



Auction Results

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Characteristics of a Good Benefit Auctioneer

Your auctioneer can make the difference between a mediocre and amazing live auction.

For an auction event that exceeds fundraising goals and has people talking and looking forward to next year, seek a benefit auctioneer who is an educator, salesman, motivational speaker and entertainer, says David Goodman, President and Founder, Auction Results (Chicago, IL).

Goodman elaborates on these four key characteristics:

1. Educator. “The benefit auctioneer needs to be very well versed about your organization, including understanding your mission and goals, so they are able to communicate that to the audience the night of the event.” Says Goodman.
2. Salesman. The auctioneer needs to be able to encourage “competitive giving” while having the skills to truly excite the audience and sell the product they are trying to convert to dollars for the organization.
3. Motivational Speaker. “As a benefit auctioneer the individual needs to be able to clearly educate and motivate the audience to elicit the response the nonprofit is looking for – to have more money come out of someone’s pockets than they thought they should spend for the actual item,” he says.
4. Entertainer. “This element blends the motivational speaker, salesman, and educator together under one hat to create the ultimate experience for guests,” says Goodman. “A good benefit auctioneer may sell 10 items to a crowd of 500, but by touching those other 490 guests, he will ensure that they have a good time and will create goodwill for next year’s event 364 days later.”
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*Source: David A. Goodman, President and Founder, Auction Results, Chicago, Illinois
Phone (773) 883-0243. E-mail: info@auction-results.org www.benefitauctioneer.org*

Tips to Select an Experienced Auctioneer

Be selective when naming an auctioneer for your live auction, says David Goodman, President and Founder, Auction Results, (Chicago, IL).

“Experience is of the utmost importance,” says Goodman. “I have been a benefit auctioneer for 20 years and have literally done thousands of events. Because I work with my clients consulting on every aspect of their live auction for six months to a year prior to their event, I am able to guide them as to what does and doesn’t work.”

Goodman Says many nonprofits make a mistake of turning to a local celebrity, auctioneer or accomplished speaker as their live auction auctioneer.

“While these individuals may seem like a good choice as auctioneer for your next event, they don’t have the training and psychological skills necessary to be able to leverage your audience to raise their paddles for the benefit of the organization,” he says. “They may be able to make your auction items disappear, but at a fraction of what they are worth, and therein lies the challenge.”

Before naming your next live auction auctioneer, ask these questions:

- Can I get a list of references? “Hiring a benefit auctioneer should be much like a job interview,” says Goodman. Ask for a list of the last 10 auctions they worked for, plus contact names and numbers. Then check them, asking if the auctioneer met or exceeded their goals. “If you hear positive comments from the clients and the list is from benefit auctions over the last four weeks, it is very telling that they are an active and successful benefit auctioneer. But if the list is spread out with a benefit auction every four months, it should send up a big red flag.”
- What similar organizations have you worked for?
- What does your average sale earn? How does that relate to what the event earned prior to you working for the organization?
- Is your focus strictly on the benefit market?
- What consulting services are offered and are they included in your fees?

Maximize Pre-event Coverage To Boost Event Attendance

Your local newspaper may be agreeable to covering your special event on the day it occurs, but advance publicity that can help booster attendance may be harder to get. Following are several strategies for enlisting their help ahead of time.

- **Choose before or after.** Since news space and staff time are limited, ask for either advance publicity or event coverage rather than insisting on both. Follow up with one or two great photos of your event and a brief release outlining attendance, funds raised and how they will be used.
- **Set a realistic but unprecedented goal.** Contact the paper to tell them you hope to boost last year's fundraising total by a record-setting amount, explaining the increased community needs for your programs and services with a local angle.
- **Let others tell your story.** Ask one or two people who have benefited from your organization to give interviews about how funds raised from last year's event helped pay for their job training, holiday dinner or back to school supplies for their children. Newspapers like inspiring human interest stories. Make the connection to your event clear by arranging the interviews and providing background.
- **Invite them to be a sponsor.** Like any business, newspapers seek ways to contribute to their communities. Ask them to become an event sponsor with full benefits, but with a combination of advertising and money. When they promote your event, they will be promoting themselves.
- **Create an advertising supplement.** Most newspapers have frequent inserts. A sponsor-funded flyer or brochure can be a highly cost-effective way to reach a broad audience.
- **Cultivate your contact.** Develop a friendly bond with the staff most likely to cover your organization's events. Send positive notes or e-mails complimenting them on other articles and let them know you have an interest in their section and work in general. Stay in touch even when you don't want something.