

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLER

Practical Advice on the Business

This pack has been developed to supply the needs of the many people who contact the Society for Storytelling and ask for advice on how to become a professional storyteller. It aims to provide information to people who are already storytellers and who are considering making their love of storytelling into their profession. It does not claim to contain everything you will need to know, but it will put you on the right track. It is a distillation of the experience of a number of storytellers.

In this pack we will be looking at:

- Beginning
- Publicity
- Contacts
- Insurance
- Accounts & Tax
- Business Bank Accounts
- Criminal Disclosures
- Arranging Fees & Payment
- Contracts
- Project Funding

How Do I Begin?

Most storytellers earn the majority of their money in schools but there are many other places to consider: Libraries; Museums; Country Parks; Hospitals and Hospices; Prisons; Community Groups; with very young in Nurseries; with the elderly in Care Homes. Storytellers with specialist training also work in the areas of Therapy or Business.

Consider your experience in and out of storytelling. List your strengths and weaknesses to help you decide the kind of storytelling work you would be most suited to.

Look at your budget. Income from storytelling can be very irregular, have you money to fall back on if bookings are slow to start? How much do you need to earn to pay the bills?

List all the stories in your repertoire and see if there is a pattern there that could be used in your publicity. Do you have a large enough repertoire or should you be learning more stories?

Do you know the stories in your repertoire back to front and inside out? Your first booking is likely to be quite a nervous occasion so it is not a time to try out new material. Use tales you have worked on for some time and are completely at ease with. In this way you are doing your best to ensure that you produce a good solid performance, which will satisfy both you and your client.

As you become more experienced and have enlarged your repertoire you will begin to craft your programmes more skilfully.

Having assured yourself that your repertoire is adequate, you are confident about telling the stories therein, decided on your strengths and the kind of people you wish to promote yourself to, it is time to prepare your publicity.

Research the client group you wish to work for.

For example if you want to work in schools look through the National Curriculum and pick out the sections where storytelling relates to it. In 2004 oral work, speaking and listening skills, are a high priority, use this to your advantage. For up to date information on the National Curriculum consult: www.nc.uk.net

Incorporate this information when writing your publicity.

PUBLICITY

How do I get myself known locally?

In order to get bookings you will need to send out large numbers of publicity fliers or leaflets. These will need to be carefully thought out with regards to both design and content.

You can produce publicity in more than one format, especially if you are planning in working for more than one kind of client. Spend time getting it right! The best publicity materials are those that are eye-catching and not over heavy on words. A memorable image and title/quote/tagline also go a long way.

Leaflets:

A4 quality paper or thin card can be folded in several ways to produce an interesting and inviting leaflet.

The most common format is 'three fold' or 'trptych' This gives you room for an attractive cover, information about the value of your storytelling service to your chosen client group, information about yourself and your storytelling experience, perhaps even a section they can send back to you for more information. But you could also fold it in half to form 4xA5 pages on which to publicise yourself.

Write down what information you want to put in your leaflet. Remember less is good, the best at this stage people want to get a rough idea of what you do they are unlikely to read something which contains a large amount of small text.

Once you have your text try writing it on your chosen leaflet format. Show where you could include illustrations, your logo if you want one or a photograph of yourself. If you have a computer you could try typing it up to see what it would look like, this gives you the opportunity to play with different fonts and formats.

Show the results to friends you trust to give constructive criticism. If they are also from your target client group that is a bonus as they can tell you what they might be looking for in a storyteller. But ensure you can deliver what your leaflet promises.

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Posters:

You might consider having A3 size posters produced, these could simply have your photo or graphic design and contact details on or have room for other information. Posters are particularly important if you are promoting your own events, but also useful for use by your client group.

Business Cards:

These are easier to carry in your wallet and less pushy to hand on to anyone who shows an interest in your work. There are firms, such as Vistaprint on the internet offering cheap business cards, or even free ones if you have a line publicising their services on the back. Alternatively you can buy software and produce your own relatively cheaply.

Follow-up material:

This is where you can go to town with detail. Cite past work and commissions. Use the nice things people have written about your work after events. Give details of the programmes and/or workshops you provide. Keep it up to date; most clients want to know what you did last year.

Production:

You may have the skills and the computer to design your own material. If so then use the best quality paper and graphics/photographic images you have. If your publicity does not look and feel reasonably professional it will go straight in the bin when it arrives with your prospective client.

If you wish to have others produce your material and give advice on the best format/layout then look around your local print shops and get quotes. You will need to be absolutely clear in your own mind what you want, how you want the finished publicity to look. Consider quality as well as price, ask to see examples of similar print jobs they have done.

Website:

If you have a computer with internet access many companies who provide Email services also provide free web pages in the package. You can produce a relatively simple website yourself. Look in your local library for books to help you; the childrens' section has the simplest guides. If you are lucky enough to have family or friends with relevant knowledge ask for their help.

PROMOTION

Now you have your publicity you need to ensure that the right people see it. If you do not tell people you are there they will not book you. When you are starting up as a storyteller it can be very daunting, but the more people you personally contact the better chance you have of getting those all important bookings.

Mailing information:

Ensure you send it to the right person.

For example if you are looking to work in schools you will get a better response if you send it to the 'Literacy Coordinator' rather than to the Head Teacher, who is probably bogged down with too much paperwork already and will not have time to give your material the attention it deserves.

You might consider phoning the organisation you are planning to send your publicity to. Ask the person dealing with incoming calls who you should contact, a name as well as a job title increases the likelihood your information will get looked at.

Do not overlook the usefulness of a short introductory letter, this can be sent with a publicity leaflet every time you try to make a new contact.

Remember that staff move on. This can be a disadvantage if you have built up a relationship with someone in an organisation, though they may introduce you to their new place of work. It can however work to your advantage, as a new person may be more open to new ideas. If you don't get a positive response on your first contact try again in a year or two's time.

Find out if your Arts Region keeps an 'Artists Database' this may be linked to work in schools.

Contacts

Arts Officers:

Find out the name and address of your County/City Literature, or Arts Officer. This person could help you in all sorts of ways. They may introduce you to all sorts of other useful contacts, get you bookings for areas which are within their remit, find you funding for projects you wish to undertake and distribute publicity for you.

Local Radio:

National Storytelling Week gives you a good excuse to contact local radio stations. They may publicise what you are doing in their 'What's On' slot and may ask you to go to the radio station to be interviewed. A few storytellers are now appearing regularly on radio stations with a slot of their own.

Local Authority venues:

Make contact with events organisers in Libraries, Country Parks, Community Centres. You might suggest a theme for an event: spooky tales for Halloween, a Ghost walk, Soup and Story evenings,

Schools:

If you are looking to work in schools, try to get to know your LEA School Advisor/s for English. Convince them that you are worth booking and they will tell schools. They may even book you themselves for courses they are running for teachers.

Check if your local/county council will distribute your publicity to all LEA schools for a set fee. If they will this can save you money and the effort of addressing hundreds of envelopes.

Negotiate with the management of Teachers and Curriculum Centres to have your publicity materials available in their centre. Most are happy to display a poster and /or leaflets for no charge. This will put your publicity in the way of as many as 200 teachers a day, but you must remember to return regularly to replenish stocks of leaflets and check if your poster is looking fresh.

BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

What does being self employed involve?

Insurance:

Many places will not even consider booking you if you do not have Public Liability Insurance. It is worth shopping around to see what is available.

The Arts Council set up a scheme which is now administered by Blake Insurance Services, 46 North Street, Bridgewater, TA6 3PN Tel:01278 453 345 Email: enquiries@blakeis.freeserve.co.uk

Some people have recommended Co-operative Insurance Society Ltd. They have branches in most areas.

Equity, the entertainment union is another option. Membership of Equity automatically gives you adequate insurance, as well as other benefits. The cost of membership varies depending on your earnings. More information is available on their website: www.equity.org.uk or contact them at Guild House, Upper St. Martins Lane, London, WC2H 9EG Tel:020 7379 6000

Registering as Self Employed, Accounts and Tax:

You have three months between setting up “a business” and informing the tax office and self-employment agency. Get things up and running before taking this step.

National Insurance contributions as a self-employed person are about £2 a week.

As a self-employed person you will have to fill in an annual tax return. Doing them on line is relatively painless and their programme automatically calculates how much tax you owe.

Make sure you keep accurate records of income and expenditure throughout the year.

Income: Record income with dates and venues/employers. Keep payments you receive for travel separate from payments for performances, travel expenses are not taxable. Where you are not paid for travel, parking fees etc. record the mileage or amount as business expenses.

Expenditure: As well as recording travel expenses keep receipts for anything you purchase in connection with your business, however small. It might be envelopes, paper and stamps, printing, cushions for children to sit on, books, a computer.

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File all the information and receipts relating to your income and expenditure with a copy of your tax return.

If you are not good at keeping meticulous records get an accountant. You could find that he or she will save you more on your tax bill than you are paying them and so they pay for themselves. This frees up your time to be creative.

If you decide to be a part time storyteller and keep a part time job to ensure you have a minimal regular income you will need to fill in both the employment and self employment pages on your tax return.

In many places you will find a local business enterprise trust who can give help and advice on these and many other matters relating to starting up your own business.

Bank Accounts:

It is advisable to set up a separate account for your storytelling activities.

Shop around to find a bank that offers the best service for your situation. Some banks operate a charge for business accounts and some offer free banking while you stay in credit. Unless you have a large turnover of money you are best sticking to a fee free account. You may decide to open a second personal account to be used solely for your storytelling earnings.

Whichever you decide a separate account for storytelling earnings will assist you in calculating loss and profit and your tax liability over the year. It also enables you, together with your bookkeeping, to keep an accurate track of income and expenses at a glance. Trying to extract storytelling business earnings from other income and outgoings is unnecessarily time consuming.

Criminal Disclosures/Police Checks:

This has become a very important issue to all bodies who work with children and to education bodies in particular. Without a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau clearance you may not be able to work in schools or with children at all. You can get information on how to apply at: www.disclosure.gov.uk or contact them at P O Box 110 Liverpool, L3 677
phone: Information: 0870 9090 811
Registration Application: 0870 9090 822

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Fees and Payments:

Each teller sets their own fees but it is important that you value yourself appropriately. Even when you are just beginning you should not be tempted to charge a much lower fee than other storytellers. By undercutting others you are lowering the value of storytelling in the eyes of employers.

When setting your fee take into account not only the amount of time you will be telling but also the amount of preparation time you will need. If you are required to learn a new set of stories for a particular event you should charge more than if you are able to use stories already in your repertoire. Equally running a workshop is more work than straight storytelling.

When schools ask the Society for Storytelling how much storytellers charge they are advised to expect to pay about the same as they would for a supply teacher, more for someone well known. Supply teachers rates differ, depending on what part of the country you are in. Find out the local rate near you and use this as a base line for setting your fees to schools. Other organisations have different rates of pay, whatever environment you are asked to work in find out the kind of rates they pay other service providers. Look at the rates charged for author visits and you will see storytellers are very good value for money.

Sometimes you will be asked to tell for an organisation that cannot pay what you would normally charge, for example a charity event where everything is run on a very tight budget. If you want the work tell them your normal fee but assure them that you are willing to negotiate a lower fee, as they are a good cause. Ask if they can do something for you in return? Publicity in the form of a review of your performance in the local press or recommending you to better-funded organisations.

Telling for free:

If someone asks you to do an event for free you need to think long and hard about what's in it for you. There are a number of reasons why you might do an event for free. To showcase your skills to potential employers, to gain experience in an area you want to expand into, to get free entry to somewhere you have always wanted to go to, or for your own satisfaction because you passionately support the cause you are being asked to work for.

Whatever fees you agree; ensure that it is clear whether or not this includes your travelling expenses. If you are going to add travel expenses try to estimate how much they will be and agree the amount in advance. It is very embarrassing to ask someone for 35p a mile for a 50 mile round trip when they were expecting to give you £5 towards your petrol.

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Payment:

Most storytellers live on a tight budget so it is important that we get paid promptly, usually on the day of the performance. Send an invoice with your confirmation letter with a note asking for payment to be ready on the day.

Some organisations pay all their bills at the end of the month. If you happen to be booked late in the month this may mean you have to wait up to 8 weeks for your payment. Ensure you know if this is likely to happen and be prepared to send a reminder if necessary.

Contracts:

It is always a good idea to have a contract between whoever books you and yourself. The form the contract should take is a matter for each individual teller. (There is a discussion of this topic on Tim Sheppard's storytelling website www.timsheppard.co.uk)

It is normal to send two contracts, one should be signed and returned to you for your records, the other is kept by whoever books you.

The contract should contain:

Where you are working; What times you are working; What your fee will be; Any expenses such as travel; Any other requirements.

You might want to include terms for cancellation.

A sample contract is set out on the next page.

CONTRACT

THANK YOU FOR BOOKING ME FOR YOUR EVENT

Please read carefully. This constitutes a written contract confirming our verbal contract dated: You should be aware that a verbal contract is binding in law and that should you break it you may be liable for the full fee negotiated. Should you need to cancel or rearrange this booking please telephone me as I may be able to make other arrangements. **Payment should be made on the day of the performance by cheque made out to:**

Or within 28 days. If payment is delayed for more than 28 days I am entitled to claim interest of 8% above the base rate for the inconvenience caused.

Please keep one copy of this contract for your records and return the second copy, signed and dated, to me as soon as possible at:

Storytelling at:

Date:

Fee:

Travel @30p a mile:

Arrival Time:

Venue:

Performance/Session Times:

Estimated Audience size:

Estimated Age groups:

Should any of the above change for whatever reason please contact me prior to my visit.

Cancellation – Should you cancel and I am unable to fill the date with another booking the following fees will apply:

2-3 calendar months before performance date 25% of fee will be charged

1-2 calendar months before performance date 50% of fee will be charged

Less than 1 calendar month before performance 100% of fee will be charged

Should I have to cancel for any reason I will do my best to find you a replacement storyteller for the day. If I am unable to find a replacement I will arrange a mutually acceptable alternative date at 5% less than the fee agreed in this contract.

I agree to this contract

Employers signature:

Date:

Storytellers signature:

Date:

Verbal contract:

Contract posted:

Contract confirmed:

Reference No.

PROJECT FUNDING

Preparation:

Many bodies will only fund organisations and not individuals. You may need to work with other storytellers in order to secure the funding you need for your project.

Funders like to see you working in partnership with other bodies. The partnership might include matched funding but you can also include contributions 'in kind' such as technical advice, administration, information distribution, provision of venues for meetings.

Find out what criteria are being used by the funders and tailor your bid to match the criteria. This means using the language of the funding body to justify your bid. Time taken here will greatly increase your chance of getting funding.

Make sure your project is viable. Spend time going over every point and possible problem you might encounter and find solutions. The funder will look for any weak points as well as the virtues of your project.

Produce a full estimated costing of the project, including tellers fees, travel expenses, publicity, printing, postage, hall hire, insurance and every other possible expense you might incur.

Be realistic. If in doubt it is better to over estimate the cost of each item by a little than underestimate. There are always unforeseen events and expenses.

Include 'in kind' expenses/costs such as rehearsal days and time spent on administration of the project for which you are not seeking remuneration.

Funders like to see that you are committed.

Be prepared to fill in the forms. Set everything out on rough paper under the headings on the form before filling in the form.

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Where to look for funding:

Local authorities, County and Municipal councils can be approached. Discuss your ideas with Arts Development, Creative Arts and Literature Development Officers. Even if they can't get you Council funding they may be able to advise you on other possible funders

Local Education Authorities may produce funding if you can convince them that your project will enhance the curriculum or raise standards. Make sure you are familiar with the National Curriculum for the age group with which you wish to work.

There are many lottery-funded agencies, which can be approached:

Awards for All – grants between £500 & £5,000

Tel: 0845 600 2040 www.awardsforall.org.uk

Arts Council of England

Tel: 020 7312 0123 www.artscouncil.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund

Tel: 020 7591 6000 www.hlf.org.uk

New Opportunities Fund

Tel: 020 7211 1800 www.nof.org.uk

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