

Wedding Timelines

Unit

4

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Introduction

Timelines allow wedding consultants, vendors, and their clients to stay organized, on-track, and realistic. While each couple's timeline is unique to their wedding, there are certain commonalities to all weddings that will help you in assisting your clients set priorities as they plan and prepare.

The average length of engagements has stretched out over time, and now couples typically have 17 months to prepare for their weddings. However, 17 months is an average, which means that some couples will take longer to plan while others will move more quickly. Accordingly, there is not one certain time period from which to operate. Thus, it is appropriate to think about wedding timelines in terms of phases.

The seven phases of wedding timelines are:

- (1) Research;
- (2) Design;
- (3) Coordination;
- (4) Legal issues;
- (5) Confirmation and details;
- (6) Implementation; and
- (7) Wrap-up and evaluation.

As illustrated in Table 5.1, you will often find that some of the phases overlap. As a consultant, you may offer your clients guidance throughout the whole process, or you can be brought in to assist during a single phase. Use the items in each of these phases as a checklist and reminder of what needs to be done next. As each task is accomplished, indicate the associated date. Over time, you will notice consistencies in the region where you live that will help you streamline the planning process and adjust the order of the task list to fit your target market. This list will also act as a guide when considering the questions you need to ask your clients.

1. Research

The first phase involves research, which starts shortly after a couple becomes engaged. One of the first things a couple needs to do is estimate the number of guests to be invited, for this will influence many other decisions, in particular, the location of the ceremony and reception. For example, historic venues create a magnificent backdrop for a wedding and reception but are often limited in their capacity.

Location assessment will in turn influence the wedding date options, as popular venues are often booked a year or more in advance. A venue may take precedence over an ideal date,

and more couples are opting to get married on Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays in order to get their desired sites.

The research phase is also the time to start a list of the types of vendors to be included in the wedding planning process. A list of the vendors commonly involved in weddings is provided in Table 5.2. A vendor is any individual or entity that is receiving payment for goods or services that pertain to implementation of the wedding. The order of vendors is based on a typical booking necessity. This does not mean that the top vendors are the most important; rather, it shows that some vendors, such as photographers, can only be present at one wedding per day, while vendors such as pastry chefs can handle multiple weddings on any given day. Based on the estimated budget, which should be determined at this time, a realistic feasibility analysis can occur by having columns of “must haves” versus “include if budget permits” where, for example, a couple who loves music may state that having a string quartet is essential but will cut out the limousine if the budget gets tight.

2. Design

The second phase of wedding planning timelines is wedding design. Discussion of design options will frequently take place during the research phase, so considerable overlap between these two stages is common. The initial design consideration is developing the theme and vision for the wedding. Also during the onset of the design phase, clients need to inspect possible ceremony and reception venues and book their choices, which will occur simultaneously with determining the wedding date. Some couples give the date precedence over the venue and will only consider venues available on their chosen date, while others feel the venue is more important than the date.

Chances are that your clients may only have one or two vendors in mind that they must have; you have been hired to help them with the rest. Thus, during the design phase you will present your clients with a list of two to four vendors in each vendor category. Part of your job is to know your area and a variety of vendors in each category so that you can match your client to the most suitable vendors and make the contacts that will get the wedding planned. Consultants will typically offer options in the low, medium, and high-price range for each area, which will allow couples to decide where and how they want to target their budgets. During this phase, the list of guests to be invited should be finalized. In addition, the couple should determine who will be in the wedding party and start considering the desired formalwear that will work with their theme and vision.

Phase	Task	Start Date
Research	- Estimate number of guests to be invited - Assess potential location for ceremony, reception, and honeymoon or - Identify wedding date options - Identify potential vendor possible - Determinate budget - Conduct feasibility analysis	12–24 months before or As soon as possible
Design	- Develop theme and vision - Conduct site inspections - Select date and book venues - Contact and visit potential vendors - Determine wedding party members - Finalize list of guests to be invited - Consider desired styles of formalwear for couple and attendants	10–18 months before
Coordination	- select and book vendors sign contracts and make payments as needed - Select formalwear for couple and attendants - Select and book honeymoon destination - Mail save-the-date cards - Develop draft of production schedule - Develop draft layout of ceremony and reception sites - Prepare the gift registry - Reserve block of hotel rooms for out of town guests and wedding night location - Take engagement photos - Mail invitations	6-12 months before 4-8 months before 2-6 months before
Legal Issues	- Review contract legalities for final payments and accountability (Marrying out of country) - If marrying out of resident country, determine documentation requirements (can take a year or longer) - Obtain passports, if applicable - Complete blood tests, if required - Apply for and obtain marriage license - Obtain name-change forms	1-3 months before (longer if marrying out of resident country)
Confirmation and Dates	- Finalize production schedule - Finalize layout of ceremony and reception sites - Finalize seating assignments, create escort cards and place cards - Finalize confirmed guest list - Determine security plan - Confirm with vendors - Prepare gifts, favors, and on-site stationery elements - Update gift registry - Finalize hotel block and wedding night location - Confirm honeymoon details - Send newspaper announcement	1-6 weeks before
Implementation	See Table 8.3 for sample production schedule	1-3 days period, some times longer

Common Wedding Vendors in Timeline Order

Wedding consultant
Ceremony and reception venues
Celebrant
Caterer
Photography
Videography
Musician/Disc jockey
Wedding attire
Florist
Honeymoon site
Dentist
Web site designer
Transportation
Rentals
Invitations
Pastry chef
Jeweler
Lighting
Hair stylist
Makeup artist
Dance instructor
Special effects (e.g., butterfly release)
Ice sculptor
Chocolate fountain
Favors and other gifts
Clerk of court's office
Local newspaper

3. Coordination

Now that all of the background research has been completed and the design elements have been chosen, the third phase, coordination, will move into full swing. As a consultant, you will help your clients make final vendor selections and walk them through the associated contracts and down payments. Formalwear for the couple and the attendants will be selected. The honeymoon destination should be selected and booked, and save-the-date cards should be mailed, in particular if the couple has decided on a destination wedding or if the wedding date is over a holiday weekend such as Memorial Day or Labor Day. This is also the time for you to initiate the first draft of the production schedule, which includes everything that will take place during the implementation of the wedding. Simultaneously, you should prepare a draft site layout of the ceremony and reception.

During the latter part of the coordination phase, the couple should prepare their gift registry, reserve a block of hotel rooms for out-of-town guests, and have engagement photos taken. Many top photographers choose two weekends out of the year when they take all of their clients' engagement photos. Be certain to check with the selected

photographer about these dates and then inform your clients so they can have engagement photos taken if desired.

4. Legal issues

Once the coordination is well under way, the fourth phase, legal issues, must be considered. The legal issues become more involved if the wedding is to be held outside the resident country of the couple. As the specifics vary from country to country, it is recommended that the embassy or tourist information bureau of the country where the marriage will be performed be contacted.

Blood tests and documentation such as passports and birth certificates are frequently required and may have to be authenticated. The Department of State emphasizes that the process can be time consuming, so it is essential to start early if a couple wishes to marry abroad. Locations that specialize in destination weddings are able to expedite the documentation process. Even when marrying in one's country of residence, blood tests may be required. In the United States, blood test requirements are determined at the state level and for the most part have been eliminated.

Many of the state blood test laws were initiated in the 1930s before the advent of penicillin and other antibiotics, to check for syphilis and other venereal diseases that could be transmitted through sexual contact as well as other diseases that could be passed on during pregnancy. As for the marriage license itself, you need to inform your clients about the rules of their state in terms of waiting period and expiration.

To apply for a marriage license, some form of identification is necessary for proof of age, such as a valid driver's license, birth certificate, passport, or military identification. Social security numbers and place of residence for both parties will be requested. State residency is not required, but the license must be purchased and filed in the county where the ceremony is taking place. If either individual was previously married, proof of divorce may be required. Both parties must be present at the time of application, and it may be necessary to have a witness. The cost of the marriage license typically ranges between £30 and £100. As the regulations vary considerably, you should be familiar with the process in the counties where the majority of your clients reside.

Finally, if one or both parties, most typically the bride, opts for a name change upon getting married, forms can be obtained in advance that will apply to documents such as the driver's license, social security card, health insurance card, workplace identification card, and credit cards. While the forms should not be submitted until after the wedding date, as a copy of the marriage license may be required, it will save valuable time in the long run to obtain these forms in advance. When applying for the marriage license, the bride must know the name she intends to use once she is married.

5. Confirmation and details

The fifth phase of the wedding planning process involves confirmation and working out the final details. At this point the production schedule and site layout should be completed, and the guest list should be confirmed. . A security plan should be in place, which may be as straightforward as determining who will be responsible for transporting the gifts but may include a complete security staff if the wedding is high profile.

At this point, it is essential that a final confirmation occur with each vendor. Many consultants prepare partial production schedules or timelines for each vendor. The vendors do not need the entire production schedule but can benefit from the specifics that pertain to their individual roles. The more detailed or particular the needs of the couple, the more important it becomes to provide the vendors with targeted production schedules. For example, if the couple wants their chocolate fountain to come out with no announcement or if there is to be no father-daughter dance, the DJ should be given specific instructions on an individualized timeline so announcement errors that would be disappointing to the couple will not be made.

Other details that should be attended to at this point include: the final preparation of favors and on-site stationery elements such as seating assignments and escort cards. The couple should also be advised to consult their registry to determine if it needs to be updated. The hotel block should be confirmed, as should the honeymoon details. Finally, if the couple wishes to have their wedding details published in their local newspaper in a timely fashion, the announcement generally needs to be submitted a minimum of 10 days prior to publication.

6. Implementation

Wedding implementation occurs smoothly if the planner has a comprehensive production schedule. Also known as a build-out schedule, the production schedule is a timeline that offers a detailed plan of the specific tasks that pertain to the actual implementation of an event (Goldblatt, 2005). For wedding events, this schedule generally includes the rehearsal, day-of, and day-after the wedding. The production schedule is your primary tool that ensures the wedding implementation will go smoothly. The first page of the production schedule includes day-of contact information for all key parties involved in the process. Following the contact sheet is a detailed agenda that includes each task, start time, the point-of-contact for the task, and any details or notes. A full production schedule sample is given in table below. Keep in mind that the day-of activities can vary significantly by culture.

7. Wrap-up and evaluation

After the implementation of the wedding, the consultant's contact with the couple will generally continue for a short time so that wrap-up and evaluation can take place. As a consultant, you should solicit feedback from the couple. Furthermore, if any of the vendors are new to you, it would be helpful to request commentary and suggestions from them as well. This information should be compiled so that a final summary of the wedding can be filed for future reference. Ad hoc services may also continue after the end of the wedding. For example, some couples have luncheons the day after their weddings, which gives them

an opportunity to unwind with their families and out-of-town guests and often acts as a forum to open wedding gifts.

As a consultant, you may be called upon to coordinate such events and tie up other loose ends such as the preparation of thank-you notes. Therefore, your timeline should take into account all services from start to finish.

Sample Wedding Reception Timeline

5pm: Cocktail Hour

After the wedding ceremony, the newlyweds will leave first followed by the bridal party and photographer. Most people use this time to take formal photographs. The guests will start arriving at the reception for cocktails and the cocktail hour should begin as soon as the first guests arrive.

6pm: Newlywed's Arrival

This is your grand entrance where you will arrive officially as husband and wife. The event coordinator will make sure the guests are seated before the emcee announces the arrival. Generally, the bridal party and both sets of parents are introduced first, followed by the entrance of the newlyweds.

6:10pm: First Dance

Since the spotlight is on the couple, this is the perfect time for the couple to step onto the dance floor and begin the first dance. Alternatively, the couple could also have the first dance after the first course is served or after the cake cutting.

6:20pm: Welcome and Blessing

Typically, the father of the bride welcomes everyone to the wedding reception and says table blessings.

6:30pm: Food service begins

The bride and groom and their parents are served first, this will allow them enough time to make table visits after their meals. The band will play light, conversation-friendly music to allow guests to socialize while they wait to be served.

7:00pm: Cheers & Toasts

The best man and maid of honour make their toasts at this time.

7:15pm: Father/Daughter, Mother/Son Dance

The groom and bride should have finished eating by now.

7:45pm: Dance floor open

The dance floor is open and now the party begins.

8:30pm: Bouquet Toss / Garter Toss

Any extra activities planned such as bouquet/garter toss and centre piece giveaways can be done now.

9:00: Cake cutting

Cake served with coffee or tea

9:45pm: Last Dance**10:00: Final Farewell**