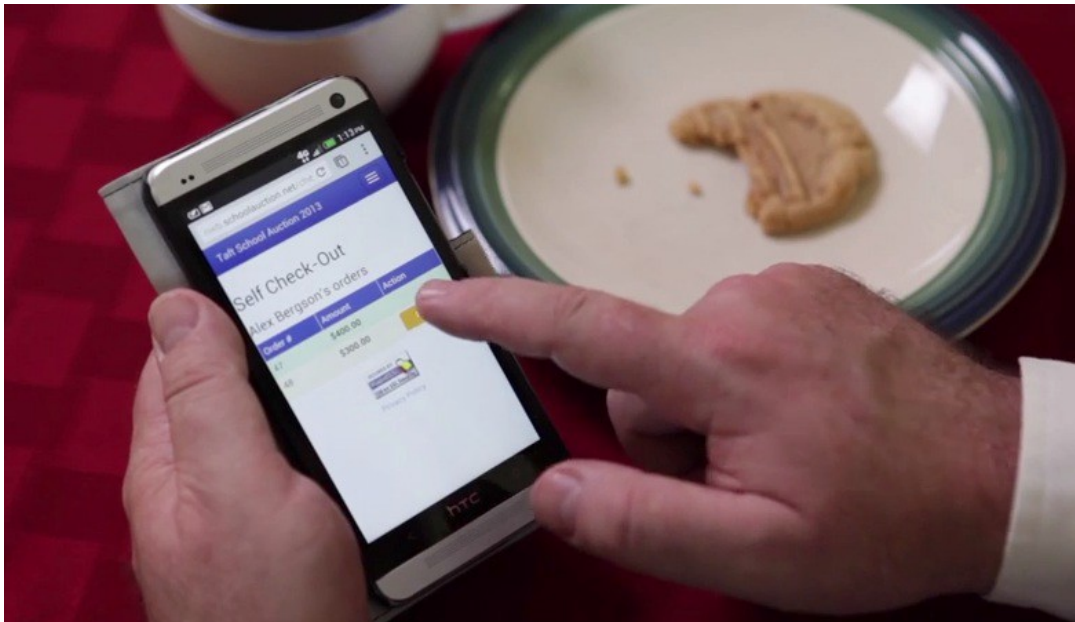
First Name*	Last Name	
<input type="text" value="Roger"/>	<input type="text" value="Devine"/>	
Address		
<input type="text" value="1631 NE Broadway, #139"/>		
City	State	Zip
<input type="text" value="Portland"/>	<input type="text" value="Oregon"/>	<input type="text" value="97232"/>
Phone	Email*	
<input type="text" value="(503) 913-4407"/>	<input type="text" value="roger@devineassistance.com"/>	

Payment Information

Name on Card
<input type="text" value="Roger Devine"/>
Card Number
<input type="text" value="4111111111111111"/>

It's been a huge hit – with both the auction teams who have used it, and their guests.

So much so that we went ahead and created a Self Check-Out feature – and optimized it for use on smartphones. Now your guests don't have to wait in a line at the end of the evening, either. They can stay at their table, review their purchases on their phone, authorize a payment against their stored card number, and instantly get a receipt delivered on-screen.



Of course, you can still also offer a regular check-in and check-out, for those guests who prefer to do things that way. Offering both methods, and allowing your guests to choose what they are most comfortable with, will still drastically reduce any lines.

Offer Mobile Bidding

With our Premium package, you can also offer your guests the opportunity to bid on items at your event from their smartphones. Our Mobile Bidding features include an electronic leaderboard you can display at the event, Extended Bidding, and more.

Please call us for more information if you are interested in adding Mobile Bidding to your next auction.

Process Credit-Card Transactions

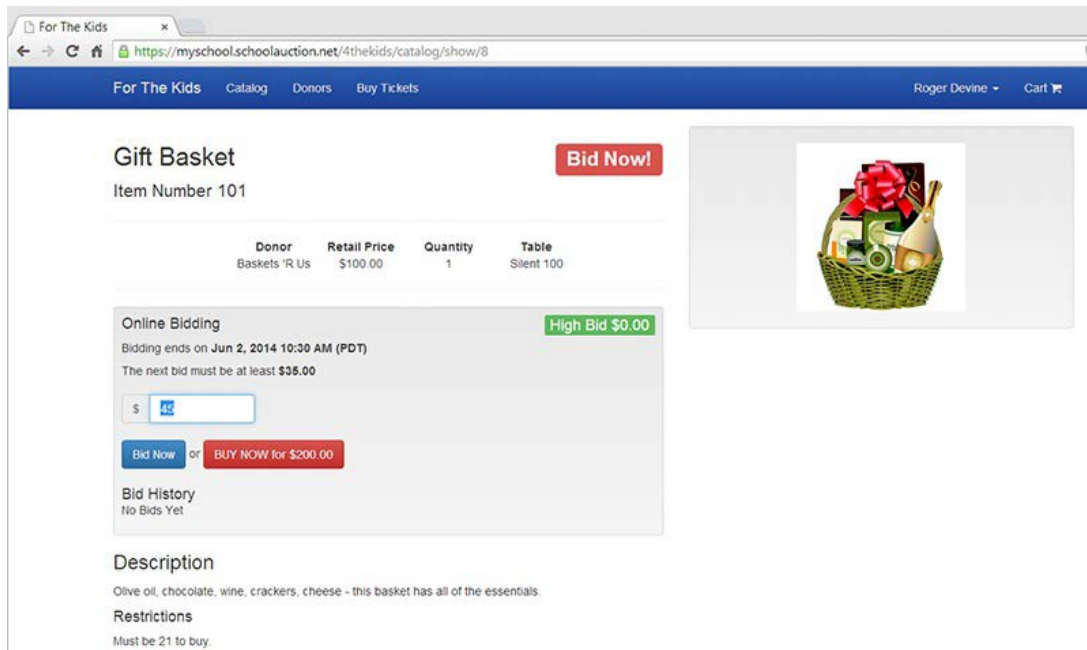
SchoolAuction.net works with a wide range of credit-card processors – chances are that if your PTA or nonprofit already has a merchant account, that we can connect our software to it. If not, there are many processors who would love to help you with that and can set you up with a suitable account. You can find a current list of these at <http://www.SchoolAuction.net/partners/>

We can connect with these processors (and many others) through our integration with 8 different Payment Gateways – these are companies that transfer transaction data securely to merchant processors (who do not put their servers directly on the Internet). As long as your processor of choice can connect to one of our supported gateways, you can use them with your SchoolAuction.net software to process payments for ticket sales, auction purchases, cash donations, and more.

The list of supported Payment Gateways includes:

- Authorize.net
- eProcessing Network
- Network Merchants, Inc.
- Merchant e-Solutions
- Schoolpay
- Vanco
- IATS
- PayTrace

Run an Online Auction




The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://myschool.schoolauction.net/4thekids/catalog/show/8>. The page is titled "Gift Basket" and "Item Number 101". A red "Bid Now!" button is visible in the top right corner. Below the title, there is a table with the following data:

Donor	Retail Price	Quantity	Table
Baskets 'R Us	\$100.00	1	Silent 100

Below the table, there is an "Online Bidding" section with a green "High Bid \$0.00" button. The text indicates that bidding ends on Jun 2, 2014 10:30 AM (PDT) and that the next bid must be at least \$35.00. There is a bid input field with a dollar sign and a bid amount of 45. Below the input field, there are two buttons: "Bid Now" and "BUY NOW for \$200.00". A "Bid History" section shows "No Bids Yet".

Description
Olive oil, chocolate, wine, crackers, cheese - this basket has all of the essentials.

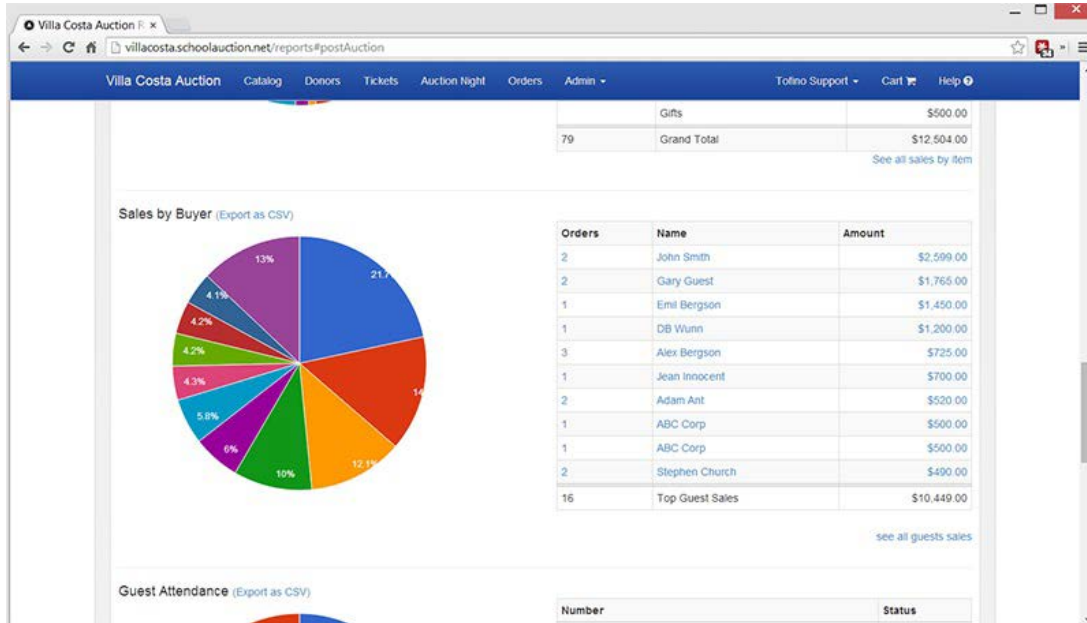
Restrictions
Must be 21 to buy.



Online auctions are an excellent way to clean-up any unsold items after your gala auction, and to increase participation in your fundraising within your community. With SchoolAuction.net, online bidding is built into the software – complete with automatic notifications, credit-card processing, and everything else you need.

Comprehensive Reporting

After the event, you can take a deep dive into the numbers by using the extensive reporting system within SchoolAuction.net. Start with a high-level view, provided by the dashboards on the Reports page:



Then drill down to get detailed reports built to your specifications:

The screenshot shows the 'Sales' report page. It includes search filters for 'User Name Search', 'Item Name Search', and 'Advanced' options. Below the filters is a table of sales records.

Sales

Item	Buyer	Price Paid	Type	Venue	Created
✓ Pizza Gift Certificate	Bernie Bidder	\$20.00	Silent	Online Auction	Jul 10, 2013 4:15 PM
✓ Gourmet Food Basket	Gary Guest	\$100.00	Silent	Online Ticket Sales	Aug 16, 2013 4:14 PM
✓ Handyman Basket	Gary Guest	\$105.00	Silent	Online Ticket Sales	Aug 16, 2013 4:14 PM
✓ Knitting Basket (2)	Gary Guest	\$35.00	Silent	Online Ticket Sales	Aug 16, 2013 4:15 PM
✓ Gourmet Food Basket	Stephen Church	\$100.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 16, 2013 9:25 PM
✓ Gourmet Food Basket	Stephen Church	\$75.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 16, 2013 9:25 PM
✓ Gourmet Food Basket	Stephen Church	\$105.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 17, 2013 3:18 PM
✓ Knitting Basket (2)	Stephen Church	\$45.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 17, 2013 3:19 PM
✓ Handyman Basket	Stephen Church	\$140.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 17, 2013 3:20 PM
✓ Gourmet Food Basket	Robbie Lewis	\$150.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 17, 2013 3:53 PM
✓ Handyman Basket	Robbie Lewis	\$100.00	Silent	Regular Auction	Aug 17, 2013 3:53 PM

How To Get Started

When you are ready to get your hands on our software, we would invite you to set up a SchoolAuction.net event website for your auction by following this link:

<http://my.schoolauction.net/signup>

You'll start by answering a few questions about your school or organization, and give us the information we will need to setup your Admin account in the software. Then you'll tell us the date, time, and name of your auction, and we'll have the software set up for you within a minute or so.

We sell our software, but you can start out on a trial basis – no commitment required. When you are sure that it will work for you, you can pay for a subscription. Then we'll remove the trial restrictions (during the trial, bid sheets are watermarked and connecting a credit-card account is not possible), and you can keep going with the same site.

Our Standard Subscription costs \$1,000/year, and lets your group run one gala auction and two online auctions during the year, with unlimited email support from our team of auction specialists. Our Premium Subscription (\$1,500) adds Mobile Bidding, unlimited telephone support from our auction specialists, and a set of 4 credit-card readers for you to keep.

Best,

Roger