



Puttin' on the skits:
Good fun when they're done well



MOSSWARNER

Need to put on a skit for your sales meeting?

Here are eight tips from our team of producers – veterans of television, theater and event production:

1. Decide if it's live, pre-recorded or hybrid (video within a live show).

Live Production: Pro

A live production is very much in the moment. There is a more personal connection with the audience and there may be opportunities for audience involvement.

Live Production: Con

A live production can require complex, potentially costly staging, lighting and choreography to pull off and there's no such thing as, "We'll fix it in post."



Pre-recorded Pro

Video offers vastly more creative possibilities in terms of available assets and ability to control the viewer experience. You can combine visuals of all kinds. You can shoot multiple takes of any scene. And yes, you can "fix it in post."

Pre-recorded: Con

Great video production isn't cheap, and it takes time. And compromises always show. Sometimes, that's okay; a shot that's meant to be just a smartphone video, for example, is fine. But if "sort of okay" won't cut it, high-quality production is a must.



2. Consider a format you can use as a template.

The most popular approach is parody, because it taps into memory structures and feelings people already have. And the nature of the original can help drive the arc and presentation of your story.

How popular is it? Well, virtually all of the many meetings we've produced in the past year have included skits, including hilarious send-ups of popular television programs – comedies, dramas, sportscasts, reality shows, and, the old standbys, game shows.

We've also produced a bunch of all-original skits. One recent example featured dueling mock pitches for the Jersey Shore and Pittsburgh, competing to be the site for a performance reward getaway. (The actual prize was more exotic.) That one highlighted the different personalities of two very popular sales leaders, another common thread.



3. Consider the format that you can best work with.

Getting started on a script is hard, even for professional scriptwriters. The universe of possibilities is infinite, and scriptwriting is an art.

One way to organize your thoughts is to decide between Storytelling, Conversation and Pure Entertainment. This decision can help drive your choice between a live or pre-recorded approach.

Here are a couple of broad guidelines:

- Storytelling approaches are best done as videos while conversation-based programs such as game shows and commentaries lend themselves well to live productions.
- Pure entertainment such as music videos or song-and-dance parodies can be great fun and can drive home high-level points and evoke strong feelings, even if they don't communicate granular information.

None of this is absolute, but the pros and cons of each offer some basic guidance:

Storytelling skits: Pro

A parody of an existing movie or show can leverage an audience's established feelings toward it. Similarly, a from-scratch production can evoke familiar touchpoints such as the dynamics of your particular team or processes.

Storytelling skits: Con

An episodic skit show requires well-crafted scripting and production to pay off its premise without becoming awkward, silly or just plain lame. As a live show, it's even more difficult to pay off, especially if physicality is required.

Here are a couple of recent examples to serve as thought starters:

- A send-up of a popular TV show featured a misplaced coach's "Ten Leadership Lessons" as a platform for discussing the qualities and attitudes that Sales leaders use to build, empower and support their teams. The National Sales Manager, as the "Coach" character, introduced each lesson with a philosophical lesson and then played a pre-recorded video of a team member's observations about it. The concept was simple and direct, and the execution only required acting by the National Sales Manager; the team members on video were just themselves, reflecting on their respective lessons.
- A parody of a popular remote island reality show went all-out to create a highly credible and entertaining send-up experience. Costumes, props, graphics, scene choreography, dialog, music, sound effects and editing all combined to create the feeling of watching the show.

Highlights included having teams competing to complete an assembly that is part of their sales demonstration process, and then following it up with a "tribal meeting" to determine who "survives" and who does not.

This last part was an example of how important agility and a combination of both live and video production capabilities can be. Originally, the plan was for set-up and assembly to be pre-recorded and the tribal meeting to be live. But at the last minute, as the Omicron wave began, the meeting became all-virtual and the entire presentation became a video-based episode.



Conversation-based skits: Pro

Game shows, talk shows, sportscasts, news and commentary shows are well-suited to live events because they can be staged with one anchor set and scripted to a well-defined format. They can be spontaneously funny and can incorporate apps for audience participation. And they don't require a lot of character acting.

News and sports programs, in particular, are perfect for deeper delivery of information and commentary.

Conversation-based skits: Con

Let's start with the obvious: game shows, news shows and sportscasts are done a lot, and they can get pretty cheesy. But somehow, they're still popular; it's all in the on-stage personalities.

Here are a couple of recent examples – again, to help trigger ideas:

- A Dating Game parody used the well-known format to present a product and two of its competitors as “date” possibilities to be interviewed by the user choosing among them. Each player, speaking as the respective product, answered questions and made its case.

The format was an effective platform not just for showing why the team's product was a better choice, but also for anticipating the competitors' sales pitches and practicing conversations that would lead their target audience to choose that product.

- A renamed and reformatted Shark Tank parody featured actual engineering teams making actual pitches for development resources based on audience responses to their proposals.



Pure entertainment skits: Pro

There's nothing like out-and-out show biz to get a crowd psyched and engaged. Getting a little “out there” with a music video or live song-and-dance routine can win over your colleagues. With backing music easily available in today's vast karaoke libraries, you can parody any music you want. Similarly, today's stock footage houses offer video backplates of all kinds that you can use by shooting on green screen, and narrative titles can be easily animated to move a story along. (You'll want to work closely with your agency or production company on this.)

Pure entertainment skits: Con

The greatest downside is lack of preparedness. A song-and-dance routine needs careful choreography and rigorous rehearsal to avoid becoming clownish. Also, some people are either unable to carry a tune or dance well. That can be charming in the case of a beloved leader willing to be self-effacing for the sake of team engagement. But generally, song-and-dance routines work best with good singers and dancers.



4. Rehearse 'til it hurts.

There's no way around this. If you're live, a flub, a missed cue or some other unexpected screw-up could make an audience wince. As friends and colleagues, they might feel sorry for you, but you'll have lost the point. On video, re-takes are great if you're shooting to have alternatives or backup, but every take caused by a screw-up is time and money wasted. Yes, rehearsing takes time and isn't always easy to coordinate. But it is always worth the trouble.



5. Take humor seriously.

Humor takes all forms. Whether it's a sight gag or dialog, being funny is as tricky as it is important. In a sales meeting setting, you may be able to cross a couple of boundaries that you couldn't in everyday business life, but not by much.

First, there are things you absolutely can't do. You can't be crude or offensive. It's not a matter of being woke, it's a matter of respecting the reality that as close as you may be to your team members, your relationship is based on business. So no sex talk. No aspersions, insults, anger or overt complaints. Nothing mean-spirited. And nothing that mocks, denigrates or diminishes your associates.

Got that? Of course.

But being close to your team members does give you a little license to have some fun. Inside jokes should be funny to insiders, but only insiders can ever see or hear them. A little gentle ribbing can be fine, especially if it's more about a process than a person or group of people. And self-effacing humor can be endearing.

6. The takeaway should be the hook.

One thing the four examples discussed here share with most other successful skits is relevance. It takes some finesse to get there, but the objective is always to have the experience impart a single, memorable takeaway. Whatever else the skit communicates, however deep into the weeds it gets and however entertaining as it is meant to be, the end game is almost always the same – to get your audience to think, feel and do what you want them to. When the vehicle is a skit, that's the destination.

7. Don't be any cheaper than you want to look

If you don't want your skit to come off like a High School play or home movie and you don't have the internal resources for a professional-grade production, work with your communications agency or production company. In addition to creative and technical capabilities, a good one will also have solid planning and production processes and will help you get the quality you need at a price you can afford.

8. Don't go it alone.

Let's face it. Not everyone is a great writer, producer or performer. And the right agency or producer can make all the difference. In our business, we provide both creative and production support as needed. Of course, salespeople are often quite creative, so it's a matter of bringing their visions to life whether we're just making tweaks or scripting from scratch.

So forgive the blatant self-interest in our saying so, but wherever you are on that spectrum, a good agency or production company can be the difference between a successful skit show and... well, let's just call it the obvious rhyme.



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