

.....BULLET POINTS.....

Week of 2-10-03

Beef Up Your Show with a Little Sketch Comedy

We are huge believers in reality radio, i.e. being who you are on the radio and clearly defining your character in conversational situations. At the same time it is a powerful combination to balance the show with staged comedy along with the real life conversations.

Jimmy Kimmel stressed the importance of planning and writing comedy when he spoke at our Napa seminar. In Jimmy's last radio morning show with Kevin and Bean, he played the role of Jimmy the Sports Guy. He did sports with a comedic spin that involved a lot of writing.

It is also possible to turn a sketch comedy bit into running serial content that can become a benchmark. Ben and Brian on WMZQ, Washington D.C. run "The Real World Nashville" where 'country music stars' are heard living together ala MTV's The Real World. Two Guys Named Chris on WKRR, Greensboro produce very funny regular character type promo sketches of themselves as kids.

The following guide to creating sketch comedy is designed to help you put together pre-produced bits to contrast and balance the reality segments. The components of sketch comedy can also be infused into topics and discussions that are live and real as well.

SKETCH COMEDY MODEL

Here is the basic outline for constructing sketch comedy:

1. Find a strong comic character

Use what you know about comic perspective, exaggeration, flaws and humanity to create a comic character for the center of your sketch – maybe it's you.

2. Find a source of opposition or conflict

This can either be another character, a situation or an event.

3. Put them together

Make a strong compelling reason why they are together. Monty Python used to force the union just by having some unsuspecting person walk into a shop run by a lunatic. Virtually any situation will do, so long as it's easier to get into than out of.

4. Escalate their conflict

No matter how the conflict starts, make sure that the argument gets worse (better!). Push it towards your characters' emotional core.

5. Raise the stakes

Introduce a new element of risk or reward for your sketch characters. Ask yourself, "What's the worst possible thing that could happen to this person next?"

6. Push the limits (exaggerate)

In the best sketch comedy, limits get pushed to the point of raving madness. Exaggeration is your best friend here – be bold and outrageous and your scene will sprout wings and fly.

7. Go for an emotional peak (climax)

If you've got strong comic opposites and real conflict in a closed situation then the thing should be about to explode. Sketch comedy works best when it goes ballistic.

8. Conclusion – get out!

To make your sketch comedy truly satisfying to the listener, you have to achieve some sense of completion or closure. One of four outcomes is possible: somebody wins or somebody loses or everybody wins or everybody loses.

ADDITIONAL COMEDY WRITING TIPS

Details Often the difference between a good story or comic moment and a great one is the application of detail to the picture. Detail helps your cause in two ways: it makes your story much more vivid to the listener. Detail draws people more deeply in, creates more emotional investment. Second, actively going for detail gives you a keener sense and a clearer picture of your own character.

Editing The real work of comic writing takes place in rewriting and editing. For every desire you have to improve the work, there will be an equal and opposite desire to protect your ego instead. Eventually you have to decide whom to serve — your ego or your work. Remember, it's far easier to turn bad material into good, or good into great, than it is to get everything right on the first try. Break it down. Mine it, then refine it. It's also easier to cut bad material out than to put in new material, so write fast, write long. Find a good beta tester for trying out your material.

Fear is the biggest roadblock to comedy (kill your ferocious editor within and rich, useful comic ideas will flow).

IMAGING TIP: Using the promotional inventory you have on your morning show to sell the unique personalities of the show/station is critical. Effective morning show promos that capture the essence of the characters on the show help new cumers and fringe cumers identify with each voice on the show much faster. These promos can be targeted to reinforce desired images for each character by using the central conflicts, endearing qualities, and comedic perspective for each character on the show. These promos can very effectively speed the conversion of fringe CUMERS to FANS!

Strong imaging promos that feature show characters and content also help the morning show recycle classic moments from the show to the 95% of the stations cume that didn't hear it happen live.

The best imaged shows use their promotional time like an ad agency uses the time it can afford to buy. They run several types of imaging promos throughout the year in their show and outside their show in other day-parts. One month's flight may focus on promos that open each break to image each character in the break along with a series of "best minutes" promos that recycle some great moments from recent shows to different listeners. Other possibilities include promos that image the great local callers a show might receive (to position the show as local against a syndicated show), image promos that talk about upcoming content on future shows to encourage today's audience to return again on another day, community service promos that highlight the work the show does to benefit the community, etc.

TIP: Good 'Love and Relationship Guest'

Dr. Perry Buffington is an excellent guest to have on the air during February, 'Love Month'. Bring him on as an antidote to all those who had terrible Valentine's Days. He will bring copies of his book Cheap Psychological Tricks for Lovers to give away. Contact: drbuff@drbuff.com



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