

## The Awards Gala

### Producing an "Entertaining Event": Part Two

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In Part I of this article, which appeared in the Nov-Dec issue of AEM, I talked about the 3 key building blocks you need to create a great gala awards evening. Those elements are:

1. A concise written schedule for the evening
2. Professionally written scripts, completed well in advance, and...
3. Great live or recorded music

If you missed Part 1, please go to [www.americanentertainmentmagazine.com](http://www.americanentertainmentmagazine.com) where you can read the article in its entirety. In this issue, we're going to focus on just one element. It's the catalyst who brings all of the other elements together and turns them into a memorable event—a professional MC.

#### WHY A PROFESSIONAL MC?

Being an experienced talent agent, I'm partial to having a professional MC running the show because I know it is usually the best thing for most awards programs. Even if a company employee is "good on stage" or "a really funny guy", a professional MC is a better alternative. Here's why:

By definition, an employee already has a job. Most can't take the time from that



job to prepare, rehearse, and memorize whatever might be required. That's not to say employees can't take part in the program. They should. But asking one person to be responsible for carrying the show, in addition to his or her regular job responsibilities, is asking a lot.

Second, a professional MC is a neutral person who is free to relate to the audience on levels a co-worker can not... or probably shouldn't. There are no office politics, no reporting relationships, nothing that can get in the way of being entertaining. The MC is free to be himself or herself, and everyone else is free to enjoy the show.

#### CHOOSING A PROFESSIONAL MC

My first piece of advice: do it early in the process. Many corporations think about their MC late in the process, after menus, décor, staging, and sound and light production are paid for. In reality, your choice of MC should be one of your earliest decisions — before the budget is spent.

With MCs, as with so many other purchases, you get what you pay for. Good professional MCs with a track record may cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000. You will have an even better selection with nationally-known MCs who cost in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range. Is it worth it?

Absolutely! If it's between having fancy centerpieces, shrimp cocktails or good entertainment, budget for the entertainment. People don't just remember how pretty things looked or what they ate... they remember what a good time they had.

That goes for non-award winners as well. A professional MC makes the awards night enjoyable for everyone, which is why it's also important to consider an MC who is truly an entertainer in his/her own right, not just a pretty face or speaking voice. Magicians, musicians and comedians all make excellent MC's, simply because they are entertainers. They can fill for five minutes, 10 minutes, or longer if necessary... and save the show in the process. Very few company executives can pull that off.

Don't forget to consider the demographics of your audience when thinking about an MC. Audiences like seeing someone they can relate to on stage, someone similar to them in age, likes and dislikes.

For example, if you are the male CEO of Tupperware or Mary Kay Cosmetics, you need to consider that your audience is mostly female. Who will they relate to? They need someone who comes off as authentic from a female perspective and who relates well to their industry background.

According to Jeff Enloe, of Enloe Productions in LA, "Today's age groups of 30 and younger are very critical of the message being authentic and true. Having the right speaker or emcee these

audiences can identify with, is crucial to the success of the event."

A comedian like Greg Schwem, for example, is all about business in corporate America. He does technology humor that resonates especially well with a young audience, particularly techie types or a predominantly male audience.

#### WORKING WITH A PROFESSIONAL MC

Some companies like to integrate their own people with professionals, and that is often a great way to combine the familiar with the professional. I've had great results combining home office people with professional talents such as

Marvelless Mark (MC/DJ), Vox Audio (a cappella group), The Water Coolers (singer/comedians), or The Raspyni Brothers (juggler comedians), to name just a few. For example, The Water Coolers, a New York-based singing comedy group, has special Awards Show packages. They work with clients to build an integrated awards show using a little, or a lot, of customization.

Another trend mimics popular TV shows formats. For instance, Marvelless Mark has a show called "Corporate Idol" that's patterned after "American Idol." The audience understands the concept and knows they're going to love it.

Bottom line-- in an era of economic challenges, an MC brings value to the

table. You get both a host and an entertainer with minimal production costs. And, having the help of an experienced entertainment producer allows for greater creativity without fearing mistakes and for tried-and-true options you may not have considered.

#### IN CLOSING

I began Part One of this series by saying "an awards gala is not a business meeting," and it bears repeating. An awards show should be recognition to the few, and inspiration and entertainment to the many. It should not be a parade of suits talking to Powerpoints. The best way to make sure that happens is to partner with a seasoned talent agent who can bring the right professionals on board. Their job is to make your clients look good.

Don't try to do it all alone. The right support production team of professional specialists and entertainers can truly make you and your event an award winner!

#### About The Author

In her 19 years as a Event Producer and Talent Agent, Charmagne Loveless has produced many award galas and provided entertainment for them as well. She has lent her talents to numerous industry award events including *The Spotlight Awards for Event Solutions* magazine, and the *Gala/Awards committee for the Chicago Chapter of MPI*, which she has worked on for the past 3 years. An MPI member since 1981, Charmagne is past president of the Orlando MPI Chapter, where she was named *Supplier of the Year*. 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](mailto:Charmagne@keyartistgroup.com)

