

Factors to Consider when Hiring Shaun Eli

(or any other corporate comedian)

What are you looking for?

A Master of Ceremonies to keep the festivities moving? Or 10-90 minutes of hilarious stand-up comedy entertainment? A good corporate comedian should be skilled at both—and they are very different skills.

An emcee's job is to be likable, cheerful and outgoing. To provide focus and continuity. To keep the event fun, smooth and on schedule. And in the event that something goes wrong? Misdirection or comic relief to take attention off the problem and return the audience's focus to the event.

A comedian's job is to make people laugh. A lot.

Can they write custom material for our group?

Entities occasionally want their group incorporated into the act. While some comedians will find generic material and try to adapt it to your event, a good comedian can write material that specifically pertains to your organization or its members. If you want this done right be prepared to pay for it. Writing good comedy takes effort. And writing specialized comedy that can't really be tested and honed and re-written and re-tested on just any audience until it's ready for your particular event... that's even more complicated. But you can have a great show with barely a mention of your organization. Funny is funny.

How to Find a Comedian

To hire a comedian there are companies that specialize in booking comedians and they're easily found on the web. However you can almost always save a lot of money by approaching a comedian directly. We're also on the web. The advantage to a comedian of using a booker is that it's someone to take care of a lot of the arrangements. The disadvantage is that bookers/speakers bureaus keep a lot of the fee for themselves. Not 10% like you may think. Often half.

Yes, HALF.

And beware of this- there are folks on the internet who make it look like they're the agent for a lot of comedians when they're not. They're very good at internet marketing so if you do a Google search for someone's agent they come up first. An agent is supposed to act in the client's best interest (for 10%). But these booking services don't have that restriction- they will charge you as much as they can, pay the talent as little as they can, and keep the (often vast) difference. They do add value- the comics are okay working with them because they take care of a lot of details. But you may be paying a lot for that.

I can speak to you directly and take care of the details directly with you (I have a

planning checklist and pre-show set-up brochure I email). My twenty years of business experience are an asset to my performing at your event. And I'm not greedy. My phone number is (914) It's Funny (914 487-3866).

How to Hire or Book a Comedian

Before you book a corporate standup comedian for an event, company or conference, start with figuring out what you want. While a comedy club or theatre comedy show may feature two or three (or more) comedians, a corporate comedy show is typically one professional comedian performing for 20-30 minutes. Whether virtual or in-person that should be sufficient for your audience to have fun and have fond memories of your event. They will be talking about it for days afterwards.

When you call or email the comedian ask what technical requirements they might have. I would suggest evaluating what questions they ask you. If they don't have a checklist or at least a list of questions for you- about your group, your event, your needs and your expectations- that may indicate that they aren't very experienced with corporate shows. A corporate comedy show is vastly different from a night at a comedy club. For both the comedian and the audience.

If you're dealing with a booking service it should be absolutely fine to ask them how they're compensated and how much of the fee actually goes to the comedian. You might also ask them if they'll have a representative on-site to meet with you and to deal with anything that might have to be fine-tuned before the presentation.

How Much will it Cost?

How much does it cost to hire a comedian? Probably less than you expect. Comedians like Jay Leno or Jerry Seinfeld may cost you in excess of \$100,000 for one show. And they keep very busy. You may find a novice local comic willing to work your event for \$50. But you get what you pay for. A reasonable expectation for a professional show is from \$1,000 to \$10,000 for 20 to 90 minutes of entertainment. Someone less experienced may cost less. Obviously it also depends on travel time and cost.

Often a comedian will ask questions before discussing a fee. Don't be in a rush- we ask because often we'd prefer to perform for less money in front of a smaller group or for a charity and give you the entertainment you deserve, rather than turn the job down entirely. But don't expect the same treatment if you're a group of three thousand investment bankers. You won't provide your expert services to the local small business for a fraction of your normal fee- please don't hold it against us that we will.

Keep this in mind- you're probably spending between \$30 and \$100 per person just for the food. How much of your budget is going towards the entertainment? Which will be better remembered? What will people be talking about next week or next year? Nobody will remember two weeks later if they ate steak or chicken unless they get food poisoning, or whether the dessert was ice cream or hand-made pastries. But because the comedian gave them a great time they'll have fond memories of your event.

How do I Know if They're Any Good?

Ask for references. Ask for videos. If you ask a comedian for a video and the answer is no then that should be your answer too. You can also check a comedian's schedule and catch his or her act at a club. But keep in mind that someone's club act may differ from his or her corporate act. There are comedians who work dirty in clubs and clean for private shows. And a comedian may be working out new material in a club— so you might get a more polished set at your private show.

A comedian who hasn't thought to discuss much of what I talk about in this memo probably isn't that experienced at corporate shows. And a comedian who doesn't have a well-designed, advertising-free website shouldn't be selling himself/herself as a business-skilled corporate comedian.

I worked in business for twenty years before becoming a comedian, I have a degree from Wharton as well as a strong science background. So chances are good that I'll understand what your company does.

Another consideration- how do they dress on stage? It might be fine if they wear a t-shirt and backwards baseball cap on a comedy club stage (although I don't). But do you want them showing up at your corporate event dressed like that? It's fine to ask them what they plan to wear, or even to give them requirements. Just don't spring that on them the day before. For what it's worth I usually wear dark jeans, a dress shirt, sports jacket and boots on stage, whether I'm at a comedy club, a theatre or a corporate or charity event. (in the summer if it's hot I may wear a polo shirt to a comedy club show). If you ask me to wear a suit and tie, or a tuxedo, I can accommodate, although I prefer to work without a tie.

CONTENT

I remain shocked and saddened every time someone tells me that they'd hired a comedian for their event and it just didn't work out. It's not common but on the rare occasion when it does happen usually what I'm told is that the comedian was simply not clean enough for the group. And then I'm asked why.

Unfortunately this does occur, and the answer to the question of fault is simple. Both sides bear responsibility, and either side could have prevented it. Yes, the comedian should know, for a private event, who comprises the audience. Is it a college fraternity? A corporation or other business group? A religious organization? Jokes that are well-received at the Beta House may not be appropriate for a Goldman, Sachs client event. And even jokes that Goldman, Sachs may welcome may not be appropriate for other audiences. Political jokes may be fine if they're not mean or offensive— unless of course you're performing in front of the group you're poking fun at. The president of the United States has to be all smiles and a good sport at the White House Correspondents' Dinner but that doesn't mean he really enjoys the experience.

I have a routine that pokes fun at the Ten Commandments. Clearly I'm not actually opposed to them. Well, not to all of them. But I wouldn't feel comfortable doing some of

these jokes for a conference of Mormons. I don't know whether jokes about alcohol– if they poke fun at other people's use of it– would be appropriate for a conference of Mormons. But I would be smart enough to ask before taking the stage. And fortunately I have enough material that I can avoid just about any topic and still keep the audience laughing for however long I'm on stage.

Absolutely, the comedian should establish some knowledge of his audience and, if he or she has any doubts, ask about what topics and language are suitable. BUT– the comedian is what he or she is. Some comedians figure that their act is their act, and if someone is hiring, that's what they get. If you call a barber to come to your house he's still expecting to be cutting hair, not mowing the lawn.

And that means that the event planner bears much of the responsibility for inappropriate content. Because the majority of comedians have at least some vulgar content in their material. And a simple “Can you do the allotted time without swearing, referring to sex or other vulgarities?” is a very appropriate question to pose.

Sometimes an event planner will respond “Well, I saw him on network TV and he was clean.” OF COURSE he was clean on network TV– he HAD TO BE clean on network TV. I know vulgar comedians who have appeared on The Tonight Show– they managed to write four and a half excellent clean minutes. But they can't fill a clean half-hour. These comedians are well-known, at least in the entertainment industry, to be vulgar. And knowing who does what is an event-planner's job.

Of course there's the rare case where a comedian sends an event planner a five or ten minute clean video that's not representative of his or her work. So it pays to be clear. When in doubt, ask.

Lastly, the kind of comedian who takes the time and effort to compile this information for you is probably the diligent, wise professional that you should want to hire.

Sincerely,

shaun eli

Shaun Eli