

Presentation Is Key to Silent Auction Success

We all know that the tickets, passes or certificates are the real value of the silent auction item. Yet human beings appreciate beauty, appearance and presentation, and two tickets sitting on a table leave quite a bit to be desired.

Why ask your supporters to imagine the experience, when, by adding a few small details, you could evoke that experience for them in vivid detail? The following are just a few examples of what this might look like in practice:

- Two tickets to a college football game could be augmented with a university-branded ball and commemorative magazine or publication celebrating the team's recent season or successes. A small gift certificate to a specialty meat shop could be included if a tailgate is involved.
- A gift certificate to a high-end winery could be paired with a few take-home bottles (which need not be expensive), an elegant pair of wine glasses and a bouquet of flowers adorned with an assortment of corks.
- A week at a condo in the Florida Keys could be turned into an extravaganza of tropical fruits and flowers, possibly on a bed of sand and shells. A travel guide covering the island would add interest and prove useful to the eventual recipient.

These ancillary items might seem small, and indeed, they will usually add almost nothing to the cost of the item. Yet the impact they can have on the minds of potential buyers should not be overlooked — nor should their impact on the bottom line of your silent auction.

Attendance-Building Tips

There are any number of ways to optimize attendance for a special event. Here's one approach to consider:

- To reach out to the entire community or target certain neighborhoods, establish a promotions or marketing committee made up of one or more people representing various neighborhoods. Assign responsibility to each for getting the word out (or selling tickets) to all residents within his/her designated territory.

Clearly Spell Out Special Events Responsibilities

By Kerry Nenn

When your team needs a new member, your success hinges on hiring the right individual. This success starts with the right job description. When Boys & Girls Clubs of the Coastal Plain (Winterville, NC) recognized their need for a combined special events and marketing professional, they needed to create a job description (www.bgccp.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Special-Events-Coordinator-Job-Description.pdf) targeted to meet their goals. Theresa Gilmore, chief development officer, shares experience-based insights into this process:

“We are serving seven counties, so logistically speaking, there is so much opportunity for things to fall through the cracks. We knew it was important to invest time in the thought process of the needs of our organization and department as we put a job description together. We started by reviewing the four goals our board set for us to achieve in 2017. We also looked at a lot of different job descriptions for similar positions from other Boys & Girls Clubs across the nation. We pulled together what we thought pertained to us and matched our current goals. As part of the process, our volunteers also got to lay their eyes on the document.” The final result is a clear, thorough description for the ideal special events and marketing coordinator.

Gilmore recommends including five key qualities when describing a special events position:

1. Simple as it sounds, special events coordinators should be well-organized with attention to detail and the ability to plan for the unexpected.
2. Your coordinator's volunteer management skill is key. A special events person is going to have a hand in all volunteer relationships and help everyone do his or her job. He or she must represent the organization well by appropriately responding to volunteers and building strong relationships.
3. Don't underestimate the role of internal and external communications. Communicating with external vendors and volunteers is a majority of what this position does, but it's also important to be able to effectively communicate with other employees who wouldn't typically play a role in the event. If he or she can get people from within the organization educated on the event and its goals, it may help raise awareness and secure sponsorships and volunteers.
4. You need someone who is not afraid to ask. He or she must ask for what is needed for events from vendors, donors, etc. He or she must be unapologetic and professional.
5. Your volunteers and/or staff must be able and willing to learn systems. Whether it is your donor database or other systems you use, the special events professional needs to be prepared to utilize those systems to meet the expectations of your organization. Keep in mind, it's not just about whether he or she can learn it, but his or her willingness to do so. People love to pick out napkin colors and centerpieces, but it's the behind-the-scenes, less enjoyable work that is most important.

If budgets are tight, an organization might consider combining marketing and special events into one position, as Gilmore has done for her organization. The description should then include an additional focus on marketing skills. She notes, “There's no better person who can promote an event than your special events coordinator!”

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