



Comedy: The Other Entertainment

by Kell Houston

With the current economy, everyone needs to tighten their belts and casinos are no exception. It is important to get entertainment value, but still service your customer with the “fun factor.” After all, you want them to come to your casino and have a variety of great entertainment experiences. Comedy is a great way of boosting mid-week business. Your costs can vary from very little, say under \$1,000, to really big names at over \$100,000. Comedy production requirements are simpler. There are fewer rooms required, typically no backline is needed, and your ground transportation needs are simplified.

Comedy is a different kind of genre. Sure you deal with agents and buyers, like you do for concerts and live music, but after that things change. Comedians are a different breed of entertainer. They can tend to be very independent, eccentric sometimes, somewhat unpredictable off and on the stage and hilariously funny. You have comedians like Jerry Seinfeld, with a very dry view of what goes on around him and who has had a very successful TV show. You have the Blue Collar Comedy guys – Larry the Cable Guy, Bill Engvall, Jeff Foxworthy. These are

expensive acts, with a hilarious view of people. Dane Cook is another hugely successful comic with a younger following. The list of “A” name acts can roll off of everyone’s tongue. You see these people on TV shows and movies, as well as on cable networks like Comedy Central, Showtime, and HBO. There are only a few casinos that can afford these “A” acts.

What about all of the smaller properties around the country and in the secondary markets? There are different kinds of shows that can fit any budget and need. Typically, it is important to establish the comedy concept and a budget you can work with. At one time, there were comedy clubs on every street corner and every bar around the country. Everyone who could tell a joke became a comic. The newness of comedy wore off and now there are fewer comedy clubs. New comedians can be seen on a variety of cable shows as specials, live multiple comic shows, “Last Comic Standing,” comedy roasts, etc. Up and coming comedians may also have credits on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Show with David Letterman* or *Comedy Central*. But these are not comedians with household names and they will probably not sell a ticket. Your challenge is to develop a regular comedy program for your property and build your business. Shows are typically set up on off nights, to drive mid-week business. Remember this will not happen overnight. There needs to be an abundance of consistent marketing and advertisement. Posters with pictures, names and the upcoming appearance schedule keep people informed. You need to educate your customers and train them to come in mid-week for a show. Your venue needs to be set up like the comedy clubs you see on TV with tables and chairs. You can serve beverages and snacks. The venue should be somewhat intimate and dark, not brightly lit. A simple stage, nice lighting, a spotlight, a stool and a decent sound system and you are ready to go.

The beauty of comedy is you can start at just about any level and build your program. Many properties have put together value shows with an opener and a headliner for as low as \$1,000 - \$1,500. As the program builds and you earn a reputation for having funny comics and a great time, you can increase your budget accordingly. Some market places run comedy once a week, some once a month, and others once a quarter. You can do this as a free show with a player card or charge a small cover charge. It’s important that the perceived value is never abused. People appreciate quality and value for their time and money. Give the comedy concept a chance in your casino. Do it right and enjoy the success it will bring. Remember that if you build your program carefully and consistently, you can create a great mid-week event. ♣

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