

# MAGIC IT IN THE **PRESCHOOL MARKET**

**HOW TO MARKET  
SELL AND PERFORM  
FOR PRESCHOOLS**

**JD Stewart**



Making It In The Preschool Market

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# CHAPTER 1

## ***THE MAGIC BUSINESS IS A BUSINESS***

My approach to the magic business is as a business. The very nature of business is competition. I believe in competition. I am not afraid to compete. Competition makes us better.

Throughout this course, you will find me talking about winning business. Win business even if someone else already has that business. It may even be a friend. Yes, I compete in business with my friends. And I expect them to compete with me. Executives and other business professionals compete against each other. They remain friends while doing so.

Nothing makes the magic business special in that regard. There is no reason why you cannot remain friends with those you compete against.

I know some feel uneasy about this. They may even think it unethical. I do not. It is business. It is the capitalist system. In fact, antitrust laws prohibit working together on pricing and dividing up customers.

I have heard professional magicians have complained about amateurs coming into their market. They claim amateurs are unethical by undercutting their prices. I am in strong disagreement. It is not unethical. It is business. If you can do the show for less than I can, more power to you. If you are willing to do a show for less and I am unwilling or unable to reduce my price, I must adjust my quality. I must prove my value. I must sell that value to my customers.



What makes the magic business so different we cannot compete with each other. Nothing!



I can get a meal at McDonald's for under \$5. That does mean I am not going to eat at Hat Creek. They both sell burgers and fries. But the experience and the quality are very different.

I know this makes me unpopular with some. But so be it. In this book, I will be talking about winning business. If you think winning business from a competitor is unethical, this book is not for you.

## **Your Competition.**

You may think your competition is other magicians. It is. But it is also the petting zoo. It is ventriloquists, jugglers, and musicians. You are competing against any type of children's entertainer.

You need to understand their value proposition. What are they offering? What are they charging? What makes your offering better than their offering? Why do they think their offering is better than your offering? In other words, you need to research your competitors. If all you do is hang out at the magic club you do not know your competition.

It may be tempting to ask the magicians in your club what they are charging. I have learned from experience they will lie to you. They will always tell you they charge more than they do. They will tell you they work more than they do. Research your competition by talking to preschool directors and owners. Do not trust your competition to tell you the truth.

## CHAPTER 2

# WHY PRESCHOOLS

What would it feel like to have this happen? You call a new client. This is a client you have never worked with before. This is a client you have never met before. This is a client who has never heard of you before. When you call, you say I am a magician would you like to hire me? And they do not say yes. Instead, they say, Oh I am so glad you called. What do you have available on the 20th?



Then when you arrive you have an audience that loves you. They have been anticipating your arrival for weeks. After the show, several will come up and hug you. They will tell you how great you are. You get paid real money, right then and there. It does not get any better than that.

That is the Preschool Market. Preschools want you. Preschools need you.

I made a lot of money the last several years during working the Preschool market.

This course outlines how I do it. I share all the tips and tricks I have learned. I will share the mistakes I have made as well. I share my mistakes so you do not have to make them.

## Why Perform for Preschools

If you are a children's entertainer, you cannot beat Preschools. Many things make performing at preschools a must. Here are a few:

1. **That is where the children are.** When asked why he robbed banks, Willie Sutton said, "Because that is where the money is." Why should children

entertainers perform at Preschools? That is where the

children are. Birthday parties are fun. They have a lot going for them. I love them.

Birthday Parties are exciting. But how many children are at a birthday party. A large party may have 20 children. And the average party is 8 to 15. Preschools have an enrollment of 40 to over 100. In the summer that can swell to over 200.

Watching the excited children come into your room gets the adrenaline pumping. If you are like me, that adrenaline rush is the high you live for.

2. **They Need You.** You are solving a problem they have. You are a fixer. And that feels great! Parents don't need to worry about their children during the school year. The elementary schools care for them. But those elementary schools are out during the summer. Parents need to have someone watch their children during the summer. The parents still need to work. So, those children need to go somewhere. Often preschools are the place parents choose. They are safe and have dedicated staff. That means preschools need programs. They need your show. More shows mean more money for you. Some preschools will book you many times or even once a week all summer!

3. **Build your repertoire.** Often a preschool will book you more than once a year. I have had them book me every week during the summer. If you only have one show, you need more material. All your tricks were great the first time. But they lose the WOW factor the second, third, and even the fourth time. This is a great way to break in new material. Add a few different tricks and routines each time before long you have enough new material for a whole new show.



4. **Holiday Shows** - Preschools provide opportunities to do extra shows over the holidays. This is another way of adding bookings to your schedule. The holidays are another time they need you. They need something special during the holiday season. Doing a Christmas show adds money to your pocket.
5. **Special Programs** - You can providing shows for a Parent's Night or a Parent's Night Out. Grand openings or any other occasion a preschool hosts. These special events are generally held in the evening after dinner. The preschool needs to show parents how much fun the children have at their school. A magic show is exciting for all ages! (Even the parents!)

## The Secret Revealed

Want to be busy performing in the preschool market? You need two things. You need a quality product and good business practices. That's it. That's the secret.

This is going to be unpopular with a several of you. I know I run the risk of insulting many or you. Please remember that is not my intention. And unfortunately, many to whom this applies will think this is not about them.

Many magic writers suggest that local magician are not good entertainers. They do so with the assumption that if they were any good they would be well known.

That is not true. There are many good local entertainers. Not being well known does not mean you are not a good entertainer. That being said, you need to have a good show before you charge people money for it. Yes, that includes a children's entertainer. One of my pet peeves is when I hear someone say something like, "It just for kids." You must have a good show, especially if it is for children. What do you call a business that sells poor quality products? Sleazy!

I can assure you. The preschools do not have the attitude that something can be second rate because it is "just for kids." And remember they are the ones who pay your salary.

You need to be able to do more than tricks that fool them. You need to entertain them. They need to laugh. They need to smile. They need to love you. If they love you they will love your magic.







Add to a good show, good sales skills, and business practices. And you have a winner. I will show the business practices you need in this book.

My prices are higher than anyone else in my area. Why? Because I have a high-quality product. And I use good business practices to sell my service.

They know they are dealing with a professional and not a fly-by-night wannabee. In other words, they

know they can trust me from the first contact to post-show follow up.

I have taken clients from other magicians in the area. Why? Well, I'll say it. They sucked.

It is easy to delude yourself into thinking you have a good show when you actually suck. How do you know if you suck? You cannot rely on your local magic club to let you know. You can't rely on your friends. They will all lie to you. Their general interest is technical. Did you flash? Did you fool them? The magic club members love magic. They will put up with a lot just to see a trick. Your friends will tell you, you are good because they know that is what you want to hear.

When someone offers you constructive criticism take it. That is gold. We all have egos. Do not let your ego get in the way. Do not become defensive. Do not dismiss it with ready-made excuses. Here are some of the more common ones I have heard.

- "You don't understand my audience."
- "My audiences love me."
- "I perform for real people. I don't perform for magicians."

I have news for you magicians are real people. Ask for criticism. Look for help from everyone. If someone has a comment they have a reason for it. Take the criticism and apply it to what you are doing. Then tell the person who helped you what you did to adjust. They will feel good about helping you. And they will be willing to help you again in the future.

That attitude is what has made the biggest change in my shows.

How do you know you are good? Here is my rule of thumb. This is the way I judge if a show was any good. I need at least one person to come up after a show and tell me I am the best magician they have ever seen. If I don't get at least one person telling me that, I know the show sucked. Think about it. How many magicians does the average person see? Chances are you are the first one they have ever seen live. If you can't be the best in a group of one, you really do suck.

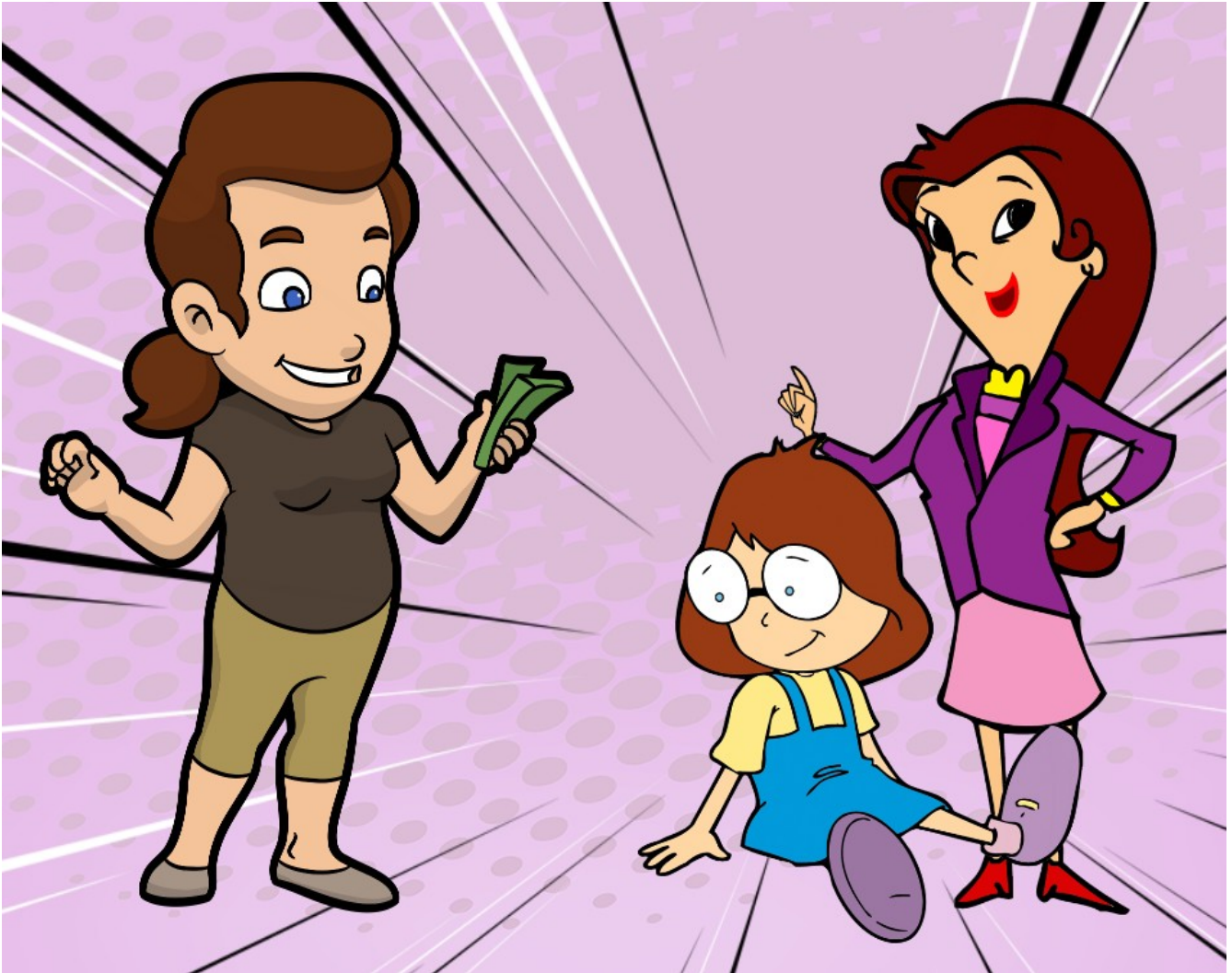
I had one preschool owner tell me she had brought in a magician before and he bored the children. She was not going to chance it again. I was curious who she brought in. I figured if I knew him and I thought he was good then I had real trouble. But if I also thought he was bad, I might have a chance. The owner gave me the name. I knew the magician. As it so happened I did not think his show was very good. His technique was fine. But he was not entertaining. Here is the bad news. Everyone in the local magic club told this guy they thought he was great. Don't trust your local magic club. They will lie to you.

I won that owner over. Here is how I did it. I offered a free show to her to prove myself. After the show, not only did she pay my full fee, she started helping me sell myself to other schools in her franchise.

Now to be honest I have occasionally lost a school to another magician. Like I said, I expect to compete. It was usually based on price. As I said, I believe I am the highest priced show in my area. But they always come back. If you have a good product and can sell, you will have always have customers.

# CHAPTER 3

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMER



### **They are Preschools**

Let's start by understanding how preschools see themselves. They are schools. They are not daycares. They educate children. Do not call them daycares. That is, do not call them daycares if you want them to hire you.

They do not warehouse children. They are schools. They teach children a variety of things. They teach academics subjects. They teach citizenship. And they teach hygiene and basic health.

Parents have high expectations. When they choose a preschool, they choose a school with care. They want their children to have fun. They want them to enjoy school. But they also want them to learn. For the preschool, this is not an either/or. It is a both/and.

Parents want their children to have all the advantages they can afford. When you work with children, you are working with the most precious thing a parent has. Parents want their children well educated. That is why preschools show off their academic areas.

Parents also want their children happy. You can solve both demands for the preschool.

You should offer programs that are both fun and educational. Create shows that teach as well as entertain.

I have several different preschool shows;

- Science
- Dental health
- Character development
- Safety

Those are my educational shows. I also have holiday shows and shows that are just for fun. You have an opportunity to do a great many things with magic. Take full advantage of you skills, educate and entertain. As a magician you can do both at the same time.

## **Your Customers**

When I worked in the high tech industry we recognized in order to sell our product we need to sell to different types of buyers. Before a company bought our product the technical people need to be satisfied it would work in their environment. They need to know the product was a good technical solution. Then there were the financial people. They need to be sure there was a good return on their investment. We had two customer. They had different needs, requirements, and concerns. The both had to be satisfied.

A children's entertainer has two customers. Both need to be satisfied for the entertainer to be successful. You have a financial customer and a technical customer. The financial customer decides on value and budget. The technical customer wants a good show. They have different interests. You must meet both.

The director or owner is your financial customer. They write the check. They look for value. Price is a part but what you bring to the table is important. Unprofessional business practices cause them to lack confidence. If your show is supposed to be educational, it better have educational value.

The technical customer is the audience. You have two different audience members, the children, and the teachers. You have to entertain both. They want something that is fun. They want a good show. They want a good time. If they do not have a good time you will not be back.

### Your Audience - The Children

The first rule is to respect your audience. This starts with what you call them. They are children. Always call them "children". Do not call them kids. "Kid" is a slang word. Be respectful.

Remember the school looks to you as an expert in child development. They expect you to know what is appropriate for different age groups. Using "kids" rather than "Children" make you sound amateurish.

There are times when using the word "Kids" is appropriate. I will use it from time to time in this book. But use the word "Children" when talking about your audience. Use the word "Children when talking to Parents, Teachers, and Directors. They will respect you more.

### Understand Your Audience

Never talk down to a child. They know when you are doing that. They won't appreciate it. Talk to them as you would an adult. Treat children with respect and care. They will give it back to you tenfold!

The probability is high your show is the first live magic show the children have ever seen. It may be the first live professional show of any kind they have ever seen. It may be their first live show ever! You want to make this a positive memory. You want this to be a memory they will cherish.



I cherish the thought that after I am dead and gone. I will live on in the memory of hundreds of children. It is my little bit of mortality.

Spend some time with children. Learn “their world” a little better. This will allow you to present your magic in a way that they will understand and enjoy.

## **CHAPTER 4** ***SELLING YOUR SHOW***



### **Which Comes First**

I debated with myself about which to address first sales or marketing. The purpose of marketing is to support sales. That is its only purpose. So, sales is the most important. Sales solve all business problems. There is an old business proverb. Nothing happens until someone sells something.

But everyone is afraid of being that caricature of a used car salesman. They fear coming across too strong. They fear they will be “salesy.” No one what to be that guy, So to help you over that I decided to address sales first. It is where you should start. Your sales effort should drive your marketing effort.

## **The Limits of Marketing**

I wasted a lot of money on marketing. I would have been better off burning the money. At least I then I would not have wasted my time as well as my money.

I listened to a lot of marketing experts. They told me telling I needed SEO (Search Engine Optimization), email marketing, social media marketing. They said I needed to learn copywriting. They promised copywriting would allow me to create a good email or print marketing pieces. They promised good copy would make people what my shows. They promised if I had a good landing page I would book a lot of shows. They promised I could turn the spigot on and off with Google Adwords.

I only needed to spend a little more money. I did not need to sell. If I did the right kind of marketing clients would come to me. Now, these experts may not all be full of male bovine excrement. But I am leaning heavily to the idea they are selling male bovine excrement.

The most effective, cost-efficient method of marketing your services is the telephone. Nothing beats direct one to one sales. The phone call cost nothing but your time. SEO , Adwords, Social Media, emails cost time and money.

Phone calls give you immediate intelligence you cannot get any other way. Phone calls allow you to adjust your presentation right now. You do not need to wait and see the data. Pieces you mail out do not give you that kind of feedback. A preschool director may never see you print ads. You will never know. The school's email server may move your email to the junk folder. The director may never open your email. You have to wait to find out. Even if they open your email did they read it? You will never know.

The phone has none of those problems.

There is a lot of hype around social media. Platforms like Facebook allow you to target your prospects. But if you know who they are why are you not talking to them? Social Media, platforms change the rules all the time. Good luck keeping up. Phone calls do not only targeted, they are pinpoint target.

Marketing does not sell. Marketing supports sales. Never let marketing take precedence over sales.



Do not take me wrong I am not saying is marketing is unimportant. Marketing makes the school aware of you and your offer. That way, when you call they have a familiarity with you. Having seen your name and face before give you an air of legitimacy. It allows them to feel they know you. They may have even learned to trust you. But a marketing piece will not sell your services, Never forget that. You have to sell your services. A social media piece, website, or email only support your sales effort.

Sales should not be a problem for you. You are an entertainer you should feel comfortable talking to people.

Always be selling. The nice part about being a performer. Is you get to demo your product while you are selling. So it all goes back to having a good product. You may hear it expressed as the importance of having a good show. If you have a good show the more you work the more you work. You want the children to go home and tell mom they want you at their birthday party. At the birthday party, you want the parents to tell their manager you would be great for the next company event.

I once watch Jeff McBride work an event. He salesmanship was beautiful. I talked to him about it. He told me his goal is to book three events from every appearance.

I wish I was that good at selling.

## The Sales Cycle

You can have a great show. But if you can't sell it. You are not performing your great show. Here is the magic secret most magicians never learn. No one pays you for performing a magic show. They pay you for selling a magic show. If you are an entertainer you are first a salesman. If you do not want to be a salesman you need to find another line of work.

There is a sales cycle for any business. Sales is not rocket science. It is not hard but it is work. And that is where most magicians fail. They fail in the hard work of selling.

There are seven steps in the sales cycle. You must complete each of these steps in sequence. But luckily when dealing with preschools you can combine many of these steps in a single phone call.



Do not try a hard sell on preschools. They do not respond to a hard sell. Realize what you are selling. You are offering a solution to a problem. As a salesman, all you are trying to do is help someone solve a problem.

## **Step 1 Prospect for Leads**

### **Solve a Problem**

The best way to find a lead is to find someone who needs your solution. This may come as a surprise to you but no preschool needs a magic show. What they need is a solution to problems they have at different times of the year. There are certain times of the year where preschools have an influx of children. These children are there for a



finite amount of time and then they are gone. These are school age children. They appear during school holidays, spring break and during the summer. Every year preschools have to put together programs for these children. You have a solution. You offer something different. You offer something the children don't get elsewhere. You offer something fun. You take a load off of the teachers. You have a solution to a real problem. That is what you are selling. A magic show happens to be the instrument you use to deliver that solution.

### **Finding Preschools**

Preschools make it easy to find them. They want you to find them. The easiest way to find preschools is to think like a parent. When a parent needs to find their child care, what do they do? They go to the internet.

Parents look up several preschools near them and call them to set up for a tour. So preschools are not only easy to find, preschools go out of their way to make it easy to find and contact them.

Go to your favorite search engine. In your browser search for “daycares near me.” Or you can search “daycares in (name of your city or area)” in your favorite search engine. Yes, I said daycares. That is the term most people use. But remember they do not like it. If you live in a location where people are having children, you will find pages of preschools.

Record the names, phone numbers, addresses, and websites. This will be the list you use in the next step in the sales cycle.

## Initiate Contact and Qualify the Lead

### The Phone Call



The best way to make a sale is the cold call. I know you hate cold calls. You hate to have someone call you and try to sell you something. I do too. So why do it? Because it works.

Here is how I look at it. If you have a problem and I can solve your problem. I am a jerk if I do not let you know about it. Think about it this way. You are walking down the street and you see someone struggling to keep their cart from tipping over. Are you overbearing by going over and helping them? No. You would be a jerk to walk on by without helping. That is what you are doing.

You know the school needs your service. Help them! When you contact a preschool and letting them know about your service you are helping. The most effective way to let people know you can help them solve their problem is to call them.

Sending postcards, fliers, SEO (search engine optimization) and all the other marketing is good. It supports your efforts. But look at it from the preschool's directors point of view. Preschool directors have a boatload of problems to deal with. When they get your postcard in the mail they are swamped with several other problems. The probability is high they will forget about you and your solution. It is not because they do not want your services. They are overloaded with problems and they forget what you can do for them.

If you have a good show. Preschools want it. They need activities to fill their programs. You have a fun activity. This is a program the teachers can enjoy too. It gives the teachers a break. They want you. They need you.

So get over yourself and call them. Sorry for being so forceful. But if you are too scared to make the call. If you will not let them know you can solve their problem. You are being selfish. Pick up the phone and help someone.

## When to Call

I opened this book by asking how it would feel to have a client ask you when you are available when you called them. The secret to that is to call them when they have a problem you can solve.

Preschools may want to use you throughout the year. But I have found their greatest needed is Holidays, Spring Break and Summer. You need to call when they are planning for those times.



For Christmas start calling mid-October. For Spring Break and Summer start calling mid-February. I love those times of the year. It is the time I get to feel good about myself. Almost everyone I call wants me and needs me. That is a big ego boost.

I get to feel so good about calling preschools I want to start calling in January. But I have learned January is too soon. Most preschools start planning their summer program in February. Some do not start until March. I found one franchise that waits until April to plan for summer. You want to be in there in the early stages. You want to contact them while they still have the budget. You want to contact them while they still have space in their calendar. The sooner you make yourself available the sooner you can solve their problem.

As far as the time of day to call I have found mornings work best. But I also had good success in the early afternoon. There is no sense calling over the lunchtime. The director may be out to lunch and you are wasting your time. Lunch is between 11:30 and 1:00 o'clock.

## Call Records

Keep a log or record of your calls. I use a log book. I write everything that happens longhand during the call. Everything will end up in my computer but during the call, I write every longhand. Why? It is faster. I can draw pictures arrows, insert things. It is easier and faster.

I want to concentrate on the person on phone, not the documentation process. I am writing during the entire call. Start writing even before they answer. Who are you calling? How many times did it ring? What time did I place the call When they answer the phone listen to every word they say. Write it all down.



Here is how a call goes.

Ring Ring

“Thank you for calling Happy Fun Time Learning School This is Mary.”

The first thing to note is who answered the phone what is her name? Write it down. Do not forget it. Use it. Call the person by name.

“Hello Mary, this is John I am a magician I and was calling to see if I could help Y'all with your summer program this year.”

That is it. That is the script. State who you are and why you a calling. Do not sweat the script there are no magic words.

That is it not a hard sell. Ask a straightforward question. When you sell to preschools you do not need any of that getting around the gatekeeper stuff. These people are friendly and helpful. That is how you should be. State who you are and why you called.

On occasion, you will find a gatekeeper. Don't worry about it. There is only a handful of them. Wasting your time trying to get around a gatekeeper is leaving money on the table. There are a lot of other schools that are easier to work with. Do not spend time trying to find a way around the few gatekeepers that exist. That time is better spent calling schools who are easy to work with. Don't waste your time. Move on.

Often I have found the person who answers the phone is the director. If they are not the director they may be the person putting the program together. If they mention someone else's name write it down.

Document everything. What was their attitude? Did they seem interested? Were they excited about the idea? Write it down. Make note of the date and time of the call. If the person you need to talk to is not there ask for a good time to call back. Then call back.

Write down everything that happened on that call. It will help you later when you follow up.

Often the person who answers the phone will tell you the person you need to talk to is out or unavailable. But they will give them your information. Go ahead and leave your information. But do not rely on them calling you back. Even if they say they will. Ask when a good time would be for you to call back. Never give the initiative to someone else. Remain in control all the time. If they call you back great. But do not make them call you back. Remember you are trying to solve problems. By making them call you, you have added something to their already full plate.

A call can have several results other than someone answering the phone. This too is good information. Document that too.

I use abbreviations to record information. I use abbreviations to reduce the friction in making calls. When you are making calls you want to concentrate on making calls not taking time to document the call. Abbreviations allow you to document all the information with minimal effort. See page 44 for a list of common abbreviations I use. But feel free to develop your own.

Once you complete the call move on. You have lots of schools to call in a short time frame. This is not the time to organize your notes. Once you are through with your calls for the day put your notes in order. Wait to put your notes in your computer after you have completed all your calls for the day.

If a follow up is in order, add the follow up to your calendar.

## Set a Goal

Set a goal for the number of calls per day. I allow myself a set period of time. And set a goal to make a certain number of calls during that time. The more calls the more shows you will do. The more shows you do the more money you will make.

## What to Say:

Keep your call quick, short and simple. Their time is precious to them. Your time is also precious.



Rehearse what you are going to say so that it comes out clear and smooth. Make it sound natural not like you are reading it. After a while, you will have learned your pitch so well it could sound canned.

What I do to prevent that is two things. First I rehearse it like it was a script in my show. I want it to sound like I am speaking off the top of my head. I want it to sound like I am saying this only for them. I even rehearse stutters and um's at strategic places.

You do not want to come off like a slick salesman.

Second, listen to yourself. I had used my pitch so often it became rote. One day as I listened to myself and I noticed a change in inflection and tone when I started to give it. That is bad! You need to sound natural. Do not become complacent, be and sound natural. You are a magician that means you are an actor. Use those skills!

Tell them quick, positive things about your show. Use descriptive words such as “Colorful”, “Bright”, “Fun”, “Exciting”, etc.

Here is my initial contact phone script.

My name is JD Stewart. I am a professional children's entertainer and magician here in the area. I was wondering if you ever brought entertainers into your school?

Shut up and listen. That is it. Base your next response on what they say.

Always be polite! If they are not interested. Thank them for their time and hang up. They know their school and what is best for their children.

There are some qualifying questions you need to get answered in this call.

- Do they bring in outside teachers, presenters or entertainers?
- Do they have the age range you can entertain? One-year-olds see the entire world as magic.
- Are you in their price range?

You may have other question to qualify them as a potential client. If the answers your qualifying questions are positive, you have a qualified prospect.

## **Present the Offer**

What is your offer? What ages are appropriate for your show? Do you have a multi-show discount? Do you have a program where you come several times in the season?

Make your offer clear and simple. Do not give them too many options. It seems counterintuitive. But more options is not beneficial to people. It causes them to freeze. If they have too many choices they cannot make a decision. If they can determine the best choice, they do not choose. Go in with one offer. If, in the discussion, you find out another option is better, offer that. Make it simple.

## Overcome Obstacles

A common reaction to calling a school you have not worked with before is: "That's a great idea. Tell me a little bit about what you do." Then they book you. But there are occasions when they will have some concerns. Here is a list of common ones

1. **Our calendar is full.** - You missed this season but what about the next? When do they start planning their summer, Christmas etc.? Ask when they plan for that season. Make a note put it in your calendar and call them next time early in their planning cycle.
2. **Your price is more than we can afford.** Here you have to make a decision. How firm are you on your price? Can you give them a trial rate? My response is always. "Oh, what is your budget?" From the answer, I make a decision. I may offer a different less expensive show. Since I am one of the highest in my area. I have a ½ hour program. That is often in their budget. But it boils down to, how bad do you want it? There have been occasions when I have come down on my price. But never give up something without getting something. Would they be willing to do a video testimonial? Would they be willing to put out fliers for your birthday program? Get something of value in return for dropping your price. Dropping your price without a reason tells them you thought you were charging too much, to begin with.





3. **I have to check with corporate.** This is not unusual with some larger chain preschools. Here is a response that I find works well. “I completely understand. Is there some information I can send you to help with the request at corporate?” Then “I’ll send that right to you. You know it might help if they were able to talk to me. It might make them feel more comfortable knowing I a real person. Is there someone I can contact at corporate to grease the skids for you?” This goes back to never giving someone else control. Do not make them call corporate. If you can you make the call. You take the initiative. By doing this you are being helpful. You are helping them solve a problem getting it approved by corporate. There is one chain I say “If approval is an issue, my program already has corporate's approval. I performed every year for several other XYZ schools in the Austin area.
4. **I have not retrieved our budget from corporate yet.** “That's fine do you know about when you will receive it?” Then, “Is it ok if I check back in with you after you have received your budget?” They will almost always say yes. And now when you call back you can remind them they wanted you to call them back.
5. **I have already booked a magician.** “Oh, do you remember his name?” I always want to know who my competition is. If I know them, which I usually do, I know how good they are. If it is someone who is good. I know I need to offer something other than high-quality product. If it is someone who has a poor quality show. They may feel like they got burned and unwilling to try another magician. That gives me information on how to approach them next time. I use that information to know how to approach them for the next season. Never put down another magician no matter how bad they are. Never make any snide comments like, “Well good luck with him.” That makes you look bad to the client. Make note of it. Contact them earlier next season. Develop an approach to any negative experiences they may have had.

## Followup

Many times they will want to “Think about it” or “talk to some of the other teachers about booking you”. Keep notes with the names of each school you call, who you talked to and a summary of the conversation.



Who did you talk with? What names did they mention and what are their positions? Get a time for you to call back. When I started I would let them call me back. That was one less thing I had to worry about. After all, they said they call. But, that meant I lost control. That meant I was not being helpful. I was placing the burden on them. And of course, an actual call back was rare. That meant I had to re-initiate the process. Maintain the initiative and maintain control. Ask them when would be a good time to followup if they give you a time they have also given you permission to followup. Get a time to call them back. Put it on your calendar and call them back.

The fortune is in the follow-up.

## Email Followup

If they requested information, do not say OK and then send them what you think they need. Do not say OK and hang up. Ask them what information they need to make a decision. Ask what would be their concerns. You want to know how to tailor your response. Send them that information. Send it right away. It is about appearing professional and responsive. In a few days call back to make sure they got the information. Ask them if they need any other information.

Remember you are trying to solve their problem. Make sure you give them what they need to make an informed decision. Address any and all concerns they have.

## Close The Sale

Once you booked a show, send the school a confirmation email. Send the email right away. On occasion, I will be out and receive a call asking to book a show. I will tell them I am out but will send them a confirmation email as soon as I get back to the office. I let them know when to expect it. It is about being professional and responsive.

## About Contracts...

Do not send a contract. Do not send anything called a contract. Do not send anything that looks like a contract. Anything that looks like a legal agreement freaks them out. People get nervous about contracts. They feel like they need to get lawyers involved.

There are no parties of the first part and parties of the second part. The only party is the one you bring with you.

Contracts are only as good as the two people signing them. A simple agreement between two honest people works fine. To me, it is the same as a contract. Think about it. If they

decide to not pay you are you going to sue them over your fee? It would cost you more in attorney fees and court costs than the show fee!

Good luck finding an attorney who would even take the case. They will tell you there is a conflict of interest. There is not enough conflict to interest them.

Send a confirmation email like the one shown. It accomplishes everything you need. It makes you look professional. It states in clear simple terms everything you agreed to on the phone. This way, there are no surprises for you or the school. Your confirmation email should be short and to the point. Do not fill it with all sorts of legal-sounding mumbo jumbo. It is a polite email stating the facts. Period.

The email serves as the agreement. All you need to do is have they look over the information. If they agree with the information and pricing, they email you back stating it all looks good.

Making It In The Preschool Market

Date  
\_\_(Name of person who booked you)\_\_ Thank you for booking me to perform at  
\_\_(Name of School)\_\_\_\_  
This is to confirm the show  
On:\_\_\_\_\_(Date)\_\_\_\_  
At:\_\_\_\_\_(Time)\_\_\_\_  
I will be performing \_\_(number of Shows) \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_(show length)\_ minute  
show for approximately \_\_\_\_\_ Children  
I will arrive 15 minutes before the Show Time. The show may get loud at times  
so please plan accordingly.  
The fee is\_\_\_\_\_. This is due after the show.  
I have attached an invoice for you. Please review the invoice to make sure there  
are no errors.  
Also, email me back to let me know you received this and everything is correct.  
If there are any changes, please call me immediately. I look forward to seeing  
you!  
Thank you!  
  
Magically Yours;  
Your Name

I send an invoice like the one shown below. It looks professional and contains all the information; price, date, time and location.

## test 2



Square Circle Productions  
 dba: New Magic Academy  
 2301 Parksville Way  
 Cedar Park, TX 78613  
 Phone 512-468-0011  
 email: jd@jd-stewart.com

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Invoice Number</b>
Children's Magic Show	123
<b>Customer Name</b>	Issue Date 2018-02-28
Happy Fun Learning Center	Due Date: 2120-03-08
<b>Contact</b>	<b>Billing Address:</b>
Susie SMith	123 Any Street
555-555-1212	Suite 123
susie@email.com	Cedar Park, Texas 78613
	<b>Venue</b>
	Happy Fun Learning Center
	123 Any Street
	Suite 123
	Cedar Park, Texas 78613

Show Type: Children's Magic Show  
 Price Each: 999  
 Number Shows: 1  
 Discount: 0  
 Total: 999

Honoree: N/A
Honoree Gender: n/a
Honoree Age: N/A
Est.Attendance: 25
Audience Age Range: 5-12
Est. Arrival Time: 2018-03-08T10:00
Show Date and Time: 2018-03-08T22:30
Comments: Contact Sharon on arrival.

## Testimonials and Referrals

You sold the show. You performed the show. You got paid. You are all done, right? Wrong! This is the time you get testimonials and referrals. This is the time to start working on getting your next show.

If you did a good job they are smiling and happy. They are feeling the best about you they will ever feel. They like you. They want to be your friend. Take advantage of the goodwill you generated.

Keep that goodwill by sending a handwritten thank you note. Not an email. A handwritten thank you. Why? Because no one does that anymore. It makes you stand out. It lets them know you care about them to write them a note. This was not an auto

generated email. This was written this for them. Mentioning something that happened at the show demonstrates this is personal. It was not cranked out by an automaton.

## Testimonials

There are laws around what a testimonial can and cannot say. This is not legal advice. I provide this for informational purposes only. Consult an attorney about the law.

Testimonials will get you more clients. Testimonials add to your credibility. Getting testimonials is a part of the sales process. But it is often overlooked. Not only do entertainers overlook them, so do most professional salespeople. But, you do not want good testimonials. You want great testimonials.



A great testimonial is the proof you have a great product. It is proof you are a professional. It is proof the school can count on you. A great testimonial eliminates the fear of hiring a poor entertainer. A great testimonial is one of the most valuable assets in your business.

But here is the problem. People give terrible testimonials. How do you get great testimonials? By following "The Perfect Testimonial Framework."

Here is a typical testimonial. “JD Stewart's show was great. The kids and teachers loved him. We plan to have him back.”

Is this a great testimonial? No! It’s flattering. I love compliments. But as a testimonial, it stinks. Why?

Testimonials serve one purpose. Their job is to persuade a school director your show will work in her school. My example testimonial blew a lot of smoke. And it does not do its job.

Now, compare that testimonial with something like this:

“Before JD came I was nervous about bringing in another magician. I had magicians before. They were all boring. The tricks did not fool anyone. I wasted my money. But I needed an affordable activity for the children so I decided to take JD up on his money back guarantee. I am so glad I did. I can tell you the children were engaged and laughing the entire time. The magic was first rate. He even fooled the teachers. They enjoyed the show as much as the children. It was one of the best activities of the summer. The children are already asking when he will be back. He was worth every penny.”

What’s the difference between the first and the second testimonial?

Sure, the second one is more specific, and it’s tailored towards what I do. But it follows “The Perfect Testimonial Framework.”

1. The perfect testimonial identifies a belief or problem in the school.

In my example, the problem is the fear of being burned by a bad entertainer. This gets a prospective school director with that belief thinking, “I’m like them. If I hire someone else I might get that other guy.”

2. The perfect testimonial shows how you solve their problem or amend their belief.

In my example, it was the money back guarantee. This show has a track record for solving their problem. And I stand behind my product.

3. The perfect testimonial provides results.

In my example, I provided the needed activity. Both the teachers and children enjoyed the show. And the children want me back soon. Happy children mean happy parents. Happy parents mean a stronger enrollment. A strong enrollment means more money for the school.

Providing specific, truthful results will get your prospects thinking, “I need that too! I can't risk someone else.”

So here are the three parts to “The Perfect Testimonial Framework”:

1. The Problem (Or Belief)
2. The Solution (Or New Belief)
3. The Result (Or Accomplishment)

Testimonials do not manipulate people. They connect the dots for them. Schools want to know what other schools have experienced. A great testimonial gives them a good idea if your show will work for them.

Your job is to remove their fears.

How do you get your school to give you perfect testimonials? It is easy. All you have to do is interview them. I try to do this right after a successful show. If you can get them to agree to do it on video so much the better. Pull out your phone and interview them. You can also send them a survey or call them. But the best time is right after a successful show. That is when their love for your is at its zenith.

## Referrals

How do you get referrals? Here are 10 ways to get referrals. These ideas are in no particular order.

- 1.**Be thankful:** When a school refers you to another school thank them. This could be with a simple phone call, email, or even better, a handwritten note. The important thing is to express your appreciation. This encourages more referrals.
- 2.**Create ways for schools to recommend you.** Ask if they are willing to be a reference. I once worked for a large corporation. It did not allow employees to give written recommendations or testimonials. But, they did not prohibit talking to people. I had a contractor take advantage of this. They asked if they could use me as a reference. Their prospective client called.
- 3.**Make sure they know about the other services you offer.** They can only recommend you if they know what you do. Do you do birthday parties? Do you do Christmas parties? Do you do parties older people? (Adult parties conjure up the wrong image) How will they know that unless you tell them? They may need you for a Holiday party for their staff. If you do that sort of thing let them know.
- 4.**Add a form for referrals on your website.**



- 5.**Be amazing!** The only way a school will recommend you is if you give them something to talk about. Being good is not good enough. Be amazing.
- 6.**Inspire confidence.** When a school recommends you they are putting their reputation on the line. It's risky referring someone. Let them know how much of your business is repeat customers.
- 7.**Create a list of schools you want to work with.** Check out LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. Are you connected in any way? If so, reach out to them via your network. It may be an individual who works at the school or the school itself.
- 8.**Treat your schools as partners.** Let them know you view them as a strategic partner and tell them you hope they'll do the same with you. Create formal channels to share referrals.
- 9.**Give referrals** It's one of the best ways to get referrals is to give referrals. Many of my schools know I refer parents and students to them.
- 10.**Ask for referrals.** You'll get a lot more referrals if you ask for them. When you finish a show ask if they know anyone who would enjoy something similar.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **MARKETING YOUR SHOW**

When you think of marketing, you may think of advertising. Marketing involves advertising. But it is much more. Marketing is any interaction with a customer. It takes several forms:

- Advertising, print and electronic
- Mailouts
- Email
- Web presence
- Search Engine Optimization - SEO
- Adwords
- Social Media
- Branding

I will cover only the areas most essential and effective to the preschool market. These are branding, web presence, email, mail outs and social media. I will not go into depth. I will only scratch the surface. These each merit whole courses in themselves.

Your brand is of first importance. Who are you? Are you the master magician? Are you a clown? Are you an educator? Are you silly? Are you a combination of these? Are you none of these? What is the image you want to pop into people's heads? Your brand influences everything else.

## Branding

What is branding? Branding is creating your unique name and image. When a school thinks about you, they think about a certain look. They think of a certain behavior. They think about the character you play.

If you have a strong brand, they do not want a magician. They want you. Your branding is what makes you unique. It's what makes you stand out in the marketplace. Your brand is what makes you desirable. With a brand, you establish a significant difference between you and everyone else. With a strong brand, you attract and keep loyal customers.

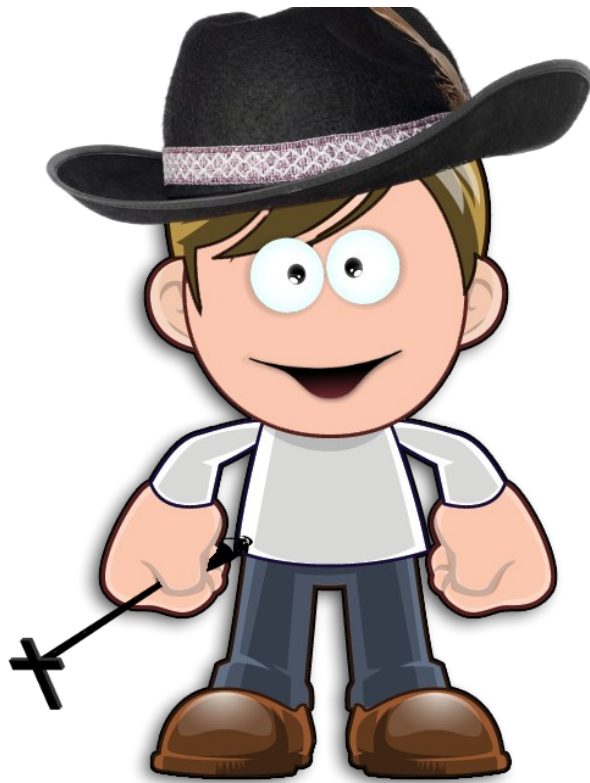
When people see your branding, they understand what you are about. They know immediately rather or not they want you.

## Creating Your Brand

Your brand gives you an advantage, it gives you an unfair advantage. It is something your competitors cannot match. There are hundreds of magicians. But there is only one you. They can all do sponge ball tricks but no one can be you. What is your unfair advantage? What is the thing that makes you different?

Write down three things that make you different. How can you make those an advantage? How can you incorporate those into your branding? Use these to start defining your brand.

Do you have a funny body shape? Do you talk or walk funny? Rather than try and accommodate it or hide it, use it. Lean into whatever makes you different or even weird.



Next, what do you want to do? That is what do you want to accomplish? What is your goal? Why are you a children's magician? Exaggerate that too.

Once you have identified who you are and why you do this, turn to the more mechanical things. Choose a color scheme that will help communicates it. How will you dress? Do you have crazy hair, hat, shoes? Is there an expression you can use?

Don't stress over it. Your brand will evolve. I have been doing children's entertaining for years. I am better defined today than I was when I started but I am still evolving. Pick a direction and go with it. If it needs to change in the future let it change.

Put your branding in and on everything you do. Any communication should express who you are and what you do. Every written communication should be in your colors. Your website needs to use your colors.

Create a logo or have one made for you. Nothing should go out without your logo.

You are unique. Communicate that fact. That is your brand.

## **Website**

Your web presence is the home base for all your marketing. After branding it is the next most important thing. All your marketing should point back to your web presence.

Where do you put your web presence? Do not build your web presence on rented land. You need your own website.

Your website helps establish your brand. I know of many entertainers who built their web presence on Facebook. Then without warning and without explanation, Facebook shut them down. It is Facebook. Facebook owns the platform. Facebook can do whatever it wants. If your web presence is Facebook remember, they get to make all the rules.

Do not build where someone else makes all the rules. If they make the rules they can change the rules. They can change the rules at any time for any reason.

Do not fall for the free tools pitch. Nothing is free there is always a catch. Plus you are giving up control. They may even show ads for Philip Henry when you are selling your services.

You must have a website that you own and control. Any other place on the web should only supplement your website.

## Domain Name

The very first thing you need is a domain name. Do not get stuck up on the domain name. It is not the most important thing. The most important thing is what you put on your website. The content and titles of your pages and blog posts are much more important than your domain name.

Think about it when Amazon started it sold books. That was it. Think about it for a minute. What is an Amazon? It is a forest in South America. Amazon had nothing to do with a forest. With the possible exception of cutting down trees for the paper. Not the most positive association. While I do not want to say your website name is unimportant. It is not as important as what you do with your website.

If every name you want is not available do not sweat it. I wanted my children's website to be magicacademy.com. But that was not available. So I got newmagicacademy.com As it turns out people like the idea of a new academy.

Use a simple three-word phrase, if what you want is gone.

## Your Websites

The easiest type of website to build is a brochure website. This is a website that is an online brochure of what you do. A website can do so much more but start with a simple brochure site. A website describing what you do is the simplest type of site to develop.

A brochure website contains all a school wants to see when checking you out. It answers the question, "What do you do?" "What are your shows like?" "What ages do you perform for?" "What other schools have you work with." "What do they think of your work?"

If you do grownup programs put that information on another website. Do



not mix your audiences. Mixing your audiences confuses your customers. No one wants “a magician for all occasions” People want specialists. They want experts. Be an expert children's magician.

What you actually do is not German. It does not matter if you believe you can do tradeshows, street magic, Illusions and Mindreading. Let's assume you can. No one believes it. So don't waste time trying to convince them. Put your corporate and geek magic somewhere else.

Your website needs to answer the questions you are most often asked.

Do you put pricing on your website? I know there are many who suggest doing it. I advise against it. Here is the reason it is a bad idea. When a school is looking for an entertainer they only know one question to ask. “How much do you charge?” If they have to call to get the answer you have an opportunity to educate them on the other questions they should ask. If they get the answer to the only question they know to ask on the website, they have no reason to call. And they miss out on all the value you bring them. And you are not serving them the best you can.

## Building Your Website

There are a large set of choices for websites. They all have advantages and disadvantages. Rather than going through them all I am only going to give my recommendation. If you disagree that is fine. But this is my recommendation for the children's entertainer.

You build your website on WordPress. WordPress runs a third of the Internet. It is stable. Support is plentiful and cheap. It is easy to find.

There are a lot of free resources for WordPress. If you still have your website built by a professional web developer. But the advantage is once it is built you do not need to pay someone to maintain it. You can maintain it yourself.

I have friends who had a professional web designer build them a custom site. Any time they needed to make a change they got to pay this professional web designer again. That kept them from keeping their website up to date. Or growing and taking advantage of web technologies as their business grew. WordPress allows you to maintain your own site. You can put up and take down photo or videos almost without effort. And you do not need to pay someone if you add a service.

WordPress is a content management program. WordPress makes building websites easy.

WordPress is Open Source software. That means that thousands of people all over the world are working on WordPress. They keep it secure and up to date. Being open source means you get the software and all that support for free. I like free.

There are other solutions. You can choose one of them. But if you do, choose a solution that allows you to control your website.

## Website Contact Form

Your website must have a way to allow the preschool to contact you. You can list your phone number and email. But if you do spammers will scrap your email address off your website and add it to their mailing list. So putting your email address on your website is not a good idea.

A better idea is to put a contact form on your website. The school 's director is already on your website. Why make them leave it to send you a message? Provide them a contact form. When they press send, your website then sends you an email. Your email address is not available to spammers. And you have made it easy for a school to contact you. This is a win/win.

## Hosting

A hosting company is where your website lives. Hosting companies set up servers that run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Do not freak out about choosing a hosting company. There are a lot of them out there.

But here is the dirty little secret. A single company has been buying up hosting companies. So, one big company owns a lot of the smaller hosting companies. Your hosting company is a division of this larger company. There are only minor differences.

There is one area you might want to consider. There are hosting companies that specialize in WordPress. If you run a WordPress site you might consider one of these. Some examples are WPengine, Flywheel or A2 Hosting. These companies understand WordPress. They provide backups and excellent support.

So, that's all you need to have your website going. You need a domain name, you need software to build the website -- usually WordPress -- and you need a hosting company. If you have those in place, you can build your website.

## Search Engine Optimization - SEO

SEO is making it easier for Google to know what your website is about. What works for Google will work for all other search engines.

There are whole books and college courses on the SEO. I am going to simplify for you in a few paragraphs. So this is by no means an exhaustive explanation.

First, if you are using WordPress for your website, get a plugin called Yoast SEO. It has over a million active installs and a full 5-star rating on WordPress. Follow its recommendations. If you do that you will be a long way down the road to optimizing your website for search engines.

Second, think like Google. Google search makes money because people use their search engine. Why do people use Google? Why has Google become a verb? It provides answers to questions people ask it. It searches the web and returns answers. So, help Google out. Write clear text. Write so it is easy to read. Cover one topic on a page. Make your site easy to navigate.

In other words, make it easy to find information on your site.

There is much more to SEO. But follow these tips and you will do OK.

## **Social Media**

My opinion is social media plays a very small role in the preschool market. Preschools are not looking for you on social media. Marketing through social media to preschools is a waste of time and money. But that does not mean social media is worthless. There are two social media networks that may provide some value. They are LinkedIn and Youtube.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a social media for online business networking. People connect on LinkedIn for business purposes. With that being the case you can find the names of people who work at a specific preschool.

You can use LinkedIn to see who your clients may know at another school. That gives you a way to ask for a referral.

Once I have performed for a school if the owner or director is on LinkedIn I connect with them. It gives me an opportunity to stay in touch with them.

Since this is a social media used for business, people list previous employment. When looking at peoples profiles you may find a school you were unaware of.

Once you find them it allows you to target your sales and marketing effort towards that school. You can call them as well as send direct marketing pieces.



But if all you want is email. Going to the school's website is quicker and more accurate. Most schools also list their staff on their website.

## YouTube

YouTube is a platform for you to showcase what you do. When a school director asks about the type of magic you do you can direct them to your YouTube channel.

You can also embed YouTube video on your website.

You can put video testimonials on YouTube. You should put you promo reel there as well. YouTube is the second largest search engine behind Google search. Do not ignore it.

## Email

Emails are the workhorse of marketing. They can do so much in so many ways.

Let's start by talking about bulk emails. First, you need a list of email addresses. Then to send bulk emails use an email provider. Every email provider I am aware of requires you to have permission to send an email to every address on your list. If you violate this policy they can and will close your account.



I have never had a preschool give me permission to send them bulk marketing emails. Even after having been a client most will be hesitant to get more email.

So my suggestion is, do not send bulk marketing emails to preschools. Every email you send should be individual and from your business email account. Make this like writing a letter.

If you have a newsletter they sign up for great. You can send them bulk emails. But do not spam them. You are working to build goodwill with each school. Do not mess it up by spamming them.

When you email, do not make it all about you. "Hey, I am here. Would you like to hire me?" When you invade someone's inbox make it about them. You need to be solving a

problem. No one needs a magic show. So what problem are you solving? How will your offer benefit them?

I would recommend you learn to write good copy. i.e. good emails. A book or course on copywriting explains in detail how to write to solve a problem.

You need to send emails with a purpose in mind. Have them take action. You do this with a Call to Action. (CTA) This may not always be hiring you. It may be signing up for your newsletter. It may be going to your website for some valuable information in your blog. Get them use to doing something. That way when you ask them to book you they are use to saying yes.

### Mailing Outs:

I used mailings my first year. But then I found actually talking to them worked better. By my third year, I had developed a good reputation and had a list of clients to call. The moral to this is do not rely on mail outs.

That is not to say you should ignore mailings. They do provide some value. Postcards are the most effective. They are cheap and they get the job done. The advantage they have is they are often filed away for future reference. This is particularly true if there is a discount offer.

I mention discounts offers because I know of magicians who have had good luck with them. I do not use them. I found it cheapened my value. The product I provide is worth the money. The only discount I now offer is if they book multiple shows on the same day. It allows me to do a show for multiple age groups. And it makes sense to the school. I have eliminated travel time and expense.

I know some have offered discounts for specific days to fill holes in their calendar.

One important note on discounts put an end date on it. I know of a magician who sent out a special price to preschools when he was getting started. Five years later one of those school called him and wanted that price. He was now charging multiple times that price. He honored it because he had that kind of integrity. But learn from the mistake. Put an end on all pricing.

Just as in an email you must be solving a problem with your mail out. As I have stated no one needs a magic show. They need you to teach a subject. They need you to help in enrollment. They need to have activities for the children. Give them what they need. Use what you have to give them what they need.

# CHAPTER 6

## SETTING GOALS & TRACKING EFFORT

### Activity is King

In the magic business, the more you work, the more you work. The more shows you do the more shows you do. I am not speaking in circles. The more work you do, the more work you get. The more work you get the more show you do. The more shows you do the more people see you and book you. That means you do more show. It is the cycle of the magic business life.

Start contacting schools. Will you get it all correct the first time? No! But you will not succeed without doing something. Activity creates sales.

You already know the best activity, sales calls. Set a daily goal for the number of sales calls you make. Do not stop until you reach that goal. If you are not getting enough booking increase the number of calls you make. It is that simple and that difficult.

When you set your goal you need to define terms. What is a call? I distinguish between a dial, a message, and a call. A dial is picking up the phone and dialing the number. That is the first activity to measure. How many dials did you make? A message is when you were unable to talk to the decision maker and had to leave a message. This may be a voice mail or with a live person. Track these separately from a call. A call is when you reached a decision maker and were able to have a sales conversion.



In planning your sales day it is important to know the ratio of dials to calls. The ratio of calls to bookings. You also want to know how long it took to reach the goal you set for your daily calls.

This helps you plan your sales day better. When you prepare the day before you want to make a list of the schools you will call. If you know the ratio of dials to calls you know the minimum number of school to put on your call list for the next day.

Knowing your ratio of calls to booking helps you improve. Do you need to improve your list? Do you need to improve your preparation so you can be more efficient? Do you need to improve your script? If you do not know the results of each step in the process you cannot improve.

Set a goal for the number of calls you will make for any given day. Since most magicians are one-man shops you cannot spend your entire day on the phone. You need rehearsal time. You need time for marketing activities. And of course, do not forget you need time to perform shows.

This is where most entertainers fall down they book a lot of show then they have no time to sell future shows. Their well runs dry and they have to prospect for future money. In the meantime they have no money coming in. It is feast or famine. Do not let this happen to you. Learn to manage your time. Set aside time each day to sell your show.

I alot a limited amount of time each day for sales calls. I have to meet my goal within that time frame. This means I need to be very efficient with my time. Batching you activities increases your efficiency.

## **Document Your Activity**

To run a successful magic business you need to track your efforts. This is more than keeping track of what tricks you did where. This includes tracking sales, marketing, and performances.

You need to document who you talked to. What was their position? Who is at the front desk? Who answers the phone? What is the name of the director? What are the teachers names?

When you call, email, mail, visit in person, keep track or what you said. Track what they said. Did you make a promise? Did you give a verbal quote? Did they make a promise? Were they receptive? What time did you call? Were they in at that time? Tracking this information does two things. First, it keeps you out of trouble. You don't forget. Second, you use this to improve your business processes.

I cannot tell you how valuable it is to look up your history with the school before you call. You refresh yourself on the last conversation. You remind yourself of the context of this particular school director's situation.

It is comforting to be able to say, "I spoke with you about few weeks ago and you mentioned you had not started your Holiday planning yet. You asked me to call you back in a couple weeks." It makes the conversation so much easier.

You can not do that if you do not keep records.

I use to own a staffing company. That is a 100% sales job. I required my staff to document every conversation and communication with every customer. The rule was, if it was not documented, it did not happen. When we reviewed their activity, they could not say something happened if it was not already documented. It made reviews very object. I have the same rule for myself. I make myself document every conversation, every communication. If all you do is keep records of your shows you are missing out on a lot of value. While important to track your shows it pales in importance to tracking sales activity. Remember no one pays you for doing magic shows. They pay you for selling magic shows.

You can use a manual system or a computer system for keeping your records. If you use a manual system I would suggest a loose-leaf binder. That will allow you to insert pages as you need.

Here is the least information to keep on a Preschool:

- Name of Preschool
- Mailing Address of Preschool
- Phone Number
- Best time to call
- Email Address
- Director's Name
- School Age program director (this may or may not be the school director. Each school has their own title for this position as well.)
- Teachers' Names who helped you
- How many children were at your show

- Which show you did
- How much you charged
- Notes about the school and show.

I worked with many sales professions and entertainers on improving sales efficiency. In almost every case we were able to make drastic improvements by having them focus on making calls. And when they were to make calls.

Once they completed their calls for the day they documented their activity. Stopping the calls to document reduced their efficiency. Do one thing at a time. This is a rule I have for myself. When I make calls to preschools I only make calls. The only exception I have is if I promised to send them information. I send it via email right then. I do not wait. I want them to see I am responsive to their needs. It would be more efficient to complete my calls then send the information. But the perceived customer service is a higher value.

To be more documenting efficient I use several abbreviations. I encourage you to create additional ones. These allow me to document common situations with the least amount of effort. It is all about efficiency.

- RNA – ring no answer – No one answered the phone
- LVM – Left voice mail
- LM – Left message with a live person
- DNLM – Did not leave a message. This usually means there was a voice mail system but I did not leave a message.
- VM – voicemail system or auto response system answered.

## **Computer Tracking Software**

You can use software to track your activities and document your customers. This is a CRM or Customer Relationship Management System. There are several free or open source CRMs available. I have used Vtiger, SugarCRM Community edition. HubSpot has a free CRM as well.

These are all web-based. I like web-based solutions because it allows me to work anywhere and I have access to all my data.

I can tell you right now none of them are perfect. They are not even near perfect. You need to adapt them to the magic business. The problem is they are more complex than

you need. I recommend using a CRM. But you need to adapt it to your use. In fact, I would not work without a CRM.

# CHAPTER 7

## THE SHOW

### Entering the School

Arrive at the school no more than 15 minutes before your show. You should be able to set up your entire show within 15 minutes. Presetting your props helps speed up this process. I pack my entire show into one case. I preload my pockets before I arrive at the school. If need be I can do the show about 3 minutes after I walk in.

Sometimes, the children see you arrive. They will watch with anticipation as you enter. So you are “On” from the moment you step out of our car. You need to put everyone at ease when you walk into the room. Smile, and be pleasant remember you are on. I will talk with the children and play as I am setting up. My personality is very silly. So I ask silly questions.

Me: Hi what's your name:

Girl: Susan

Me: Hi Susan how are you doing?





Girl: Good

Me: How do you know? How do you know you are good? Who told you, you were good?

This lead to a lot of byplay. The rest of the children are watching. There is interest all around.

My show can be set with the children watching. It is often an inconvenience on the teachers or impossible to have the children leave. If the weather is bad they cannot go outside. So, they have nowhere to go. Remember you are there to solve problems not create them.

### A Note about TIMID CHILDREN:

On occasional you will find a child who is timid. This is particularly true if you are a strong character, like a clown. Here are a couple tricks you can try.

#### Tip 1

- Look at them from a distance and say “Good-bye” and wave as a response to their waving and saying goodbye. Then step towards them, still saying goodbye, and saying “I gotta go now. Good-bye” They will wave and say goodbye back. Stick out your hand for them to shake and say “Good-bye, See ya! I gotta go, goodbye...” They instinctively will shake your hand saying goodbye Ask them their name as they shake your hand. Then ask them if you can stay a little while. Viola! You have a new found friend

#### Tip 2

- Look at them from a distance and act scared. Cover your face like a baby would when if they were scared. Peak out at them from behind your hands see them look and at you and quickly hide your face behind your hands again. Do this a few times and they will start laughing. Once you have them laughing at you, you are in.

## Unpacking Your Show

Do not dawdle setting the props. Be quick about it. Arrange your props in a “display”.

I put out circles on the floor where I want the children to stand when they come up to help me. I cut these from non-slip shelf liners I buy them from the dollar store. I have glued colorful feet on each one. That way I can tell the child to stand on the yellow feet or the orange feet or the pink feet. Depending on the routine I want them to stand in different places.

I also string a rope between two chairs. This tells the children how close they can come. Tying the rope to chairs or table keeps the children from moving the rope ever closer to you. Trust me on this you need the rope attached stable objects. I do not put tape down. I do not what to take the chance on ruining the floor.

Once you are set, you are ready to begin. But first, you need to seat your audience! If there were children in the room when you set chances are more will be joining you. The art of seating the audience impacts how your show will run.

## **Seating Your Audience:**

Control starts the minute the children walk into the performance space. You are in charge now. The teachers and children are looking to you to see what you are going to do. They want to know what you want them to do. The teachers are looking to you to handle the group – this is their break!

There are many thoughts on audience management. Some of these are neat “tricks” to seating children.

Rarely will you ever have a platform or stage. You will more be performing on the same level as the children.

Sit them on the floor. Have them sitting their bottoms, with their legs crossed. They call this Criss Cross Applesauce.

Always seat the children on the floor, not chairs. ALWAYS!

Sitting on the floor is no problem for children. It is something they do all the time. Sitting on the floor allows everyone a clear, unobstructed view of the show. It makes it easier and faster for volunteers to come up to help you. You want the audience to sit close to each other. This encourages like reactions. If one person laughs, they will all laugh. If there is space between them they will often react like they do at home watching TV, deadpan faces. They will take in the show, but not react. You want them to react. Do not miss out on this tip. You want them to enjoy the show. The more involved they are, the more they enjoy the show. So manufacture involvement and excitement. That is part of entertaining.

Ask the teachers to help seat the children. The children will obey the teachers “commands.” They will obey them, in anticipation of the show. Sometimes, the teachers will sit on the floor with the children. I have a time in my show I ask the teacher to be a volunteer. I have yet to have a teacher who would not play along. Deep down inside there is an actor/actress in everyone. Besides that the children love it.

## Where to Seat Your Audience

The best seating formation I have found is counter-intuitive. I like to have the older children in the front and the younger children in the back. This accomplishes a couple thing. If anyone needs to leave in the middle of the show it will be one of the younger children. If they are seated in the back there is far less distraction. The older children make the best volunteers. Having them up front makes it easier to come up to the “stage”

The reason everyone thinks to put the younger ones in the front is so they can see. With the children seated and you standing there are no obstructions. Everyone can see. No matter rather they are in the front or back.

## The Show

Here some basic rules for your show.

- **“Kid Talk”** - This one is simple -DON'T! Do not talk down to a child. They do not like it. Treat them with respect. Talk to them as you would an adult.
- **Exaggerate and Express Yourself.** When children express or show emotion, they let it all hang out. They do not hold it in. And they don't care what they look like doing it! You should not care either. Become “one of them”; over animate your movements. When you laugh, laugh large! Put your hands over your mouth as you discover something. Get that twinkle in your eye; pretend you are a 4-year-old. Go through your show and look at each trick's emotion – Are you surprised? Scared? Startled? Is the outcome of the trick funny? Make your show fun. If they can see you are laughing at everything. They will laugh at everything.
- **Make the Children the Stars** - As a children's entertainer, you are only there to facilitate the fun. You are not the star. This too is counter-intuitive. Not being a star make you a star. If you feel you must be “The Master Magician” than children's entertainment is not for you. A 4-year-old could care less what you are in the grownup world. They will remember the special show you performed. That is enough to make anyone feel like a star!
- **Lots and lots of audience participation.** One of the best-kept secrets to a successful show is audience participation. Audience participation does not mean every child must come on stage and help with a trick. The entire group could wiggle their fingers and say the magic words. You could ask the group to wiggle their noses! Wiggle their tongues! Wiggle their toes! The possibilities are endless.

- **Never “Cast a Spell”** Saying a magic word and wave your hand. “Makes the magic happen” But never cast a spell. “Casting a Spell” has occult-ish overtones. You are performing magic tricks. You have no special powers etc.
- **Watch Voice levels** ~ Smaller Children associate a loud voice with an unpleasant action. (Usually, a parent screaming at them... I am sad to say) Keep your voice level at a “calm” level. Many times when I am performing, I will S-L-O-W-L-Y raise my voice level for certain bits or tricks. This allows me to create the effect I am looking for! Then I will bring my voice back down to a calm level.
- **My Broker is E.F. Hutton.** Some of you may remember a commercial that ran many years ago. It had two people in a very noisy a restaurant. One person in a low whisper would say. Well, my broker is E.F. Hutton and E.F. Hutton says...” The restaurant got quiet and everyone was listening. It showed the power of the whisper.

If the children start talking among themselves do not try to talk over them. The E.F. Hutton trick is a quick easy short-term fix. Lowering your voice. You can look right at them and continue with the same energy but begin to whisper your lines. It is as if the sound man turned down the microphone. But look at your show. why did you lose them? Fix that! That is the long-term fix.

Watch for reactions. The children's faces will tell you a lot. If you are too loud, not loud enough, too scary, or if you are funny! Their faces will be your gauge to tell you if you need to change anything.

## Changing Up Your Show.

I currently have two different standard shows. When I first started, I thought to myself, I should have a new show with new tricks each time I appeared.

I was wrong. The children grow up (Well duh) and move on. New children are always entering the school. If a child sees my show at age four that child he or she will see me 3 times. They do not know the tricks in the first show.

Besides that, children like repetition. Repetition is common with them. It is even comforting. Think about when you were a child. How many times did you sit and watch the same cartoon show every Saturday? I know I did! And I never tired of watching them! Much the same way a child will enjoy your show a second time around.

There are some tricks I have in both shows. Why? They are signature effects. When I took them out the children asked why I did not do those tricks. So those tricks go in every show.



## **Magic Show Physiology**

It is about entertaining your audience. It is not about doing tricks. Anyone can buy a few tricks, read the directions, and do them. But your job is to perform magic not “do tricks.” There is a difference. Your job is to entertain. Anyone can buy a violin and play it. But it takes a musician to make the violin create music.

There are many ways of making your magic tricks entertaining. I have found playing with the children is the best way for me. An example is my a rope routine. In the routine I do a cut and restore twice and then professors nightmare. You can do

those tricks can in about one minutes. But my routine lasts about ten minutes. But it one of the tricks people always talk about. Why? It was entertaining. They laughed and had fun the whole time.

## **Common Themes That Work**

- **Magician in Trouble** - This is a great theme in children's magic. Think about it. Adults can do things. Adults can do things children cannot. A magician is like a super adult. When things go wrong for you, a magician, it makes you one of them. If they “caused” the problem so much the better. Children love to catch, an adult, having problems when they know how it should be. It empowers them.
- **What just happened?** - When something happens and the children see it either before you or instead of you, they feel empowered. They know or see something that you do not. Adults always tell children they know better. The adults are always right. When they know something you do not, they feel special. An example would my performance of middle diddle silk. I say the silk cannot jump to the middle hole because that would be real magic. When it jumps to the middle I do

not look at it. All the children are screaming, "It is in the middle hole." I keep saying, "No there is no such thing as real magic." They see something is true that I am denying.

- **Personification** - A child's imagination is powerful. As we get older, tend to forget how powerful imagination is. Personifying a prop exercises that imagination. In my needle through balloon, I draw a face on the balloon and name it Charlie. This allows it to have a personality. It misbehaves and I have to chase it around the room. Use imagination in your magic. The children will be using theirs. When children play, they personify almost everything. Stuffed animals talk and have emotions. This is not weird to children. That is the world they live in. When you personify, you enter their world.
- **Storytelling** - Children love to hear stories. For that matter, who doesn't? This is another way to allow them to use their imaginations. Storytelling is a great way to incorporate different tricks together. Assemble a string of tricks which tell a story. Allow each trick to make sense of the story. It also gives the inanimate props a "human aspect." This is something the children can understand a little easier. Ropes are just ropes. A balloon is only a balloon. But pretend the ropes are now snakes or the balloon is a person Gives the prop a name (Charlie, Papa Snake, Mama Snake, Baby Snake) makes the story easier to follow and understand.

## Funny Props

Funny Props are anything that looks funny or is out of place. It could have an unusual size. Use an item in an unusual way. In the middle of my show, I need a hat. So pull out a diaper and put it on my head. If you produce a baby bottle and suck on it kids think that is hilarious. You are an adult are sucking on a baby bottle. Oversized shoes, and toothbrushes, are funny. Tiny gloves, small Coke bottles are example of funny props that are too small. An extra long long wand works. Anything that seems irregular in size, shape or color. Any item out of its norm. Any of these can make an audience of children laugh hysterically just by picking them up.

## Let the Show Begin

### Goals

A children's show has several requirements. You must meet them all. They are not optional. If you fulfill them all you will have a great show. You will have a happy customer and delighted children.

1. **Capture and keep the children's attention.**- If the children start talking I see it as a failure on my part. It is not their problem. It is mine.
2. **Make All Your helpers Heroes.** One of my pet peeves is the way most magicians use breakaway wand. They blame the child. Find a reason that is your fault. I use the excuse I gave them the wrong size. You can still act surprised. It is still funny. But you are the reason it broke not the child.
3. **Make your audience comfortable.** This includes both psychologically and physically. If they are uncomfortable they will not enjoy your show.
4. **Keep the children safe and seated.** At no time should you put a child in any danger. EVER!
5. **Involve the Entire Audience.**- Everyone needs to feel like they were a part of the show. Everyone needs to feel they were an important part of the show. They are. If they are not laughing and smiling your show was a failure. So their involvement is key to your success.

## The Show Before the Show – The Warm Up

The warm-up is your show before the show. You may have several classes coming in to see your show. What do you do while everyone is getting seated? There are different lines of thought. Some better than others.

Here is a bad thought pattern. You could stand to the side or hide and wait for everyone to get seated. After all, the school only paid for one show, not two. If you did something to entertain the children before your show, that is an extra show. If you start doing something with the ones who have already arrived, later classes may feel left out. That would not be fair. If you want to make a grand entry or a big opener. Doing something before the show reduces its impact.

If you feel the need to make a grand entrance find another venue. The preschool market is not for you.

While I understand that thinking, it is a poor way of thinking. You need a pre-show show. Warming up the children ahead of time does so much to make your show better. It helps the children adjust to you and your “stage.” It introduces your character to them. You get to know them before the show. It gives you insight into who will and who will not make good helpers. It sets the tone for your show.

The children get to know a little bit about you. Any fear a child may have disappears. My warmup is to play with the children before the show. I do not mean I get down on the floor and play with trucks and dolls. I play verbally. During a recent show. While I played with the children in my warm up, one little boy yelled your silly. It reminded me of my granddaughter. She used to call me silly grandpa. I almost lost it right there. But was able not to break character. "I am not silly. You're silly." and resumed the playing.

Your warm up should be fun for you too.

I play with the kids. I want them a little rambunctious for my show. But only a little bit. I want them to feel like they can let me know if they catch me on a trick. That is part of my show. My show relies on that. You may need something else.

Danny Orleans, a children's entertainer for whom I have a lot of respect, uses the warm up to calm the children down.

At the end of the warm-up, they need to know they are to sit down and pay attention.

In the warm up the children learn what you expect from them. For me, they learn how far is too far. They learn how to take part. The warm-up gets the children on your side. You develop a relationship with the children during your show before the show.

Your warm-up is a gentle reminder to the teachers this is to be fun. They should not get after the children for making some noise. For me I want them to make noise. That is part of the fun.

I like to close my show before the show with Danny's magician exercise. It is a "Do as I Do" interaction.

You tell the children you need to warm up by doing some magician exercises. They should join in if they want to be a helper. Sometimes I start doing it and the children join in on their own if they do I know I have them.

The exercise is all done without saying a word. It has two parts. The first part is moving the index finger up and down. Then show both sides of the hand with the finger extended. Then do the same thing with two fingers. Add a third. Then a fourth. Finally, the whole hand flaps up and down faster and faster until it is out of control. This is fun for the children to do. They will giggle as they do it with you.

The second part is similar. Bring the index finger of the two hands together in slow motion a few times. Act like this requires precision. Then add a second finger, then a third, then a fourth. This is all done in slow motion and with great care. Once all four fingers are touching start separating the hand again in slow motion. Bring them back



together. Gradually speed this up. As you go faster and faster you end with everyone applauding wildly.

Your warm-up gives the teachers confidence you know what you are doing. They know you can control the children. Now, they can enjoy the show too. That is important for repeat bookings.

## Show Structure

I am going to outline a basic show. This outline has nine routines. This is not the only structure. But it will give you a skeleton you can use.

Each routine in the structure has a purpose. I give this outline structure as something you can use and expand upon. When it comes to the show structure there are no absolutes. But this guideline provides a good structure.

As you read through the suggested structure you will notice a flow. High intensity and low intensity. If you only have one level it will be either boring. Or you will tire your audience so they do not have the energy to make it to the end of the show. Either way, you lose them.

No matter rather you follow my guidelines or not be intentional. Have a reason for the routines you pick and why you put them in that spot in your show. Being intentional alone will improve your show.

## Openers

Before you start, check with the teachers and make sure everyone is there. You do not want late arrivals. Even if you think you know. Always ask permission to start.

My opener is a quick but strong piece of magic. I do a coin production followed by a coin flurry. It is quick funny and magical. I do not introduce myself before the opener. The kids feel like they already know me from the show before the show. I do give my name at the end of the opener as you will see.



I jump right in. I ask a question. “Do you know this is? You can't? Really?” I then produce the coin. It is rare I do not get an audible, “Whooooooa” when I produce the coin. I do the coin production to lasso in the teachers and any last minute troublemakers. I want them to have no doubt this is going to be great magic. I want them to want to watch.

I make it fun by cracking corny jokes. I end the routine with a jumbo coin production which is a total surprise. I get another audible, “Whooooooa.” I have the children's attention. And I have the teachers' attention.

This opener does everything an opener should do.

- It tells them what to expect
- It is brief
- It is visual
- It grabs attention rather than requires it
- It uses something unexpected, the Jumbo Coin

Look through the effects you have. Find something that fits and does everything an opener should do. If you have something that fulfills all those requirements it gets a grade of A as an opener. Make that your opening effect.

After the opener, I introduce myself and the show. I explain what they will see and how they can get picked to come up.

“Hey, My name is JD Stewart MD (magic dude). I use a lot of helpers in my show. Let me tell you how I pick my helpers. You need to be sitting all the way down on your bottoms. Criss Cross Applesauce with your hands in your lap. Not talking when you're not supposed to be talking and Hoop'n and Yoller'n when you're supposed to be Hoop'n and Yoller'n. And when I say I need some help. The first person who raises their hand and goes oh -oh pick me, pick me “(I raise my hand, jump up and down while I say this)

Does not get picked. (my acting crazy waving my hands, this adds a little more humor)

But if you sit there politely, quietly raise your hand I might, might pick you. I can't pick everybody because we don't have that kind of time. But if you are jumping up and down like a monkey and shouting pick me, I definitely won't pick you. (I have found it important to tell

them even if they follow the rules, that does not guarantee they will get picked.)

Most children today have never seen a live performance of anything. You may be the first live performance they have ever seen let alone a live magic show. You will have to teach them how to be a good audience member. You must teach them the basic rules of politeness when seeing a show.

### Your second routine – Personality Piece



This is still an introduction. They need to know you and about the magic in the show. After getting the children's attention you need to interact with them. This is a personality piece. How do you interact with the magic. Are you a magician that makes magic happen? Is there magic all around and you channel it? Does magic happen to you? There is no right answer. And these are not all the choices. But decide how you interact with the magical world. Be intentional and consistent about it.

This routine should have a lot of magic. It should have several steps or phases. Involve the children in some way. They can wiggle their fingers or say a magic word. I use the "What happened" technique here. They are yelling or laughing at me for not noticing the appearance of another sponge star. I ask them questions, "How many stars?" They all yell back.

Relate to the children on some level. You could use a helper. Or you could have them interact as a group.

By the end of the routine, they know what kind of magic you do. They know how you interact with the magical world.

There is no need to rush. Let them enjoy the magic. Use a routine that has several magical surprises.

### Your Third Routine- Wrap up your introduction.

Here you want a simple routine. The effect should be straightforward. It needs to be easy to follow. This allows everyone to catch back up. You should choose a routine that uses a

minimal number of props. It should have a simple series of actions. If you intend to do a running gag this is the place to introduce it.

### Your Fourth Routine -

Here put in your most unique routine or effect. This could be your signature effect. It can be something silly, funny or quirky. You are now into the meat of your show. Change the pace of the show. If you are trying new material you can try it out here. If it flops you have enough time in the show to recover. Once you have a show that works for you and your young audience, try only one new effect per performance.

I like to do thumb tip blendo here. It is an effect that no one does and my routine is hilarious. Sometimes I replace it with my rope routine. It is not as unusual as far as magic effects go. But the children are familiar with rope and putting a cut piece of rope together is unusual.

Both of these effects are signature effects for me.

### Routine Number Five

Increase the energy at this point. Select something that is up tempo fast, or flashy. Picking up the pace keeps the children excited about what to expect next. Select something that happens suddenly. Something with an unexpected kicker ending would work well in this spot. Again, if you are using a running gag, this is the best place for the second phase of your running gag.

### Routine Number Six

Do something that shows a little skill. At this point you want the teachers to realize they cannot hire anyone and get this level of quality. You do not want them to think anyone with a box like that can do your show. This also makes the children realize you are something special. Those boxes do not do the magic you do.

This should be serious magic. I am not saying you should not do a comedy bit here. All I am saying is the magic you do should show some skill.

Select a routine that you feel will appeal to both the adults (teachers) and the children.

### Routine Number Seven

This routine should not need the children to pay close attention. This could be a fluff effect or throw away piece. But it has immense value. You could do something almost non-magical. This lowers the guard. I put my middle diddle silk here. When the silk

jumps from one end other board to the other. The children know exactly what happened. I turned it around behind my back. The children are not going to let me get away with that. They are telling me what to do to prove they know what happened. I keep misunderstanding and trying to show they are wrong. But I get “caught” in the end. There is smug satisfaction knowing they caught the magician. I then go ahead and explain it. I explain how to can make it look like it jumps from one end to the other. But no one can make it jump to the middle. If it jumped to the middle that would be real magic. And there is no such thing as real magic. When it jumps to the middle They are screaming it jumped to the middle. I am arguing with them until I notice it in the middle I react and there is large laughter again. They saw something I did not.

Whatever you decide on, even if it is a fluff piece, has to be entertaining.

### Routine Number Eight.



This is the next to the last piece. It is your showstopper, the grandest thing you do. Contrary to popular thought do not put your big showstopper at the end. It goes next to the last effect.

Let the children know you are near the end of the show. This will help you close the show. Build this routine to the pinnacle of amazement. Give it everything you have. Make the children think that there is nothing that can follow this. Use your best routine.

This routine should be different from the rest of the routines in your show. There are lots of ways to be "different." I produce live goldfish. Nothing else in my show is like that or even hints about it. This is a strategy used by many successful magic performer. Take a look at any of Cooperfield's TV specials. This is not only for children's show.

This is your finale. Sometimes, a finale can go from funny and highly interactive, to minimal and intemit. Eugene Burger use to end with Gypsy Thread. It was which different from his dark or funny material.. In a preschool a sucker effect can go here, if it's the only one in the show. The children finally “caught” you. If this is a holiday show routine for centered around the season can make a strong finish.

### Routine Number Nine - Your Closer

This is your last routine, your closure. After the children have reacted to your blockbuster. They can calm back down.

This is where you thank them for being such a great audience. Then (almost as an afterthought) offer to do one more thing. This makes them feel like they are getting a bonus. You are rewarding them for being good.

This is a preschool equal to the encore. The last part of any professional show is either the encore or the curtain call.

This allows you to say thanks and goodbye. The children will want you as their friend. You return to their level. Close the show with something quick silly and/or charming.

If you have a running gag now you perform the final payoff.

Well that is it. That is the basic structure of a good children's show. You can play with it expand and repeat parts if you like but that is the basic structure.

## **A Word on Volunteers**

Children love to help. Picking the right volunteer is more of an art than a science. Picking the right volunteer makes the routine run smooth. If you pick wrong, the volunteer makes it unpleasant for you and the audience.

That is one of the values of the Show Before the Show. It allows you to decide who you think will be helpful and who will not. I always pre-select the volunteers. I have in my mind who I want before I ask, who would like to help.

This makes the show run smoother. There is always a chance the person I want does not want to come up front. They may be a little shy. So, I have an alternate in mind as well.

## **Animals**

Animals are a big hit. If you have an animal you should allow the children to pet it at the end of the show. Hands-on with a live animal adds value to your show.

I do not use live animals in my show. (other than 2 goldfish) I have friends who do. They all have horror stories about things that have happened with live animals. I do not want any horror stories. I can get in trouble all by myself.

There are also laws that protect animals in show business. You have to have special licensing even for your pet rabbit. The USDA can also come and inspect their living conditions at any time. If you keep them in your home, that means the government can come into your home at any time.

For me, the hassle with the government, mess (yes they poop on stage) feeding and care issues are not worth it. I could charge more if I had a live animal. But for me, it is not worth the expense and trouble.

If you use a live animal, do not make it disappear. VANISHING AN ANIMAL IS NOT A TRICK to children. They will worry about it the rest of the show. If you do not bring it back, they will worry the rest of the day. Teachers do not want to have to reassure a child the animal is OK. This only hurts your rebook-ability. And since it happens after you leave you will not know why they do not want you back. See this through eyes of the child. They believe something happened to that animal. And now it is gone. Is it dead?

## **Tricks, Gags and Bits**

### **Playing Dress Up**

Dressing a child up adds to any routine. Children love to play dress up. Costume pieces help the children play along. It aids the imagination. The costume pieces should be one size fits all. It is bad mojo to have a child come up and find out they are too big or too small. Never leave a child out of the fun because of their size. The costume pieces should be colorful and fun.

Where can you find costume pieces. One word, Halloween. I also have found many fantastic items at the dollar store and thrift stores. Start looking for new pieces as soon as the Halloween stores open. This means you need to shop in earnest for costume pieces in October. Sometimes stores will have things out after Halloween. If they do you can pick up some bargains.

- **Hats:** Hats are great. You can get a lot of mileage out of a hat. They pack small and play big. Everyone loves a silly hat. I notice when a hat goes on a child the cameras come out. I use a couple in my show. They get a great reaction. Halloween is a great time to pick up specialty hats. I have a large hat I can pull things out of during the show. I also use it as an extra case to carry things in. During the show, I put the hat on a child and it falls over their head. The child enjoys the added attention that when I pull it up they will intentionally cause it to fall back down. Now I am fighting with the hat. This is funny in itself.

I also use a disposable diaper as a hat. I think I came up with the idea myself. But I understand Silly Billy and the Great Zucchini use diapers as hats. Like I said I think I came up with it myself but who knows. I have been doing it so long the origin has been lost.

I will wear the diaper to prove it is a hat. The children go on about how it is a diaper and I claim, “No it is a hat.” I go on about how I can prove it is not a diaper. First I do not wear diapers. So this is a hat! Where do you put a diaper? On your bottom. See it's a hat! I lose the debate despite all my efforts. Again a lot of fun.

- **Head Brands:** You can use these for so many ideas. You can use something as simple as a headband to turn a child into a lion, alien, monkey. Headbands are great for theme-ing a holiday show. Some have furry ears Some have antlers. Use them to make the child special. You can put a headband on a child quick and simple. The reactions are fantastic. Teachers start taking pictures. They put on their website and bulletin boards for the parents. This is great for you.
- **Aprons and Capes:** Small aprons can be sewn up to look like different costumes. If you are handy with a sewing machine or know someone who you can make any costume and it packs small and plays huge. They add to any storytelling effect. My thumb tip blendo routine uses a cape. It is not any cape. It is Harry Potter's cloak of invisibility. Of course these day I have to explain who Harry Potter is.
- **Wands:** Wands make for some funny moments in your show. I do not use a wand in every effect. But the wands I use add to the fun. The market is full of trick and comical wands some of which include:
  - **Breakaway Wand:** I have found it is important not to make the child feel like you are blaming them. I always claim it was something I did. It was my fault I gave them the wrong size. Or, I gave them the wrong end. The children still laugh. But now your helper does not feel like you are blaming them for something they did not do.
  - **Spring Wand Wand -** This wand wobbles all about. Any time something looks like you have no control the children think it is hilarious.
  - **Squirting Wand –** This wand squirts water. Squirt yourself not the child.
  - **Mooing Wand:** This wand moos like a cow when turned over.
  - **Jumping or Rising Wand:** This is a wand that you can make jump out of your hand. Or my favorite, letting it rise slowly. This goes back to personification. The wand is misbehaving. You are struggling to keep the wand down but it keeps rising. The children think its funny to see you fighting with your props.
  - **Fishing Pole Wand:** This is a wand that unfolds to resemble a fishing pole.



- **Banner Wand:** This is a rolled up banner. When you roll it up, it resembles a wand. You let the banner fall and it turns a child into a rabbit or dressed like a magician. The Banner is vertical and has a hole in the drawing for a child's face. These make great photo opportunities.
- **Multiplying Wands:** Wands keep appearing. As you give a wand to the child, another one appears in your hand.
- **Flower Wand:** This is a wand where a flower appears from the wand. If you use this can use this is connection with the multiplying wands. The last one is a flower. Fuuuunny.
- **Pop Wand:** This one is so much fun. The ends keep popping off and you have to go chasing after it. Very funny.
- **Squeaking Wand:** This is like a dog's toy. The wand squeaks when you squeeze it. "Where did that come from?"
- **Large Sponge wand.** Being oversized alone makes this funny. Add to that the fact it is foam and flopping around leads to a lot of comedy.
- **Large Appearing 8 Foot Wand:** This is a wand that is about 8 feet long. It is so big the child is clumsy with it. You can produce it from a lunch bag or other container which would be too small to hold it.

## Balloon gags

Be careful with balloons do not give the children a balloon. Some schools have strict rules about balloons. There could be a latex allergy or a child could choke on a balloon. The school does not want the liability. Using balloon is OK. But do not give a balloon to a child.

Blow up a balloon and pretend to tie it You can ask a child to hold it. As they reach for it let go and the balloon goes flying off. That is the most common method. Again do not blame the child. Admit you forgot to tie it.

I let the balloon fly in my needle through balloon. The gag is the balloon is trying to get away from the needle.

Another way of having the having the balloon deflate without handing it to a child is to pretend to tie it shut. Remind everyone of the rules to pick a helper. As you are going over the rules place the balloon under your arm. To show how to raise their hands you place the balloon under the opposite arm. The balloon deflates. You then discover the

deflated balloon under your arm. The joke is on you. And the children never touch the balloon.

If you use 260 balloons (Those are the long skinny balloons) You can try to blow up the wrong end. When you realize you are using the wrong end and switch ends. The children will laugh. You look at them and say, "Yeah like you've never done that."

Another great gag is to try to blow up a 260 balloon with the end cut off. It flops around and makes funny noises.

## Tricks

I use a wide variety of tricks in my show. Try to mix up your tricks. You don't have like effects back to back. There are seven basic principles or effects in magic:

- ✓ **Appearance** - making something appear
- ✓ **Disappearance** - making something disappear.
- ✓ **Transposition** - making something trade places with something else.
- ✓ **Suspension** - something floats in mid-air and does not move.
- ✓ **Levitation** - something rises in the air moves
- ✓ **Penetration** – Something solid penetrates some another solid object.
- ✓ **Mentalism** – magic with the mind.

All these effects are good for preschools except mentalism. It is rare to have children sit through a mentalism act. This is true even if they understand what is going on. Make your visual. They should be:

- Bright and colorful
- Fun not complicated
- Card tricks are OK if the children do not need to know the names of the cards. I have been doing 6 card repeat for years. It is always a hit. If they need to remember a card use a picture or alphabet cards. Playing cards are too hard to remember. Sometimes even for adults.
- Use tricks that include lots of audience participation. My opinion is you can never have too many tricks that use helpers.

- Do not include tricks that use fire, knives, guns or weapons of any kind. This is a good way to have your show cut short and shown the door. It will probably be without being paid.
- Storytelling keeps a trick interesting. But do not let it drag on. The story needs to be short and exciting.
- Make the pace of your tricks fast and fun.

## **Helpers**

You will always have more children than you can use as helpers. The first time I realized this was a big problem was with a group of very young children. They did not understand I could not use everyone. Every child wanted to help.

I was at the end of my show and I noticed some tears starting to form. I had to think quick. I had done my show. I had no more routines to do.

I started to jazz. I had a change bag I brought all the children who had not helped me up front. One child showed the bag was empty. Another child put in a silk. All the children got to wave their hand over the bag. Another child showed the bag was empty. They all waved their hands over the bag. The last child got to pull out the skill. I could have made it easier and fast if them all just wave their hands.

They only wanted to be up front. They wanted to feel special. They wanted to do the magic. They all went home happy and proud. They could say “I helped the magician today.”

## About the Author

JD Stewart is a successful children's and family entertainer. His greatest enjoyment is seeing children laugh and smile. He has been a professional magician since 2001. He has been a successful entrepreneur and C-level executive. He has worked with large corporations such as Texas Instruments and Dell. He has also worked with small startups. JD owned and run his own staffing company. So he knows what is required to run a business. His approach to the magic business is as a businessman.

JD lives in Cedar Park, Texas. If you do not know where Cedar Park is, according to JD, Austin is a suburb of Cedar Park.

