



FREE TEMPLATE PACK

How to Run a Silent Auction

Run your next silent auction with a clear plan from start to finish. This editable playbook gives you a 9-step process, 8-week timeline, item and pricing formulas, and ready-to-use run sheets, MC scripts and email templates.

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How to Use This Guide

This guide is built to be used, not read. Work through the nine steps in order, fill in the worksheets, copy the templates, and print the run sheet for event night. Anything in [square brackets] is a placeholder. Swap in your own details.

You'll Find

- 1 **A format decision table**
- 2 **Your auction math: items, mix and revenue targets**
- 3 **The 8-week planning timeline**
- 4 **A donation request email template**
- 5 **Starting bid and item description formulas**
- 6 **An event-night run sheet and four MC scripts**
- 7 **A 48-hour follow-up checklist**

What Every Silent Auction Needs

Six decisions do most of the work. Get these right and the rest is logistics:

- ✓ **A format that matches your audience.** In-person, online only, or hybrid — decide this before you do anything else, because it sets your timeline.
- ✓ **The right number of items.** One item for every two to three attendees. More items than that spreads bids too thin.
- ✓ **Low starting bids.** 20 to 40% of estimated value. Lower entry points get more people bidding, and more bidders means higher final prices.
- ✓ **Descriptions that sell.** Specifics beat categories. What's included, the detail that makes it feel real, and the value.
- ✓ **Promotion before and during.** Preview your headline items beforehand, and brief your MC to keep promoting all night.
- ✓ **Auto-extend and instant payment.** Keep the final bidding war instead of cutting it off, and let winners pay from their phones.

Before You Open Bidding: A 60-Second Checklist

- ☐ Have I tested the full bidding flow on a phone, on the venue's wifi, as a guest would?
- ☐ Is every item loaded with a photo, a specific description and a starting bid at 20–40% of value?
- ☐ Are QR codes printed, placed on tables and pointing to the right registration page?
- ☐ Is auto-extend turned on, so a hard close doesn't cut off the final bidding war?
- ☐ Does my MC have the run sheet and the announcement scripts?
- ☐ Can winners pay from their phones the moment they're notified?
- ☐ Are my follow-up emails drafted now, before the event, rather than after it?

STEP #1

Choose Your Format

Three delivery models exist, and the one you pick determines your timeline, your promotion plan and how long bidding stays open. Decide this first.

Format	Best when	Bidding runs for	Biggest advantage	Watch out for
In-person with mobile bidding	You have a live event and a social crowd	Doors open until 30–45 minutes before the formal part ends	Visible, competitive, fast bidding	Venue wifi — test everything on site
Online only	There's no event, or your audience is spread out	5 to 10 days	Lower cost and much wider reach	Momentum dips in the middle days
Hybrid	You have an event and want reach plus urgency	Opens days before, closes on the night	Combines wide reach with a hard deadline	Two sets of communications to manage

Whichever you choose, bidding activity concentrates in the first 24 hours and the final few hours. Plan your promotion around those two windows, not the middle.

Lock It In

- ☐ Our format is: in-person with mobile bidding
- ☐ Our format is: online only — bidding open for [5–10] days
- ☐ Our format is: hybrid — opens [date], closes [time] on event night

STEP #2

Your Auction Math

Three numbers decide most of your result: how many items you source, how that mix is balanced, and where you set starting bids. Find your guest count in the table below and work to those targets.

Guests	Items needed (1 per 2-3)	Experiences 40%	Local goods 40%	High-value 20%	Projected raise (\$100-200/guest)
50	17-25 (aim 20)	8	8	4	\$5,000 - \$10,000
100	33-50 (aim 40)	16	16	8	\$10,000 - \$20,000
150	50-75 (aim 60)	24	24	12	\$15,000 - \$30,000
200	67-100 (aim 80)	32	32	16	\$20,000 - \$40,000
300	100-150 (aim 125)	50	50	25	\$30,000 - \$60,000

A well-run silent auction typically raises \$100 to \$200 per attendee, though results vary widely with your audience and the quality of your items. Treat the lower end as your floor and the upper end as your stretch goal.

Fill In Your Numbers

Your auction, by the numbers

Expected guests: []

Items needed (guests ÷ 2 to 3): []

Experiences to source (40%): []

Local goods and services (40%): []

High-value items (20%): []

Revenue projection (guests × \$100-200): []

Our fundraising goal: []

STEP #3

Build Your Item Mix

A proven structure is 40% experiences, 40% local goods and services, and 20% high-value items. The balance matters more than the total: a curated catalog of the right items beats a crowded one every time.

Category	Share	What it covers	Why it earns its place
Experiences	40%	Dining, travel, activities, behind-the-scenes access	People bid harder on things they can't simply buy
Local goods and services	40%	Gift cards, memberships, products, vouchers	Broad appeal and easy to source in volume
High-value items	20%	Premium packages, big-ticket items, headline lots	Drives your average and gives promotion something to lead with

Where to Source Them

Start six weeks out, and start with people who already know you:

- ✓ **Existing donors first.** They have already said yes to you once. Ask them before you approach anyone cold.
- ✓ **Board members and their networks.** Ask each board member for one item and one introduction. The introduction is worth more.
- ✓ **Local businesses you actually use.** A personal relationship converts far better than a mass mailout. Name the business in the ask.
- ✓ **Go with a mid-range, specific ask.** A \$50 or \$100 gift certificate is an easy yes. "Whatever you can give" is an easy no.
- ✓ **Offer to collect the item.** Removing the logistics from their side is often what tips a maybe into a yes.

Watch How She Sourced Auction Items



STEP #4

The 8-Week Planning Timeline

Eight weeks is enough time to source well without losing momentum. Print this page and check the boxes as you go.

When	Focus	What to do
8 weeks out	Decide and set up	Set your fundraising target, pick your format, choose your platform, build your donation ask list
6 weeks out	Source items	Start item sourcing through personal outreach to local businesses, existing donors and board members
4 weeks out	Chase and confirm	Chase outstanding donations, confirm your headline items, start promoting the event
2 weeks out	Load and test	Load items into your platform with photos, descriptions and starting bids. Set up bidder registration and QR codes
Event week	Go live	Open online bidding if you're running hybrid, brief your MC on the run sheet, test everything on venue wifi

Week-by-Week Checklist

- ☐ Week 8 – Target set, format chosen, platform chosen, ask list built
- ☐ Week 6 – Outreach started; [number] asks sent
- ☐ Week 4 – Headline items confirmed; outstanding donations chased
- ☐ Week 2 – All items loaded with photos, descriptions and starting bids
- ☐ Week 2 – Bidder registration live and QR codes printed
- ☐ Event week – MC briefed, run sheet printed, bidding tested on venue wifi

Donation Request Email

Send this six weeks out. Personalize the opening, name the business, and keep the ask specific. A generic mass-send gets a generic response, which is usually silence.

Subject: We'd love your support for our upcoming event

Hi [Name],

We're hosting [Event Name] on [Date] to support [cause], and we'd love your help.

We're inviting a small group of local businesses to contribute an item or experience to our silent auction. In return, we'll recognize your business across our event materials and communications.

Suggested donations:

- Experiences (dining, travel, services)
- Gift cards or vouchers
- Products or packages

All donations will be acknowledged, and we can provide documentation for your records.

Would you be open to contributing? Feel free to reply here or call me on [PHONE].

Thank you for supporting [cause],

[Your Name]

Tip: If a business has its own corporate giving portal, use it. Sending this template instead of following their process can actively hurt your chances.

STEP #5

Set Starting Bids

Set starting bids at 20 to 40% of an item's estimated value. Lower entry points get more people bidding, and more bidders means higher final prices. When in doubt, 30% is the safe default.

Item value	Start at 20%	Start at 30%	Start at 40%	Use when
\$50	\$10	\$15	\$20	Low-value items — start low and chase volume
\$100	\$20	\$30	\$40	Standard gift cards and goods
\$250	\$50	\$75	\$100	Mid-tier experiences with broad appeal
\$500	\$100	\$150	\$200	Strong items you expect several bidders to want
\$1,000	\$200	\$300	\$400	Headline items — 30% is the reliable choice
\$2,500	\$500	\$750	\$1,000	Premium packages — go to 40% if demand is narrow

STEP #6

Write Descriptions That Sell

Categories don't sell; specifics do. Use this formula, then compare the three versions below.

The formula: What it is + what's included + the detail that makes it feel real + validity or restrictions + "Valued at \$X."

Weak: "Dinner for two"

Better: "Dinner for two with wine pairing (valued at \$180)"

High-performing: "Three-course dinner for two with premium wine pairing. Chef-selected menu, window seating, valid through [date]. Valued at \$180."

STEP #7

Promote Before Bidding Opens

In the two weeks before bidding opens, your job is to make sure people arrive already knowing what they want to bid on. Four moves do almost all of it.

- ✓ **Preview 3 to 5 headline items.** One at a time, across social media and email. One item per post beats a catalog dump.
- ✓ **Send the auction link with every event reminder.** Let people browse before the night so they arrive with a shortlist.
- ✓ **Ask your item donors to share it.** They have audiences who trust them, and being featured is the recognition you promised.
- ✓ **If you're hybrid, announce the moment bidding opens.** Lead with your single best item — the first 24 hours is one of your two peak windows.

Two-Week Promotion Plan

When	Channel	What to post
14 days out	Email + social	Announce the auction. Lead with [headline item] and the date bidding opens
11 days out	Social	Item preview 1 — photo, what's included, value
8 days out	Social	Item preview 2, and tag the donating business
5 days out	Email	Reminder with the browse link and [number] items now live
3 days out	Social	Item preview 3 — your highest-value lot
Bidding opens	Email + social	Bidding is open. Lead with your best item and a direct bid link

STEP #8

Run It on the Night

Open the silent auction before the formal program begins so guests can pre-bid, and use auto-extend bidding so the campaign stays open if bids arrive in the final moments. It stops sniping and captures the last-minute bidding war instead of cutting it off.

Event-Night Run Sheet

Time	Activity	Owner
6:00 PM	Guests arrive, silent auction opens	[Name]
7:30 PM	Dinner service begins	[Name]
8:15 PM	MC announces auction highlights	[MC name]
8:45 PM	Final 15-minute warning	[MC name]
9:00 PM	Silent auction closes	[Name]

Adjust the clock to your own program, but keep the shape: open early, one mid-event push, one final warning, hard close with auto-extend on.

Four MC Scripts

Hand these to your MC. An auction that nobody mentions from the stage is an auction that underperforms.

1 • Doors Open

Welcome, everyone. Before you sit down — our silent auction is open right now. Scan the QR code on your table, register in about thirty seconds, and you can bid from your phone all evening. We have [number] items tonight, including [headline item]. Every bid goes straight to [cause].

2 • Mid-Event Push

A quick auction update. [Item name] is sitting at \$[amount] — that is still below its value, so someone in this room is about to get a bargain. [Item name] has had [number] bids and it is the one to watch. If you have not bid yet, it takes thirty seconds. Scan, register, bid.

3 • Final Warning

Fifteen minutes left on the silent auction. If you are the high bidder, stay with it. You will get an alert the moment someone outbids you. If you have been waiting, this is the moment. Fifteen minutes.

4 • The Close

The silent auction is now closed. Winners, you will get a notification on your phone with a payment link, so you can pay right where you are sitting. Thank you — tonight you raised \$[amount] for [cause].

STEP #9

Close, Collect and Follow Up

Make payment instant: winners should pay from their phones the moment they're notified, not queue at a desk. Then move fast on the follow-up. Consistent follow-up is what turns a one-off auction into an annual revenue driver.

Within 48 Hours

- ☐ Thank-you emails sent to winners, donors and guests
- ☐ Winner highlights and the fundraising total shared on social media
- ☐ Item donors recognized publicly, by name
- ☐ Winners have received their items and vouchers
- ☐ Feedback collected while the night is still fresh

And One More Thing

Turn your thank-you into a second ask. Some organizations have doubled what the auction itself raised by following up a few weeks later: thank everyone who took part, then add a line for the people who missed out or didn't win.

"Thank you to everyone who bid in **[event name]**. If you missed out or didn't win this time, you can still support **[cause]** here — **[donate link]**."

Watch How a Virtual Silent Auction Doubled their Donations



PRO TIPS

Five Mistakes That Cost You Money

- ✓ **Starting bids too high.** Set them at 20–40% of value. Lower entry points increase participation, and participation drives the final price.
- ✓ **Too many low-quality items.** A curated selection outperforms a crowded catalog. Cut anything you wouldn't bid on yourself.
- ✓ **No promotion during the event.** Brief your MC and highlight popular items in real time. Silence from the stage costs you bids.
- ✓ **A hard close with no extensions.** Turn on auto-extend, or you lose the final bidding war at the exact moment it's worth the most.
- ✓ **No donor follow-up.** This year's silence is next year's empty catalog. Thank every donor by name within 48 hours.

Start Your Silent Auction in Minutes

With GalaBid, you can set up your auction quickly, manage all your fundraising activities in one place, and run the whole auction from your phone. Every dollar raised goes straight into your account.

Everything this guide asks for, built in:

- ✓ Mobile bidding with outbid alerts
- ✓ Auto-extend, so you never cut off the final bidding war
- ✓ Winners get a payment link the second bidding closes and pay from their phone in one tap
- ✓ Reporting that shows which items and donors performed best

SIGN UP NOW →

SEE HOW IT WORKS →