

Kathy Kingston's Dazzling Dozen Tips to Plan a Superb Benefit Auction



By Kathy Kingston, Professional Auctioneer, Kingston Auction Company

Auction success begins with careful planning long before the gavel is raised. These key planning tips will boost your benefit auction profit to a new level.

- 1. Jump-Start your Auction!**
Begin NOW! A great fundraising auction needs at least six to 11 months of pre-event planning for success. Create an auction fact sheet and master-planning checklist with key action dates. Distribute these to all committee members and volunteers early and follow up often.
- 2. Timing is Everything.**
Design a fast-paced exciting event. Plan a minute-by-minute schedule or “show flow” of your entire event and stick to it. The majority of your revenue is in the live auction, so place it prominently in your event. Assign a Day of Auction Chair to keep your schedule on track.
- 3. Location, Location, Location!**
Book a spacious venue with plenty of nearby parking. It's ideal for silent and live auctions to be in the same large space. If not, make sure your silent and live auction areas are adjacent, so your guests spend more time bidding and less time traveling. Allow at least two feet between silent auction items so your guests can comfortably and generously bid.
- 4. Hire and Involve your Professional Auctioneer Right Away.**
Many auctioneers are booked for a year or more in advance. Some auctioneers offer consulting services to assist you in making the most revenue for your organization. A professional auctioneer – especially one with a consultative approach -- will help take the risk out of fundraising by generating more awareness, excitement and profit for your organization
- 5. Don't Trip over Pennies to Pick up Thousand Dollar Bills!**
No one knows better than you that Non-profit does not mean No profit. In special event planning it's necessary spend money to make money. Solicit underwriting for expenses to budget for success. Plan your budget to forecast reasonable expenses so you can produce profit.
- 6. Your Auction Data is a Goldmine.**
Analyze your auction results from the last few years. Who came and who spent money? What generous bidders were absent this year? What items sell best for you? Which ones do not move? What items

generate excitement and spirited bidding? What types of items have the highest ratio of retail value to winning bid? How can you build a strategy to achieve 100% of retail value or more. These questions will often stimulate important planning discussions for your auction committee.



7. Solicit High-Yield Auction Items.

Know what your audience wants and solicit those types of auction items. Be specific; ask your top bidders what they want. Procure these items and they will generate spirited and generous bidding. Emphasize items that are one-of-a-kind, personal and unique. Make sure you have auction items on which a group of bidders can team up, like dinners and exclusive experiences. Raise the bar and ask for more from donors. Remember to create exciting marketing materials and that personal word-of-mouth buzz before your event to maximize dollars on auction night!

8. It's Not about the Color of the Napkins.

Don't get too bogged down with decorating details. While decorations and theme are important for a wonderful event, remember, it's about raising much-needed funds to achieve your mission. Make sure all your committee members and volunteers understand the goals of your auction and how the auction profits will be used to support your organization's cause.

9. Great Sound and Light will Generate Revenue.

Sound and lighting are one of most overlooked areas for auction success! If your guests cannot see and hear - they will not bid. Hire a professional sound company to provide independent auction-quality sound. The hotel or "house sound" systems are notoriously inadequate for an auction, and you will lose money. Your guests must be able to read the silent auction forms and catalog. Turn lights UP for silent auction the live auction. Your auctioneer must be able to see your guest's eyes and bid numbers. Spotlights on the stage will blind your auctioneer and s/he will not be able to see bidders.

10. Your Dynamic Auction Team

Volunteers are the heart, soul and backbone of benefit auctions. Select Auction Co-chairs and all committees as soon as possible. Plan your entire year-long meeting schedule early and make sure it is on everyone's calendar. The secret to success is to involve as many committed volunteers, board members and staff as possible, providing clear written communications and lots of recognition and thanks!

11. Fund Raising is Friend Raising.

A good benefit auction raises significant funds, increases awareness of your cause, and draws new commitment from those attending. Fundraising auctions are wonderful events for cultivation of guests, sponsors, donors and volunteers. Connect your audience to your cause and they will bid generously.

12. Thank your donors, sponsors, volunteers and guests early and often.

The spirit of recognition and appreciation will create a dynamic climate for future giving.

13. Give MORE than your guests expect!!!

One more treat than they expect - just like Kingston's Dazzling Dozen.





Kathy Kingston, Professional Auctioneer

Kingston Auction Company's mission is to Ignite Generosity at Auctions!

A professional fundraising auctioneer and consultant since 1986, Kathy Kingston has raised millions of dollars for non-profit organizations across the country. One of the few auctioneers in the nation who has expertise in both non-profit management and fundraising, Kathy consistently helps clients exceed their fundraising goals and offers a wealth of practical strategies for revenue enhancement.

An active member of National Auctioneers Association, Ms. Kingston is a popular speaker and has won numerous awards. She is an avid sea kayaker and loves the outdoors.



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