

How Salvation Army livestream auctions connect shoppers with secondhand finds

In the back corners of The Salvation Army's Long Beach and Anaheim, California, thrift store sorting warehouses, secondhand shopping is getting a digital twist.

With ring lights, a smartphone and racks of donated fashion, staff go live twice a week on Whatnot—a [livestream shopping platform](#)—auctioning off unique clothes, bags and accessories to online thrifters.

“We’re selling brand-name items like Michael Kors, Marc Jacobs, Loungefly, Lululemon and Coach,” said Jacob Presnell, Salvation Army E-Commerce Specialist and Whatnot livestream host. “Many shoppers are surprised by [what they can find for a good deal](#).”



During each show, Presnell and E-Commerce Specialist Dorthea Nemtoc present up to 200 items live on camera. Bidding starts at \$10 per item, with just 15 seconds on the clock.

In a fast-paced format, viewers place bids online until the timer runs out, then it's on to the next piece.

Additional e-commerce staff and ARC beneficiaries keep the process moving off camera—once an item sells, they collect it and prepare it for shipping.

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Jacob Presnell, Salvation Army E-Commerce Specialist and Whatnot livestream host

“Everything happens very fast,” Presnell said. “At the same time, we’re answering questions—checking the material, measuring the length, or even modeling the item.”

Presnell said he takes current trends into account when suggesting how someone might use an item, drawing on his sales experience and work in e-commerce with The Salvation Army to highlight its value and help close the deal.

“This blazer can be great for the office or dressed up for a night out,” Presnell told a viewer, helping convince her to make the \$20 purchase.

While live, he reminds shoppers that [every dollar supports Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers](#) (ARCs), helping fund recovery programs for those in need.

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Livestreaming on Whatnot launched in May and runs Monday through Thursday from 1-4 p.m. On average, each session generates around \$2,700 with a record high of \$4,369 from an Anaheim show.

ARC Director of Strategic Projects Piers Fairclough said the online sales channel is ideal for those who prefer to shop virtually.

“We’re reaching new shoppers who seem to prefer the online experience,” Fairclough said.



The Whatnot livestream setup features a simple backdrop and ample lighting to highlight each item. Photo courtesy Haley Osness.

The channel has over 7,000 followers, and Fairclough said many tune in every week.

“Some get to know the host’s name and stop by just to say hello,” he said.

Others, Fairclough said, are on the hunt for specific items or sizes. One shopper, Amber Andrade-Foltz, joined a livestream and mentioned she was looking for a Lululemon workout set. Presnell acknowledged her request, and off-camera staff quickly searched the nearby Whatnot inventory.

Within 10 minutes, staff returned with a Lululemon dress for Presnell to showcase. After explaining that the built-in shorts made the dress perfect for exercise, Andrade-Foltz placed a bid and won the dress for \$26.

“I wasn’t expecting you to actually find something!” she commented in the livestream chat.

E-Commerce Supervisor Fatima Jimenez said livestreams are a natural addition to [The Salvation Army’s online thrift store](#).

“We already sell clothing and some accessories online, but the livestreams add energy and create a real-time connection with shoppers,” she said.

Looking ahead, Fairclough said they plan to expand livestreams to Salvation Army thrift stores in Riverside and Canoga Park, which already contribute to the online thrift store and have the space to host livestreams.

“We’ve seen success in Long Beach and Anaheim,” Fairclough said. “Shoppers enjoy it, and so the next step is to continue expanding and grow our reach.”

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