ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Sanjay Manaktala is an Indian stand-up comedian based in Bangalore. With a stand-up experience of more than four years, he has performed in over 90 Corporate events and 200 solo shows across the country.

He is best known for his techie humour videos. In this genre, he made a parody of IT engineers called the ‘IT Guy’. Sanjay was born in New York City and later moved to Los Angeles, California. In June 2010, Sanjay formed a performing group called ‘The Polished Bottoms’, along with other stand-up comedians such as Sundeep Rao and Praveen Kumar. Comedy Central India, Forbes Magazine, CNN.com, BBC and many others have featured his comedy. He is regularly being featured among the ‘Best in Stand-Up Comedy’. Sanjay recently toured India with UK superstar Russell Brand, performing for over 10,000 people.
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Elements of a successful joke

What are the efficient ways in which you can turn your joke into a successful one? Learn more in this first lesson.
What is a joke?
A joke in its basic form is a setup, a premise, topic and a punchline. Some jokes break you into fits of laughter while the others do not. For instance, consider the following joke:

“I knew that my maid was from Bangalore because she asked me whether she could work from home.” The setup/premise is the maid whereas the punchline is “work from home.” Here is a list of few things that are must-haves if you want your joke to make the audience laugh.

Originality
Being original is the core of being an excellent comedian. You are a writer first, and then a comedian. Make sure the jokes you write and perform are your intellectual property. If you copy someone else’s jokes, you will be inevitably caught doing so. You will end up losing your credibility, thereby, ruining your ambition of becoming a successful comedian. A standard joke amongst comedians is “People who get paid to tell other people’s jokes, are called actors”. Although it is okay to look at others' performances to gain inspiration, it is not acceptable to copy their content and use it to your advantage.
Elements of a successful joke

The Element of Surprise
An element of surprise is bound to catch the audience off-guard and make the joke even funnier. One of the ways of adding this element of surprise to your joke is by using the technique of misdirect (discussed in another module). Using misdirects, pointing out irony etc., are practical ways of adding an element of surprise to your joke. Predictable jokes can get monotonous. Do not ever let the audience know where/when the punchline is coming!

Intelligence
Let your wit and intelligence exhibit a part of your act on stage. It will add credibility to your performance and draw appreciation from the audience. Look at your gigs as an opportunity to play around with trending news and events and push your audience to newer and unexplored ideas. Remember, your audience will always love a challenge from your end. Many comedians think comedy is all about community and sex jokes. But, in reality, comedy can be anything. For instance, if you are performing for a group of 8000 Java engineers, then, you can make jokes related to the Java programming language and make sure you keep the audience aligned with what they are going to catch out of your joke.
**Relatability**

The ‘relatability’ factor helps to establish a connection between the audience and the performer. If you joke about events and instances the audience is not concerned about; then, your jokes will completely misfire. The audience will eventually lose interest because of a lack of relatability and connection.
Type of stand-up comedy

Learn how to identify and differentiate between the various genres and types that exist in the world of comedy.
Comedy differs amongst various comics regarding their subject matter and the form of the delivery. For a beginner, it may be difficult to choose a genre. However, with time, practice and experimentation, he should be able to focus on a particular style.

**Political/Satirical**
This type of comedy draws inspiration from political events and personalities. It is usually flavoured with satire and sarcasm. Such comedians look at the news and find jokes on news headlines.

**Observational/storytelling**
This type of comedy is something that’s common amongst comedians. Such a genre of comedy is based on events and situations that one comes across on a day-to-day basis in life. The comedians often narrate experiences and stories from their own lives and draw humour out of it, like a weird Tinder date or a funny experience at their office.

**Character-based comedy**
This form of comedy is centered around individuals or specific characters. You need to get yourself into the shoes of the character. Sometimes, such characters become an integral part of your identity and branding.
Impressions/ mimicking
This genre of comedy involves impersonating another personality. Mimicking is performed for figures and celebrities by emulating their voice and mannerism. It establishes an instant connection between you and your audience.
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Comedic devices

Learn about the comedic devices such as the rule of three, call backs, improvisation, puns, misdirects and storytelling that are required for a Stand Up comedy act.
**Rule of Three**
Such a comedic device requires at least two examples to establish a pattern and another standard to flip the scenario altogether. The third case should break the rule and prevent the audience from interpreting your next line. The Rule of Three prevents monotony through unpredictable and unperceived jokes and gestures.

**Call-back**
It involves developing a connection with the previous joke to be able to demonstrate a flow in the set of jokes that are being presented. It also helps to put the act together and give it a satisfying finish. This is something a lot of stand-up comics follow, they reference a joke they did earlier in a set, and this helps the audience and the performer to connect on a deeper level.

**Improvisation**
This is one of the unique types of comedy. Most jokes that make it to the set that a comedian performs in front of a relatively larger audience are already presented to a smaller audience. This helps one to gauge the reaction of an average person. It enables a comedian to polish the joke by adding another character or giving it another dimension altogether.
**Misdirects**
This is a favourite amongst stand-up comedians. One relies on misdirects during the set curation for a performance. A misdirect is a comedic device that adds an element of surprise to the joke. It is usually used in situations where the general audience can predict the joke.

**Puns**
Clever use of puns always adds to the flavour to the joke. Give enough time to the audience to identify the pun. It may go unnoticed if you rush through it. In India, there is an additional opportunity to mix both Hindi and English to have clever puns.

**Storytelling**
Storytelling is another technique that helps a standup comedian connect well with the audience. It involves performing jokes in the form of narratives and general observations made in day-to-day life situations. It can include scenarios from grocery stores, restaurants, theatres, workspaces etc. Storytelling is a comedic device that takes years of experience to hone. Sanjay’s dating life has a significant influence on his comedy. For example, he makes jokes about dating a girl in America vs dating a girl in India.
Stage etiquette

A great performer is recognized by the way he carries himself on stage. In this lesson, you will learn about the etiquettes to be followed on stage.
Dress Well
Try to look better or as good as your audience. This is because people have made an effort to drive all the way from their offices and homes to the venue. Most newbies seem to overlook this aspect of stand-up comedy. Unless you possess a ‘street style’, remember to dress well.

Eye contact
You want to make sure that your audience remains interested throughout the act. One of the easiest ways to do that is to make eye contact with them. Such a gesture not only portrays confidence but also helps build a healthy relationship between you and the audience. Looking up at the ceiling or looking down at your microphone will alienate the audience.

Reset the Stage
The stage may not be set up in a way that is comfortable for you. You need to rearrange and reset the stage that suits your best interests. For instance, if you do not like the way the mic is placed, then, place it in a position that is suitable for you. If you feel that the stage is cluttered, then, make an effort to unclutter it. If you realize that the last comic had higher energy in comparison to yours, then, consider making a joke out of it.
**Maintain Great Body Language**

Stand-up comedians do not have access to PowerPoint presentations or graphics during their act. You need to develop a sense of stage presence as a stand-up comedian. You need to remember that the spotlight is on you. Your act on stage will always be watched & judged. Also, remember not to overdo body gestures. If you feel that you are nervous in a particular scene, make an effort to overcome it.
Knowing your audience

To be able to connect with your audience, you need to resonate with them at some level. Master the art of knowing your audience in this lesson.
Having an encouraging and engaging audience is one of the most critical aspects determining the success of your stand-up comedy. Here are a few things you need to keep in mind to get the most out of your audience and curate your jokes accordingly.

**Age Group**
You need to be aware of the age group of your audience. If your audience is in the early twenties, then, jokes concerning real estate will not go down well with them. They would relate to jokes on dating and Tinder more. If your audience is above the age of 40 or 50, then you can consider making jokes on marriage divorce, retirement problems and so on. If your audience has different age groups, then take out some time to reach every segment of that audience through your jokes.

**Gender**
Gender-specific jokes can help you attract the audience better than any other average joke. However, you must keep in mind that if such jokes are not appropriately executed, they can backfire as well. If your audience has an equal proportion of men and women, then you can take out time to joke about both genders. But in case the percentage of one sex is higher than the other, then, consider not victimizing the other gender by passing misogynist or sexist jokes. It may end up making people feel uncomfortable.
**Environment**
You need to take a look at the surrounding environment of your venue. You need to understand that your jokes must be relevant to the event. If you are addressing the MBA students, then the joke must be about them. If you are performing at a corporate event, then, consider making jokes on the HR department. If you are at a restaurant, then, do not throw questions at your audience.

**Background**
The best part about India is that you can quickly tell about the whereabouts of a person. You can use this knowledge to make jokes relatable to your audience and prepare yourself accordingly.

**Body language and demeanour**
You can determine the kind of audience by looking at the body language and behaviour. This information can be used to make your act successful. This, however, comes with the associated risk of stereotyping. Stereotypes can be helpful and funny but going overboard may offend the audience. You need to know where to draw the fine line between being ridiculous and being offensive.

**Staying Relevant but also Safe**
India is a land of varying cultures and sentiments. It is almost impossible to perform a set without getting a few people offended. This is especially true for events that are most likely to have affect an average person residing in a city or country. You need to be careful while putting out sensitive content in front of your audience as you stand the risk of hurting sentiments. The last thing you would want is to lose your life in this process.
In this lesson, you will learn the hacks that will help you become a great Stand-up comedian.
**Write daily**

You need to write daily without fail. People do not write as often as they should. Remember that you are a writer first and a comedian later. Try not to analyze or judge your work too much. It is tough to create jokes on paper initially. However, if you put in the habit of writing every single day then eventually you will get ideas for new, unique and original jokes.

**Study your jokes**

You need to be prepared for your performance on stage. It is essential to study your jokes regularly to make them sound funny. You should never turn up on stage unprepared. Studying your jokes will help you better your act and enable you to remain confident on stage.

**Present your jokes casually**

Even though you might have spent hours writing your jokes, researching and memorising them, it is crucial to present jokes casually through your act. The audience must be convinced that you are not trying to remember your jokes. The jokes should be offered seamlessly without any visible effort on your part. This skill takes years of practice, but eventually, you will become a master of it.
Use clean jokes

If you are a beginner, then you should start writing clean jokes. Jokes on sex and below the belt stuff are usually generic and funny. Comedy is all about finding humour in the most monotonous things around you. If you can create jokes on the most mundane of things, then you are on the way to become a great stand-up comedian.

Experiment

You need to keep experimenting with your jokes and tweak them time to time. You will soon realise that you have grown out of some jokes. You need to look for ways to improve your act and add new things to your comic inventory. Soon, you will be able to make those same jokes sound better than before. Get out of your comfort zone. Attend open mics to gain inspiration and make your act better.
Why open mics are the best teachers?

Both amateur and professional Stand-up comedians go to open mic to hone their skills as a comedian. In this lesson, you will learn the importance of open mics.
Stand-up Comedy is the only art form where the practice is the performance. Something that is funny on Twitter may not be funny in real life. Start practicing your jokes in front of a live audience.

**The advantage of a “small audience”**
One of the most considerable advantages of open mics is that the audience size is relatively small. If 50 people laugh at your joke, then, it is evident that an audience of the greater size will also laugh at the same joke. You can afford to make mistakes and take open mics as an opportunity to get more fluent and comfortable on stage.

**Inconveniences and their advantages**
Open mics are usually organized by small companies, bars and restaurants. You are more likely to run into technical glitches and other organizational issues. This can be used as an opportunity to equip yourself better when you get on stage in front of a large audience.

**Gauge Audience’s Reaction**
Performing at an open mic can help you gauge the audience’s reaction better. It can be used as a green signal to accomplish the same job in front of a large audience.
Determine Longevity of Jokes
Open mics let you understand the longevity of your joke. You will notice that a few jokes never die out. They are as evergreen as you can imagine it to be. You will also realize that a few jokes cannot be used beyond one or two shows. This knowledge can help you prepare better and perform well in front of a live audience.
Branding yourself

Building a brand can be tricky and exhausting. Learn how to carve your niche in the booming pool of the comedians today.
**Twitter**

Twitter is a great deal when it comes to stand-up comedy because it has a lie free audience. Since you are limited to just a few characters, you have the advantage of being creative. Brainstorm funny and catchy one-liners, look into the trends every day and try to create jokes on it. Almost all stand-up comedians have a Twitter account since their audience are not just limited to their friends on Facebook.

**Facebook Page**

Having a Facebook page is as important as having a Twitter account. But create a Facebook fan page of yours only after you have a sufficient number of followers on Twitter. You can use your fan page to highlight your upcoming events, share videos and much more. Unlike Twitter, you have the liberty to go out of the way to keep your audience engaged.

**Learn to Make Videos**

You need to learn how to make videos that are captivating and engaging to the social media audience. You need to be the jack of all trades when you are starting out. Most of the stand-up comedians in the country are either engineers or MBA graduates. None of them possesses the necessary skills to make videos. But, necessity is the mother of invention. Take help from your photographer friend or hire a videographer to create videos and showcase your work to the people.
**Remain consistent**

Consistency is the key to success. You cannot rely on one single viral video to change your fate as a stand-up comedian in the country. You need to create content and showcase it to the world consistently. Take your time with experimenting and ‘finding your voice’. Once you find your voice, branding and USP will develop automatically!
Is stand-up comedy a viable career option?

Just like any other career option that is viable, Stand-up Comedy has its ups and downs. In this last lesson, you will know the scope and earnings of an average standup comedian.
The scope of Stand-Up Comedy

An average standup comedian makes nothing for the first two years of his career. In fact, you will end up losing money driving to the venues and on food and drinks. If you are looking forward to making quick money, then, stand-up comedy is not the right place for you. If you are patient and hardworking, then, you can make money in this country through stand-up comedy. Interestingly, a stand-up comedian in India makes way more money than one does in the United States or UK. India has become the hub for stand-up comedy today. Since not many people are taking it up as a career option, there is a lot of space to grow as a comedian.

How much money can you make?

If you are doing a show at a bar for 50-100 people, then, you can make as little as Rs 1200-2000 or even as much as Rs 30,000-40,000. You can expect a pay of Rs 10,000 for 30 minutes set for a corporate event, housing 100 people from MNCs such as Google, Infosys or Microsoft. As you grow in experience, you can expect to get paid in lakhs for a set. It is not just about the money. You will get approached by brands if you have a large following on social media. Influencer marketing on Instagram can get you somewhere around Rs 10-100K per post. Some people are even paid to tweet, post on Facebook or Instagram and write for newspapers. In India, if a stand-up comedian has around 3-5 million views on YouTube, then he can make 8-10 lacs per year.
Conclusion

It is also very necessary for you to have a plan to fall back on. You should initially start off with doing it part-time. Only when you feel that you have got a significant foothold in the industry, should you consider pursuing it full-time. Tap the opportunity before the market becomes saturated. Stand-up comedy is definitely a viable career in the country and will only continue growing.
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