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Your Virtual Auction Planner

by ReadySetAuction

Introduction

After creatively adapting to the all-digital era 2020 has brought upon us, fundraisers everywhere have garnered success by applying short-term, socially-distanced solutions to their long-term fundraising strategies, especially regarding events. That's because the events they had to completely reimagine as virtual turned out to have a crucial benefit: virtual events expand their once hyper-local guest list to, well, the entire world.

Nowadays, whether you're planning a gala or a live auction, all of your events can go virtual in the form of a donor-engaging, money-raising online auction, and guests can participate from wherever they are. With ReadySetAuction auction management software, your team is fully equipped to host your nonprofit's auction entirely online, from marketing your event to collecting final payments. Best of all, you keep 100% of the proceeds.

In this guide, you'll learn how to host a virtual fundraising event and auction, plus how to seamlessly manage virtual events with ReadySetAuction with these tips to make it a hit from home.

Just like with any event, you'll need to plan ahead. Who you'll invite, what software you'll use - making these decisions early will help you make it a smooth experience for everyone.

Here are the tasks you'll need to complete before your event:

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1. ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM

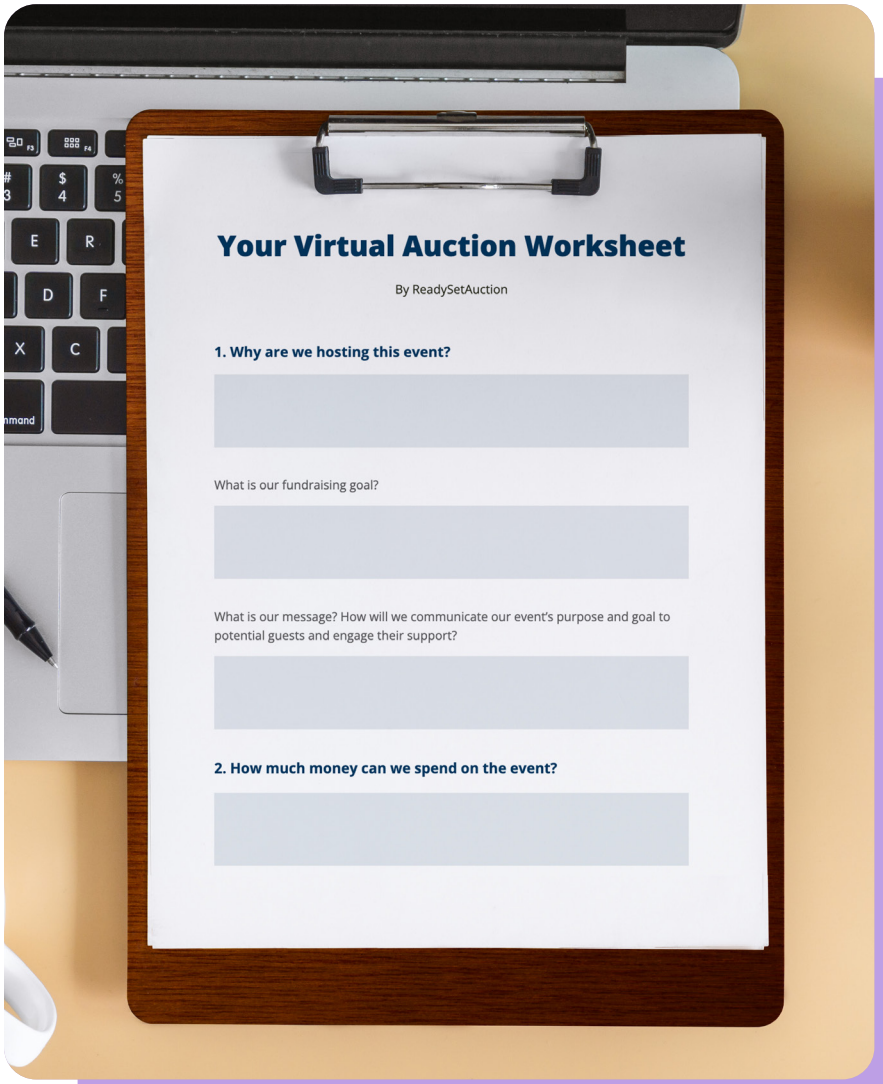
Because your event will be entirely virtual, you'll need a team who will effectively communicate the logistics. Form a committee that will be responsible for overseeing the event from start to finish. Strategically choose who you include, because you will delegate specific tasks to each of them.
You may consider having subcommittees for tasks like:

- Acquiring auction items
- Coordinating volunteers
- Seeking talent for performances, cameos
- Communicating with registrants
- Promoting your event
- Choosing the right tech tools

2. COMPLETE AN EVENT SETUP WORKSHEET

Of course, every event will be different, but all of them start in roughly the same place in the planning stage. Use this worksheet at the beginning of your event planning to guide your team's conversation.

[Download the worksheet »]
OR [Get the Google Doc »]



3. ACQUIRE AUCTION ITEMS + SPONSORSHIPS

Auction items and sponsorships are the bread and butter of your virtual auction. Put your feelers out to determine who in your community may be willing to donate goods or services or sponsor your event by taking these steps:

Start with your board

Think about the people your board may be affiliated with or relationships they may have with local businesses that might connect your nonprofit to sponsorship and in-kind donation prospects.

Recruit local businesses

Send out a solicitation to local businesses to request that they participate any way they can.

Follow up with a phone call

Task your board and auction committee with personally reaching out to businesses where they may have a connection and appeal to them for donated goods and services.

Try these suggestions from NPOs

We surveyed nonprofit professionals to learn what auction items they've come to rely on in the all-digital era. Here'swhat they shared:

- Virtual experiences (ex: exclusive meet-and-greets and performances, AirBnB experiences)
- Fresh produce for pickup/ delivery from local farms
- Crafts from local artists
- Local experiences (ex: wine tour, bed and breakfast)
- Gift cards for small businesses
- Golf outings

Pro tip:

Don't forget that your ReadySetAuction website can help you acquire auction items as well! Simply enable the Online Procurement option in Website Settings. This allows your website visitors to submit offers of items/experiences/etc. that they are willing to donate for auction.

Offer something in return
Instead of what you'd typically offer to sponsors at a live event like free admission, drink tickets, advertising in program books/signs, consider virtual perks such as:

- Digital ads on your social media accounts
- Mentions in your event email communications
- Spotlights in your leaderboard on your event website

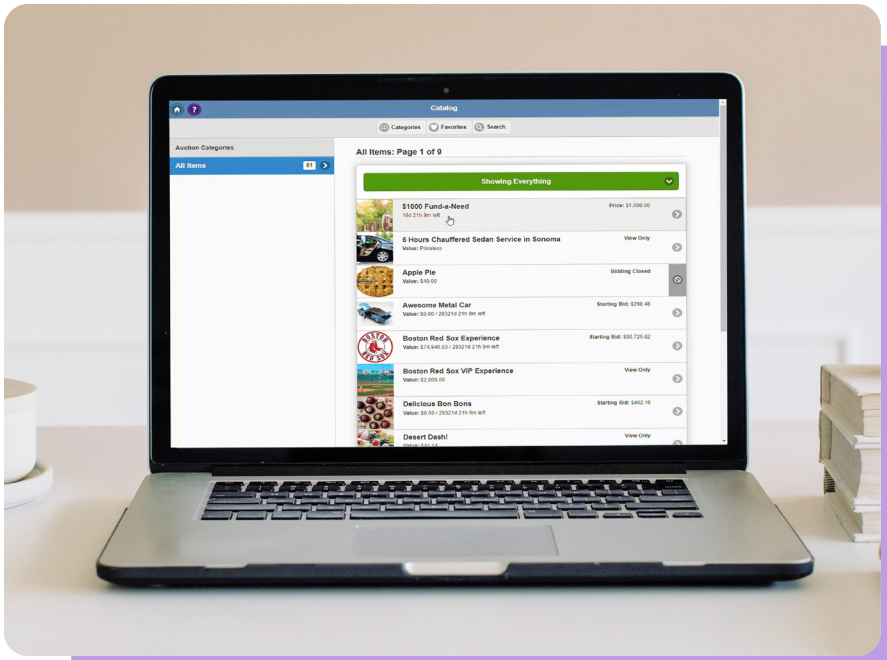
Need big-ticket auction items? Reserve them at no cost!

Give attendees unique experiences to look forward to from Winspire's risk-free catalog. Winspire helps nonprofits raise more with high-ticket auction items at no cost to you. Once the highest bid is made, Winspire takes a payment for the value of the item, and you get the rest.

Be sure the price is right

How can you ensure that you're getting the revenue your nonprofit needs while keeping costs fair for patrons? A good rule of thumb for most of your items is to start lower to encourage more bidding. Start higher for your more highly sought after items, as there will likely be a lot of competition for them. Depending on the type of item, the starting bids will vary.

- **Donated Items:** Price your starting bids between 20-40% of the fair market value of the auction item.
- **Consignment Items** (Like Winspire): Start bidding at 10-30% above your organization's cost for the package to be sure you're getting proceeds.
- **Win It Now:** For items that patrons can purchase outright, list the price at 150-200% of the fair market value of the item.



Packaging your items in ReadySetAuction

After you've gathered auction items, enter and package these items in ReadySetAuction. When creating packages for a virtual auction, there are a few settings you want to keep in mind:

Package Kind

- **Biddable:** Patrons enter bids to win an item.
- **Buyable:** Patrons buy a package outright, either at a fixed price or at a price that falls within a predetermined range.
- **Raffle:** The package is a raffle item. Raffle tickets are traditionally sold before the event and your staff can record the sale directly in ReadySetAuction.

Win It Now

A Win It Now option allows a bidder to bypass bidding and pay a larger amount to win the package instantly. Traditionally, the Win It Now price is set at 150% to 200% of the fair market value. If patrons continue to bid and the bid amount reaches 80% of the Win It Now price, Win It Now will automatically be disabled in ReadySetAuction to encourage the "bidding war" to continue.

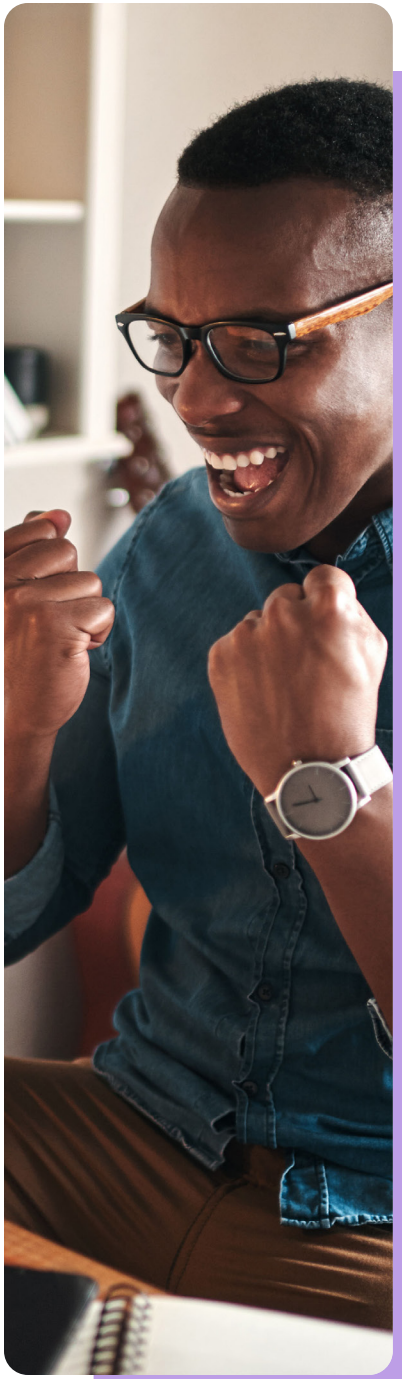
Overtime Bidding

ReadySetAuction can prevent that last-minute bidder from swooping in and stealing the show. If you enable Overtime Bidding, any bid entered within 5 minutes of a package closing will extend the closing time of the package by another five minutes. This can occur up to 12 times, extending a package's close time by up to an hour.

Make sure to have all of your package settings established before your auction's scheduled open time as many of these settings cannot be edited after the item opens for bids. Check out this ReadySetAuction article for other great tips on packaging your items in ReadySetAuction, including advice on how to set minimum bid amounts and minimum raise amounts.

Pro tip:

Make sure all of your items are packaged because these are the only items that will be featured in your eCatalog.



4. MAKE IT EASY TO COLLECT PAYMENTS

You can't host a fundraising event without the ability to collect payments! Equip your organization with a payment processor so your patrons can purchase tickets and auction items and give donations before, during, and after your event.

Payment methods in ReadySetAuction

Cash and checks are not ideal options with a virtual event, so consider processing electronic payments available through ReadySetAuction using a SafeSave merchant account gateway that processes online payments and handles data entry for you.

Watch this video to see how easy payment processing and guest checkout can be.

Pro tip:

Consider a payment processing solution that does all of the above, from anywhere. Solutions designed for fundraising like DonorPerfect SafeSave integrate with ReadySetAuction and provide your guests with easy and accessible ways to give and bid, as well as a streamlined checkout process.

5. SET UP AN EVENT WEBSITE

You'll need a website that can act as a central information and engagement hub so guests can learn more about your event and complete registration.

Pro tip:

ReadySetAuction lets you preview your website for a desktop and mobile device so you can be sure it looks perfect on both mediums.

Your event website must-haves:

- **Your Nonprofit's Branding:** People will trust an event website that reflects your nonprofit's brand and logo, so it's important that your website spotlights the imagery your supporters have come to know and love.
- **Mobile Responsiveness:** If your website doesn't render well on a mobile device, invitees will be less likely to follow through with event registration. Your website should function optimally on a desktop and any mobile device.
- **Event Details:** It may seem like a no-brainer, but it's worth mentioning that you should include your event's date and time, as well as details about the tools you'll use to stream your event.
- **Event Registration:** Once you've directed your invitees to your website, make it easy for them to register themselves and their guests.
- **Donation Option:** Some of your invitees who cannot attend may want to offer a donation with their polite decline. Give them the option right on the registration page.
- **eCatalog + Bidding:** Allow guests to peruse your catalog of auction items to build excitement around the big day. Keep it simple by using the very same website for bidding.
- **Leaderboard:** Highlight your sponsors and big-ticket items in a slideshow on your website. Showcasing featured items with real-time updates on their bid status is sure to boost bids, while giving sponsors exposure can attract even more sponsors for your event.
- **Self Checkout / Donation Option:** Your event website should include payment processing so guests can donate during your event and purchase the items they've won.

Setting up an event website with ReadySetAuction

ReadySetAuction equips you with easy-to-use website customization tools that allow you to create a beautiful event website without needing the skills of a programmer. Give yourself plenty of time to get your ReadySetAuction event website up and running to drum up excitement for the big event well in advance.

To get your event website in tip-top shape, you'll want to turn on these three settings:

- **Enable Event Website:** ReadySetAuction will help you design your event website to inform guests about the upcoming event.
- **Enable eCatalog:** Allow guests to pursue auction items up for bid. You can choose which packages and items will be available in the eCatalog and open the eCatalog for up to 45 days before your event! Take advantage of this time to do lots of promotions for your event and drive people to your event website.
- **Enable eBidding:** Invite donors to enter their bids remotely from their own mobile devices and desktops.

Note: Do NOT enable Pre-Bidding. This style of bidding only works in conjunction with live in-person events.

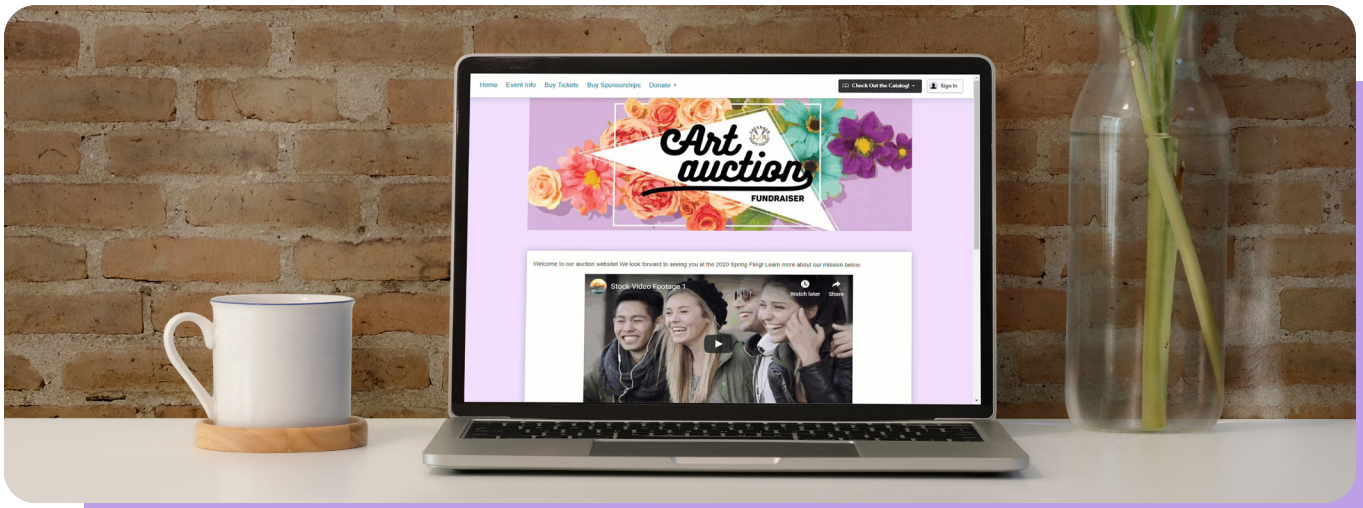
These settings are also available for your team to consider:

Bidding Settings

- **Automatically Hide Won and Sold-Out Packages:** Keep guests' attention focused on items that are still available.
- **Require a Stored Credit Card for eBidding:** Require bidders to have a credit card on file BEFORE they bid on any items. This supports a smooth checkout process for package winners.

Watch this video to what bidders will see on their end.

- **Enable Outbid Notifications Via Text Message:** Want to give your virtual auction the urgency and excitement of a live auction? Create buzz and drive up bids by enabling this feature. Bidders will receive up-to-the-minute texts letting them know when someone else has taken the lead on their favorite items.



Website Settings

- **Enable Online Ticket Sales:** If your virtual event has a price of "admission," you can sell tickets through ReadySetAuction. Simply create a ticket, decide what's included, and determine the ticket price.
- **Enable Online Sponsorship Sales:** Customize and sell sponsorship packages on your ReadySetAuction website. With sponsorship packages, you can choose the amount of admission tickets included with the sponsorship as well as any other benefits, including advertising space in your Event Showcase.
- **Enable Online Cash Donations:** Allow donors to make a contribution to your event prior to the big day. Invitees who are unable to attend may still want to make a contribution.
- **Enable Online Procurement:** Invite supporters to donate items that will be sold at auction. What a fun way for them to donate to your cause!
- Select Event Website Access Options
  For Patrons:
  - **Public:** Anyone can request an account to bid on items. With this setting, the request will be automatically granted.
  - **Private:** Only those who have been invited can access the auction website to bid.
  - **By Request:** Only those invited can view the auction website, but others who have not been invited can request an account to gain access. With this setting, the request will need to be approved by you or your staff.

6. INVITE GUESTS WITH A MULTICHANNEL CAMPAIGN

Don't rely on just one channel to promote your virtual event. Adopt a multichannel engagement strategy to ensure that no one misses out. Let your guests know exactly what your event is funding for your organization and include the link to your event's website.

Consider these ideas for promoting your all-virtual affair:

Direct Mail

QR Code: Add a QR code to your mailed invitations that links to your event website and encourage invitees to peruse your auction items.

Raffle Ticket: Entice invitees with a raffle ticket taped to their invitation and let them know their RSVP equals one raffle submission.

Tip Sheet: Overcome the challenge of getting less tech-savvy donors to attend by including a tip sheet in your mailing so they know what to expect.

Email

Pre-Recorded Video: Invite guests with a video, featuring your staff, to share a heartfelt message about just how important this event's proceeds are for your mission. Encourage them to participate by showing them some of your featured items.

Sponsor List: Add your sponsors' logos to the bottom of your email. In addition to being a sponsorship perk, this list may garner the interest of your invitees.

Social Media

Facebook Event: Create an event on Facebook with a link to your event website. Your followers will be able to share the event with their friends, and everyone will see your growing RSVP list.

Livestream and Video: Use social media platforms with broadcasting features like Facebook and Instagram to frequently stream promotions of your event and featured auction items. Feeling camera shy? Pre-record them and share as a post or a story.

Miscellaneous

Personal Phone Call: Give a call to VIP guests and invite them to your event. This personal touch may be the deciding factor in their virtual attendance. Phone calls work especially well for reassuring less tech-savvy donors about the technical aspect of your event.

Flyers: Post flyers about your event around your community where you know they'll be seen: in your facility where volunteers will see them, at the grocery store, in civic centers, etc.

Ads on Radio/TV: Reach out to your local news networks! They're often looking for stories to share about social good, and your event may be just the ticket.

Pro tip:

Review guest lists from previous years to make sure they get an invite and be sure your communication with them speaks to their past support.

Managing your guest list with ReadySetAuction

RIn addition to spreading the word using the tips above, you can also send invitations using ReadySetAuction. The email sent through the software will contain a link for your users to create their own bidding accounts. Make sure you've entered all attendee information into ReadySetAuction, including their email addresses, before you send out invitations.

After invites are sent, monitor your invite list over the next few days to make sure your attendees' account statuses update from **None** to **Confirmed**. This means they followed the link in the email invitation and created their account and that they'll be ready to bid when the big event starts.

Note: Follow up with users who have an account status of None because the link in the email expires after 48 hours. Remember that ReadySetAuction does allow you to re-invite attendees whose links have expired, so don't be afraid to resolicit those who haven't yet RSVP'd.

Shortly before the start of your event, send a ReadySetAuction welcome email. This can remind bidders where they'll need to go before the excitement begins. If they've forgotten their username or password, this will nudge them to sort that out so they don't miss bidding on any of their favorite items.

Pro tip:

Encourage bidders to register before your event by offering incentives, such as a free mini bottle of wine mailed to their home in time for the big day.

ReadySetAuction reports to run before your event

ReadySetAuction offers helpful reports to run before the event to make sure everything is in order:

- **Bidder Status Report:** See which bidders have already created an account and are ready to log in during the event, along with bidders who don't yet have an account and may need your help with setup. Additionally, the report displays which bidders you have stored payment methods for which will make checkout a breeze.
- **Unpackaged Donations Report:** Determine if you have any outstanding donation items that have not been packaged. Remember, if an item is not packaged it cannot be bought or won. Your packages can include one donation item or many, but items must be made into a package in order to be available in the eCatalog.
- **Packaging Status Report:** Check that all of your packages are ready for the eCatalog. This report provides important details like package category, starting bids, package kind, and more.

Pro tip:

Print out ReadySetAuction's Countdown to Auction Checklist to make sure you're prepared for the big event.

Put on a polished event

"Gotta love technology" seemed to be the phrase of the year as many of us overcame learning curves and curveballs with the new tech tools we've relied upon to get through the challenging year of 2020. But rest assured, despite inevitable hiccups during your event, you'll find great success with proper preparation and a little creativity.

Keep your event engaging

A common concern nonprofit professionals have around virtual events is losing the interest of their guests due to a lag in their program. Let's take a look at how the nonprofits we surveyed were able to overcome this challenge even amid the COVID-19 pandemic:

Choose the right tech

Streaming Tool: There are many streaming tools you can use to broadcast your event. A number of the folks we spoke to recommended Zoom. Zoom features that would certainly work with a virtual event or auction include:

- **Screen Sharing:** This might be helpful in the event that you hold a raffle. Perhaps you'll spin a virtual wheel of attendee names for all to see.
- **Breakout Sessions:** Attendees can enter virtual "rooms" where they can mingle with guests, a capability many virtual events lack.
- **Recording:** Consider recording your entire event and sharing it with the public later to garner more donations from those who couldn't attend. This could also make a wonderful advertisement for your next virtual event!

Pre-Recorded Content: You may want to pre-record some elements of your event, such as entertainment, anecdotes from your hosts, or a tour of your facility to fill your transition times.

Pro tip:

Consider doing a dry run of your event ahead of time so you'll know just what to expect.

Create buzz

Hashtag: Adopt and share a special event hashtag and invite guests to post photos of themselves, perhaps with props they can print, to promote your event. You can also use the hashtag to highlight your featured auction items.

Email: Send an email reminder to everyone you invited the moment your event starts with a subject line like "Happening Now!"

Get creative

Direct Mail: Consider an element of your event that requires you to mail guests something in order for them to participate (ex: a wine tasting kit for guests to purchase prior to a professional wine tasting tutorial during your event).

Recipes: Share recipes for special treats guests can make at home.

Talent Show: Ask attendees to submit videos of their special talents to be played during your event and voted on by guests.

Award Ceremony: Include an award ceremony to honor donors and volunteers who have hit special milestones.

Storytelling: Ask attendees to share what your mission means to them in a video or create your own video that tells the story of someone who your organization helped. This reminds guests why you're hosting your event in the first place!

Cameos: Invite special guests to co-host your event or appear in a cameo at some point during your event.

Unique Learning Experiences: Invite a professional to present on an interesting topic.

Costumes: Give your supporters a chance to have fun and be creative by making your event a costume party!

Hosting an effortless event with ReadySetAuction

Logging into ReadySetAuction

When the big day arrives, have all hands on deck to troubleshoot any issues that arise. First, prepare to help bidders who may need assistance logging in to your auction site.

Here are some things to remember as you usher your guests into the virtual event:

- Have the URL for your event website on hand and a team of people who can share it via email, text, or by phone.
- Make sure their account says Confirmed in ReadySetAuction. If it has a status of None, resend the event invite by email so they can quickly create an account.
- If their account says Confirmed, they may simply forget their username or password. Their username is the email address you have on file, so you can provide that to them. If they forgot their password, they can click the "Forgot password" link.

Winning bids

There are some additional considerations that come with running a virtual auction.

Notifying winners

First, when packages close in ReadySetAuction, there will not be an immediate notification sent to winning bidders. Ask volunteers to notify your bidders of their prize as the packages close. You can also use ReadySetAuction to send an invoice to your bidders, but if closing times are staggered, you may want to wait until the end of the event in case they win additional packages before the evening is over.

Managing live bids

If you are offering a streaming service allowing bidders to place "live" bids, recruit staff and volunteers to enter the winning bids into ReadySetAuction.

Spotlighting a fund-a-need package

With a fund-a-need package, the auctioneer will present a cause or project that needs funding and guests can raise their paddles to donate an amount of their choosing.

ReadySetAuction provides the opportunity to create a "fund-a-need" package in your eCatalog. Simply create a buyable package, setting either a fixed amount or a range-price so your donors can choose how much they would like to contribute. Make sure to set the quantity to 9,999 so the package is available to all of your bidders! The amount your bidders choose to donate will be added to their invoice when they go to checkout.

Checking Out

The easiest way to check out, especially if you have electronic payment options available, is to allow your bidders to use Self-Checkout. Make sure you enable this feature if you'd like guests to check out on their own. Remember, your bidders will not automatically be notified of packages they've won, so be sure to share the good news with them.

Watch this video to see what bidders will experience when you offer self-checkout.

If you'd prefer, you can store credit cards and even require a credit card in order for your guests to bid. If that's the case, you can process sales and donations for your guests at the end of the night. Don't forget to send them a copy of their winnings using ReadySetAuction's easily generated receipts.

Finally, if you do not have a credit card on file, or have chosen to allow your guests to pay after the event by cash or check, you can quickly generate invoices for them.

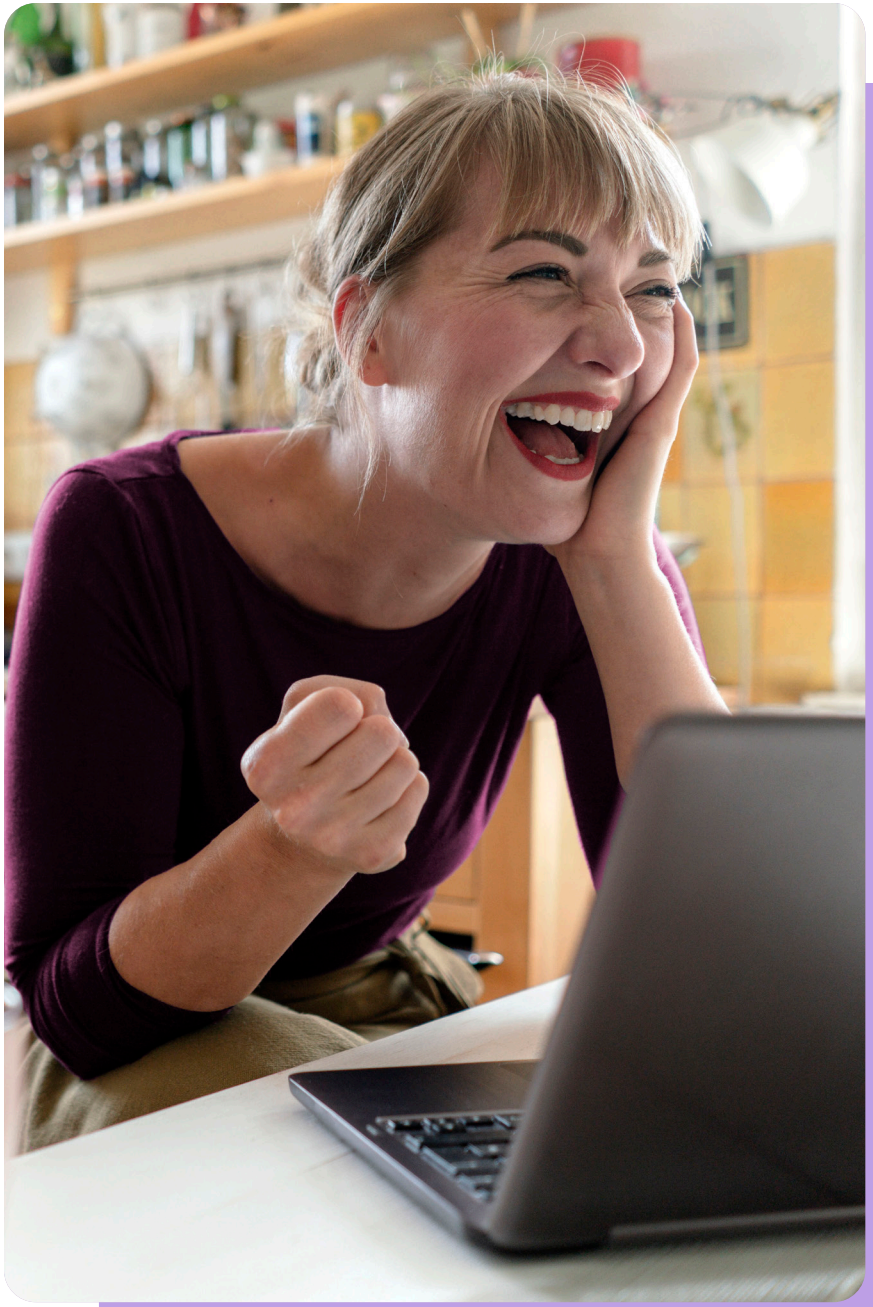
Closing out your event with ReadySetAuction

Saying Thank You

ReadySetAuction makes it easy to quickly thank donors and bidders. Donors will receive a copy of the donations they made that includes the value of the items, if applicable, whereas bidders will receive a copy of their receipt indicating what they purchased or contributed at the event.

Although your event will inevitably come to an end, it gives you the opportunity to embark on new beginnings, whether it be through new donor relationships or through an even stronger bond with your existing donors. Be sure to regularly keep in touch with your ever-expanding network, starting with a thank you, immediately following your event.

Engage guests beyond your event.

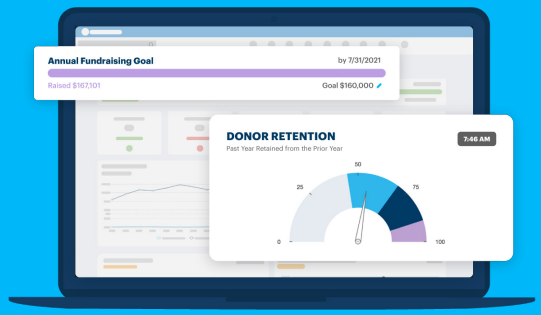


Pro tip:

Because ReadySetAuction integrates with DonorPerfect, it's never been easier to stay connected. With a few clicks, your event data is available in DonorPerfect so you can keep in contact and cultivate your relationships with your new supporters.

Transform your auction into an online success with ReadySetAuction

Understanding what it takes to put on a virtual event is just the first step toward gaining new, refreshing ways to engage donors and diversify your revenue streams. When you pair ReadySetAuction with DonorPerfect online fundraising software, you can seamlessly maintain records of who's attended your events for more comprehensive donor profiles, built for fostering relationships with your supporters for a lifetime.

See how ReadySetAuction + DonorPerfect can help your organization deliver experiences your supporters will cherish well beyond your event.

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