

# Upstate Vegas Events

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## **A SUCCESSFUL CASINO FUNDRAISER PARTY**

Upstate Vegas Events works with 40-50 fundraising organizations throughout each year and we help to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars. We've seen many casino parties as fundraisers and want yours to be successful in realizing your fundraising goal. As your resident expert, we are committed to helping you achieve your goals by assisting in organizing and planning a successful event. Here are some points of interest for any fundraiser planning committee.

### **SET GOALS**

Set a financial goal for your fundraiser. How much money do you want to make? This will help you determine how many people to invite, where you want to advertise your event, and how much to charge for tickets/admission. It will also help you determine how much money to spend on entertainment and food.

### **HOW WILL MY EVENT MAKE MONEY?**

Revenue from your fundraiser will come from the following areas:

#### **Ticket Sales**

Sell admission tickets in advance. You can do this in many ways. If you are having a more formal event, you will want to mail out invitations with response cards and have your attendees RSVP with a check. You will need to gather the names and

addresses of your responders in a database to assist you in checking your guests in at the door, to mail thank you notes and keep track of attendance.

If you want as many people as possible to attend your event, you will still want to mail out invitations to your target market and VIP's, but you will also want to sell outside tickets and advertise in the local papers and social media sites to generate more attendance. In this case, delegate outside ticket sales to more than one person. It is easier for 20 people to sell 10 tickets than it is for 1 person to sell 200 tickets.

Keep in mind that ticket sales are your main source of revenue. The success of your event is largely dependent on how many tickets are sold in advance.

### **Table Sponsors**

Find at least one sponsor per casino table. These sponsors can be found by looking at your local vendors that you already work with now. They often share common interests or have products or services that match the audience likely to attend your event. For large scale events show off the sponsor's access to high attendance, great tradition, and the wide media coverage.

The amount of sponsorship should be at least \$100 - \$200 per table but could be more. If the scale of your event is BIG, you may consider sponsorships levels; i.e. Standard Sponsor at the \$100-\$200 level, General Sponsor for \$300-\$400 level and Superior Sponsor at the \$500 or more level.

Some additional sponsorship ideas include:

- A banner on the event website
- Sponsor name or logo in the event's newsletter and emails
- Sponsor mentioned at the event opening
- Table signs or tent-cards with the sponsor's name at the tables
- Promotional materials at registration or at their sponsored gaming table

Do not forget to add your sponsors (and anyone they would like to invite) to your VIP list to mail them event tickets.

As a final note on sponsors you will want to consider getting sponsorships for everything offered at your event. For instance, a sponsor for a portion of the food, or the bar services or the decorations at the event all help to offset the cost and generate more revenue for the fundraising goal.

## **Food and Drink Sales**

Depending on how formal your event, food and drink sales are a way to generate revenue. If the event you are hosting is formal, you will want to have a higher price for admission and have a limited open bar (beer, wine, and soda).

Be sure to discuss all food and drink arrangements with the establishment where you are having the event before you sign a contract. You do not want to assume you will be making money on drinks if the establishment is going to charge you full price for each drink sold. Consider a drink special with a unique event name (i.e. Red Cross Martini or "It's for the Kids" cocktail). These drinks have special pricing with a large portion of the proceeds going to the fundraiser. Most establishments in the Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse areas have hosted fundraisers before and will assist you in determining how to charge for drinks.

Determining your food choices will follow a similar path as your drink choices. Just remember not to make your guests feel that they are being short changed on food. The more expensive the admission ticket, the more food and drink included for your guests.

We do not suggest a sit down dinner or full meal for a full-blown casino night. These events work better with hors d'oeuvres and lighter fare.

## **Auctions**

Silent auctions work best for a casino event. Silent auctions provide additional types of revenue without taking away from the casino action. Just remember that you will have to solicit for more prizes for the auction.

To help insure a successful silent auction:

- Move identical items away from each other.
- Stager the closing of auction items by say 10-minutes apart.
- Fly balloons or stage lights above the silent auction tables as they are closing to indicate where they are and raise excitement.

Live auctions can also generate more revenue. If you have a live auction, shut down the tables at auction time to get everyone's attention. Hold the auction for only 30- 40 minutes and have only high-ticket items. Make sure you have a dynamic auctioneer with experience and someone on the sidelines to hand out the prizes to the winners.

Auctions are a lot of work and it is advisable to have one or two people to be solely responsible for the auction and solicitation of prizes.

### **Additional Cheque (Chip) Purchases**

As part of their entrance fee, guests will be given a specific amount of cheques (chips) to use at the casino tables. (Usually it's \$500 in chips.) When people run out, they can "donate" money to acquire more chips. This is another source of revenue for your fundraiser and it also gives people additional time to have fun. Keep the donation amount a round number that is covered by a single bill (\$5, \$10, \$20) and make sure your guests are receiving an appropriate number of chips for their money so they do not feel short-changed.

### **50/50 Raffle**

A 50/50 raffle simply involves the sale of raffle tickets with the proceeds being split evenly between the winner and your organization. It is one of the simplest and easiest fundraisers you can do. Your only fundraising expense is the raffle tickets. A double ticket roll is ideal. All you need is one or more ticket sellers.

Raffle tickets normally sell for \$1 each, with an incentive for multiple purchases such as 3 tickets for \$2, or 5 tickets for \$4, etc. Using a price incentive for multiple tickets can often increase your total sales and builds a larger 'pot' to split with the lucky winner. Another option is 5 tickets for \$5 or an arm's length for \$10. Using a tall person with a long wing span to sell these tickets makes for added fun.

All ticket stubs are placed in a hat or other container from which one lucky number is drawn. The 'take' is tallied and one-half awarded to the holder of the lucky number. One drawing per event is normally held, but we would recommend at least two, one in the middle and another near the end of the event. In a 50/50 raffle your fundraising group gets to keep exactly 50% of all the money raised.

We at Upstate Vegas Events offer a 24-space Prize Wheel. These spaces can be sold for say \$5 each until all of them are filled. Each buyer can have their name written into the space with a dry erase pen. You then spin the wheel for one lucky winner. You can follow the same 50/50 format with one-half of the total dollars taken in (say  $\$120/2 = \$60$ ) going out to the winner. The wheel can then be cleaned and resold a second time (or more).

People are always happy with a chance to win a cash prize. It's usually easy to get people to spend a little bit of money, when they have a chance to win quite a bit more.

## **Ad Books**

Ad books are another way of generating revenue, but like auctions, you will want a small team of people solely in charge of the ad book. These people will solicit local businesses to buy an ad to place in a small book to be handed out at the door. You may have a brief schedule of the night's events (what time dinner or the auction is, who the entertainment is, etc.) and a brief note from the organization thanking all the attendees and sponsors for their generosity, and thanking the organizers for their hard work. You may also have ads for the table sponsors in this book for no additional charge (more "bang for their buck"). Just remember that you have to generate enough ads to make more money than the cost of printing. You do not want your ad book to be an expense.

## **EXPENSES**

It is critical to keep the expenses for your event at a minimum without compromising quality to ensure a successful event, yet it is important to have a quality event for your guests. Your event will include (but may not be limited to) the following:

### **Facility Costs**

Here is where you have to weigh your costs. Do you want to have your event at a place that will also supply food and drink or will it be more economical to have it at a place that does not supply food and drink? If you go that route, you will have to hire a caterer and purchase your own drinks. It may be cheaper to purchase your own drinks from a wholesaler but then you will have to hire a bartender. Keep all these costs in mind when you determine the location of your event. The most important aspect in determining a venue for your event is to make sure that it is big enough to accommodate all your guests but not so big that they feel like the place is empty.

Also make sure the venue is set up appropriately for your event. If you are having a sit down dinner or buffet, you will want tables set up with the casino action away from the eating area but close to the bar and the silent auction tables. You will also have to accommodate any other forms of entertainment that you may have.

### **Decorations**

Keep decorations to a respectable minimum. Balloons and flowers are always a nice touch. Always ask for a discounted price or donations for your event in exchange for an ad in the ad book or a sponsorship. Don't forget centerpieces if you are having a sit down dinner. Sometimes the facility can throw these in for free or solicit donations from a florist.

## **Casino Equipment**

Upstate Vegas Events will need a good estimate of your anticipated guest count at least two weeks prior to your event. We suggest that you provide seating for approximately 70-80% of your guests for a fundraiser casino night. With this good head count Upstate Vegas will be able to determine the appropriate number of tables, amount of equipment and personnel needed for your guests to have a good time. You do not want the tables too crowded or people will get angry that they cannot play. We however will work with you and your committee to come up with the right number of tables that fit your budget, accommodate your crowd and meet all your event needs.

## **Beverage and Food Costs**

Discuss all costs with the facility before you sign a contract. Always ask for a discount and ways they can help curb costs for your event. For example, you may be able to bring in your own food but they will supply the servers or perhaps bring in the drinks but they provide the bartenders. You may also be able to supply a team of volunteers to clean the facility after the event for a discounted rate.

## **DETERMINING TICKET PRICES**

Here is a simple formula to determine the cost of tickets to your event:

$$\text{Net Profit} + \text{Expenses} = \text{Gross then, } \text{Gross}/\text{Number of Tickets} = \text{Ticket Price}$$

### **Example:**

You wish to raise \$5000 at your event

Your total expenses are \$6500 (If you obtain table sponsors, your total expenses would be reduced by the amount of money raised through sponsorships.)

You want to sell 250 tickets

$$\$5000 + \$6500 = \$11500 \text{ then, } \$11500/250 = \$46 \text{ per ticket (round up to } \$50)$$

If you determine ticket prices in this way, any other revenue that you generate from the ad book, auctions, additional chip sales, or 50/50 raffles will be money in your organization's pocket. Work hard to sell all tickets you intended to sell. If you don't, your revenue will be greatly depreciated. Do not rely on any other source of revenue as much as you rely on your ticket sales.

## THE SUCCESSFUL EVENT

### Things to Know Before the Event:

Have a “cashier’s cage” or people walking around to solicit “donations” for more money to obtain more chips, and/or to purchase drink tickets, if applicable. Have the cage staffed by enough volunteers so that people do not have to wait in line but do not have too many volunteers or the area will look chaotic. If possible, have the area set up with a long table to hold all the volunteers. Have the area or people well marked so your guests know where to purchase these items.

Have volunteers posted at the door to greet your guests, check in VIP’s using the database, collect tickets and collect entrance fees from walk-ins. These volunteers should also be providing guests with their initial chips and drink tickets. Upstate Vegas Events will provide instruction on how to hand out chips. You may want to have nametags and markers available for your guests.

Have sponsor signs made up in advance for each casino table. If the sponsors donated promotional items or gag gifts, make sure they are accessible to the dealers.

Designate tasks ahead of time - which volunteers are on set-up duty, clean-up duty, cashier’s cage, etc.

You will want to provide raffle prizes for your casino night guests. Once again, you will want to solicit local businesses for prizes but, it can be anything: I.e. a \$50 gift certificate from a local grocery store, baseball tickets, weekend getaways at area hotels, wine and cheese baskets, floral arrangements, etc. These are things that are too small for an auction but big enough to make a nice give away gift. Throughout the evening, your guests can turn in their chips with the Upstate Vegas Events Dealers at the gaming tables for raffle tickets to be drawn for door prizes. Upstate Vegas will provide these raffle tickets. The exchange is often one raffle ticket for every \$100 in chips. Have a microphone and an “emcee” announce when drawings are going to be held. (You will want to announce this well in advance of each drawing so that there is not a rush to turn in chips for tickets). Then draw a ticket and pass out prizes. If you have a lot of door prizes, you can draw tickets throughout the evening to generate excitement throughout the evening and not create a rush at the end of the evening to pass out prizes.

Have the raffle ticket for the largest prize drawn at the end of the evening to encourage people to stay for the whole event. The Upstate Vegas Events’ dealers are trained to encourage people with a lot of chips to turn them in for raffle tickets at the casino tables.

## **UPSTATE VEGAS EVENTS**

We are committed to help you have a successful event. Upstate Vegas Events will work very closely with you and your organization to ensure that you reach your fundraising goal. Let us assist you in any way we possibly can in order for your event to run smoothly and successfully. Finally, we are most appreciative for this opportunity to serve you and to help out with your very worthwhile community service.