***Tips for Organizing an Online Benefit Auction***

If you want to produce an online auction, begin with two tasks: assembling items of value to auction and choosing an online auction service.

We recommend that you dedicate six weeks to securing pledges for items to auction. Start by making a list of ideas for the kinds of items that could be auctioned. Event tickets, travel, and restaurant meals are all popular, but so are experiences, such as getting to go behind the scenes for the rehearsal of a play or sitting in the announcers’ booth at a baseball game.

The total suggested time frame is six weeks to secure pledges and select the auction platform, three weeks for the auction service to set up your auction, and six weeks to promote the site and collect bids.

After your board members have pledged auction items, ask for their help in reaching out to other people or businesses they know. You don’t need a long list of items, as long as some of the items are truly appealing.

While you’re assembling your items, also check on your online auction site options. Here are some factors you want to consider when choosing a service:

* **The look and feel of the auction site:** You want your event to be exciting and appealing.
* **How you’ll be charged for the service provided:** Will you be charged a flat rate upfront or as a portion of the proceeds?
* **How hands-on the auction site will be:** Some sites require you to package and mail the auction items to them. Then they photograph them for the website and send them to the winners when the auction ends.
* **Whether the site has a built-in list of buyers who have purchased things through previous online auctions.**

After you’ve assembled your auction items and chosen your auction service, the event will move quickly. Six or seven weeks can work well. The auction service will want two or three weeks to set up your auction website.

While the service is arranging the site, you’re drafting a series of email announcements and an announcement for your website. If you have a Facebook page for your nonprofit, you can preview the auction there.

When the online site is up and open to bidders, it’s time to focus on driving your followers to the auction site. You do this through email announcements to your list, sent at least once per week. Ask your board and volunteers to share the newsletter with their personal lists and to “like” and share the auction announcement on Facebook. In these emails, work to build momentum and excitement about the different items and competition among the people who are bidding.

Experienced bidders like to swoop in at the last minute to see if bargains are available. Be sure to send a final wave of email announcements one day before the auction closes.

After your auction closes, celebrate your success. Thank the bidders and the donors, and recognize the winners on your website and Facebook page.