



St. Mark Catholic School

St. Mark Catholic School is one of thirty-three elementary schools currently operated by the Catholic Diocese of Dallas, TX, serving grades K-8. The diverse curriculum features a self-contained classroom environment emphasizing individualized learning. In addition, St. Mark's offers a structured, well-rounded program of enrichment activities: music, art, and physical education. The foundation of St. Mark's School is religion, in which students receive instruction five days a week and attend Mass every Friday. Since 1982, St. Mark has served the needs of their parishioners and other families in the community.

Highlights

- Getting new and existing donors interested in and bidding on St. Mark's online auction was easy due to the power of email and online search engines.
- Bidders outside of the St. Mark community participated in the online auction after locating the event via online search engines.
- Since the majority of their auction items sold at their online auction, and they didn't need a large space for the live auction, St. Mark's was able to conduct their live auction in a donated, smaller space.

Challenge

Each year, St. Mark Catholic School of Plano, Texas, holds a successful auction gala event. While the parish parents were always very supportive, they were also stretched to the limit. "It's a tough situation because we ask our parents to donate, then we ask them to come buy the items they've donated," explains Claire Murad, former auction co-chair. What's more, while St. Mark Catholic Church boasted a large parish, only a small percentage of parishioners had children enrolled in the school, thus most parishioners were uninterested in attending school fundraisers.

The auction committee needed to find a way to engage this sizable potential donor base literally right on their doorstep and appeal to prospective donors beyond the school walls.

Solution

For the past two years, St. Mark's has found a way to successfully blend an online and live auction by utilizing Greater Giving Fundraising Suite, consisting of Greater Giving Event Software, Greater Giving Online Payments, Greater Giving Online Auctions and Auctionpay terminals. Rather than limiting the auction excitement to a one-night event, the St. Mark's auction team extends the fun a full two weeks earlier with their online auction. This format has enabled them to effectively promote their Fund-a-Cause, which raises money to purchase projectors and screens for every classroom.

Using Online Auctions, St. Mark has reached beyond school parents, to relatives and other supporters who are sometimes unable to attend the live event. And in 2008 there was an unexpected bonus—online bidders completely outside of the St. Mark community who found the event via on-line search engines. Said Murad, "We brought people into the auction that had no relation to the school—about \$2K of the total sold online was from Bidding for Good. Some of the people I talked to said they just like to bid on all of the Catholic School auctions to support Catholic education."

Because so many items are pre-sold during the online auction, St. Mark's found the live event could be more intimate, and their options for donated venues opened up. This year, the event venue was donated by a Classic BMW dealership. "By limiting the amount of items going to the event night, I believe we ended up making even more on the items that were bought that evening. The event was festive and most people focused on the 2 or 3 items they really wanted, and had fun bidding,

eating, dancing, playing casino, and visiting,” said Kerri Rushing, current auction chair.

For the live event, the school utilizes the Online Payments, Event Software and Auctionpay, which helps everything from item procurement to event check-out run seamlessly. Guests are able to register and pay online with Online Payments. Event Software simplifies auction committee tasks by enabling them to organize auction items, pre-print bid sheets, manage table assignments, and write follow-up letters. And for the night of the event, Auctionpay terminals provides an easy solution for securely capturing payments at registration and check-out.

Tips from St. Marks

- Use a central storage facility for storing items sold at your online auction, so all the volunteers and bidders know exactly where to go for auction donations and pickups before and after the online event.
- Don't be afraid to ask local businesses, like car dealerships, to donate their venue for your live event.
- If shipping items won at an online auction, note that the shipping fees will be automatically billed to the winning bidder.

Results

In 2007, St. Mark's first online auction raised \$25,000—over 1/4 of their total revenue of \$97,000, increasing total revenue (the combination of funds raised at the online and live events) by over 20%. This ratio continues today. Having an online auction option makes it easy to make money on items like event decorations and re-present unsold auction items for bid by establishing an after-the-event online auction.

Perhaps the school's biggest success has been getting new people involved with the online auction. “We saw a lot of interest from people who haven't participated in the past, including parishioners and out-of-state grandparents. Having everything set up online made it very easy for everyone to spread the word.” said Murad. And their live event continues to improve each year. For example, in year's past, volunteers scanned bar-codes to track auction items, a task made obsolete due to the processing of bid sheets using Greater Giving. And, with Event Software, the St. Mark's auction committee needs about half as many volunteers to process winning bids. And because Greater Giving' solutions are so easy to use, volunteers are able to step in and take over for one another without hours of training.

By being creative with Greater Giving solutions, and leveraging them to the fullest, St. Mark's has found a way to include more participants in their auction experience, even donors from outside the area whose connection to St Mark's was made via the Web.