

cMarket Essential Recommendations

# cMarket Best Practices

cMarket 



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## INTRODUCTION

**Hosting an online auction is an exciting and rewarding experience.** It should be fun for you and a great revenue source for your cause. All you need are the right tools and a little help.

cMarket provides the resources you need to create your own online auction easily. With cMarket you'll discover how to communicate with your organization's members, promote your auction, launch and manage an online event and enhance your live and silent in-room auctions. cMarket can also help you find auction item donors and sponsors as well. Our online auctions are a fun and successful way for organizations to raise more money in less time, using fewer dedicated resources. They give you the chance to increase overall productivity and decrease the workload on the day of your event.

Because cMarket has partnered with so many different causes offering a huge variety of auction items to many different people, we've learned a great deal about what works at charitable online auctions. This "Best Practices" introduction is a *how-to* guide to the approach, the tips and the tricks that we've discovered by working with so many charitable fundraising events.

### Flexible Use of cMarket Tools

Before we dive into the process of building an online auction, we encourage you to take a moment to consider the different uses of a cMarket auction.

You can use cMarket in conjunction with your live and silent auction and complement your current fundraising event. Offer bidding both on the web and off to raise even more money from your fundraising programs.

Many communities look forward to their annual charity gala with its silent or gaveled auction. When you add an online auction, you increase accessibility, interest, and bidding from community members who may not be able to participate due to logistics, time, or resources. cMarket even allows for Absentee Bidding that can occur when an online bidder is not able to attend your live event but wants to participate in it with higher bids. Absentee Bidding carries his or her interest from the web to your on-site auction. Either way, your online auction extends your reach and broadens the time frame of your fundraiser in very significant ways.

Additionally, an online auction can enhance a live event by providing important management tools. cMarket provides: Bid Sheets, a Printable Catalog, Reports, and the Live Event Bidder Registration to seamlessly go from an online to live event. All these are described in some detail below.

One of the advantages of cMarket is that we can provide sales and marketing oomph to an auction catalog prior to a live event. It can be used solely as a promotional vehicle. Create an online auction catalog to promote live and silent auctions and give participants a sample of the items they will be bidding on - building buzz and anticipation for your fundraiser.

A perfect cross-promotional marketing tool, an online auction is a great way to excite your live event attendees and allow your community members to "preview" catalog items that will be up for bidding at your live event. In fact, cMarket encourages you to populate your online auction

catalog with both online-only, and live-event only items so more of your community can participate, as well as generate that auction fever. Holding some items for late announcement online helps to achieve this, and promoting other items that can only be bid on at your live event will boost attendance. Finally, keeping an online auction open for a while after a live event will allow you to promote the “final days” of the online auction during your gala. It also allows your organization the opportunity to “sell” leftover items that saw little or no bidding.

### Team and Community

The best charitable events are team projects. While it’s certainly possible to plan, promote and host an online auction single-handedly, the more people you can involve, the better. More enthusiastic help inevitably leads to greater auction participation, more item donations, and more creative thinking. Plus, the emotional lift everyone enjoys from working together toward a worthy cause is one of the key benefits of working with cMarket auctions.

To expand participation, start as early as possible. Make the most out of the time available in the weeks and months leading up to your online auction and event. Planning ahead will give potential bidders and donors the opportunity to do the same.

Begin by involving as many members of your organization as possible, and establishing an Auction Team with focused roles. Such roles may include tasks like: catalog and donor development, sponsor development, auction management, email promotion and marketing, and outside promotion and marketing. (Auction Administrators can add team member accounts within the Auction Tools, under the Setup tab, Team Members.)

Ideally, you’ll want to start promoting your auction as early as possible. You can set up and announce your auction well in advance of your auction even opening. Don’t underestimate the value of a lengthy preparation and set-up time for your event. Processes like public relations (getting mentioned in local magazines and newspapers, for instance) can take much longer than you think.

The most effective auction length is (generally) between three and four weeks. This allows adequate time for promotion during the event (very important) and heightens the appeal to potential sponsors. It also lengthens the period you can promote your cause to those interested in joining your community.

Shorter auctions, 1-2 weeks can be effective if they have excellent constituency lists to rely on, and/or have a substantial media partner to promote the event. Shorter auctions are also appropriate for workplace giving events where communication can be immediate, repeated and assured.

Team Roles: Some of the roles required in a successful online auction include:

- Donor solicitation, responsible for getting donated items;
- Sponsor development, responsible for articulating and selling the value of auction sponsorships;
- Auction management, responsible for publishing catalog items and editing homepages;

- Promotion and marketing, responsible for developing a promotional plan that includes email and other direct-marketing;
- Payment processing, responsible for processing credit cards once your auction and/or live event has ended.

### **Plans & Revenue**

For your auction to maximize its potential you need to establish an ambitious but realistic revenue goal. Realistic so that you can use it as a practical guide to the value of the donated auction items you'll need to locate. Ambitious so that it can be used to motivate volunteers on your team, donors, sponsors and bidders.

For a first experience online, expect to raise approximately one half the total value of your auctioned items. That is, if you wish to raise \$10,000 you'll probably need \$20,000 in real, retail value in auction items. Generally speaking this means between 50 and 100 items. If you are also including a silent or gaveled auction at your live event, the value of your items should be 150%-175% of your fundraising goal. Which is to say, you need slightly less if you are including a live event at the end of your online auction.

Publicize your goal, letting your constituency know what the proceeds will be used to accomplish. You should include this bit of information on the homepage of your auction site long before the actual online auction begins. The earlier you post this page, including some items that will be auctioned and your revenue goal, the better. You should also include the "Donate an Item" and "Donate Cash" buttons on this home page.

## **BUILDING A NETWORK**

As mentioned above, charitable auctions are team endeavors. So, cMarket has been designed with many tools to help you build a network of volunteers, donors, sponsors and bidders.

### **Refer a Friend**

Build your email list (and constituency) by adding the "Refer Your Friends" button on your auction homepage. By clicking this button, an auction participant can give you the names and email addresses of up to five friends and family members who may be interested in attending your auction. Each email address that you receive will automatically be added to an email list that you can easily manage from within the auction tools.

### **Donate an Item**

One of the easiest ways to solicit interesting catalog items and increase your total auction revenue is by utilizing the "Donate an Item" feature. Using this button, donors are afforded an easy, efficient way to submit donations to your auction...entirely online. Organizations earn an average of over \$1,600 more per auction when they use the Donate an Item button on their auction pages.

### **Sign Our Guest Book**

Make sure the "Sign Our Guest Book" button appears on your auction homepage. Individuals who visit your online auction can click this button to add their names and email addresses to your guest book. All visitors who sign your guest book will automatically be added to an email

list that you can easily manage within the auction tools. You have the option of sending them the same emails that you send your auction community, as well as promotional emails asking them to become auction participants.

### **Email This Page**

Just like the “Refer a Friend” button, selecting the “Email this Page” button to appear on your auction homepage is a great way to get your auction homepage seen by people who are not yet part of your auction community. Auction participants will welcome the opportunity to help promote your fundraiser by sending an email of your auction homepage to someone who has not had a chance to visit your site. Make sure that your homepage copy encourages your community’s use of this button.

## **BUILDING A CATALOG**

There are many sources of items for inclusion in your auction catalog. Plus, there are a number of ways in which you can solicit these items and/or financial support for them. Finally, how you describe and picture the items offered and how you manage their promotion will have a significant impact on your success.

### **Finding Catalog Item Donors**

A donor can be defined as a person, group, or business who contributes goods, services, or “experiences” that your organization will offer to the highest bidders in your online auction. Potential donors of auction items can come from virtually everywhere. Be sure to discuss with your auction team any ideas they may have, and be sure to investigate the following:

- Colleagues, business affiliates;
- Friends, family, neighbors;
- Local business owners, firms;
- Community service providers;
- Yourself

Of course, donors are contributing goods and services because they see the worthiness of your cause. But with a cMarket online auction, you can provide your donors value in exchange for their donations... a refreshing and practical change from traditional, live events.

In every online description of a donated catalog item, donors receive the benefit of having their name, logo, and hyperlink included in the description. Donor logos and links can be included in auction emails, as well as on homepages and catalog items. This means that, instead of one “impression” made in a traditional flyer, program, or one-time event, donors can receive several weeks of exposure, repeated visibility to your growing online auction community and a way to connect with their consumers by having their logo linked directly to a website.

The essential first step for every successful auction is to get to know your donor, sponsor, and bidder community. It’s likely that you already have a good understanding of the profile of people

who attend your onsite events. However, with an online auction, you'll be able to reach a much broader audience. Since a cMarket online auction will help you reach many more people than could attend your onsite event, it's important to take the time to reflect on and discover the tastes, needs, and preferences of this much larger, and possibly more diverse, audience.

Take a demographic "snapshot" of your bidders. This will help as you approach donors and sponsors. Use the materials in cMarket's "Donor/Sponsor Solicitation Kit" to spark ideas about the kinds of items that will perform best in your catalog. As a result, creating such a profile will spur your thinking about which businesses or individuals to approach for donations. The kit includes templates for forms and letters, along with several important worksheets to organize your efforts.

The second step to attracting donors is to develop and communicate a strong marketing plan that shows potential donors exactly how they benefit when they participate in your auction. Of course, mention the number of "impressions" your marketing will create via email, bid activity and other promotions. This may include announcements in local, regional, and trade papers; radio promotions; or, working with corporate partners to drive traffic.

Next, voice your catalog item needs. As they say, "you don't get what you don't ask for," so identify a varied "wish list" of items for your auction. The materials in cMarket's Donor/Sponsor Solicitation Kit will help you outline the categories of items you are looking for and give you ways to describe them.

Lastly, don't be afraid to recruit donors creatively. cMarket Place offers a variety of consignment items that you can include in your catalog. Then you can easily request "Sponsors" for these items. Non-traditional donors who don't have a specific item to donate, but would like to contribute and/or underwrite an item's cost, can then contribute some or all of the cost of your cMarket Place items.

### **cMarket Place**

cMarket Place is a great way to boost your auction and supplement your catalog with desirable and exciting items your community will want to bid on. Our selections have been made with charitable auctions clearly in focus. We offer these items on a no-risk basis. Simply click and to add them to your catalog, set a minimum price you'll accept for them, and when you successfully sell these items, just let us know and you'll be billed for them. cMarket Place is a great way to round out your catalog with unusual and profitable items. What's more, organizations that feature items from cMarket Place raise an average of \$600 more per auction.

### **Experiences**

Some of the best revenue-generating auction items are "experiences." This type of item will easily be among the most-popular in your auction catalog. An "experience" is more than an ordinary auction item – it is a once-in-a-lifetime memorable opportunity. For example, suppose four football tickets have been donated to your online auction. Instead of simply selling the football tickets to the highest bidder, you could ask a donor for a pre-game tour and a signed football to create a memorable (and desirable) experience for the winning bidder.

As a nonprofit, you can, through the connections your board and staff have, get “experiences” donated that will be remembered for a lifetime. Remarkable experiences that members of your auction community will want to win. Consider the endless possibilities in the following scenarios:

- Backstage access at a sport event, concert, play, or news/radio broadcast
- Dinner with a celebrity, broadcaster or politician – or one of them cooks dinner for you!
- A renowned chef prepares an elegant dinner for four in your home.

### Soliciting Sponsors

Sponsors are people and businesses who pay your organization to be associated with your online auction and its cause. It’s important to note that funds you raise from sponsorships are completely exempt from cMarket fees. They are direct proceeds to your organization.

cMarket offers a variety of sponsorship opportunities, from single placement options to multi-tiered programs including spots on email communications. Selling online sponsorships in your cMarket auction can result in an estimated \$10,000 more for your organization, apart from your auction catalog.

Sometimes overlooked, sponsors are a critical piece of a successful fundraising program. Since their contributions have a dramatic impact, be sure to help them explore and exploit the potential of their sponsorship so they become repeat sponsors for your organization in its future fundraising campaigns.

Sponsor contributions are often of a higher value than those of donors. Therefore, sponsors often receive greater prominence than donors, including logo placement on auction materials and sites. Like donors, sponsors participate because they see the worthiness of your cause. Be sure to suggest that, in addition to great promotional value, sponsorship fulfills a civic and charitable duty of the contributing organization.

Some sponsors may turn out to be donors, too, giving them further exposure in your item catalog. Sponsorship on your auction page can mean that instead of one “impression” made in a traditional flyer, program, or one-time event, sponsors receive several weeks of exposure, and repeated visibility to your growing online auction community. Just as in donor solicitation, it’s important to have a good understanding of the profile of people who attend your onsite events. So, take that same demographic “snapshot” of your bidders and use it as you approach sponsors. Clearly articulating the demographics and size of the community you’re reaching may provide sponsors a greater incentive to make larger contributions.

cMarket’s Donor/Sponsor Solicitation Kit provides a wealth of information about working with sponsors, including advice about defining sponsorship levels. For example, a three-tier structure of “Gold, Platinum, Silver” (with three different publicity levels within your auction) allow you to open up sponsorship to lower levels, while also enabling your organization to offer valuable “premium” packages to the largest contributors.

Finally, since a sponsor’s commitment is usually larger than a donor’s, it’s recommended you personally meet with sponsors. Once again, use the Sponsor Benefits Sheet included within the

Donor/Sponsor Solicitation Kit to outline the major advantages of committing to a sponsorship for your event. Then, be creative. Remember, not only can sponsors pay for the exposure they receive; they also have the potential to underwrite any auction cost, from a cMarket Place catalog item, to staffing expenses.

### Catalog Details

If you have an auction item with specific shipping requirements (e.g., local pickup only), buyer limitations (e.g., buyer must be at least 18 years of age), or product restrictions (e.g., not valid on weekends), you will want to make these details very clear to your bidders before they bid. Otherwise, you may encounter bid retractions (and loss of revenue) at the end of your auction because the winning bidder is unable to meet or fulfill the special requirements necessary to purchase the item. You can avoid unpleasant situations like this by always inserting special instructions about an auction item in the Special Instructions section during the Create New Item process.

Here are some examples of shipping terms:

- Winner is responsible for paying the cost of shipping.
- Winner is responsible for picking up item at the donor's (city), (state) location.
- The (name of organization) will mail the gift certificate to the winner

Here are some examples of other restrictions or details:

- Dinner certificate not valid on Friday and Saturday nights.
- Winner must be age 18 or older.
- Winner must be a licensed driver and present proof of residency.
- Airline/Hotel/Cruise tickets subject to (list conditions)
- Bidders must be members of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Expires on \_\_\_\_\_.

Auction items that make memorable first impressions are those with titles and descriptions that are clean, clear and concise. Write "eye catching" titles using keywords describing the item, or simply state the name of the item. You can also try adding the brand name, artist or creator of the item to the title if you think it will help attract bidders.

Be careful of names that embellish excessively so that what the item is becomes unclear. For example, for the same spa weekend, you would want to avoid a description like: "Spend the Weekend in Your Own Little Piece of Heaven."

### Live Event Items

If an item is going to be bid on at a live event, you must check the "live event item" box while entering the item into your catalog. Doing so will assure that the public understands that the

online high bidder might not end up being the final winner. This is an action that must be completed before the first online bid is placed on the item.

### **Keep It Fresh**

One way to maintain auction interest is to add new items to your auction catalog at various times throughout the auction. You can let everyone know when the new items are available for bidding by featuring them in an auction home page, and in promotional emails to your auction community.

### **Stagger Your Offerings**

As part of your online auction setup, you have to select a date and time for all of the items in your auction catalog to open and a date and time for all of the items in your auction catalog to close. However, should the need arise, you have the option of setting a different open and close date for individual items in your auction catalog. This is a great way to stir up excitement and ignite a bidding war, especially if your auction catalog is featuring multiple, identical items for bidding at the same time. You can do this during the item import process.

## **ESTABLISHING BIDDER RULES**

You have considerable control over the “rules” that govern bidding on your cMarket Auction.

### **Minimum Bids**

cMarket makes it easy for you to set a minimum bid below which bids are not accepted. Where you have costs, such as with cMarket Place (our catalog of no-risk items for your auction) or where a donor has insisted on some reimbursement, this feature assures that you cannot lose money on any item.

You should be certain to set minimums very low on items that have been donated. Items with appeal will generate their own activity, attracting bidders and driving the price up. Those that are less attractive to your constituency will not attract higher bids simply because your minimum demands them. Many items, offered by very successful auctions, have no minimums whatever.

### **Custom Bid Increments**

A “Bid Increment” is the minimum increase required to outbid a current high bid. The cMarket Auction Tools automatically calculate and adjust bid increments based on a percentage of an item’s value. However, cMarket provides you the ability to alter this default calculation and establish your own Custom Bid Increments. You should do this only if you have experience with auctions and your particular constituency. The default minimum increments in cMarket are tried-and-true and, generally, very effective.

If you have a particularly rare or expensive item that suggests a bid increment greater than \$100, you can apply your own settings to this item. This will allow you to achieve maximum value for these offerings. If you would like to set a custom bid increment for an auction item, simply contact cMarket Client Services at: [support@cmarket.com](mailto:support@cmarket.com).

### **Opening Bids**

Determining the opening bid of an auction item is easy, and should always be low. On the

average, an opening bid is usually 40% of the actual cost of the auction item. However, you can make an opening bid as low as 25% of the value of the item. Note that your minimum bid may be higher than your opening bid. Which is to say, the first few bids will be below the minimum. This practice gets the ball rolling and tends to cause bidders to “search” for the minimum.

### **Buy Now**

A great way to build excitement at your online auction is to give your auction participants the power to immediately purchase some auction items through cMarket’s “Buy Now” feature. You can apply this feature to an item at the same time that you add the item to your auction catalog.

What makes the Buy Now feature so exciting is the element of surprise. Once someone agrees to purchase an item for the “buy now” price, the bidding for that item will abruptly stop. Both you and your bidders have no way of knowing if and when someone else will suddenly purchase an item, which makes bidding, rather than buying now, risky. If enough excitement is created over an auction item that has the “buy now” feature, you will find many of your auction participants choosing to “watch” the auction item, with others thinking of ending the bidding process, and simply purchase the item.

Make sure that the Buy Now price you set represents a clear premium price for maximum revenue.

### **Last Minute Bidders**

Some bidders, in an effort to avoid the higher prices competition tends to create, wait until the last minute to out-bid their competitors. Items that are online-only are susceptible to this behavior and it can dramatically limit your revenues. To avoid the “sniping” syndrome, use the “Bid Extension” feature in cMarket. Using Bid Extension means that any bid placed in the last 5 minutes of an online auction extends the open bid time for another 5 minutes. The first bid within any extension period causes the item to extend for an additional 5-minute extension period. The item closes when no bids are placed within an extension period.

### **Absentee Bidding**

When you are managing an online-to-live event, Absentee Bidding occurs when bidding from leading online bidders at the close of your online auction carries into your live event. So, if a leading online bidder’s bid is trumped, bids are placed on behalf of these leading online bidders until their maximum bid is met. When enabled, the Absentee Bidding feature effects all live event items.

You must designate a member of your auction team to bid on behalf of your online participants up to their Absentee Bid amounts. This is a great revenue-generating feature, but be sure to plan your event staffing to ensure Absentee Bids will be placed as appropriate:

- For a silent auction, members of your auction team will need to write in bids for your Absentee Bidders on bid sheets for each item at large;
- For a gaveled auction using an auctioneer, one of your auction team members should play the role of “Bid Clerk” and bid on behalf of the absent online bidder for each item, up to the maximum Absentee Bid the leading online bidder has specified.

The cMarket Auction platform contains printable Absentee Bid Sheets in .pdf format. These absentee bid sheets provide your auction team and bid clerks with the information they need to bid on behalf of your Absentee Bidders – the perfect tool for absentee bidding at both silent and gaveled auctions.

## **MARKETING AND PROMOTION**

The first and smartest step you can take to promote your auction is to involve as many members of your organization as possible – from volunteers to board members. However, it's equally important to identify other supporters in the community through media outreach and your corporate contacts. So you will be best served to exploit every available communication method. Consider everything and try whatever fits.

### **Email**

Email is critical to the success of any online project. It makes vivid, frequent and personal communication essentially free. Because email has proven such an effective way to promote charitable auctions (before, during and after them) cMarket has created a robust email tool with a wealth of templates to make scheduling, designing and executing your email promotions easy.

cMarket's outbound email tool manages your email lists and delivers controlled as well as automatic outbound messages. Even better, the emails sent for you are striking and powerful. In overview, the advantages of using cMarket's tool are clear:

- Market's emails are like delivering your auction homepage into your community's inboxes;
- Emails include featured items, sponsors' links, and other feature buttons, so you convey many messages with each mailing;
- You will be employing two important direct marketing strategies within your distinct community: frequency and repetition;
- You will have fewer unsubscribers due to your email's charitable message.

cMarket users have a great number of worksheets and templates designed specifically for managing your email promotions. They include "to do" lists and worksheets as well as templates for the most important outbound messages you should send. The platform also makes your auction a source of email addresses that will serve you well the next time you host an auction.

### **Gathering Email Addresses**

cMarket makes it easy for you to obtain addresses for your auction email lists. Start collecting email addresses using your auction's "Guest Book" and "Refer-a-Friend" buttons. These are easily activated so that they are included on your auction homepages and emails.

Signing the "Guest Book" ensures people will receive future information about your auction. Also ask people to "Refer-a-Friend, by sending the auction information they have received along to their contacts. If possible, you may also consider putting out the call for guest book signings and referrals through a link from your organization's own website.

All visitors who sign your Guest Book or send or accept Refer-a-Friend emails are automatically added to an email list that you can manage from within the cMarket auction platform. You can then send them the same emails that you send your auction community, as well as promotional emails asking them to become auction participants.

You can also collect your community's email addresses through sign-in sheets at all of your events and meetings. Insert flyers or cards into your newsletters, annual appeal letters, and other communications that invites readers to respond with their email addresses. Some cMarket customers offer drawings with prizes for lucky community members who respond with their email address.

### **Managing Lists**

Chances are, your auction community is comprised of several groups, including auction participants, volunteers, employees, board members, and others. Sometimes you need to send a "blanket" email to all members of your community such as "Auction Now Open". But, other times you may want to send email messages to a select group of your auction community.

This problem is easily solved by creating multiple email lists within the cMarket Auction Platform. After segmenting your lists, you are then able to send targeted emails to specific groups. For example, create and send an email of "high-end" items to your "A-Level" donors and/or Board of Directors. Then, send a similar email to your "general" segment consisting of moderately priced items.

### **Clear Subject Lines**

Email clutter is everywhere and so most people are very familiar with the delete button in their email client. It's therefore critical to avoid being mistaken for unwanted email. One way to avoid having your auction emails overlooked or diverted is to always give the name of your organization – or it's common abbreviation or acronym – somewhere in the subject line. Also, be sure your subject line includes a compelling, action-oriented "call to action" message to draw visitors into your online auction. Here are a few:

- Red Cross Online Auction - New Items Just Added – Bid Now
- Rescue League Auction – Closing Tues. 9PM EST, Bid Now
- ABCD Online Auction OPEN – Browse and Bid Today
- Community Center Auction Open - Unique Gifts
- N. Shore Hospital Online Auction – Try "Guilt-free Shopping"/Great

### **Promote Your Goal**

Let your auction community share in the excitement that comes from meeting (and exceeding) your fundraising goal. Before your auction even opens, email your auction community to tell them what your fundraising target is. As your auction progresses, send weekly emails that update your community on how close you are to meeting your goal. Not only does news of this kind stir up the excitement, it also creates a challenge that everyone strives to meet.

## Featured Items

Your recipients can get an exciting window into your auction when your emails highlight “featured items.” Show your best and most interesting items – and change them for each email that you send (it only takes a few seconds to change).

Try creating an article in your email that features groups of items or categories. Then, tie your article with related featured items that reflect your article. For example: “This week, we are highlighting our TRAVEL category. Browse it to find incredible vacations to Florida and the Caribbean, a New York luxury weekend and a cozy B&B weekend in the mountains.” (Then, feature these or other items from this category for the coming week.) Remember that you can include a link directly to an item’s category. For example: “See our entire category of our Sports related items here.”

## Showcase Your Sponsors

Auction sponsorships provide you with a source of additional auction revenue that is free of a cMarket fee. Remember to feature your sponsors’ logo graphics and website links on every email. For your sponsors, this logo and link is most of the value of their sponsorship.

## Visuals Matter

With cMarket’s email templates, you have the power to create emails about auction items that are not only informative, but also visually appealing. While a clear, detailed description of the auction item is essential, the old cliché rings true: a picture is worth one thousand words! Your auction community is far more likely to bid on an item they can see. If you are having a difficult time obtaining images for the items in your auction catalog, try contacting the donor; or, visit the web site of the manufacturer who makes the item.

## Highlight Item Categories

Give a promotional boost to potentially valuable auction items that are lagging in bidding activity - or highlight “hot” items - by promoting entire categories of items in emails to your auction community.

For example, one cMarket customer (a well-known historical church in Boston known for the beautiful music performed there) featured an entire category of music-themed items. For reasons that weren’t clear, these items weren’t attracting bid activity in the early days of the auction. However, as soon as the Church promoted this musical category in an email, the popularity of these items rose, bidding increased, and the items sold for a great price at the end of the auction.

## Links

Embedding hyperlink (clickable links) is an easy process in managing your cMarket emails. We encourage you to embed at least three hyperlinks to your auction catalog in every email you send to not only drive traffic to your auction, but also to encourage bidding. You have the power to include hyperlinks to your online auction’s homepage, one or more catalog categories, or individual items.

## Promote Your Promoters

If a local television or radio station is featuring your online auction, extend the impact of that publicity by sending an email to everyone on your email lists that alerts them to the time and date of each broadcast. Make sure to include a thank you message to the media promoting your online auction story, and ask everyone who receives the email to forward it to other friends, family, and interested persons using the “Refer-a-Friend” button.

## Pre-Auction Email

The period leading up to your auction should be planned carefully to announce the event and develop enthusiasm for it. The pre-auction messaging you deploy should touch on all of the following:

- Mention that your auction is approaching, and note the opening date and time;
- Instruct recipients to click on the Guest Book button to include themselves in the auction, and use the Refer-a-Friend button to send auction invitations to up to five friends at a time. Remember, many people will pass along an email to others if you just ask them to – especially given your auction’s charitable focus;
- If you are using the Donate Now button to solicit auction donations, state what donation you are looking to add to your catalog and invite donors to click Donate Now or contact you for additional information.

## Mid-Auction Email

Mid-auction emails create auction drama and attract bids. Try using one or more of the following suggestions:

- Hold back a few items and announce their arrival in an email during your auction’s second or third weeks;
- Give one or two exciting items in your catalog closing times that are a week or two prior to the close of the rest of your auction. Then, include messages in their description such as “Closing Friday at noon! Bid now!”
- If intense bidding wars break out on an item, tell your entire community in an email. This can attract more bidders.
- In your auction emails, write about unusual or innovative items, or items with a special story.
- Highlight items that have been donated by or are affiliated with a successful sports team. Highlight “getaway” travel items, if inclement weather is on the way
- Encourage additional donations and tell your community that you are still accepting contributions online through the “Donate an Item Feature”. Remember, you can add items as they become available, and the more items you have the more revenue you can generate.

### **Pay Attention**

Your cMarket auction reports show the items that may not be generating the bidding activity you'd expect. You can write about these items or categories in your emails to draw attention.

### **Pre-Close Email**

As the close of your auction draws near, create a final surge of excitement with an "Auction Closes Today" email that reminds your bidders how much time remains before the official close. Send this email to your key cMarket-generated lists: "Interested Persons" & "Auction Participants". If your auction participants are watching items or waiting until the last minute to bid, this "last call" email will serve as a reminder.

### **Post-Auction Email**

Once your auction closes, send an email to all participants thanking them for their participation, but also letting them know of other ways they can help support your organization, such as: by volunteering time, donating cash, or providing you with the email addresses of friends and family. As an additional benefit from these effort, the more email addresses you collect, the larger your auction community will be for future fundraisers.

### **Beyond Email**

There are, of course, many other ways to spread the word about your auction. As mentioned earlier, use all that are available to you. cMarket has created a number of resources to help prepare and distribute marketing materials. Templates for creating these documents and worksheets to help you organize your efforts are available in the Resource Center of the cMarket platform.

### **Traditional Direct Mail**

At the very least, send everyone in your cause's community a letter. A simple announcement of the date of your auction's opening and closing, along with an explanation of your goal and cause, can do wonders. Be sure to include the URL of your cMarket auction.

### **Flyers**

One of the simplest and most effective promotional tools available to you is the basic paper flyer. Use promotional flyers in various ways: as mailing inserts, on retail counters, or on local bulletin boards and informational kiosks. Once you have created the wording and design for your flyer, consider using it repeatedly as a handout at meetings and events. Also think about mailing it to your community members, or even use it as an insert in a newsletter or other organizational publication.

### **Cards**

Promotional cards are simply smaller versions of your flyers. Anytime your organization holds a meeting between the kick-off and the ending of your cMarket online auction, hand out these cards to drive more people to your auction's website. For example, if your organization is holding an event with a registration table, ask people to add their email addresses to your Guest Book so that they can get involved in your online auction.

### **Speakers**

Another great way to promote your organization's online auction is to use every opportunity to

talk about it. If there's an event prior to or during the auction, why not have a public speaker encourage participation? Using a public speaker has been proven to be especially effective if the speaker is someone with whom your community is familiar.

### **Networking**

The members of your organization can sometimes be the best proponents of your online auction. Encourage volunteers, board members, and staff to spread the word about your organization's online auction in every way possible: through email, or by word-of-mouth.

### **Media**

The media is one of your best (and least expensive) sources for promoting your online auction. A feature story about a local charity's auction is certain to create excitement throughout your community, especially if the auction contains unique items and experiences. In fact, announcing the start of your online auction through the media not only creates more interest, it also generates new sources of email addresses from visitors to your auction site and donors of auction items.

Local media can play a critical role in driving traffic to your website. Perhaps your organization has relationships with key managers or executives at local radio or TV stations, or newspapers who can help promote your cMarket auction. Consider sending a letter to all the media contacts you can asking them to feature your event on their high-traffic websites using a link and logo to your cMarket auction. It will not cost them anything to do so and it gives them an opportunity to align themselves with your organization and show their support for a worthy cause.

### **Calendars**

Many local newspapers and websites publish "Calendar" sections that list activities and events for free. This is an excellent way to get publicity and promote your cause. Simply contact local media outlets to find out how they want submissions to be made, and send in your listing.

### **Corporate Contacts**

Your corporate contacts are another powerful yet often overlooked way to create significant publicity for your online auction. Contact your partners or other businesses and organizations that share common values and ask them to support your cause. An ideal business contact will have a large number of employees, a website, and an Intranet within which your online auction can be linked. Many organizations also have member or employee email newsletters, and other means for promoting the auction.

Organizations that are allied with your cause and the people it serves are also a valuable means of promotion. For example, a non-profit organization that benefits children may also send auction promotion notices to Children's Hospitals, Day Care providers, etc.

Consider soliciting area retail stores to promote your online auction through checkout flyers and promotional mailings – as well as emails – to their customer bases. Sometimes, even other charitable organizations are be willing to spread the news about your online auction... it doesn't hurt to ask!

## YOUR AUCTION WEBSITE

All of the marketing and promotion you do will attract people browsing your auction home page and the rest of your website. So, throughout your auction make sure that it is “self-promoting.”

### The Homepage

Your website’s homepage is the first and most important “face” your auction has. It is, literally, the portal to your efforts. There are a number of important functions to be fulfilled by your home page. But don’t overlook the obvious: Every organization that raises funds for good causes has a story to tell. The best auctions share their story with their auction community. There is no better place to share the history behind your organization, the purpose for this online auction, and how the proceeds will be used to benefit your organization’s cause than on your cMarket Auction Homepage.

With the cMarket online auction templates, you can create auction homepages that are as unique to the style and purpose of your organization as your own website. All you need to do is plan your homepage content. This includes selecting a color scheme, and other content that uniquely identifies your organization such as a mission statement, banner and logo. Consider themes found in your organization’s own website. Familiarity is the key. You want to make your auction community feel comfortable in their surroundings, beginning with your auction homepage, all the way through to your online auction catalog.

### Navigation

Once your auction participants are on your auction homepage, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to go to your online auction catalog. You can do this by inserting multiple auction catalog links throughout the content of the auction homepage. At a minimum, we recommend you include at least two to three links on your auction homepage that will bring the visitor directly to your auction catalog. Links can point to individual items, your categories of items, or your auction homepage.

### Auction News

Your auction homepage could be considered a tool to announce other events and newsworthy items happening around your organization. Yet, while this information is great to share with your auction community, it shouldn’t be the primary focus of your homepage.

It sounds simple, but the primary focus of your auction homepage should always be your online auction. Our most successful auctions avoid losing the primary focus of their auction homepage by only allowing the main headline and main article of text to be used for promoting the online auction. If you have something else that you want to promote — like an associated live/silent auction event — you can always use one of the subheadings with articles of text found on the auction homepage template.

### Featured Categories

If you have a whole category of auction items that you know will be popular among auction participants during your online auction, write about the category on your homepage. Each cMarket auction homepage template contains at least two subheads and articles of text that you can use to promote the exciting auction category, or anything else that you would like to share

with your auction community. If you write an article to promote a specific category of items, you may also want to insert images of the items within that category in the “featured items” section of your auction homepage.

### **Changing “Featured Items”**

Your featured items are a readers’ window into your auction. Feature your best and most interesting items. However, since bidders will continually revisit your auction and homepage, be certain to change your featured items frequently. Changing featured items on a homepage takes only a few seconds.

You can even create a text area that features groups of items or categories, then make your featured items reflect the section you have created. Example: “This week, we are highlighting our TRAVEL category. Browse it to find incredible vacations to Florida and the Caribbean, a New York luxury weekend and a cozy B&B weekend in the mountains” (Then feature these or other items from this category for the coming week.)

### **Pre-Auction Homepage**

Auctions that post a “Coming Soon” home page early are more successful in attracting donors and sponsor. They also gather “Refer a Friend” contacts as well.

You will want to start promoting your online auction as early as possible — even if just to support your catalog items and auction sponsor solicitation. One of the best ways to get an early start promoting your online auction is to post a Pre-Auction Homepage on your cMarket online auction website. Even if all you have to include on your auction home page is just the dates and times your auction will open and close, you have enough information to share to begin promoting your auction to your prospective item donors and sponsors. Your coming soon homepage will initially serve as a tangible visual aid to show item donors and sponsors the online auction — its likely it is the first time they will see a charitable online auction.

### **Mid-Auction Homepage**

While your auction is underway, feature valuable items with little bidding action on your homepage. Give a promotional boost to a potentially valuable auction item that has been selling poorly by featuring it on your homepage and in emails to your auction community. One cMarket client put this best practice to the test by featuring music-themed items that they felt should have been very popular, but were not receiving much bidding. As soon as several music items were featured on their homepage and the entire category was mentioned in one of their weekly email articles, the popularity of these items soared, bidding increased, and the items sold for a good price at the end of the auction.

### **Pre-Close Homepage**

If the time for your auction to close is drawing near, you have a great opportunity to promote your online auction one more time by creating a Pre-Close Auction Homepage that will remind your auction community how much time is left before your online auction officially closes. If your auction participants are watching items, or were waiting until the last minute to bid on items, this “last call” home page will serve as a gentle reminder.

By the time your online auction is getting ready to close, you will have a good idea as to which items have been popular sellers, which items have not been popular sellers. Even if your online auction is scheduled to close soon, you still have enough time to edit your existing homepage and continue promoting your online auction by featuring these items. The best way to feature these items is by type (i.e., hottest selling items, coldest selling items (“bargains”), closing soon items), and on a rotating basis (i.e., daily basis, or every couple of days) until your auction officially closes.

## **DURING YOUR AUCTION**

### **Emails**

Remember to remain active with outbound emails throughout your auction. Templates in the cMarket platform that you should use are the Auction Update, Special Auction News, Early Close Items, Auction Closing and Last Chance emails.

### **Homepage**

While your auction is under way, change your home page frequently. Vary the items and categories of items that you feature prominently. Also, keep your constituency informed about the progress you are making toward your fundraising goal and remind everyone of the use to which your funds will be put. Finally, be sure to solicit new donations and/or sponsorship of cMarket Place items throughout the process.

## **CLOSING YOUR AUCTION**

### **For Winners**

Since your winning bidders are already familiar with your online auction website, there is no better place to post final instructions, and other general information for winning bidders than on your “Auction Closed Homepage”.

While the most obvious use of the “Auction Closed Homepage” is to announce that the online auction is officially closed, it is also a great place to describe the fulfillment and shipment process. It is a cMarket recommended best practice to always let winning bidders know when they can expect to receive their auction item. This will help to minimize the number of calls and emails you might receive from anxious winning bidders, who are awaiting delivery of their auction item.

### **Non-Winners**

In a charitable auction, bidders are not just looking to win items, but are also looking to help your cause. Consider letting visitors to your Auction Closed/Thank You Homepage how they can still donate money to your cause—whether or not they were winners. You may also want to let your community know about how they can help beyond donating cash—by getting involved in other ways.