# In the Industry

News  and  notes  from  the  auction  industry.

## Proven Software product cuts checkout time in half for fundraisers

Although auction checkout is typically perceived as an "end of night" issue, it is often at the forefront of a benefit organization's auction concern. For fundraiser Gary Tice, the decision to utilize ProvenBenefit software saved time and led to a $25,000 growth in net proceeds in less than 2 years above the manual system he had used. In 2006 Gary Tice was forced to re-think his approach to fundraising after volunteering to help the Step By Step Early Education and Therapy Center in Naples, FL. His daughter Heather had become event chairwoman that year and inherited an old, manual system that lacked efficient protocols and a continuum mind-set.

"When I'd volunteered for other events, I was involved in getting the tables set up," says Tice. This time I was involved in the check-in and check-out process and saw how difficult it could be. It was disorganized and frustrating. I was worried about getting people to come back next year. I thought to myself that there must be a better way."

Tice, a former banker, analyzed the event and realized the old procedures were, in a sense, myopic: in no way did they lay the groundwork for future events. It was this realization that compelled Tice to go online in search of a solution. He selected ProvenBenefit from Proven Software, in part because it included many of the capabilities of SOLD II – a product used for over 20 years to manage professional auctions where the pace and complexity is much more demanding.

According to Tice, the check-in process was fast and smooth the following year, and the checkout time was cut in half. Online credit card processing was cut to 3 to 4 seconds and invoices with full item information, payment information and even fair market values were instantly available for winning bidders to take to their financial advisors for appropriate tax deductions. All that was left was picking up the item. There was no waiting.

Despite heavy emphasis on speedy checkout, the stability and consistency of donor and bidder information is perhaps the most critical element of the process. This extends far beyond entering a name and contact information into a spreadsheet. "I can't imagine running any event fundraiser without software," says Tracy

Merfeld, an industry consultant who estimates that it "easily" improves the efficiency of an event by more than 25%. "There is no way you can run an auction of any size with paper and pencil, or a simple spreadsheet."

True donor tracking includes detailed records that identify donor contributions over time (including major or frequent contributors), items donated for auction, volunteer assignments, reminders of best times to call, etc. Corporate and foundation solicitations such as these must be organized on a schedule that is planned months or years in advance to allow sufficient time for cultivation of the prospect, preparation of the request and support material, and interaction with the funder's staff. Tracy Merfeld, along with her husband Doug, have spent the past 14 years and counting working the live auction component of the annual Roger Maris Celebrity Benefit Golf Tournament. Now in its 26th year, this event has raised over $1,200,000 for charities. Merfeld utilizes the Proven Software product to manage many aspects of the auction, which features hundreds of items from the sports and entertainment worlds.

Tracking attendees and developing a history of bids and donations can also improve the returns for future events. "We want to identify the top 15 percent buyers, the VIPs who spent the most money," explains Benefit Fundraising Consultant Andy Hill. "With the fundraising software, you find out who your VIPs are and you track them all year long."

In addition to a live auction, for example, silent auctions, raffles, fund-in-needs, and many others "revenue enhancing" techniques

can be utilized. The rule of thumb at an event is that you should get more on most items than fair market value. An organized software system such as ProvenBenefit facilitates the management and execution of these revenue enhancers. For example, a silent auction with a "buy it now" price can increase revenue generated on a single item by 20% over a silent auction with no buy it now. Research has demonstrated that bidders that dearly want an item will happily pay a higher price on the spot — in this case 150% of the fair market value — as an alternative to waiting until the end of the event to see if the item has been won.

Properly executed raffles also dramatically increase the revenue of certain items, for example jewelry and electronics, which typically do not sell well or at fair market value. Instead, the software can manage a raffle at the event with $20 tickets that generate $2000 for the same item. "If I'm involved in a charity event," says Hill. "We will be using software as a tool because there is too much to be left on the table if we don't use it. It's that important."

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