

And The Winner Is.....

Create Great Contests That Work Every Time!

I picked the contestants very carefully from this large corporate event. We could not have two of the same type of contestants. I have got the typical company accountant, the head of the sales department, and the CEO himself. They have all just performed what I would categorize as the worst Model Walk performances ever. The audience loved every second of it, and now it is time to judge these three stunning examples of runway modeling. Who will walk away with the coveted title of “Male Model Walk Champion”? I then turn to the audience and begin the judging. The audience is involved, the contestants are laughing and of course the accountant is the winner.

The cornerstone of the interactive entertainment world is a great contest. In one contest you can make people laugh, create an abundance of energy, get the entire audience involved, and gain complete control of the room. Contests are the perfect transition element for any event and can save you during some unforeseen emergency. Contests are essential for any interactive performer who is serious about taking his or her skills and company to another level.

Over the years, I have developed contests for almost every event situation you can imagine, and all of them have one thing in common, structure. When I create anything, I give it a solid structure and foundation. In this article I will attempt to give you a good structure with which to build your own contests. The below formula is proven and will put you on the right track to effective contest development.

STEPS TO THE PERFECT CONTEST

1. Pick the Contest theme or topic

What makes a good contest? Though it may sound simple the concept is the most important element of the contest’s success. If your basic concept is too obscure or complicated, chances are you will need to do a great deal of explaining, thus the contest is doomed. Use something musical and recognizable like Mike Jackson, Madonna, or a theme such as Model Walk, and Rumpshaker. These are simple concepts, and you can create easy actions around their themes. You could also use topical subjects, like Impressions and current events such as Survivor and the presidential election.

2. Create The Challenge

What will your contestants be doing in order to win? This needs to be very specific, and you need to determine EXCATLY what they will be doing. Also, how much action will be needed and who will demonstrate it for the contestants. (You or The DJ or Both) You will most likely need to rehearse the action so you have it mastered. Make sure the challenge relates to the topic or theme (i.e. Model Walk: All contestants must perform a model walk and pose just like the host demonstrates.) Decide if the contest will need a demonstration or if it will be cold start. Also, if you are doing a performance based contest make sure it can be adapted for all adults, as well as children.

3. Write Out Your Goals

Define the beginning, middle, and end of the contest. At each point in the contest what should be happening. (I.e. In the beginning we are going to get the contestants and explain the contest. In the middle we will have the contestants perform. At the end we will judge the contestants.) Once you have written out the goals you can begin to create your contest layout. List when each goal will occur.

Key Point: The reason we set clear goals is so that if the contest becomes derailed at some point it is easier to get back on track.

4. Good intro and setup

First, decide if you will bring up contestants before or during the intro. Decide if the contestants will begin at different points in the room, or if they will all be seated. Whatever the setup the contestants should already be there BEFORE the contest begins.

Write out what you will be saying to introduce the contest. Treat this like a television game show opener. The bigger the better. Remember that a big introduction creates excitement and anticipation.

Script the transition between intro and the contest itself. This transition is vital so you do not lose your audience at any time.

5. Create An Exit

How will the contest end? Who will be judging the contest? The end dialogue should be easy to remember and smoothly move you into the next activity or set of music. (I.e. "Everyone please give our winner Jim a round of applause. While Jim is exiting the Dance Floor let me remind you all that my name is Todd, that is my DJ Pat and together we are Mitchem Interactive. Right now I need you all to face the DJ Booth and put both of your hands in the air just like this. Now everyone watch me and do what I do.") Notice I have created a smooth transition that will take me to the next routine.

Below is a sample layout of a contest that I created. See how it compares to the above list.

Male/Female Model Walk Contest Layout

Overview: Entertainers will choose several participants (all male or all female) each contestant will be brought to the front of performance space individually by the entertainers. The MC's will then get to know each contestant using basic questions. (i.e. Where are you from? What do you do? What is your name?) Each contestant will then perform his or her best model walk as demonstrated by one of the MC's. After all of the contestants have completed their model walk, the audience will be asked to vote on a winner. (As always, everyone wins something.)

Theme: Runway Model Walking Spoof

Challenge: Each contestant will be performing a model walk based on the MC's demonstration.

Goals: Find Contestants

Intro Contest

Describe and Demonstrate the Model Walk

Allow Contestants to Perform

Judge All Contestants After Contest is Finished

Distribute Prizes

Smooth Exit

Intro: Contestants will be pre selected and seated near the front of the performance space.

Intro Script:

“Hello everybody and welcome once again to...(place where show is being performed) as you can see, we have chosen our contestants for a little contest we like to call the Male or Female (depending on contestants) Model Walk Contest”

Exit: The contestants will be judged then the winner and all contestants will move to a pre selected “Prize Area”

Exit Script:

“Everyone make some noise for our winner! No one is a loser; you will ALL walk away with something. Audience give them a round of applause as they go with my partner to get their FREE STUFF!!!!!! (To Audience) You are all parting here at the (venue) for the (event). My name is (name) and the dance floor is once again open!”

Notice how specific I have made this layout. If this were your contest layout you would now be ready to begin rehearsal.

CONTEST REMINDERS

Here are some additional reminders when dealing with contests and their explanations. These reminders will make your existing contests more effective and will aid you in creating your own new contests.

1.) Keep it short!

Do not linger in the moment. Keep the contest moving. Try to keep focused on the next goal. This is especially true during your introduction. If it is too complicated you will lose focus and interest will be hard to regain from the audience.

2.) Be Friendly.

Try not to be upset with the contestants if they start to get out of control. If necessary, seat the contestants prior to the contest to prevent movement. Do not excessively pick on a contestant's performance. If you stay focused on your goals then it will become easier to deal with problems if they occur.

3.) Have Clear Goals

Map out each step of the contest. Beginning/Middle/End

4.) NO DEAD AIR

Something should always be happening. I suggest a bed of music under the entire contest. Do not talk to contestants off microphone when the focus is on you or them.

5.) Stay Focused

Keep on track with the goals.

Set the clear goals. For Example: Open

Introduce

Perform

Judge

Close

6.) Believe in the contest.

If you fully commit and believe in the contest so will the audience. Do not let the audience know for a moment that you are unsure about your actions. If you do, you will most likely lose people very fast.

Contests are fun and exciting. If created and used properly a good contest can create more energy and excitement than you can imagine. As a performer for many years I have learned that one simple rule applies to all contests, keep it simple. The more complicated and difficult a contest is to you, the more difficult it will be to convey it to the audience. Another item that I need to stress is that once you have written out the goals of the contest and are ready to execute it, you need to rehearse it. I can not stress this enough. **Rehearsal** before you try something new is a vital step in the creation process. If you do not rehearse you will certainly have difficulty in the actual show.

New contests are invigorating for you, your show and your audiences. Use the above steps in creating your new contests or in changing your existing ones. You will definitely see your games become more specific and effective. Try not to fear the unknown, and sit down to create a new contest right now!

Todd Mitchem conducts seminar/workshops to better your interactive skills including creating your own interactive routines, better microphone skills, and much more. In the workshops you get the benefit of having direct feedback from Todd. This article is taken from his Level 2 seminar. You can also now purchase his interactive video of the Level 1 Seminar as well as Level 2 by visiting his website at **www.mitcheminteractive.com**. Summer tour of workshops and seminars coming to a city near you.