

Report: How to Make Your Next Event Immensely Successful With Hilarious Entertainment

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1. Why Comedy?

People love to laugh! Everyone, or nearly everyone - we don't worry about the 2% of permanently sour people - enjoy laughing.

We know why. We've heard it before. Laughter releases endorphin, which is a natural drug in our body...blah, blah, blah.

Chances are a motivational speaker recently filled you in on all the healthy benefits of laughter.

Here's a simpler theory.

- People are really busy and need a break
- People like to relieve stress any way possible
- People even like to laugh at others so they feel better

When you host, sponsor or organize an event, besides accomplishing your main purpose, you might as well give people what they want: a laugh!

In fact, shrewd planners and organizers understand that entertainment should often be considered FIRST, thereby ensuring the success of the event, REGARDLESS OF THE PURPOSE OF THE EVENT ITSELF.

The Point: Providing high-quality, humorous entertainment is giving the people participating exactly what they most want!

2. Why Comedy? Part 2

The other reason you want to have funny professionals performing at your event is your desire to have people remember the occasion.

Not so much, the details of the event, but a general feeling of, "Hey, my financial company puts on a great client appreciation," or "Wow, I can't remember our annual meeting being so much fun."

Great hilarious entertainment makes your event memorable!

A **memorable event** is important for many reasons:

A **memorable** client appreciation "locks" the name of your company and service in the minds of your participants.

A **memorable** fundraiser makes it easier to reach your financial goals and helps attendance for future events.

A **memorable** conference or convention increases attendance by getting back all your registrants and capturing the “spillover” of people who didn’t attend but heard how great the conference was.

A **memorable** special event is literally made by the quality of the entertainment you have. That’s what makes it special!

The Point: Great comedy makes your event memorable and successful!

3. Getting the “Act Together”

Knowing that comedy is one of the most effective ways to make any event memorable, understanding the technical requirements of sound and stage, and placing the comedy in a good position in the program is an accomplishment all in itself.

Three main areas comedy acts can be placed in are **stand-up comedy**, **specialty acts** and **improvised comedy**. A stand -up comic is a lone performer, a comedian. A specialty act refers to any “special” act or skill such as a magician, a juggler, a hypnotist etc. Improvised comedy refers to any acts that use audience suggestions to create spontaneous humour.

Which one you hire depends on your event, your purpose, and your audience. Here are some **concerns** you should address for each category, before making your decision.

Make sure the stand-up comedian you hire has experience performing at corporate events and can work “clean.” Especially if you know it is important to your group (which it is about 90% of the time these days).

A specialty act can be visually appealing to your audience, but always make sure there is evidence the performer’s ability to make people laugh is as strong or stronger than any talent the entertainer has. Remember, we want comedy.

Improv comedians are always subjecting themselves and your audience to a certain amount of risk because of the spontaneity of the show. Make sure they are clearly professional improvisers with a high degree of skill and corporate show experience.

There are specific **benefits** associated with each type of comedy as well.

When hiring a stand-up comedian you are getting a pre-packaged act. You can easily find out how funny the comedian is by checking references. But when you find the comic with the right act for your audience the results will be excellent.

A performer in a specialty act has that extra zip that often appeals to audiences. In addition

to the created humour there is the added “Oh, wow” of the skill and the talent demonstrated.

Improvised humour can sometimes capture some of both worlds. Like stand-up comedians, some improvisers are skilled at creating shows for corporate groups, planning a show that really connects with your audience. In addition, well-performed improvised comedy can also cause the audience to say, “Oh, wow,” just like the specialty act performer. The main strength of improvised comedy is how it can be tailored, customized and personalized to every group.

4. Customizing the Show

About customizing. Any professional comedy performer will customize their presentation to some extent for your group and function. Professional comedy performers do this because they are aware of the impact and increased success they have when their material and delivery is made to closely fit the group they are entertaining.

Good performers understand how much more funny their performance is and how much stronger the audience’s reaction is to a show that hits “close to home.”

When hiring talent there are several ways you can assess the performer’s ability to customize to this level:

Ask them straight out if they tailor their presentation and how much

Request references from previous clients revealing the amount of successful customizing they did.

See if they have a procedure, questionnaire or other method for planning a customized show

Ask the comedians how they plan to use key people from the company or organization.

Inquire if they will be using key terms and jargon from the industry or the “field”

Determine how much audience participation the performers plan on

Point: Not only do you want comedy to make your event successful, but take it a step further, and get the best quality of comedy you can with a customized presentation.

5. A Matter of Taste

Often the major concern individuals who hire comedy have, is the **tastefulness** and **appropriateness** of the act. As much as comedy can make an event memorable, nothing can spoil an entire evening or program more than humour that offends some of the audience, and leaves many of the others uncomfortable.

The main way to protect against this is to request references indicating the act is clean and tasteful. It can be a written reference or the phone number of a previous client you can call.

If "clean" humour is important to your function - and chances are it is - then this is a good step to take.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect is trying to sort through the various definitions of clean and tasteful. Your definition, the act's definition, and the version members of your audience have will probably all be different.

Most important, you need to identify what the comedy act considers clean. Is it some off-colour language but no graphic language concerning sex? Is it completely clean language-wise, using only sexual innuendo? Is some of the comedians' material based on off-colour language or sex in relationships?

The best answer to these questions will invariably come from the references the act supplies to you. One more reason why recent, accessible references are crucial to your decision-making.

Point: Make sure you understand what clean and tasteful means to you, your audience and the members of the act themselves.

6. Making Your Job Easier

Anything the professional comedy act can provide you to make your job easier will become a factor in your decision. Here are some of the resources you can expect from an organized, professional comedy act:

A prepared and ready-to-go introduction. Just hand it to your MC and the job is done.

A picture, preferably in an e-mail format like jpeg, that you can forward to your printer or communications department for brochures, posters and other promotions.

A bio, ready to go. Maybe one on the Internet you can simply download and modify, then use.

A list of stage requirements. Let the entertainment speak directly to the facility manager.

7. The Entertainment's References

It seems simple to request a reference from a previous client of the comedy act you intend to hire. But you should keep several factors in mind when asking for and determining the value of the references you see or hear. Consider the following questions:

How recent of a reference can you receive? If the "hallmark" reference the act provides is 3-4 years old, you don't need to be suspicious, but you might like to know about more recent shows.

Besides written references, can you call and speak directly to anyone about a recent show?

Can the comedians offer a variety of references from different types of clients? For instance, does your act have any experience performing for audiences involved in healthcare? Or education? Or client appreciation? If they can provide more specific references you can make a better decision.

Does the quality and the quantity of the references suggest a professional act? Do you feel confident hiring the act by the references they provide?

Point: It is always more important to see or hear what others say about the act you intend to hire. Consider the recency, the variety, and the accessibility of the references you get to see and hear.

8. Seeing is Believing

Obviously you might want to see or hear a bit of the act you intend to hire, particularly if you have other individuals or a committee to work with in making your decision. A good indication of the type of act you are dealing with is if they have audio or video of their show and how easy it is to hear or see the sample.

Clips of a show or examples of what the entertainer does can take many forms: audio tapes, video cassettes, CD ROMS, or website multimedia. Hopefully once you request a sample you receive it quickly.

One thing to consider when listening or seeing samples of a show:

Is it an edited clip with cuts, fades, screen wipes etc? Usually a professional production like this is nice, but sometimes it is nice to see a straight segment of a single show to get a real good idea of what the act is like.

9. Let's Get Technical!

Surprisingly, the most often overlooked details at an event are those concerning the physical set-up of the stage and the sound system itself.

Stage:

One of the main reasons for this is that organizers usually think the facility management itself will handle the physical set-up. The facility people assume the act itself is looking after it. And unless the planners of the event have drawn a map or are setting up the tables and chairs themselves, the facility staff set up based on a generic plan.

This general plan or scheme they have is often lethal to comedy acts, because the basic set-up formula is primarily for ease of moving food. Secondly, the formula assumes the

entertainment is a band or music.

Therefore you get the dreaded comedy-will-fail stage set-up. The stage is set up in front of an empty "dance floor type spot." Often buffet or serving tables are set up here. Once removed, you have a 20 to 40 foot gap between the stage and the audience. This almost always impacts the show in a negative manner.

It is hard enough to achieve chemistry with an audience even if it is seated right in front of you. It may be impossible when they are seated so far away. People at the back, unable to see and hear real well begin talking and it spreads and kills the show.

Special care must be taken to plan the stage if there is a head table. You don't want the head table guests to be seated behind the entertainment, staring at the backs of their heads. Nor do you really wish to move the head table guests to different seating if at all possible.

Sound:

Sound systems don't need to be discussed at great lengths, because all of you reading this at one time or another have been the "victim" of weak and poor sound in banquet room somewhere.

Simply, the entertainers should have their own system, or will order and have a system in place, or at the very least will discuss their needs with the facility staff. As an organizer if you have concerns about sound requirements for your program make sure you discuss your needs with the staff. Be wary of "house systems." Particularly ones that are adjusted by a dial in the kitchen.

Sometimes the place hosting the event will have a contract with a sound supplier. Their success rate is much higher, but be sure to go over all your needs with them. Be aware that most sound providers will hook it up and pre-set a level and will **not be there** during the event. It is in your best interest to have someone there who can adjust the volume controls and other settings on the equipment.

The Point: A good sound system is crucial to the success of your event. Particularly the entertainment. Do all you can to ensure the best sound possible, and hope the group you hire are also aware how important sound is.

10. On With the Show...

It might be a sad comment on people in general. It could be the large role Television has played in society. It could be agricultural chemicals - but, for whatever reason, people **do not have long attention spans.**

It is a mistake to hire entertainment to perform longer than 60 minutes. Especially if there is any program or presentations to accomplish as well.

90 minute shows often sound good and seem appropriate, but are almost always a mistake. Here's a few reasons why:

As mentioned, the audience has a short attention span. Programs, banquets, awards, and presentations invariably run longer than anticipated. Then, to add a 90 minute show on top, makes the event too long.

One act performing 90 minutes has to be very, very good (you paid a lot of money). Or, if two or more acts are performing, you will start to lose your audience during the "breaks."

Placement:

Placing your entertainment at the end of your program makes the most sense, most of the time. It caps off the event, leaving the audience with a memorable impression and saves the best for last.

It is unwise to mess with this basic formula, but here are a few things to consider:

If your program etc. runs long, then your entertainment is in a precarious position. They will not succeed as well as they could have if they follow a long program.

If your main goal is to entertain the audience (e.g. a client appreciation) then you might want to lead with the comedy.

If your presentation or awards program is very brief you might want to start with the entertainment, and finish the program off with a few short presentations.

The Point: Take the time to consider the length of your program and place the entertainment where they will be most successful. That makes your event successful.

11. The Cost of Great Comedy Entertainment

First, with a comedy act, as with any product, you will get what you pay for. A \$500.00 act is very different from a \$3500.00 act. Once you do a little research and have selected a comedy act that is just right for your group it is actually quite difficult to calculate exactly what a great show and a memorable event is worth. Therefore, if you select a great match for your audience, you will always gain far more benefits and rewards than your actual cost for hiring.

The Point: The effect of a great show is always worth the cost to your company or organization.

This article was written by Mark Schweighardt and Lee Bells. Mark and Lee are corporate entertainment professionals and the founding members of Don't Mind Us Improv Comedy. Visit their website at www.dontmindus.com