



Vichy Mothers Club

The Vichy Mothers Club encourages and organizes parental involvement at Vichy Elementary School, located in Napa, California. The organization has a clear mission: “To make decisions that use financial, physical, and technological resources to positively impact and improve the education experience of Vichy students, from building a better education environment, to fundraising.”

Though Vichy Elementary School resides in Napa, which is often perceived as an affluent area, the school itself is not a magnet, title one, or charter school, and lacks the district-provided funds for some necessary curricula—including reading support, math, P.E., and music. Every year, the Vichy Mothers Club holds fundraising events to make up the difference in funds, purchase things the school cannot afford, and get the community involved in supporting the school.

Highlights

- Online event registration, sponsorship sales, advertising sales and event table management saved volunteers time and effort leading up to the event—90% of registration tickets were sold online.
- Investing in Greater Giving solutions; targeting top-selling auction items; and inviting a smaller, more committed audience resulted in a 20% revenue increase over the previous year.
- The introduction of Greater Giving Event Software and Auctionpay card readers at check-in and check-out helped create a smooth, easy, and enjoyable event experience for attendees.

Challenge

Vichy Alternative Association president Jack Irby got involved in the Vichy Mothers Club’s annual fundraising in 2009. “The perception is that Vichy has a lot of money out here,” said Irby. But in reality, Vichy is a classic elementary school that supports a widespread, rural neighborhood with a low population density. The Vichy Mothers Club raises nearly 65% of the school’s revenue during annual events, which pays for school supplies and important student programs that the school otherwise couldn’t support. The organization needed to reach a wider audience to make their fundraising goals.

When Irby stepped in, the Vichy Mothers Club was using another software solution to run their auction. It was cumbersome and difficult to use, and guests were experiencing long lines at the event. Irby decided that the school needed something different to meet their fundraising goals and help grow the Vichy Mothers Club’s donor base.

Solution

After a parent recommended Greater Giving, Irby attended a webinar, and then scheduled a demo. He wanted a solution that multiple users could access and use at the same time; he also needed a way to sell event tickets online, take donations online, and streamline the event’s check-in and check-out processes. To expand the organization’s donor base and reach a wider audience, Irby wanted an online auction platform, too. In the end, Irby purchased the Greater Giving Fundraising Suite to meet all of the Vichy Mothers Club’s wide-ranging needs.

Irby also changed the way they procured auction items. “In years past we would put out an email blast that was a general call for donations.” Last year they had 130 items in the live and silent auctions, and long lines at check-out. This year, the committee was selective about which items were included in the auction. After analyzing

which items sold well the previous year, the committee then sought out those items specifically—ending up with a much slimmer number of 85 auction items.

In addition to changing procurement methods, the Vichy Mothers Club also changed the way they offered items for bidding. They decided to include Guaranteed Purchase on bid sheets, and started items with a higher minimum bid. Items valued below \$500 started at 40% of value, whereas items valued over \$500 started at 50%.

In a final effort to tackle long lines at registration, Irby and the Vichy Mothers Club consciously limited the number of guests that attended the event to fewer than 200. They sold tickets through their Greater Giving event website, and even offered sponsorship sales and advertisement sales through the page, so the Vichy Mothers Club didn't have to enter and track these sales manually. The event page also boasted an online item donation form, an option to make direct donations to the school, and all the event details guests would need—making it a one-stop shop.

To supplement the live event, the Vichy Mothers Club also held an online auction. It included items that might not interest locals, such as resort experiences and wine tasting, but could be of great interest to buyers outside Napa.

Tips from Vichy Mothers Club

- Deliberately procure items that performed well in previous years. Remember that less is more, and to focus on quality items.
- Strategically select items for the online auction, knowing your audience could be coming from all over the world. Select items for the live and silent that will appeal to locals.
- Advertise items directly to the people you think will be interested, and display them on your event website to build pre-event hype.
- Start early with preparation, and do a dry-run of check-in and check-out before—it will pay off.
- Be prepared for every situation. Bring battery backups for your computers and train your volunteers in advance, then refresh them before the event starts.

Results

Using Greater Giving Event Software Online, Irby was able to assign permissions to each user, and loves that he can segment who can do what. Irby said that the software “encourages you to get organized. The more organized the event, the smoother it runs.” Because the software is designed to turn items into packages, the auction committee was able to easily sort through their inventory and for example, create exciting packages out of “four or five lackluster items.” The Vichy Mothers Club even displayed their auction items online using their Greater Giving event website, getting attendees excited about them prior to the big night.

By auctioning fewer, higher-quality items and focusing on high-performance categories of items, the Vichy Mothers Club annual fundraiser experienced a 20% growth in revenue over the previous year. The live auction sales averaged over 100% in item value; the silent auction averaged 72-75% of value. And thanks to the decision to add the Guaranteed Purchase feature, country club members who were milling around during event setup—and weren't even attending the auction—were able to purchase items before the event started.

Irby combined an online auction with a live event, a tactic learned from working with the Napa Valley Education Foundation the previous year. One bidder from the online auction was so thrilled with his purchase that he actually flew out to attend the live auction! “The beauty of the online auction,” Irby said, “is we had the opportunity to raise funds outside of our area.”

Online sales and registration were also a big success, with the school selling 90% of the event tickets online. The online registration process and easy table assignments saved volunteers huge amounts of time and work.

And as for those lines at check-out? This year, there were no lines at the Vichy Mothers Club annual auction. Irby chalks it up to preparation: they did a dry run of the event in advance, and made sure everybody was trained on what they needed to do.

Guests and staff exclaimed about the auction being so much better than the previous year. Everything ran smoothly with Greater Giving tools in place to help manage the details. Citing his previous experience as a CTO, Irby said, “If it looks like my task is easy and I'm not doing anything, then I have absolutely done my job!”