



Wish Night[®], a Virtual Gala

The Situation

Wish Night, Make-A-Wish Wisconsin's largest signature gala, was scheduled for Thursday, April 2. A lot of work had been done in preparation for the event, including securing all sponsors and selling out at 65 tables with a table cost of \$4,000 for a regular table of 10 and \$6,000 for a Gold Star table of 10. About 650 guests were expected to attend the event at The Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee. Auction items, and 350 bottles of wine had also been secured with the help of our Wish Night committee and many donors. The Auction Website through givesmart.com was set-up completely with all items. The script for the evening's program had been written and was in the process of being finalized with AV cues, etc. The video stories had already been shot and were in the process of being edited by Brian Artka of Size 43 Films. Artka has done the video stories for Wish Night for the past five years.

On March 16, Make-A-Wish Wisconsin staff began working remotely from home, with a safer at home order issued the following week by Wisconsin's Governor. The MAWWI team immediately began considering options for Wish Night, considering rescheduling the event for late May or early June, rescheduling the event for fall 2020 or going virtual. With the uncertainty of the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that May/June was not an option. It was also decided that rescheduling for fall would have impact on next year's Wish Night which is already scheduled for March 2021 as well as fiscal year concerns.

With all that was already set-up, the team discussed what going virtual would look like. The team did some research and discussed numerous options, looking at GiveSmart, social media, and other potential platforms. The team also took into consideration the fact that not all of the 650 expected guests would necessarily tune into a virtual event. The budget for the net event revenue was set at \$750,000.

The Plan

The MAWWI team made the decision to do a virtual gala on April 2 using social media platforms with the goal of looking like a live event. This was a strategic decision to include the broader public, giving those who typically wouldn't attend the event the opportunity to experience the program and to participate financially, whether it was through bidding on auction items, purchasing wine through the wine pull, purchasing opportunities to win the Kesslers Diamond Pull or making a donation.

The auction website was updated to allow individuals to participate in all of the activities online. It was opened for bidding two weeks prior to the event. The team decided to extend the auction bidding time on April 2 to 9:00 p.m. Normally, the silent auction closes at 7:10 p.m. right before the main evening program.

A communication plan was formed to communicate with Wish Night table hosts and guests as well as promoting the event to all Make-A-Wish Wisconsin constituents. *Please see the attached addendum - Communications Plan.* The Development team along with the President & CEO began calling all table hosts and sponsors. They also called a number of key donors who had already been approached about donating at certain levels during the paddle raise ask. After the event, Board members called table hosts to thank them and gather feedback. Phone calls were also made to any donor who gave \$100 or more to thank them.

A Facebook event was created to invite people to attend the live event, containing all of the details of when to tune-in and where to participate financially online. Numerous posts were shared through the event page leading up to the event. The event page was also boosted.



For the program, the team decided to shorten the script, combining the story videos with a few supplementary and transitional videos, forming one long-form video that would play “live” that evening. This was also a strategic decision as the team did not want to have any additional risk for technical errors trying to go back and forth between live and video formats. The script was updated – *please see the attached addendum – Virtual Script*. It was also decided to shoot the supplementary videos, using cell phone cameras, intentionally to give a more authentic feel to the presentation.

The team chose to have MAWWI President & CEO Patti Gorsky serve as the “emcee” in the transitional videos as she is the most recognizable figure in the MAWWI family and is well known in the broader community. Videos were shot of Patti at the MAWWI office in front of the donor and wish kid honor wall, using a cell phone camera.

Once the story videos were completed, the WISH Award video was sent to the Stark family, with specific instructions to watch it for the first time while being recorded using a cell phone camera, so that authentic emotion could be captured. The family was also asked to turn immediately to camera after watching the video and share their response and acceptance of the award.

The same instructions were given to Wish Dad, Robert Sprengel in regard to his daughter, Grace’s story. Robert was already scheduled to speak leading into the paddle raise ask during the evening. A OneDrive link was provided to both the Starks and Robert so that they could upload their videos, giving access to Brian Artka so he could assemble all of the videos into one long-format video.

While all of the program elements were in progress, research was done to figure out how to present the video “live” on multiple platforms at once. The team found a subscription online service called OneStream.live, which with the appropriate plan, allowed for a video of up to one hour to be streamed on up to 15-25 different platforms at once. The cost was \$39 per month with the option to cancel at any time. The team wanted to have the presentation on Facebook as MAWWI has more than 16,000 followers on that channel and on YouTube for those who may not use or like Facebook. Both platforms were promoted through the communications plan. The team also decided to add a stream to Twitter, using its Periscope service through OneStream, though this was not promoted as Twitter is not a strong channel for MAWWI.

On Monday, March 30, the first draft of the final long video was presented to the team. A number of suggestions and edits were made and the final video was provided on Wednesday, April 1. The video was then uploaded to OneStream.live and scheduled to run at 7:00 p.m. on all three social media channels. A teaser video that had already been created to play that evening was also scheduled as a teaser at 6:45.

Throughout the 2 ½ week period leading up to the event, the MAWWI team met daily through GoToMeeting to discuss any details that needed to be covered. Everyone on the team played a role and had input.



The Outcomes

The Virtual gala was a resounding success. The videos streamed “live” without any technical issues. That evening about 400 participants watched the video on Facebook and 200 on YouTube. Those numbers varied slightly throughout the 40-minute program, but remained fairly consistent the entire time. Original number of guests expected at the Pfister Hotel was 650.

Of the 65 tables originally sold, only 2 individual tables and 2 corporate tables backed out asking for their money back.

Board members and development staff received a lot of feedback after the event and it was all overwhelmingly positive, including from sponsors, table hosts, guests, donors and other friends of Make-A-Wish. The stories made a big impact and the generosity of participants shown through.

Social media impressions & video views of the live post originally shared on April 2 as of April 13, 2020:

Facebook impressions: 14,018
Twitter Impressions: 10,442
YouTube video views: 2,425

Total video views: 12,753
Total Impressions: 26,885

Additional impressions from promo posts:

Twitter: 14,413
Facebook: 18,737

Facebook event – participants that either said they were going or interested in going: 1,181

Traditional Media: a media alert was sent out the week of the event. The CBS affiliate and FOX affiliate in Milwaukee ran stories on April 2, and the ABC affiliate and radio stations also did stories in the Green Bay market. The Milwaukee Business Journal and the Milwaukee BizTimes also ran stories after the event.

Financial Participants: 386 people participated financially, whether purchasing an auction item, diamond pull, wine pull or donating funds. In 2019, at the physical Wish Night event 391 people financially participated.

Of the 386 financial participants, 150 were actual registered guests for Wish Night, meaning that 236 participants came from our general public participants.

Financials (as of April 16, 2020):

Silent Auction:	\$128,649
Wine Pull - over 300 bottles of 350 sold:	\$8,325
Kesslers Diamond Pull:	\$6,990
Donations, including matches and Adopt-A-Wish donations:	\$101,000+
Total net revenue including sponsorships, table sales and all of the above:	\$600,000 +





The Lessons Learned

- **Teamwork is KEY!** Our development and communications team met in the virtual world daily with our President & CEO and everyone's input was valuable. We also included our video storyteller and our producer of the event to get their feedback.
- **The Wish Night committee and staff's hard work for months ahead of the event prepared us for success, regardless of the event being live or virtual.**
- **Stay focused, don't panic and think strategically.** While we were forced to pivot in 2½ weeks, we kept our eye on the mission and thought carefully about what strategically made sense for our event and our chapter. We also opened our minds to new possibilities, including using a new streaming platform to broadcast the event "live."
- **Utilize what you have in place.** With tight timing parameters we utilized the things we already had in place, including the Givesmart auction platform and our social media channels. Using tools that are proven, reduce risk.
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** It was critical that we communicated with our sponsors, table hosts, guests, volunteers, vendors and our general public. We did this through multiple channels, including emails, social media and phone calls. Personal connection is especially key with donors. Giving donors the opportunity to participate is effective. Don't take the opportunity away from them by assuming they might not be able to or want to give at this time. They will tell you, but always give them the opportunity while caring for their needs and being relevant with current situations.
- **Keep the mission at the heart of everything you do.** In times like this it is tempting to veer off course and focus on what's going on in the world but focusing efforts around mission will keep you on target and will engage the heart of your constituents.