

The Awards Gala

Producing an "Entertaining Event": Part One

By Charmagne Loveless
Key Artist Group

An awards gala is not a business meeting. Sure, PowerPoints and speeches may have a proper place somewhere in many programs, but information should never be the focus of an awards program. So what should be the focus? Celebration and entertainment!

To make your own awards celebration entertaining, engaging and memorable you need to understand what's important to your event and how to best manage those elements. So let's boil it down to what I consider the most crucial pieces, beginning with...

YOUR SCHEDULE

Award shows are all about pacing and timing, which is why your evening's schedule is vital. More people will refer to your schedule than any other piece of information related to the show. So you need a definite structure to your evening. Here are a few general guidelines to keep in mind when creating a schedule.

Keep your printed schedule simple. Don't overload it with information—that's what scripts are for and we'll talk about those later. Show a start time for each presentation, how long it should last, the exact name of the presentation, who's presenting, and what's physically being presented. Here's how to begin the process:

1. Rank your awards presentations from "least significant" to "most significant." You want to build the evening from least to most.

2. Then add in everything else that will be part of the evening — reception, dinner, installation of new board members, entertainment.

3. Look at your evening from the perspective of people sitting in the audience all night NOT receiving awards. What's holding their interest? Do you need to build in options for them, such as door prizes, drawings, or participatory entertainment?



Some producers like to create a table in Word, or use an Excel spreadsheet to help them map out their evening. Others actually cut out individual pieces of paper and move them around like puzzle pieces until they have their basic structure. Do whatever works for you. Just remember to look at the evening as a whole. Does it build? Is there variety? Or are there "bald spots" where nothing interesting is happening?

One last piece of schedule advice:

always number pages and always include the date and time of the latest revision on the top of the first page.

YOUR SCRIPTS

Actors in movies don't write their own lines, so don't ask your presenters to write theirs. You need the continuity that only professional scriptwriting brings to your event. For one thing, scripts aren't just the words that presenters say. They're the road maps that tell everyone what to do and when to do it.

The second most important thing to know about scripts is, creating good ones is a highly practiced skill. Don't leave it to your PR person, administrative assistant, or anyone else. Hire a professional scriptwriter. With a pro, you know everything that needs consideration—music cues, stage directions, clever transitions—will be addressed.

In addition to being a good wordsmith, a scriptwriter is also a good technician who can "see" the show before it happens. "Clients are sometimes taken by surprise when we're in meetings and I say I'm "watching" their show in my head," says Dick Wilson, a corporate scriptwriter and show producer with many years experience. "But it's true—I do see the show happening as I write it, and I think most good scriptwriters do the same."

For the sake of your show and everyone's sanity, have your scripts done 7-10 days before the show. Everyone involved in your program will benefit from having scripts completed AND approved ahead of time.

And then rehearse with those scripts. To be effective, a rehearsal should be run by the show producer, someone who knows how to keep things moving. Insist that real MCs, not stand-ins, show up for rehearsal. Otherwise, you're wasting

time and putting your show in jeopardy.

YOUR MUSIC

I can't tell you how many times I've walked into an awards show rehearsal and asked about the music, only to have the client say, "Oh, the sound guy will just flip on some music when we need it." Trust me— the sound guy will have more than enough to do just keeping the room sounding right and everyone's microphone hot. Music is far too important to an awards program to leave it to the poor, overworked sound guy.

Let's explore the two options you have: live music vs. recorded music.

Recorded Music

The best solution is to hire a professional DJ who brings his own music and gear and plugs into your sound system. He or she will need a script book well in

advance so they can have the appropriate songs located, edited, and ready to go in the order they'll be needed.

Nothing else gets an audience going like having upbeat, familiar music playing. "Familiar" is the operative term here. So make sure you have a DJ who has a large variety of songs from a variety of musical eras, not just what's on the pop charts today.

Not all songs are good "play up" songs, especially if they have a long intro. Don't be afraid to ask your DJ to edit music, or cue a song up to "the good part." Well-selected music can create an emotional response in the audience and throughout your show.

Live Music

An experienced live band is the best way to get what you need, but there are definitely some caveats here. Don't call your entertainment producer and ask for the rock band you're using for the 'after party' to do the awards show music. Sure, there are a few top-notch bands around the country that can do it all, but those are rare. And remember, the bigger the band, the costlier the rehearsal. Most bands work on a three-hour call, with additional hours being overtime.

I often recommend hiring a trio for just the awards. A piano, bass and drums will give you all the sound you need for your dedicated awards show band, and save you lots of money.

The best way to get what you need is to listen to your entertainment professional. Don't try to make one band do double or triple duty. Give your agent a budget, then let him or her come back with the best options.

Next Issue

Today, we've quickly explored three of the key building blocks of successful awards gala—a thoughtful schedule, complete scripts, and good music. In the next issue of AEM, we'll look at the catalyst that brings everything together, a great professional MC.

About The Author

In her 19 years as a Event Producer and Talent Agent, Charmagne Loveless has lent her talents to numerous industry award events including *The Spotlight Awards for Event Solutions* magazine, and three years on the Gala/Awards committee for the Chicago Area Chapter of MPI. She is currently VP of the Midwest Office for Key Artist Group, which also has offices in Orlando and Las Vegas. Contact Charmagne at 414-425-4878 or Charmagne@keyartistgroup.com.



John Charles



Marveless Mark