



Raising Money at Charity Events

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Please see the sadly now necessary 'small print' at the end before reading. Enjoy!

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Contents

Introduction	3
Before The Event	4
What type of event?	4
Choosing a style	4
Choosing a day	5
Ticket sales in advance	5
Sponsorship	7
Publicity	8
Poster campaigns,	8
'Networking'	8
'Quid Pro Quo'	8
Press & media coverage	8
Local celebrities	8
Planning the evening	9
During The Event	9
Overall	9
Raffle	10
Auction	10
Games to run during the evening	10
'Playing Cards'	10
'The Birthday Game'	11
'Heads and Tails'	11
'Sliding coins'	11
Penalty Fines	12
Running a Bar	12
Database	12
After The Event	13
In Conclusion	13

Introduction

Having been a musician since the 1970's, a band leader from the 80's and an agent in the 90's, I've been involved in quite a few charity fund raisers over the years.

Clients have often commented that this is all new to them, and can be a bit intimidated, confused by, or not aware of all the options available.

Hopefully this eBook this should help a bit with the planning of the entertainment for your 'Big Day'!

Although it covers the 'Period and Traditional' styles that my own company, 'Barn Dance to Banquet' specialises in, much of it will be relevant whatever style you decide to choose.

As with so many things in life, spending a bit of time in advance can pay dividends later on. Having a clear plan of what you would like, and knowing what is available should help reduce the stress and hassle to a minimum. As they say in the army, P.P.P.P.P.P.
or:-

'Prior Planning Prevents P*ss-Poor Performance'

My thanks to Marc Lemezma, 'The Wedding Magician' (www.lemezma.com) for his ideas and suggestions.

Before The Event

What type of event?

Here are some of the events performed for charity fund-raisers, hopefully there will be some ideas for you to use directly, or adapt.

Afternoon tea party - music and magic
Auctions, and auctions of promises
Barn dance / ceilidh / country dance
Burns' night
Christmas fair
Jazz picnic
Medieval banquet
Murder / mystery evening
Music hall
Opera evening
Paella evening
Pantomime
Quiz night
Supper with entertainment - music and/or plays
Village festival

Choosing a style

As well as a theme, what audience are you 'pitching' to? Who would your ideal attendees be?

'Black Tie' events can often make people back-off - but on the other hand they attract wealthier folks with deeper pockets. If you are going 'up market' then remember that you will be dealing with a very discerning audience. Everything must be up to standard – venue, decorations, refreshments and entertainment.

Choosing a day

Saturdays are the usual choice for charity events, but of course also for weddings, anniversaries, parties and other shows. Move away from the weekend (apart from the obvious exceptions like Burns' night, and St. Patrick's night), and there will be far more chance of finding a decent band who are free, and a venue.

Not only that, but market forces will come into play; 'Supply and Demand' will now be on your side. We have many calls from organisers expecting a discount for charity events, but to be frank, musicians rely on weekends to earn their wages. The life of a 'jobbing' musician is not usually one of enormous riches - we have quite a few good jokes on the subject (Question: "What do you call a musician without a girlfriend?" Answer: "Homeless").

I know that my arm can't be twisted on a Saturday in summer, but for a Tuesday night in February?.....let's talk....!

Don't just pick a free day however; it will be harder for you to sell. Find a day that has significance - an anniversary, a (relevant) Saint's day, or founder's birthday - when something significant is happening for your cause. This will raise the relevance of the date; making the event more of an occasion.

Ticket sales in advance

Offer commission for ticket sales - put out tickets in books of ten for the price of eight - so anyone who sells eight can have two tickets free

The aim should be to get the most number of sales as early as possible. Not only will this generate extra money on the night from raffles, games, bar sales or even 'fines' (see later), but more importantly for future years, it will help give you a well attended and 'fun' event that your audience will want to repeat.

How about offering 'friends' tickets (for the same price, but only available in advance) which offer 'extras' that won't actually cost you much - a listing of their names in the programme, a free glass of punch on arrival, fancier looking tickets etc.

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Never offer to refund sales, but do make the tickets fully transferable, so they can be passed on to friends and family. If you have a strong 'pitch' available for your cause on the night - in a leaflet, programme or newsletter - it may bring in more members.

Importantly, you need to generate enough 'critical mass' to make an event work well. If just twenty hard-line 'regulars' turn up to an event planned for a hundred and twenty then it's going to be a pretty miserable affair for all concerned. Upper lips will be stiffened, and all will press on relentlessly, working hard to have a good time.

Without sufficient sales beforehand, someone on the committee - cautious about this happening - will probably suggest 'pulling the plug' in advance. This is not good for anyone; organisers, guests or performers. Sell enough tickets in advance however, and you will achieve a self-fulfilling prophecy, potential attendees will not be frightened of being the only ones there, and the event will build its own momentum - people will want to be included, and to be there.

Always set the maximum number of tickets available in advance, sell as many as possible as soon as possible to the regulars, then emphasise how quickly they are going, and how few remain. The American psychologist, Dr. Robert Cialdini, devotes a chapter to the power of 'scarcity' in his book 'Influence, Science and Practice' (quite a fun read anyway!).

Can you tie in the event with something else that will attract an audience, such as a prize giving? You could hold an evening to follow on from a fair, or fete held during the day.

Themed events tend to be popular; we have performed for medieval, 'wild west', music hall and Burns' night evenings amongst others.

Sponsorship

In an ideal world you would be able to troll up to a local magnate who had some involvement with your group or charity, wade into the clouds of billowing cigar smoke and come out clutching a nice fat cheque covering all the costs of your event, thus leaving all your takings as clear profit. Ho hum, back to Planet Earth.

Just as musicians have to deal with a constant flow of 'But it's for charity' calls, so local businesses - who are already acting as unpaid tax collectors - also receive continual invitations to place ads in diaries, stump up prizes and part with their very hard earned dosh for a multitude of good, and perhaps not so good causes.

Instead of just asking for a straight contribution, offer instead something they can relate to - take the opportunity to produce a programme, or newsletter to go with your event. A local business may well be happy to produce this for you, free of charge, in exchange for a credit and an advert inside (but take care to control the content yourself!). As well as the chance to sell advertising space, you can also include a bit about you group and your aims to attract new members. Include an address slip for those who would like to know about other events, or how you are getting on in achieving your aims.

Alternatively, or better yet as well, you could ask for smaller sums to cover specific parts of the event, by splitting it down into smaller parts - the hire of the hall, or cost of the band - you could approach different groups.

Start with the most generous to set a high 'normal' donation, and see if you can 'tweak' any rivalries..... - we have even run barn dances where the individual dances were sponsored by both local companies and individual families, with the names read out to much cheering!

Lots of smaller sums can be easier to get than one big sum, and can add up to a bigger total.

Again, make sure they get as much 'value for money' by advertising their donations, and give them free tickets if possible as a 'thank you'.

Publicity

Poster campaigns,

Including running a competition in local schools to design the poster, with the prize being presented on the night so that proud parents can come along (and buy tickets, and raffle prizes, etc. etc.).

'Networking'

Make the most of social and work contacts - are there notice boards, newsletters or other ways to spread the word?

'Quid Pro Quo'

Time to call in all those favours, especially from friends, family and work/social contacts who regularly come to you for donations and help with their events. Not just ticket sales, but venues, design and other skills, equipment etc. Remember to thank them profusely, and make the experience as pleasant as possible for them ('credits' in publicity material, the odd bottle of wine or bouquet of flowers). You'll probably want to go back to them in the future....

Press & media coverage

Don't forget to write press releases for your local newspapers, and to send details to radio stations for inclusion in their free events diaries.

Local celebrities

Is there anyone locally connected with your cause willing and able to draw prizes, open the event or be involved in any other way? Don't be afraid to ask - if they agree with your cause you may be surprised who will help. As above though, do look after them.

Planning the evening

Have a clear plan and structure right from the start - who is in charge? Who is the MC? Does everyone involved understand (and agree with!) their role for the event?

Make sure there is a clear running order/seating plan, and that everyone involved knows about it. Talk to the caterers in advance for example, to make sure that sufficient time and access has been allowed for them to do their job properly. Has someone checked power, access and space for performers (remember, P.P.P.P.P.P!).

During The Event

Overall

Time raffles and other paying competitions to "spread" the outlay by guests across the evening - making them dig deep too often can make them stop giving - and you may well find them to be more relaxed and generous later on in the evening, after a few drinks...

Having no 'Political Correctness' mandate to observe here, I can suggest that you consider who would be best to sell interact with your audience to sell tickets, run games etc. As a generalisation, a younger person with a pleasant manner and charming smile will usually be the most effective person to deal with audience members of the other gender. Is this exploitation, and if so, of who? I would suggest that if you are raising money for a good cause, your audience probably realise that they will be gently 'fleeced' during the evening, and it is your duty to make the experience as pleasant and gentle as possible for them!

Raffle

The usual, but not the only way to raise money for a charity. Donations from local firms for prizes - can be either an item, or the offer of a skill or service. A good way for local companies to advertise their products - for example garden maintenance, osteopath, web design company, etc. Don't forget to mention them in any publicity and on the night - and some free tickets wouldn't hurt either. If they do come, it won't hurt to ask for a round of applause - look at the 'lifetime' value of a sponsor, not just the one-off value.

If you are just giving out cash prizes, do remember to check the ratio of ticket cost to prize values so that you neither fall foul of current legislation by giving out too little, nor 'catch a cold' by giving out too much!

Auction

Donated gifts, or else specialist skills. A great way to raise money, especially when there is a friendly rivalry between different members of the audience. A good barn dance 'caller' should be able to act as your auctioneer if you don't have anyone 'in house' able to carry out this role.

Games to run during the evening

'Playing Cards'

Start with two standard packs of playing cards.

Sell one of the packs, at a pound a card.

Shuffle the second pack of cards, and then draw and discard the cards one by one - the last card wins a prize for the owner of the matching card.

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Participants can start by all standing, sitting down one at a time as their cards are drawn. You could also elect to have more prizes – either spread out, or all at the end .

'The Birthday Game'

A raffle barrel has slips of paper with 366 dates of the year written on it.

Throughout the evening folks can pay a pound to draw a slip of paper - beforehand they must declare their birthday - if they draw their birthday they get a big prize - but this is unlikely so a lot of cash could be raised.

'Heads and Tails'

Members of the audience who want to participate all pay (usually about a pound, but could be a 'fiver' with a big prize), then stand up and put their hands over either their heads or bottoms - a coin is tossed, and the losers sit down until only one person is left - the winner. Can be repeated for different prizes, possibly with different 'participation' fees.

As a variation, you could run this game as a quiz, and the audience choose 'Head' or 'Tail' to show their choice of answer - could be either 'heads for yes, tails for no', or 'heads for answer A, tails for answer B'.

'Sliding coins'

A prize, often a bottle of whisky or similar, is placed at the end of the hall, and £1 coins are slid along the floor towards it. The nearest coin wins, the audience can have as many goes as they want.

It's best to collect the furthest away coins as you go, so have a plentiful supply of coins to swap for notes, and to make it easier to keep track of the most likely coins.

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Try experimenting first in your hall to get a feel for distances, in sports hall there are often lines already painted on the floor that can be used, otherwise a 'feet' behind' line can quickly be marked on the floor with plastic electrical tape. Bottles in cases or tubes are best in case of chance contact by over-eagerly hurled coins!

Penalty Fines

If you are running a themed event, such as a Wild West Hoe Down, or a Medieval Banquet, then you can also have a small jail, or a set of stocks in the corner. Those found guilty of committing crimes mobile going off, not in proper costume etc) can then be ordered by the Master of Ceremonies (Sheriff, or Lord Chamberlain accordingly) to pay a fine or face the consequences.

Running a Bar

Either arrange the licence and bar yourself, or arrange to take a percentage commission from a local landlord.

Database

Do take the opportunity to capture names and addresses on the day / evening. There is a saying in direct marketing that 'the money is in the list'. Hopefully all will go well, and you'll have a room full of 'happy bunnies' who wouldn't mind repeating the experience in the future.

After The Event

Don't forget to write and thank any sponsors, or those who have given any form of donation. Explain how much you were able to raise with their help, and what their contribution will mean in real terms - it is only polite, and will help build up a relationship for when you go back to them for future events.

Plan out your year in advance, so that you can 'bags' the dates you want in advance before others. Wait for too long, and you'll not only have to fit round rival events, but will also loose out to 'sorry, but we've already accepted an invitation for then'. You won't stop people changing their minds for more important events, such as family parties and weddings, but it should still help overall.

Use your database (see above) to contact past attendees and offer them special deal in advance. Again, restrict the numbers of tickets available.

Also ask for feedback and comments, so you have some comments to help sell future events, as well as ideas for other ways to raise money. One local group 'floats' different options first, the goes with the most popular.

In Conclusion

I hope these ideas are of interest, but am sure that there are many other good tips and bits of advice out there, not included in this eBook.

Do please pass on any you know, and I'll include them in later editions!

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