



# USING COMEDY AT A CONFERENCE

Comedian and event director Barry McLeod says comedy can enhance a conference program and help cement key messages in the minds of delegates. Or it can bomb like nothing else!

We have loved a laugh since the dawn of time. We were told by our grandparents that laughter is good for the soul. We even LOL when texting to communicate we are understanding a joke. So how does comedy fit into the MICE market?

I write this from a personal experience point of view from a multi-faceted career as performance coach, professional MC, comedian, and event director. Events, conferences and exhibitions all benefit from humour - whether it is a gala dinner set or a few grab lines at an exhibition.

Knowing your audience, and getting the right person to adapt a performance is paramount for success. If you need knowledge and want entertaining, get someone who understands your market segment. If you just want funny then get a comedian.

Engagement is the key and there is no better way to keep an audience entertained than laughter. However, it can be a minefield - a real case of "Goldilocks and the three bears" - where getting it just right is vital - and we're not talking porridge!

There is a massive difference between club and corporate comedy. Club comedy is where the audience is purely there to be entertained. Their reason for being there is to laugh. Corporate comedy incorporates comedy into a program (unless it is a comedy

set), where delegates are primarily there to be informed. They have sacrificed time and spent money to be there, travelled a distance, been up early/ had a big night, and so it has got to be relevant! It must fit in to "why am I here?". The best piece of scripted comedy, no matter how clever and how funny, can bomb if it is not in context or not targeted to the audience.

To make comedy work you must know your audience, know the talent, and provide the clearest of clear briefs, especially what to avoid and what is "open season." Being in the right time-slot on the program is critical - not too late and definitely not too early... just right!

Critical to success is the correct room set up and proper production. A comedian needs to connect with their audience. A stand up function with a stand up comedian is a disaster in the making unless the audience is moved up to the stage. This is a must at cocktail functions where people cannot applaud when they are holding drinks, canapés & handbags/briefcases!

I find the biggest laughs in the MICE market is repartee - 'on the spot'. Comedy that is totally relevant to the group or industry where the comedian is working the crowd. Keeping in context and relating back to the day's events, gossip bloopers and characters. Leaders in the industry will put their hands up to be involved - they welcome a roast (as long as they know the content). Delegates love being entertained by their own and if it is funny, even better. Content must never be cruel or defamatory.

The best idea is to have an experienced professional master of ceremonies to host your event. There are many funny MCs who claim not to be comedians. They say "but I'm not a comedian!" They make you laugh and that's comedy! There are MCs who claim to be comedians who are not funny. There are some comedians who are engaged as MCs who are totally inappropriate.

How to find the best comedian MC? They should be both MC and comedian. And it's a fine mix. Testimonial pages will guide you, and be sure to make those phone calls for references!

An MC who is funny will lift an event, keep everyone on their toes and will give light relief periodically to the driest conference.

There are brilliant comedians out there - some have the corporate comedy nailed and some are just not appropriate for the conference. If you are using a comedian as part of your entertainment then it is key to have them in the right slot, and it is imperative to have the correct room set up. Standup needs to be intimate, the delegates must be relaxed and feel safe.

When that balance is just right, it's gold! **m**

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