GalaBid

FREE CATALOG PLAYBOOK

# Build a Winning Silent Auction Catalog

A practical, editable playbook for deciding what to list, how to price it, how to describe it, and how to organize your catalog to keep bidders browsing and bidding.

GET STARTED

# How to Use This Playbook

Your catalog is not a list. It is the interface between the items people donated and the decision a bidder makes on their device. A well organized, easy to browse catalog keeps guests engaged longer, and when more items get viewed, more items get bids.

Building a good catalog is one of the highest leverage, lowest cost improvements you can make to a fundraising auction. Work through the nine steps in order, fill in the worksheets, and run the audit before you open bidding. Anything in [square brackets] is a placeholder for you to fill in.

## You'll Find

1. **Catalog size ratios, worked by guest count**
2. **A price ladder with tier-by-tier targets**
3. **A starting bid and bid increment cheat sheet**
4. **A description formula, with before and after**
5. **Category and bundling tables**
6. **A photo requirements checklist**
7. **A staged launch plan and a pre-launch audit**

---

## What a Winning Catalog Has

*Six things separate a catalog that raises money from a list that gets skipped:*

✓ **Fewer items than you think.** Oversized catalogs dilute bidder attention and leave items with a single bid, or none at all.

✓ **A price ladder, not a price cluster.** Something for the guest who will bid $30 and the guest who will bid $500.

✓ **One or two anchor items.** Showstoppers you can promote before the event, and that carry your total.

✓ **Real category variety.** Twenty restaurant vouchers, however well priced, get monotonous fast.

✓ **Descriptions that sell the experience.** Bidders are not buying a voucher, they are buying the evening they imagine.

✓ **Three or more photos per item.** Photos are the first thing a bidder sees, and they do work that text cannot.

---

## Before You Open Bidding: A 60-Second Audit

- ☐ Does every item have at least three clear, well lit photos?
- ☐ Is every item assigned to a category a guest can filter by?
- ☐ Do I have at least three items priced under $100?
- ☐ Do I have one or two anchor items above $500?
- ☐ Are there similar items I should bundle into one package instead?
- ☐ Is every starting bid between 30 and 50% of fair market value?
- ☐ Is every bid increment between 10 and 15% of fair market value?
- ☐ Does every description lead with the experience rather than the object?

STEP #1

# Get the Number of Items Right

More items does not mean more bids. Oversized catalogs dilute bidder attention, which leaves many items with a single bid or none at all. Pick your ratio based on how long bidding runs and how far your audience reaches.

| Catalog size | Ratio | Best suited to |
|---|---|---|
| Curated | About 1 item per 8 to 10 guests | Events leaning on quality over quantity |
| Mid-sized | About 1 item per 4 to 5 guests | Most galas and dinners |
| Larger | About 1 item per 2 guests, or per couple | Online-extended or hybrid auctions with longer bidding windows |

## Worked by Guest Count

| Guests | Curated (1 per 8-10) | Mid-sized (1 per 4-5) | Larger (1 per 2) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 50 | 5-6 items | 10-13 items | 25 items |
| 100 | 10-13 items | 20-25 items | 50 items |
| 150 | 15-19 items | 30-38 items | 75 items |
| 200 | 20-25 items | 40-50 items | 100 items |
| 300 | 30-38 items | 60-75 items | 150 items |

*A single evening auction needs a tighter catalog than a two week online auction. If bidding runs for days, you can carry more items, because each one has more time to be found.*

STEP #2

# Build a Price Ladder

The common mistake is loading up on similar mid-range items, which ignores the guest who is happy to bid $30 but never $300. If budget conscious bidders only see high value lots, they disengage completely.

| Tier | Price range | Role in the catalog |
|---|---|---|
| Entry-level | $20 to $75 | Gift cards, small experiences, local vouchers. Gets casual bidders participating early. |
| Mid-tier | $100 to $400 | The bulk of your catalog: dinners, hampers, mid-range experiences. |
| Anchor | $500 and up | One or two showstoppers that get talked about before the event, and that do the heavy lifting on total revenue. |

## A Working Split for a Mid-Sized Catalog

| Guests | Total items | Entry-level | Mid-tier | Anchor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50 | 12 | 3 | 8 | 1 |
| 100 | 24 | 6 | 16 | 2 |
| 150 | 34 | 8 | 24 | 2 |
| 200 | 45 | 11 | 32 | 2 |
| 300 | 68 | 17 | 49 | 2 |

*One or two anchors, about a quarter of the remainder at entry level, and the rest mid-tier. Adjust to what your supporters actually give you, but never let the entry-level row reach zero.*

## Fill In Your Ladder

### Your catalog, by the numbers

Expected guests: [ ]

Our ratio: 1 item per [ ] guests

Total items to source: [ ]

Entry-level, $20 to $75: [ ]

Mid-tier, $100 to $400: [ ]

Anchor, $500 and up: [ ]

Anchor item 1: [ ]

Anchor item 2: [ ]

*If procurement falls short of your target, no-risk consignment items can fill the gaps with proven experiences and trips that carry no upfront cost.*

STEP #3

# Set Starting Bids and Increments

Once items are in the catalog, pricing decides whether bidding builds momentum. Set the starting bid at roughly 30 to 50% of fair market value: low enough to encourage a first bid, high enough that you do not undersell the item. Set increments at roughly 10 to 15% of fair market value, which keeps the pacing competitive without long gaps.

| Fair market value | Start at 30% | Start at 40% | Start at 50% | Increment (10 to 15%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $50 | $15 | $20 | $25 | $5 to $8 |
| $100 | $30 | $40 | $50 | $10 to $15 |
| $200 | $60 | $80 | $100 | $20 to $30 |
| $300 | $90 | $120 | $150 | $30 to $45 |
| $500 | $150 | $200 | $250 | $50 to $75 |
| $1,000 | $300 | $400 | $500 | $100 to $150 |
| $2,500 | $750 | $1,000 | $1,250 | $250 to $375 |

*For items with no obvious retail price, ask the supporter what they usually charge, or research a comparable experience to set a fair estimate.*

## Which Percentage Should You Use?

✓ **Start at 30%** when the item has wide appeal and you expect several bidders. Momentum will carry it.

✓ **Start at 40%** as your default for most mid-tier items.

✓ **Start at 50%** when demand is narrow, or the item is genuinely premium and you cannot afford to undersell it.

STEP #4

# Write Descriptions That Sell

A well priced item still underperforms if the description reads like an inventory line instead of a sales pitch. In the example below the value does not change at all. Only the story does.

**The formula:** Open with the experience + name the specific place or thing + add the one detail that makes it feel real + say who it is perfect for + state the value.

**Before:** "Gift voucher worth $300."

**After:** "Enjoy an unforgettable evening of fine dining with a $300 voucher to one of the city's most celebrated restaurants, perfect for a special occasion."

## Apply It to Every Item

✓ **Lead with the experience, not the object.** Bidders are not buying a voucher, they are buying the evening they picture.

✓ **Name the specifics.** "One of the city's most celebrated restaurants" beats "a local restaurant".

✓ **Give one concrete detail.** A window table, a chef-selected menu, a behind-the-scenes tour.

✓ **Tell them who it suits.** "Perfect for a special occasion" helps a bidder decide it is meant for them.

✓ **Always state the value.** Bidders need an anchor to judge whether their bid is a good one.

✓ **Add restrictions plainly.** Valid dates and blackout periods prevent an awkward conversation later.

STEP #5

# Organize Your Categories

A catalog of nothing but restaurant vouchers gets monotonous, however well priced it is. Mixing categories widens the pool of guests who find something worth bidding on, and keeps people browsing, which matters most on a phone.

| Category | Examples | Why it earns its place |
|---|---|---|
| Experiences | Travel, tickets, classes, private tours | Bidders pay for the story, not the object |
| Tangible goods | Art, electronics, memorabilia | Photograph well and feel concrete in value |
| Services | Professional services, home services, personal training | Cost the supporter time rather than stock, so they are often easier yeses |
| Local and community | Small business vouchers, local experiences | Bidders recognize the business, and the money stays local |

## Make It Searchable

✓ **Let guests filter by category.** Screen reader users and keyboard navigators can then find relevant items without wading through an undifferentiated list.

✓ **Categories help your team too.** Staff can locate and hand out items at the end of the night without confusion.

## Check Your Balance

### Your category balance

Experiences: [ ] items

Tangible goods: [ ] items

Services: [ ] items

Local and community: [ ] items

Any category sitting at zero: [ ]

STEP #6

# Bundle Your Small Items

When item outreach produces a long list of small donations, resist listing each one as its own lot. Combine related items into themed packages. Bundling lifts the perceived value above the sum of the parts, and turns forgettable small donations into something you can actually market.

| Bundle these | Call it | Why it works |
|---|---|---|
| Hotel voucher + restaurant gift card | Weekend Getaway | Two mid-value items become one package worth promoting |
| Wine + glassware + cheese hamper | Dinner Party in a Box | Reads as a complete gift, not three leftovers |
| Movie tickets + dinner voucher + babysitting hours | Parents' Night Out | Solves a real problem, which is what people bid on |
| Golf round + lesson + pro shop voucher | The Golfer's Upgrade | Targets one specific bidder who will chase it hard |
| Spa voucher + robe + candle set | Home Spa Day | Turns a small voucher into an experience |
| Kids' class pass + toy store voucher + photo session | Family Fun Pack | Appeals to every parent in the room |

## Bundling Rules

✓ **Bundle five similar items instead of listing five.** Five spa vouchers dilute interest in all five. One Home Spa Day plus one Couples Retreat creates two wins.

✓ **Name the bundle like a product.** "Weekend Getaway" gets browsed. "Hotel voucher and restaurant card" does not.

✓ **Photograph the bundle together.** One image of the whole package sells it better than three separate photos.

✓ **Price it just below the sum of its parts.** It reads as a deal, and it still raises more than the items would separately.

STEP #7

# Photograph Everything Properly

Photos do persuasive work that text cannot. They are usually the first thing a bidder sees, before they read a word. Clear, well lit photos from several angles let someone judge quality and value straight away, and that is what gives them the confidence to place a first bid.

## Photo Requirements

- ☐ At least three photos per item, from different angles
- ☐ Well lit, natural light where possible, no hard shadows across the item
- ☐ Close-ups for art and memorabilia, including the frame and any signature
- ☐ Something in frame for scale, so a bidder can judge size
- ☐ For vouchers and experiences, photograph the place or the experience, never the paper voucher
- ☐ Shot at high resolution and uploaded at full size, not a screenshot

---

***Tip:*** *Choose a platform that allows multiple images per item and accepts large file uploads. This matters most for art auctions and memorabilia, where bidders want several close-ups before they will commit to a bid.*

STEP #8

# Digital or Printed?

Printed catalogs and paper bid sheets still have a limited role, but the constraints are real: only guests in the room can browse them, every update means a reprint, and remote supporters cannot bid at all.

| What matters | Digital catalog | Printed catalog |
|---|---|---|
| Who can browse | Anyone, anywhere, before and during the event | Only guests physically in the room |
| Updating an item | Instant | Requires a reprint |
| Remote bidding | Yes | No |
| Bidding before the event | Yes | No |
| Checkout | Winners pay from their own phones | Manual invoicing, or a queue at a desk |

---

***Best of both:*** *run a digital catalog, then put printed, QR-coded displays around the room so in-person guests can browse the item in front of them and bid in two taps.*

## Watch How QR Codes Generated Nearly $8,000 at an Event



STEP #9

# Launch in Stages

Opening the entire catalog at once wastes your best promotional asset. Pre-event campaigns can generate up to 40% of sales before the event even starts, which builds momentum and gives quieter items more time to attract interest.

- ✓ **Open bidding early wherever you can.** Up to 40% of sales can happen before the doors open.
- ✓ **Feature your anchor items prominently.** They are what people talk about beforehand, so give them the top of the catalog.
- ✓ **Hold some items back.** Revealing a few at a strategic moment keeps energy up through to close.
- ✓ **Give quiet items a second chance.** An item with no bids by mid-week is the item to feature next.

## A Staged Launch Plan

| When | What goes live | What to promote |
|---|---|---|
| 2 weeks before | Anchor items, plus a handful of strong mid-tier lots | Lead with anchor item 1. One item per post. |
| 10 days before | The bulk of the mid-tier catalog | "The full catalog is live", with a browse link |
| 1 week before | Entry-level items and your bundles | "Something for every budget". Feature the bundles. |
| 3 days before | Your held-back reveal items | "Just added", led by the strongest held-back lot |
| Event night | Everything, anchors pinned to the top | MC calls out the items with active bidding |

PRO TIPS

# Five Catalog Mistakes to Avoid

✓ **Too many similar items.** Five different spa vouchers dilute interest in all five rather than creating five wins. Bundle them instead.

✓ **No items under $100.** This locks out budget conscious bidders who genuinely want to support the cause.

✓ **No anchor item.** You are left with nothing to build promotion or excitement around.

✓ **Flat, uncategorized lists.** They make browsing, and checkout, harder than they need to be.

✓ **Launching the whole catalog at once.** You give up the pre-event momentum that can carry up to 40% of your sales.

---

## Build Your Catalog in One Place

Tracking price tiers, categories, bundles and increments across dozens of items takes real effort. GalaBid's silent auction software is built around exactly that workflow:

- ✓ Bulk upload items, then set categories, starting bids and increments centrally
- ✓ A digital catalog bidders filter by category and browse in seconds
- ✓ Outbid alerts and reminders that bring bidders back to the catalog
- ✓ Downloadable reports showing every bid placed and how each item performed

SIGN UP NOW →

MORE INFO & PRICING →