



## **How to Successfully Find, Choose, and Coordinate Entertainment for Your Next Event**

**By Mitch Williams**

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**E**VEN more than the location, the décor, and other elements, the right entertainment can set the tone for your event and give your guests a unique, memorable, and truly *enjoyable* experience that they can carry with them for many a day to come. The right entertainment can add atmosphere and class, humor and fun, or inspiration and encouragement to the tone of your event.

The decisions about entertainment really come down to the type of event you're having and the tone that you wish to set. Make sure you're clear about what specific needs you hope to fill with the entertainment, and choose accordingly. You want to look for entertainers who can tell you specifically what benefits they will offer for your event, and how those benefits will **fill your unique needs**. If an entertainer is unable to communicate clearly and directly how he or she can fill those needs, they may not have your needs in mind at all. Make sure you're completely clear about the specifics of what the entertainer will be providing, and that it's spelled out in a written agreement.

Some simple questions will help you determine your needs and how to begin filling them. If you're having music, what purpose do you want it to accomplish? Is it for dancing, background? How many musicians, what type or style do you need? A show band or a DJ can be good for events where the tone is casual, upbeat, and lively. A string quartet can add a great touch of elegance during the cocktail hour. A jazz combo gives an energetic, classy feel.

Strolling entertainers can be great for a wide variety of situations, especially close up magic (but then, I **do** tend to be biased!) And if you'd like a "main event" type of program to round out the evening, a variety entertainer, such as a comedian, a comedy musician, a hypnotist, or even better, a magician, 😊 can be a great way to leave your guests with the feeling they've been treated to a well rounded, "fun-filled night out".

For meetings, conferences, or other business related events, a dynamic or motivational speaker or entertainer can help to break up information sessions and keep people alert

and in good spirits. Again, a good choice might be a comedian, hypnotist, or *especially* a magician with a fun, inspiring approach.

You can find a variety of entertainers in the yellow pages or on the Internet. Don't assume that the one with the biggest ad will be the best. As with any other service professional, make sure they have experience and good references. Any quality entertainer should be able to provide you with background credits, testimonials, and reference letters from past clients.

And don't make the mistake of letting price be the only deciding factor. It's important that the entertainment not only provides a fun filled, lively experience, but also that none of your guests are put off or offended in any way. If your audience is conservative, or a family group, make sure that the entertainer's material is appropriate. Comedians and other performers who are used to working in adult nightclubs can sometimes have a very different idea of what's "clean" than what you may have. So make sure you're clear and specific about your needs.

If you're working with a talent agency, make sure they **also** have good references and are a licensed agency. Be certain the contract spells out all details of the performance agreement, including the amount to be paid to each performer, the agent's commission, as well as who is responsible for each. In some cases you'll pay each performer directly, and he or she is then responsible for paying the commission to the agent. With others, you may pay one fee to the agency, who then pays their acts, after deducting their commission. Some unscrupulous agents have been known to charge a much higher fee than the performer would normally ask, without telling either the client or the entertainer, and then keeping the difference. So be sure everything's laid out in the written agreement.

Make sure you're clear about the technical needs of each of your entertainers. Spending top dollar on a great entertainer is largely wasted if your room is set up so that a big part of the audience can't see the performer, or if an inadequate sound system

means they can't be heard. If the performers are visually appealing, make sure everyone has good sight lines, and that there is adequate lighting on the stage, platform, or other performance area. Any experienced entertainer should be able to help you plan for these needs and give you a list of their technical requirements.

Whoever you end up hiring, you want to be certain you're getting the best value for the money you spend on entertainment. Here are a few useful tips to help you determine whether an entertainer can come through for you in bringing the best experience to your guests.

### **Be sure to ask these important questions...**

- ✓ ***"Are you a full time professional entertainer?"*** While there are exceptions, in many cases if an entertainer isn't full time, it may mean he's either not experienced enough, doesn't have a good enough show, or is simply not professional and dependable enough to support a full time career. In general, those who make their living as entertainers **have** to be good enough to continue getting strong referrals, customer loyalty, and repeat business, and will tend to be more talented and more professional than those who merely do it as a sideline.
- ✓ ***"Can you provide references from past clients?"*** As I mentioned, any performer worth his salt should be glad to furnish you with letters and testimonials from his happy, satisfied customers. If he can't, you may want to proceed with caution!
- ✓ ***"Do you offer a money back guarantee?"*** If an entertainer doesn't guarantee his work, there may be a reason he's not prepared to do so! Even paying a much lower price is still a waste of money if your guests aren't thrilled, or worse, are somehow offended or put off by the performance. You need to be certain the entertainment can deliver for your event.

- ✓ **"Can you tell me clearly and specifically what benefits you provide for my event?"** Many performers are more interested in looking good than in meeting your unique needs. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, make sure the entertainer is clear about how they can help meet your specific needs.

As with every other aspect of planning your event, don't be afraid to be creative and to think "outside the box". Don't assume that certain types of entertainment are "just for kids". (That's one of the biggest misconceptions I encounter regarding magic, here in the midwestern United States.) Or that they won't work in certain situations. Quite often the least obvious types of entertainment can be just the unique twist that will bring a touch of freshness and appeal to your event. The main thing is, don't automatically rule something out because you think it "wouldn't work". Look into a variety of options and ask for input from other creative or knowledgeable individuals.

Speaking of which, if you need help in planning your event, here's a special offer: Even if you decide that I'm not the entertainer who fits the bill for the specific event you're planning, call me anyway. I'd be happy to give you a free consultation on how to get the best results in putting your event together. I have years of experience at working with a wide variety of groups to help make their events unforgettable and fun. I'd be glad to share the benefits of my experience and insights with you to make your event the best it can be. For information or to set up a free consultation, give me a call at 309-647-3692.

Above all, have fun creating your event!

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