

# 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 ten minutes to an hour of top stand-up comedy entertainment? A good 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.

Often entities 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 pertains to your organization or its members. But if you want this done right, be prepared to pay for it. Writing good comedy is work. 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 very, very good show with barely a mention of your organization. Funny is funny. Except... (the exception will be found below, under "**Content**")

**How to Find a Comedian** There are companies that specialize in booking corporate 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 and frankly many comedians aren't such great business people and they under-price themselves.

I am and I don't, but I'm worth it. My twenty years of business experience serves as an asset to my performing in your corporate show. And my phone number is (212) 252-2888.

**How Much will it Cost?** Comedians like Jay Leno or Bill Cosby will cost you in excess of \$100,000 for one show. And they keep very busy. You can probably find a novice local comic to work your event for \$300. But you get what you pay for. A reasonable expectation for a professional comedian is from

\$3,000 to \$15,000 for thirty minutes to an hour of entertainment. If you want someone you've heard of/seen on TV, figure towards the high end of that range. Someone less experienced may cost less. It also depends upon travel- it's going to cost you a lot less to hire someone who just has to drive a few miles than it would for someone who has to take a day to fly across the country to perform.

Often the comedian will ask questions before discussing a fee. Don't be afraid to answer- we ask because we'd often rather perform for less money in front of a smaller group, or for a charity, and give you the entertainment you deserve, rather than turn down the job 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 in mind one thing- 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, or whether the dessert was ice cream or hand-made soufflé. But if they laughed they'll have fond memories of your event.

**How do I Know if They're Any Good?** You can ask for references. You can ask for a tape or DVD. 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 different experience at your private show.

A comedian who hasn't thought to discuss much of what I talk about in this memo with you probably isn't that experienced at corporate shows. And, in my opinion, a comedian who doesn't have a well-designed, advertising-free website shouldn't be selling himself/herself as a business-skilled corporate comedian (with the exception of comics like Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Cosby and Jay Leno, who clearly don't need to promote themselves).

**CONTENT** I remain shocked and saddened every time someone tells me that they'd hired a comedian for their corporate event

or other private party and it just didn't work out. Frequently I'm told that the comedian was simply too vulgar for the group. And then I'm asked why that happened.

Unfortunately this occurs far too often, 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 mixing drinks or 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 TV and he was clean." OF COURSE he was clean on TV- he HAD TO BE clean on TV. I know plenty of 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 hour. And 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.

## **What do I Need to Know for Show Night?**

Experience has shown that the best setting for a comedy room is making it look as much like a comedy club as possible- that's why comedy club showrooms are set up the way they are. An elevated stage at one side of the room (the long wall if possible). Seats facing the stage (or at least no seats facing directly away from the stage- sideways is fine). It's okay to pack people in. In fact the closer to the stage, the better. And if at all possible, have someone seat people and fill the seats closest to the stage first. There shouldn't be empty seats up front.

A microphone and sound system (and if you have to use a wireless mike, please have a spare mike- not just a spare battery). A mike stand and stool for those who require it. Lights in the room turned down or off- and stage lighting to highlight the comedian. Window shades should be down, and the room should be set up so people aren't walking through it during the show. And of course the comedian should be the only entertainment at the time... no roving jugglers or magicians (yes, I've heard of this happening).

Serving snacks during a show- that's okay. A full meal is not- it's noisy and detracts attention from the entertainment. If there's a dinner, serve it first, clear the plates, then start the show. And of course no TVs should be on during the show.

Comedians often sell merchandise (CDs/DVDs, books, t-shirts, novelty items) at club shows. They may want to sell at your event-- please let them know whether or not you consider this appropriate. But keep in mind that often merchandise sales comprise a large share of a comedian's income, so that his/her fee may be lower if you allow merchandise sales. Or, for an added bonus, arrange to provide everyone in your audience with the comedian's book/DVD/t-shirt, and all your guests will leave with a reminder of the fun time they had!

Certainly you should allow placement of business cards on a table so that your guests may have a way of contacting the comedian after the show.

Recording the show will be strictly prohibited.

The comedian will probably give you a written introduction. Please follow it. It was written for a reason- and remember, it's the comedian's job to be funny, not yours. Attempts to funny-up an introduction usually fall flat and make it that much harder for the comedian to start the show. If you want to get what you're paying for, allow the comedian to do his or her job.

One more thing- 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 prefer to hire.

Sincerely,

*Shaun*

**Shaun Eli**

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