

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR EVENT PLANNERS

The Ultimate Event Checklist

How to Book the Perfect
Comedy Show

*Everything you need to know to find the right comedian,
set up your space, and create an event your guests won't stop talking about.*

dandeibert.com

So You're Booking a Comedian...

First of all—nice choice. A great comedian can transform an ordinary event into one people genuinely remember. The kind where coworkers reference jokes at the coffee machine on Monday. The kind where your boss says, "Whoever planned this deserves a raise."

But here's the thing most people don't realize: the difference between a comedy show that crushes and one that just... happens? It usually has less to do with the comedian and more to do with the planning.

Room setup, timing, audience expectations, sound quality—these are the invisible forces that make or break a show. And if you've never booked a comedian before, you wouldn't necessarily know what to think about.

That's exactly why this guide exists.

Inside, you'll find a straightforward, phase-by-phase checklist covering everything from "What kind of comedian do I even need?" to "Where should we put the mic stand?" It's designed for first-time and occasional event planners who want to get it right without having to learn it the hard way.

No fluff. No sales pitch. Just practical advice from 30+ years on the other side of the microphone.

How to Use This Guide

Work through it in order, or jump straight to the section you need. Each phase includes a checklist you can print and work through as you plan. The checkboxes are there for a reason—use them!

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PHASE 1

Know Your Event First

Before you start Googling comedians, get clear on what you actually need.

The biggest mistake event planners make? Jumping straight to browsing talent before they've nailed down the basics. A comedian who's perfect for a 500-person corporate gala is a completely different hire than one who's right for a 40-person team dinner. Get these details locked in first, and the rest becomes much easier.

Your Event Profile Checklist

- Event type defined
Corporate event, fundraiser, holiday party, conference, awards banquet, team building, etc.
- Expected attendance count
Even a rough number helps. 50 people vs. 200 changes everything about the show.
- Audience demographics noted
Age range, industry, mix of employees/spouses/clients. This matters more than you think.
- Event date and time confirmed
Comedy works best in the evening, but afternoon shows can work too with the right setup.
- Venue selected (or narrowed down)
Ballroom? Conference room? Outdoor tent? Each has different requirements.
- Budget range established
Know your range before you start shopping. Professional comedians typically cost \$1,500–\$10,000+ depending on experience and travel.
- Entertainment time slot identified
How long do you want the show? 30 minutes? 45? 60? Where in the evening does it fall?
- Content boundaries defined
Clean comedy? PG-13? Is there anything specific to avoid? Be honest and specific here.

PRO TIP

Write down three words that describe the vibe you want for your event. "Relaxed, fun, memorable" is a very different brief than "high-energy, edgy, surprising." This will help you evaluate comedians later.

PHASE 2

Finding & Evaluating Comedians

Where to look, what to look for, and how to separate the pros from the amateurs.

Where to Find Comedians

There's no shortage of people who call themselves comedians. Your job is to find one who's a professional—someone who does this for a living and has real experience with corporate and private events (not just open mic nights).

1

Search for "corporate comedian" or "comedian for hire" + your region

Skip generic talent directories that list thousands of acts. Look for comedians with their own professional website.

2

Ask your venue or event planner for referrals

Venues that host banquets and galas often have a shortlist of entertainers who've performed there successfully.

3

Check industry associations and conferences

If your event has an industry focus, look for comedians who've performed for similar groups. Experience in your field is a big plus.

4

Word of mouth from colleagues

Ask around. "We had this comedian at our holiday party and they were amazing" is the gold standard of referrals.

What to Look For

Professional website with video clips

This is non-negotiable. If they don't have video of themselves performing, that's a red flag. Watch at least 5 minutes.

Experience with events like yours

A comedian who's headlined comedy clubs but never done a corporate event is a very different animal. Ask about their event experience.

Testimonials from event planners (not just fans)

Look for reviews that mention things like "easy to work with," "customized the show," and "everyone laughed"—not just "so funny."

Clean or adaptable material

For most corporate and private events, you need comedy that's smart and clever without relying on shock value. Make sure they can work clean.

Responsive and professional communication

How they handle the booking process is a preview of how they'll handle your event. Slow replies and vague answers? Move on.

Willingness to learn about your group

The best event comedians will ask about your audience, your company culture, and any inside references they can work in.

PRO TIP

When watching video clips, pay attention to audience reactions—not just the comedian. Are people genuinely laughing? Engaged? Leaning in? A good event comedian connects with the room, not just delivers punchlines.

PHASE 3

The Questions You Need to Ask

Don't be shy. A professional comedian will welcome these questions—and be impressed you asked them.

Once you've narrowed your list to two or three comedians you're genuinely interested in, it's time to have a real conversation. Here are the questions that will tell you everything you need to know:

About Their Experience

- How many corporate/private events have you performed at?
- Have you worked with groups similar to ours? (industry, audience size, event type)
- Can you share references from recent event planners you've worked with?
- What's the largest/smallest group you've performed for?

About the Show

- How long is your typical set? Can you adjust the length for our schedule?
- Do you work clean? How would you describe the content rating of your show?
- Will you customize any material for our group or industry?
- Is your show interactive, or more of a traditional stand-up set?
- What happens if the show runs short or you sense the audience needs a change?

About Logistics

- What are your technical requirements? (microphone, lighting, stage area)
- Do you provide your own sound equipment, or do we need to arrange it?
- What time do you need to arrive for setup and sound check?
- Do you have specific requirements for the room layout?
- What's included in your fee? (travel, hotel, meals, setup)
- What's your cancellation policy?
- Do you carry liability insurance?

PRO TIP

A professional comedian won't be offended by detailed questions—they'll appreciate them. If someone gets defensive or vague when you ask about content, experience, or logistics, that tells you something important.

PHASE 4

Setting Up Your Space for Maximum Laughs

This is where most events quietly succeed or fail. The room matters more than you think.

You could book the funniest comedian on the planet, but if they're performing in a cavernous room with bad sound, the audience seated at scattered tables 40 feet away, and the bar still open and clinking glasses in the back? That show is fighting an uphill battle.

The good news: the fixes are simple. Here's what to think about.

Sound & Microphone

- Quality sound system is arranged and tested

This is the single most important technical element. If people can't hear clearly, nothing else matters. Renting a professional PA system is worth every penny.

- Wired or wireless handheld microphone available

Most comedians prefer a handheld mic over a lapel or headset. Ask your comedian what they prefer, and have it ready.

- Sound check time is scheduled

Even 10 minutes before guests arrive makes a huge difference. Let the comedian hear themselves in the room.

- Background music plan for before/after the show

Music sets the mood as people arrive and fills the silence after the show ends. Have a playlist ready to go.

Room Layout & Seating

- Performance area is at the front of the room, not the center

Comedians should never perform in the middle of a room with audience on multiple sides. The energy scatters. Front of the room, with everyone facing the same direction.

- Audience seating is close together and near the stage

Comedy feeds on shared energy. If there are big gaps between tables or rows of empty chairs, laughter literally dissipates. Tighten it up.

- Remove or rope off excess chairs/tables

A room that's half-full feels dead. If you have 80 guests and 200 seats, block off the back section. Better to feel packed than empty.

- Clear sightlines from all seats to the performer

Pillars, tall centerpieces, projector screens—anything that blocks the view breaks the connection. Walk the room from different seats and check.

- Stage or riser available if needed

For groups over 50–75 people, a low riser (even 12–18 inches) helps everyone see the comedian. Flat floor is fine for smaller groups.

Lighting

- Comedian is well-lit and visible

The audience needs to see facial expressions—that's half of comedy. A spotlight or focused lighting on the performance area is ideal.

- House lights are dimmed (but not blacked out) during the show

Dimming the house lights signals "the show is starting" and naturally focuses attention. Total darkness isn't necessary and can feel awkward.

Timing & Flow

- Comedy show is scheduled AFTER dinner, not during

Competing with clinking plates, waitstaff clearing tables, and people chewing is a losing battle. Let dinner wrap up, clear the room, then start the show.

- Bar service pauses or moves to the back during the show

Blenders, ice bins, and a crowd gathering at the bar are the enemies of a good comedy set. Pause bar service or move it out of earshot.

- A clear introduction is planned for the comedian

Someone from your team should give a brief, enthusiastic intro. The comedian can provide intro copy—just ask.

- No competing activities during the show

Auctions, raffle drawings, slideshows, award presentations—handle all of this before or after the comedy. A comedian needs the room's full attention.

PRO TIP

The two biggest show-killers? Bad sound and a room that's too spread out. Fix those two things and you've already solved 80% of the problems that sink comedy shows at private events. Everything else is polish.

PHASE 5

Day-of Event Checklist

You've done the hard work. Here's your final rundown to make sure showtime goes smoothly.

Before the Comedian Arrives

- Confirm arrival time with the comedian (aim for 30–60 minutes before showtime)
- Verify sound system is set up and working
- Test the microphone in the actual room (not just a back office)
- Confirm room layout matches what was discussed
- Remove or reposition any visual obstructions (centerpieces, podiums, screens)
- Set lighting levels for the show
- Designate a parking spot or clear entry plan for the performer
- Identify your point-of-contact person who'll meet the comedian on arrival

Right Before Showtime

- Allow time for sound check (even 5–10 minutes helps)
- Confirm the introduction plan—who's doing it and what they'll say
- Alert bar staff about the service pause during the show
- Make sure dinner service is complete and tables are cleared
- Have background music playing that can be faded out for the intro

During the Show

- Sit back, relax, and laugh—you've earned it
- Resist the urge to check your phone or manage logistics during the set
- Keep doors closed if possible to minimize hallway noise
- Watch the room energy—are people engaged? Laughing? This is useful feedback

After the Show

- Thank the comedian publicly and allow time for audience mingling with them if appropriate
- Settle any remaining payment or expenses per your agreement

- Make note of what worked and what you'd change for next time
- Send a quick thank-you note or email within 48 hours
- If they were great—leave a review or testimonial. It helps them and helps future planners like you

BONUS

Red Flags & Deal-Breakers

Trust your gut—and watch for these warning signs.

Most professional comedians are exactly that—professional. But the entertainment industry has its share of people who look great on paper and disappoint in person. Here are the warning signs that should give you pause:

No video of their performances. In 2025, there's no excuse. If they can't show you what they do, there's a reason.

All their clips are from comedy clubs—none from events. Club comedy and event comedy are two very different skills. You need someone who can read a room full of accountants, not a room full of people who paid to see comedy.

They won't discuss content boundaries. If a comedian gets offended when you ask about keeping it clean, imagine what they'll say onstage.

They're hard to reach before the event. If they don't return calls or emails during the booking process, they're not going to magically become responsive on event day.

No contract or formal agreement. A professional comedian should provide (or be willing to sign) a clear contract covering date, time, fee, content expectations, and cancellation terms.

They can't provide references. Experienced event comedians will happily connect you with past clients. If they can't name anyone? Proceed with caution.

Price seems too good to be true. Like most things in life, you get what you pay for. An unusually low quote often means less experience, less reliability, or both.

They show zero interest in your event or audience. A great event comedian asks questions—about your group, your goals, your people. If they just want the check and the address, they're not going to give you a customized experience.

PRO TIP

On the flip side, here's a great sign: A comedian who asks you questions. About your group's inside jokes, your industry, who's retiring, who just got promoted. That tells you they're going to put in the work to make the show feel personal.

You've Got This.

Planning an event is stressful enough without having to become an expert in live entertainment overnight. But here's the good news: if you've read this far, you already know more about booking a comedy show than 90% of event planners out there.

To recap the big ideas:

- 1 Know your event inside and out before you start looking for talent.
- 2 Vet comedians carefully—watch video, ask questions, check references.
- 3 The room setup is not a detail—it's the foundation of a great show.
- 4 Sound and seating are the two biggest make-or-break factors.
- 5 A little preparation on event day goes a long way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This guide was written by Dan Deibert, a stand-up comedian with over 30 years of experience performing at corporate events, conferences, fundraisers, and banquets across the country. He's done more than 2,000 shows for groups of every size and type—from Fortune 500 companies to small-town chambers of commerce.

Dan wrote this guide because he's seen firsthand how much the planning side of things affects whether a comedy show succeeds. He wanted to give event planners a resource they could actually use—whether they end up booking him or not.

Have questions about booking a comedian for your event?

Dan is happy to chat—even if you just want advice and aren't ready to book. Sometimes a quick conversation with someone who's been doing this for three decades can save you hours of guesswork.

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No pressure. No hard sell. Just helpful.

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