The Seattle Aquarium Society

Imagine a place where you can experience the wonders of Puget Sound, meet a sea otter and help to support marine conservation efforts in one day. You'll find that and more at The Seattle Aquarium—a world-class aquarium located along the waterfront in downtown Seattle. This city institution has provided both entertainment and education to over19 million visitors since its opening in 1977. And behind the scenes, The Seattle Aquarium Society, governed by an independent Board of Directors, works to generate support through special events, annual fundraising, grants, and a membership program.

Highlights

- Greater Giving is credited with contributing to the Society's fundraising results, which grew from $750K in 2006 to $1 Million in 2008.

- Even on event night, Greater Giving Client Services was easy to reach and always helpful.

- The Society can now easily import/export donor information into their donor management software.

Challenge

The Seattle Aquarium Society is well acquainted with auctions. In fact, they have been holding their annual Splash! Auction for 15 years, with 30% of their annual fundraising goal relying on this single event. The auction usually attracts around 600 guests, so efficiency is an important aspect of the planning and execution.

The Society's auction team looks to Allie Serious, The Aquarium Society's Database and Operations Specialist, to make sure they have the right technological tools to manage the event. When Allie first came on board, they were using software that wasn't compatible with Microsoft® Windows® XP, so the group switched software programs. Serious saw holes in this new system from the get-go. "Navigating the software was

difficult, reporting was bad, and sometimes it did not sync correctly night of event," said Serious. "And to top it off, their support staff was rude." She recommended that they replace their new package, even though this would be adopting a third solution.

Serious discovered that the Society already used Auctionpay terminals for their payment processing and began comparing Greater Giving Event Software to their current program. After much consideration, Serious convinced the Society to give Event Software a try.

Solution

Proving that "third time's the charm," the auction team found that Event Software did all the things they needed to manage their event and more. With 300 silent and 15 live auction items, a raffle, a special appeal, and a large number of guests and sponsors, they had a lot of data to manage. Because of the user-friendly software interface, Serious and her team no longer find the work volume a challenge. Instead of trying to figure out the software, the tool works with them and gives them back time to focus on procurement and audience development.

Additionally, importing and exporting data from their Raiser's Edge donor management software to and from Event Software is a huge bonus. "Being able to export is so wonderful, and the process is really easy to manipulate," said Serious. Because of this feature, they can now trust that their donor information is accurate year-round.

Tips from The Seattle Aquarium Society

- Make sure to set the operator in the Event Software PC Sales Bar to track who enters what data.

- Get creative with data entry for golf events—use the table seating function for foursomes and use other fields for handicaps and t-shirt sizes.

- Familiarize yourself with the software terminology and how it applies to the search feature.

Results

In 2007, The Aquarium Society used Event Software and Auctionpay together for the first time. It was obvious that every aspect of the event management process was more efficient because of the marriage of these products. At the event, staff commented on how much easier it was to manage all the attendees, and repeat attendees noticed how much shorter the check-in and check-out lines were.

Serious and her team are also thrilled about the robust features that Event Software offers. The reporting tool gives them so many options, like the ability to limit the numbers in a group and pull bidder reports with detailed information. In the past, adding last-minute bidders created obstacles because of the new reports and labels required—now with Event Software it's a quick one-step process. "I think of a lot of the things we do in the database are just a lot clearer using Greater Giving," said Serious. "I just don't have that frustrated feeling anymore when working on the events!"

Moving forward, they began using Event Software and Auctionpay for the annual Otter Open Golf Tournament in September 2009. Getting creative with data entry, they used the table seating function for foursomes and some of the other fields for handicaps and t-shirt sizes—showing product flexibility.

Serious credits Greater Giving with contributing to their fundraising growth from $750K in 2006 to $1 Million in 2008. And best of all, managing The Aquarium Society's annual events is no longer a source of stress—it's an opportunity to raise the bar even higher.