

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for asking us to assist in the organisation of your After Dinner function. The following pages provide a brief insight into the basic ideas that need to be taken into account when putting together the most profitable evening possible.

The back page provides a blueprint for a proposed running order for the evening, but please remember that we are always on hand to offer advice or give assistance in any matter concerning the function.

Please note that when you plan your dinner, work out how many guests you anticipate will come, and use the following pages as a guide to work around.

After all - you know your club better than we do!

We wish you the best of luck,

Yours Sincerely,

On behalf of After Dinner Speakers & Comedians Ltd
After Dinner World Ltd

THE DATE OF THE EVENT

Dates and days do make a difference!

Surveys show that running a dinner in Summer used to be a bad idea, but with changing times Summer dinners are becoming more popular, but avoid popular holiday times. Christmas and New Year when people are often too busy and cannot afford the extra expense are not generally a good idea.

However please also consider bank holidays (bad idea) and public events such as major sporting fixtures and events, royal weddings and local community and charitable events plus consider the impact other events similar to yours, or how asking the same audience to attend may impact.

Autumn time, late Winter and Spring are the most popular seasons for holding dinners.

Likewise, with days, Fridays and Thursdays tend to be most popular, for obvious reasons, and Saturdays are increasing in popularity however if your event is aimed at "all male" audiences then it likely struggle for support on a Saturday. Obviously if you are choosing a peak date then early booking is necessary. Allow at least 6 months ideally, before your event date, to get the speakers you desire.

Ultimately, you know what will suit - we don't mean to patronise.

THE VENUE

Ensure that the venue you choose will suit all the requirements of the function. Are the parking facilities sufficient to cater for the number of guests attending?

Is the venue accessible? Do you go for a quiet function suite in the countryside, that may involve a long trip for some people, or a more centralised location with easy access. Remember some guests like to 'go clubbing' after the event.

Consider if there is a cost to hire and whether there are extras thrown in, such as sound system.

The size of the room is important but so is the shape. Do not pay extra for a room you cannot fill, and likewise do not always assume the room will fill to capacity - a half empty room makes a massive difference to atmosphere. An intimate gathering creates the right ambience for the speakers to work in, and for the guests to enjoy themselves. Most importantly, the acoustics and ability for the guest speakers to be heard over a lively audience should be considered. Church style rooms with high ceilings will be much harder for an entertainer to perform compared to a standard function room.

Please do consider the importance of the sound system. Many function rooms have built-in PA systems - this may seem ideal but little care is often put into the installation and knock on effect. As such the systems are usually inadequate and of poor quality for professional entertainers. Testing this system in an empty room is nothing comparable to a real world environment with 200 people chatting and requiring order. **We cannot underestimate the importance of this element.**

With a large audience, the sound will not carry, will often distort and has a huge impact on the success of the guest speakers. If the audience can't hear them clearly, or the comedian cannot be heard making off the cuff comments to the crowd, it can quickly become a battle. Where alcohol is involved, the job becomes even harder. An external PA system is always best, and will have the amplification and volume to cover the whole room. Please contact us for advice. We have no interest in selling a product but will find a solution for you.

Catering is important - a good quality 3-4 course meal should not cost any more than £15-£30 per head, though in-house catering should seriously undercut this for a 3 or 4 course meal. To go much higher than this will obviously make a difference to ticket prices. No doubt if you are a sports club using your own facilities, you will have addressed the above points.

We find many start up events steer towards a casual meal of pie and peas or similar. This will bring the ticket price down substantially and we have found more recently that audiences are driven by ticket price rather than meal cost. A £20 ticket to attend with basic food compared to £50 with 3 course meal will encourage much more support for your event. See more information below.

TICKETS

Work out how much you think your guests will be willing to pay. The aim of the evening is to make money. Normally we would suggest that you try and start the evening at minimum break even point. That would mean allowing for the meal, printing costs and entertainment, however you know your target audience better than we do.

Once the evening begins there should be scope to raise all the expected profit on the evening from fundraising games, raffles and auctions.

The printing of menus, tickets, posters and/or advertising must all be accounted for in the budget.

AIMS

Work out what the aim of the evening is. It may just be that you want to give guests a cracking evening's enjoyment. Sports clubs will be using it to increase club funds, hopefully by a few thousand pounds. It is often worth tying in with a charity - this will mean handing over some of the profit, but will greatly help in the selling and promotion of the event.

This should also help you to gauge what fund-raising you need to do throughout the evening. People are always more willing to part with money if they know it will be going to a good cause - the club or the charity.

If you book a professional host from ourselves, they will also provide ideas and solutions to further generate income on the evening.

SPEAKERS

Referring to the lists, work out who would work for your function. Sports stars are the most popular at many events, but do not discount the slightly off beat, sometimes lesser known speakers for something a little different. The profile of the main guest will usually increase

ticket sales and generate the most interest so consider increasing the budget, particularly if it is going to mean a larger number of guests. Someone may cost twice as much as another, but could attract four times as many guests!

If you can guarantee the audience it is worth going for someone who will provide excellent entertainment, regardless of their name - this will provide the basis for your next function.

The comedian is quite often the star of the evening, ending it on a high. It is necessary that you pay for the right comic. Because they tailor their act accordingly, After Dinner Comedians are more expensive than standard cabaret comedians. It is all too true to say that "you 'get what you pay for". For a change, a popular choice is to book a well-known comedian with a good speaker, instead of the other way around.

The key to a successful evening is to book the correct MC. You may think that £200-£500 is a waste of money for something that anyone can do, but the fact is, anyone cannot do! It is essential to build up the right atmosphere on the night, people will spend more, and you will make more from auctions, raffles, etc. The Master of Ceremonies works harder than anyone on the night. It is not just about holding up a microphone and announcing the guests - Take the pressure off yourself and let a professional run the evening.

If the budget will allow, table hopping entertainers - magicians, caricaturists for example will enhance any event and we are happy to provide information.

DRESS CODE

Whilst dress codes used to be either lounge suits or formal, things have relaxed over the years. Most people do not have dinner jackets, and to hire them costs about £35, so they are usually only reserved for very formal occasions. In the right situation, however, Black Tie does make a function appear important and exclusive.

If you dress down too much and leave the code as optional, jeans, trainers and t-shirts - be prepared for the audience to take a more relaxed approach to the event - in both how they interact with the entertainment, and the way they get involved in the auction.

AUCTIONS/RAFFLES/GAMES

The *real* way to make funds on the night. Auctions and raffles speak for themselves. Cash prizes are an easy way to generate interest and impressive but not overly expensive prizes such as a TV will always seem like a cracking prize for someone. Don't have too many prizes either, as if it drags the night out, people will lose interest. Again, the MC will arrange everything on the night so leave it to him to get the best out of the evening and the guests.

Where possible, we suggest you pool raffle prizes for free but signing up local businesses in exchange for an advert or a plug on the evening. Mutual benefits and great for community representation.

A few basic games can also raise a few quid. "Stand Up Bingo" and "Heads & Tails" are popular, and both easy to play. How to play would be explained on the night and should raise about £5 per head.

Charity auctions are a popular way of generating additional revenue. These usually come in the form of memorabilia, however many companies are now thinking beyond that and producing unique experiences to maintain interest. The items come on a sale or return basis, are fully staffed and managed, including the transaction, and a commission is paid

back to the club, based on agreed reserve prices etc. It is worth deciding if this is right for your event as these are commercial operations and may not produce the returns expected. They are however risk free - so long as you work with a reputable company. Please ask us for advice and we will refer you to a suitable organisation.

THANK YOU-S/GRACE

The formality of the event is up to you. A good host will welcome guests at the start of the evening, followed by grace (religious or non religious). It's also offering thanks to special guests attending, the committee, caterers, bar staff etc. Always go overboard with sponsors - with advertising on the tables, announcements and a well placed table close to the guest speakers.

BOOKING/TICKET SALES/CANCELLATION

If you can, always try to book as far in advance as possible. The best venues and speakers maybe booked up 12 months in advance. The longer you leave it, the more difficult it becomes to book your preferred guest speakers.

Never take anybody's word as to the number of tickets they can sell - the truth usually comes out on the night, when 50 seats are empty! Money up front or deposits before the event is the only way to keep the budget balanced. Cancellation is generally not acceptable by artists, caterers, etc., as they do the job for a living, and it can cost them a week's wage! Some people are negotiable, but the logical answer is to avoid cancelling the function - it will often cost less to run with it than to cancel.

To save on expenditure, it is advisable to attempt to obtain sponsorship from various local companies. If each business sponsors a guest speaker, it may allow more scope for bigger name attractions. An easy way to generate sales is create menu booklets with details on the event, the speakers, the club, plus the menu and any future events you are looking to promote, and of course allowing for numerous low cost advertisements from local business. This doesn't have to be anything flash, just relay the information. It also alerts your guests to why they are here and indicates what will be happening on the evening and in the future.

Remember, it is a proven fact that when an event is cancelled for the first time, it will almost certainly be impossible to get off the ground a second time so event if you run the first event at a loss, the goodwill should certainly help promote the following years event.

It is worth noting that as finances become tight for many people, the costs for 2 people attending (or even 1) a function can easily be over £100 when you factor in fundraising, bar prices, taxis etc so do bear this in mind when setting a ticket price and looking at the people you are attending – whether individuals or companies.

One way to avoid high costs is to replace the 3 course meal with a pie and pea supper, fish and chips or curry for example. This should bring the ticket price down substantially but still deliver what people expect from the evening. In many cases we have found people prefer the cheaper ticket prices and leave the option open for them to arrange their own food prior, or have the snack on the evening. This should encourage ticket sales and discourage cancellation. Even if it means deciding to go down this route a few weeks from the event taking place – it will almost certainly work out the cheaper alternative to cancellation.

PLEASE SEE BELOW FOR A DRAFT RUNNING ORDER FOR A PROPOSED DINNER FUNCTION. THIS IS ONLY OUR OPINION, BUT EXPERIENCE HAS PROVED IT TO BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE.

Presentation Evenings can be a challenge for many speakers if the guidance below is **not** followed.

Please ensure that the presentation is either very short and takes place immediately after the meal, or if much longer, ensure the speakers (and comedian) performs **before** the trophies are handed out.

We cannot stress the way in which the audience mood changes once they have received their trophy. The attention given to the speakers, the banter across the room to the losers etc has a huge impact on how the entertainers perform. Please do not be surprised if the slots are shortened because the audience are not giving good order.

7.00 RECEPTION

7.30 GRACE followed by MEAL

During the meal, MC to advise guests about the fund-raising formats for the evening.

After main course, girls go round tables to collect £5 / £10 from all guests.

After sweet - to propose loyal toast if appropriate

9.15 short comfort break

9.30 PLAY STAND UP BINGO – Or similar – An easy way of breaking the ice prior to the entertainment.

9.45 SAY THANK-YOU TO CATERERS, BAR STAFF, ORGANISERS
INTRODUCE TOP TABLE GUESTS ANY OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE ROOM

Followed by GUEST SPEAKER/S

10.30 Short Break

10.40 COMEDIAN

11.20 Break followed by AUCTION (Or can be broken up into singles items throughout the evening)

RAFFLE

THANK-YOU and GOODNIGHT

We always recommend that the auction does not drag on all evening - if you have a larger number of items, please auction these intermittently through the meal and evening. ALWAYS run the raffle after the guest speakers and auction. Your audience will stay to see if they have won a prize - they will also remain far more engaged up to that point.