



**How to
Make Your
Special Event**

SPECIAL

**Surefire Ways to
Boost Attendance**



**Good
Info.
KEEP!**

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

1

Introduction

Here's why we wrote this resource booklet, and how it will help get people to attend your events . . .

After many years of performing for the senior market, in hundreds of different venues, we've learned a few things. We've seen good ideas that worked very well. And we've seen mistakes that could have been avoided.

After working with hundreds of Activity Directors and Event Coordinators, it became obvious that most are overworked, under-appreciated and under-paid. As a result, turnover is high. Every year, about half the people we work with are brand new. Some have little or no experience. Others are volunteers. Some are dedicated professionals, and we are grateful for all the great ideas we've learned from them through the years.

This booklet will help you tap into the authors' 180+ years of combined experience as full-time professional entertainers, so you won't have to start from scratch. For career Activity Directors, our intent is to offer a thorough and concise overview of proven ideas and potential pitfalls. We hope you will find a few new ideas to consider and/or a good review of many of the same ideas you've likely learned through your own personal experience.

Keep This Resource Booklet

Considering the typical high turnover of Activity Directors, we hope you will keep this booklet accessible in the Activity Office as a handy resource of helpful info for new employees and volunteers. Again, our intent is to help make your events successful and everyone's job easier.

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

2

Competition

At first glance, you might think the authors are in competition. But *Laughing Bird* and *Bernie and Red* don't see it that way.

As professional entertainers offering our original music and comedy shows, the real competitors are the other choices audiences have for entertainment. Instead of attending our concerts, we realize people could go to another show across town, or to a movie, or stay home and watch TV.

Our job, this team effort, is to find the best ways to make sure potential audience members know this show is . . .

A SPECIAL EVENT!

They can watch TV or go to a movie on any other night. But this show, this special event at your resort is one-of-a-kind and one night only.

People need to know that.

Together we can maximize the fun factor, as well as ticket sales, by making sure everyone catches the exciting buzz and feels the anticipation of a professional, memorable show.

That's why this booklet is titled:

“How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL.”

How to Make Your Special Event **SPECIAL**

3

Contents

Introduction ...	1
Competition ...	2
Contents ...	5
A Buzz Doesn't Happen Accidentally ...	4
Word-of-Mouth ...	4
Posters ...	4
Mailbox Stuffers ...	4
Dinner Show "Cruise Theme" ...	5
Coffee and Dessert Show ...	6
Cabaret Night ...	6
Food and Drink Concession ...	6
Ticket Sales ...	9
Season Ticket Discount ...	8
Compensation ...	8
Ticket Prices ...	9
Booking ...	11
Special Event Timetable ...	11
Day of Show ...	12
Sound System and Lighting ...	12
Setting Up Chairs ...	13
Show Time ...	13
Length of Show ...	14
Intermission ...	14
After the Show ...	14
The Times They Are A-Changin' ...	15
Thanks ...	15
About the Authors ...	back cover

How to Make Your Special Event **SPECIAL**

4

Deliberately Generate Awareness, Excitement and Anticipation

(A Buzz Doesn't Happen Accidentally)

Word-of-Mouth

Create a buzz by talking about the show at all meetings and gatherings for *at least 2* or 3 weeks before the date. Examples: morning coffee gatherings, meals, bingo, pool parties, park business meetings, etc. Give them an idea about the entertainers and what kind of show it is. Read a couple of testimonials from the act's promo material. Be excited. It's contagious!

Posters

Put up lots of posters. Not just in the Activity Office, but in the pool area, the shuffleboard court, the laundry, restrooms, the business office and wherever people gather or pass by. Put up posters on the entrance and exit doors to all public rooms, especially the room where the concert will be.

Top acts will provide you with as many professional looking posters as you can use. Don't be shy – ask for plenty.

If you like to print your own posters, make sure they look as good, or better than the ones provided by the act. A cheaply printed, bad quality poster reflects poorly on the act. Image is important, and often the poster provides the first impression in the mind of the potential ticket buyer. This is why top acts are happy to provide you with high quality, professional looking posters – as many as you can use.

Mailbox Stuffers

Laughing Bird has been using this mailbox stuffer technique

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

5

since 2003, and it has been very successful. At the beginning of every winter tour, we send 10,000 to 15,000 mailbox stuffers, along with several hundred posters. We recommend the mailbox stuffers go in the mailboxes and the posters go up about 2 weeks before the show date. That gives people enough time to plan accordingly. Activity Directors have told us over and over that advance ticket sales are brisk immediately after the mailbox stuffers are distributed.

A good mailbox flyer will provide an overview of what kind of show it is, a good photo, a few short testimonials, as well as the date and time of the show. Top acts will provide you with as many as you need to reach everyone in the resort. Mailbox stuffers provide a cost-effective way to let people know this is a professional show – a special event.

If you don't have access to the mailboxes at your resort, come up with another way to get the flyers in the hands of all potential ticket buyers. Hand them out at every opportunity wherever people gather.

Leaving a stack in a public area might be better than nothing, but few people will pick them up, so it's wasteful. It's better to find a way to get them into the hands of people, so they take them home and have an on-going reminder of the event, as well as the exact date and time.

Dinner Show “Cruise Theme”

If you are considering a dinner show, a theme might attract more people. A theme that we have seen work well is a “cruise night.” Invite people to dress up as they would on a formal night on a cruise. Find a volunteer with photographic skills to take formal portraits. The photos can be picked up the following day, either printed at Costco or Sams, or by the photographer.

How to Make Your Special Event **SPECIAL**

6

Coffee and Dessert Show

Create a special atmosphere by offering coffee and dessert before the show. Add a dollar or two to the ticket price, and buy mini cheesecakes, brownies or cookies at Sams or Costco. If you are fortunate enough to have a group of volunteers willing to bake pies, cakes or cookies, so much the better.

Cabaret Night

Rather than the typical concert seating, this is also known as Las Vegas seating. Set up tables and encourage people to bring their own drinks and snacks. It's a way to attract a new group of people to your event. For instance, the baby boomer generation seems to enjoy the social hour before the show starts. This casual atmosphere of elbows on the table while drinking and snacking with their friends is appealing. You can make it special with tablecloths and electronic candles.

Food and Drink Concession

If you have a food and drink concession at your resort, make sure it's staffed and open on the night of the show. (Can you imagine a movie theater with no concession?) It's a nice service for the audience, and a good profit center. If you have limited help, just bottled water and ice cream bars will still add to your profit for the night. If you have more help, consider additional high-profit choices like pop, candy, popcorn and hand-dipped ice cream.

Ticket Sales

It's best to sell tickets in advance for several reasons:

* People make a commitment to come to the show. They mark the date on their calendar, and don't make other plans at the

How to Make Your Special Event **SPECIAL**

7

last minute. Also inclement weather is unlikely to deter them from attending if they already have tickets.

* Pre-selling tickets sends a message that this is a **SPECIAL EVENT**. The rest of the message is, "Professional shows with top acts sometimes sell out, so get your tickets now. Don't miss out." (Fear of loss is a powerful motivator.)

* People are accustomed to buying tickets in advance for special events. Think of other special occasions like concerts, plays, sporting events, etc. Tickets are almost always sold in advance.

* Tickets should also be available at the door, but they should cost \$1 or \$2 more than tickets bought in advance. That's enough incentive to encourage people to buy their tickets early.

* Many people who buy tickets at the door will not be residents of your resort. It makes your people feel they are getting special treatment when they can buy tickets cheaper than the outsiders. For those who buy tickets at the door, the extra dollar or two is never an issue. Once they've made the effort to drive to your venue, they are committed and won't mind paying the extra dollar or two.

* When you pre-sell tickets, it's easy to use numbered tickets so you can have a drawing during the intermission. People love the idea of winning free stuff, and most entertainers will be happy to donate a CD for a door prize.

* You could have assigned seating to add value, which helps create urgency to buy tickets early. Those who buy tickets first get the best seats. If assigned seating is too much trouble, you could simplify and reserve the first few rows for advance ticket buyers. (We have seen from experience that people will pay a couple of dollars more to sit in the first three or four rows.)

How to Make Your Special Event **SPECIAL**

8

Season Ticket Discount

You can offer a small discount for a season ticket to all the shows. This could be sold as an “Entertainment Club” with special perks. Examples: Host a complimentary dinner or dinner show for season ticket buyers only. Or, free popcorn or ice cream at each show. A few people might actually show up to all the shows throughout the season. But most will have conflicting schedules and miss a few shows. This will make up for the discount given and the perks offered.

Compensation

There are three options for compensation:

- 1) By far the most common contract calls for a split of ticket sales, usually an 80/20 split or sometimes a 90/10 split. This means that 80 or 90 percent of the ticket sales goes to the performer, and the remainder goes to the venue. The entertainer is taking a risk, and there is little or no risk to the venue.
2. Most often with the above arrangement, there is a guaranteed minimum amount to be paid to the performer.

As an example, the performer receives a \$750 guarantee. This means that regardless of the number of tickets sold, the entertainer is guaranteed to receive \$750. If many tickets are sold, then the entertainer will receive the 80 or 90 percent of ticket sales. In other words, the entertainer gets paid whichever amount is more: the guarantee or the split.

Example Agreement:

\$750 guarantee with an 80/20 split of a \$10 ticket.

Let's say 100 people buy tickets. (Gross sales would be \$1,000.)
The entertainers would get \$800.

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

9

(That's 80% of \$1,000, since it is more than the \$750 guarantee.)

Let's say only 90 tickets are sold. (Gross sales would be \$900.)

The entertainer would receive \$750.

(80% of \$900 is only \$720, which is less than the \$750 guarantee.)

3) Under special circumstances, a flat fee might be agreeable to both parties. This is the least common, but as the name implies, the venue and performer agree on a flat fee, regardless of how many people attend the event.

Ticket Prices

Note: These numbers are offered to illustrate how the split works. Actual ticket prices vary from act to act and from venue to venue. We like to keep our ticket prices toward the high end of what the market will bear – not overpriced which could limit sales, but enough to send the message that this is a professional show – a special event.

There are several reasons why the split of ticket sales (with guarantee) is preferred by professional entertainers:

* We invest in advertising. Examples: display ads in local publications, mailbox stuffers, programs distributed at the shows listing our season tour schedule, quality posters, email blasts to our lists, etc.

* We have invested tens of thousands of dollars over many years to reach new people, keep our name in the forefront, re-connect with existing fans, while continually building our fanbase.

* A split allows us to benefit from the many years of building our following. When these people come to a flat fee show, we are not as well reimbursed for the costs of acquiring and maintaining our fans.

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

10

* The split motivates us to do everything we can to maximize ticket sales. The guarantee gives you a reason to maximize ticket sales. This is win/win teamwork at its best.

Booking

Beware of acts that have no DVD or video online. Anyone can sound great on a CD these days, so it's important to see how the act looks and sounds onstage in front of a live audience. A video or attending one of their shows will give you that information.

Make sure there is plenty of variety in your booking . When similar acts are booked back to back, this usually encourages people to attend one or the other – not both. Instead, mix it up. Have a dance, then a music and comedy show, then a tribute show, then a family band, then a comedian, then an Elvis impersonator, etc.

Don't overbook entertainment. One show a week is usually plenty, and in some instances, two per month is enough.

Be careful about booking on special dates. For example, avoid booking anything on Super Bowl Sunday. Nobody will come.

Maintain high standards. If you book a terrible show, people will remember that, and be reluctant to come to another. Create a reputation of presenting quality shows and attendance will grow organically. Just one disappointing show can tarnish people's impressions about the quality of shows offered and will affect future ticket sales.

If something unavoidable comes up and it's necessary to cancel a booking, contact the entertainer(s) immediately and talk about it. Re-book another date RIGHT THEN.

Phone etiquette: Don't ask entertainers to call you back again

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

11

and again. It's better to go ahead and say no, if the act won't work in your entertainment line-up, rather than to string someone along. Entertainers are as busy as you are and appreciate consideration, honesty and professionalism, just as you do.

Special Event Timetable

3 months before the show: Review the contract so that if you have any questions, you can call the performer well in advance. If the performer needs accommodations or a place to park their RV on the night of the show, make sure those arrangements have been made and the spot has been reserved. Make sure all shows for the season are listed in your entertainment calendar, so people can see at a glance what is being offered and make plans early.

1 month before the show: Print (or buy) the tickets. Make sure you have received the mailbox stuffers and posters from the performer. If you can't find them, call the performer for replacements. If they do not provide mailbox stuffers, you may choose to print them yourself.

2 weeks before the show: Put up lots of posters. Let everyone know that advance tickets are on sale now. If the performer is to be paid by check, do whatever is necessary to insure the check will be available on the night of the show.

1 week before the show: Contact the entertainer to confirm the arrival and set-up time on the day of the show. (*Laughing Bird* and *Bernie and Red* will call you about a week before the show.) Make arrangements for the sound and light guy to meet the performers during set-up time, if necessary. Talk about the show at every opportunity with prospective ticket buyers to help create excitement and anticipation.

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

12

Day of the Show

It's important to stick to the set-up time agreed upon with the entertainers. It takes time and energy to get the stage ready for the show. It's a tight schedule, and last minute changes and delays make it more difficult to be energetic and ready on time.

If you (the A.D. or concert host) can't meet the entertainers at the agreed upon set-up time, delegate the meet-and-greet so that someone is there. Entertainers may have a few questions about the dressing room, auxiliary sound and/or lighting.

If the only available dressing room is a broom closet or storage area, please ask the custodial crew to clean it up a little and sweep it.

If the stage is cluttered, ask the owner to remove their stuff, so the entertainer is not put in the awkward position of having to handle someone else's gear. The idea is to make the stage look like a special event show.

If there is a bingo board or a big TV screen, be sure you have covers for them. This gives the stage and the room a different look than usual. The idea is to do whatever can be done to make the stage and hall look like something special will be happening.

Sound Systems and Lighting

Both *Laughing Bird* and *Bernie and Red* travel with their own sound system and lighting. But everyone does it differently, so communicate with the entertainers about it. For instance, we always set up our own sound system for a consistent, dependable, quality sound. In the larger halls, we send a feed from our mixer to the house sound system to help fill all areas of the room. In those situations, we work with the local sound guy to

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

13

get the best overall sound. If this auxiliary sound is required, it's important for the sound guy to be there during set-up. Using our own stage lights and spotlight allows us to make the stage and the room look different than usual. This different look and top-quality sound helps make the show a special event.

Setting Up Chairs

If there are tables on the floor, set them up in such a way that nobody's back is toward the stage. With long tables, place them so that they are pointed in the general direction of the stage. Then people on both sides of the table can adjust their chairs 90 degrees and sit comfortably beside their table, facing the stage.

With theater seating, don't make an aisle down the center of the room. Instead, divide the chairs into 3 groups, with two aisles. Here's why: The center of the room, directly in front of the stage offers the very best view and the very best sound. People need to be there, not aisles.

You may need to check your local fire regulations to see how many seats can be in a row between aisles.

Show Time

Introduction: Different acts prefer different types of introductions. For instance, *Bernie and Red* prefer their own pre-recorded introduction for a consistent professional start of the show. *Laughing Bird* prefers to use their own pre-recorded introduction followed by a short introduction from the Activity Director. (We provide a crib sheet with 2 or 3 easy-to-read sentences.) If the A.D. has an aversion to the stage, someone else who is comfortable can do the introduction. We feel it's a nice

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

14

touch, and the people enjoy seeing a familiar face introducing the show. **Important:** This is not the time for a long list of announcements. People have come to be entertained, and it feels awkward and anti-climactic to have to endure too many announcements before the show. That's a surefire energy dowsers.

Length of Show

Although we can easily do a shorter show for special situations, most pros (including *Bernie and Red* and *Laughing Bird*) prefer to do a 2-hour show with a short intermission. This offers excellent value for the ticket price, and makes it a special event.

Intermission

The intermission serves important purposes:

- * Most chairs are uncomfortable, and after an hour people need to get up and stretch, go to the restroom, etc.
- * Good time for the concession stand to offer refreshments. (Also before the show.)
- * It gives people an opportunity to interact with the entertainers. Those interested in CDs can purchase them and get them autographed.
- * A few people may need to leave early, because of previous commitments, or health issues, or whatever. The intermission provides a convenient time for that without disrupting the show.

After the Show

If the show goes over well and people obviously enjoyed the show, book another date for next year RIGHT NOW. Top acts present different shows every year to offer variety and book

How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

15

tour calendars a year or two in advance.

If your people are impressed with the show, and you like the professionalism of a particular act, tell other Activity Directors in the area about it. Word-of-mouth networking with other show hosts helps everyone – the audience, the entertainers, and the A.D.'s.

The Times They Are A-Changin'

Audiences are changing. The demographics are shifting, and the new generation wants different entertainment than their parents. With so many choices it has become more of a challenge to get people out to shows. Resort owners, entertainment coordinators and performers would all like to have bigger audiences. The ideas in this booklet will help us all to maximize the potential, make people happy, and have some fun in the process.

Please keep this booklet, and pass it along to anyone who is interested so it will help as many people as possible.

Thank you. We appreciate everything you do to help make it all happen.

Yours for a song,
Tupelo and Janey Kenyon (Laughing Bird)
Bernie and Red

P.S. Please refer to the back cover for more information about the authors.

Need more booklets? Let us know.

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How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL

16

Event Accounting Report

Name of Venue: _____

Name of Entertainer(s): _____

Date of Event: _____

Ticket Price (Sold in Advance): \$ _____

Ticket Price (Sold at the Door): \$ _____

Total Amount Collected for Ticket Sales: \$ _____

Split % Agreed Upon: Entertainer: _____ % . . . Venue: _____ %

Total Proceeds for **Entertainer**:

Total Amount Collected: \$ _____ x _____ % = \$ _____

Total Proceeds for **Venue**:

Total Amount Collected: \$ _____ x _____ % = \$ _____

Accounting by: _____
for Venue

Received by: _____
for Entertainer(s)

From: "How to Make Your Special Event SPECIAL" by Laughing Bird and Bernie & Red. Download free booklet at www.LaughingBirdMusic.com

About the 4 authors:

Bernie & Red



Bernie & Red are musical humorists who have been performing together for more than 35 years.

They began their partnership in Liverpool, England back in the 60's and by the late 70's were established on the entertainment scene in Canada.

Gradually adding more comedy to their show, they were soon performing on cruise ships worldwide and at concert venues across the US.

Frequent comparisons to Johnny Carson, Bette Midler, The Smothers Bros and Benny Hill notwithstanding, these two are originals, effortlessly blending their cheeky British humor with great music and excellent vocals.

Call Bernie: 604-850-2278
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Laughing Bird

"Original, refreshing, energetic, hilarious, and entertaining." . . . words used by Activity Directors about Laughing Bird's show. But the real magic is their warm, unpretentious energy. Tupelo and Janey clearly love what they do, and it shows!

Laughing Bird's show is a lively mix of country, bluegrass, and light acoustic rock played on many instruments. At their performance, you'll hear original songs that will "wow" you, songs of the heart, and songs that make you laugh.

The overall effect is a light-hearted, high-spirited and intimate show that makes you feel good.

Performing together for 37 years, 14 CDs, on Wyoming Arts Council's touring roster.

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