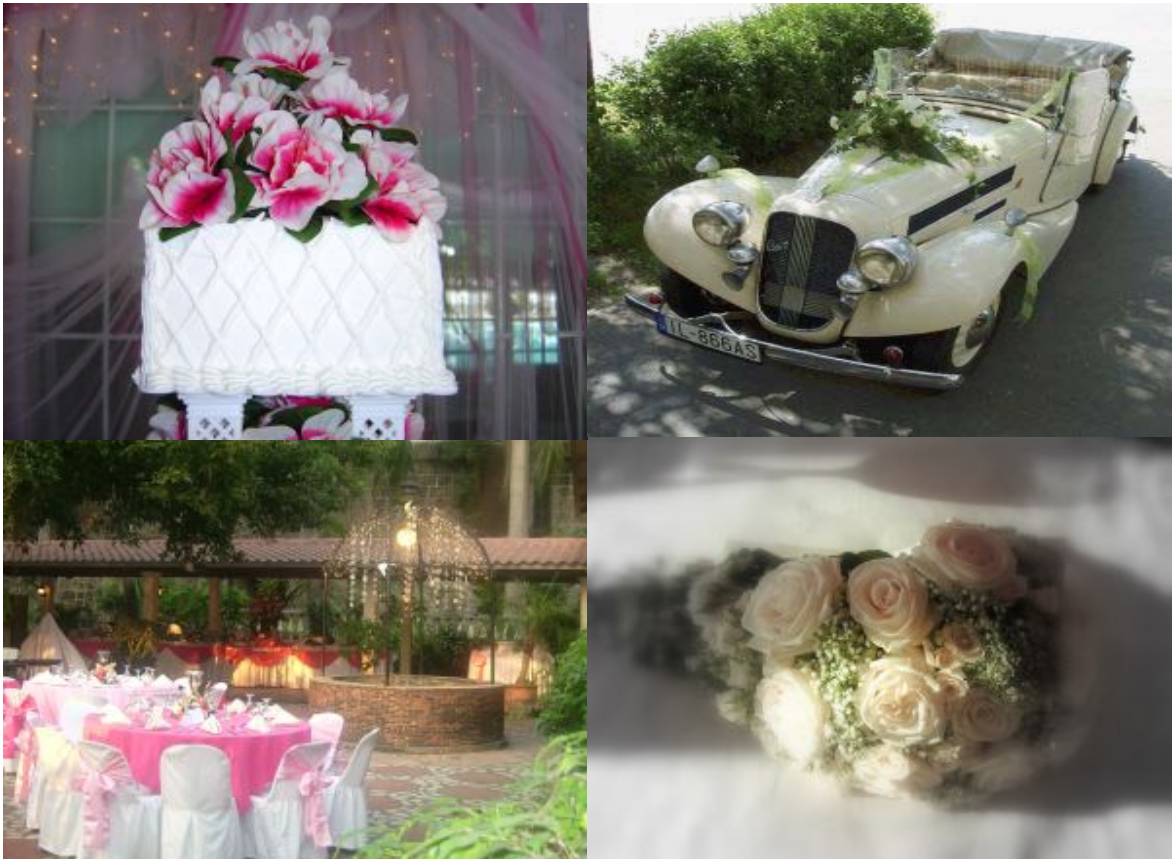


How to Set Up a Successful Wedding Planning Business

By Carolyn Henderson



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Foreword

Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of wedding planning! This career choice is full of limitless opportunities, excitement and incredible fun. Every day your job responsibilities will change, allowing you to take advantage of a dynamic, constantly evolving career path.

If you're the kind of person who loves throwing parties, the epitome of organization and who thrills at the thought of a challenge, wedding planning will bring you immeasurable pleasure; allowing you to tap into your natural skill and flair for organization.

Your decision to become a wedding planner will allow you to begin a career that is both rewarding and lucrative.

Let's get started!

How to Use this Manual

This manual is divided into several sections that will allow you to learn about the business of wedding planning, how to become a wedding planner and progress to how you can set up your own business and finally how you can promote and grow your business.

This manual is designed with an interactive table of contents that will allow you to comfortably move around throughout the text.

Part One: Wedding Planning 101



In the last several years the weddings industry has witnessed a tremendous growth increase. Spending for weddings worldwide is estimated at \$72 billion per year. Beyond the clear ramifications of this widespread growth, it is also important to note the wide diversity of the weddings industry. There are numerous avenues which an individual may take upon first entering this industry; all clearly leading to lucrative business opportunities.

Although wedding planning has become particularly popular for new entrepreneurs in the last few years, the profit margin in this industry has not dimmed in the least. Quite the contrary, in fact. As the industry has continued to grow, so have profits. Today the average profit margin for wedding planners is 15%. Considering that the average price of most weddings today is \$20,000 (which has increased significantly in the last decade) it quickly becomes clear exactly how much money can be made in this very lucrative industry.

Welcome to the World of Wedding Planning

The wedding industry has grown so much in the last few years that today wedding planners have plenty of opportunities to specialize in the types of weddings they enjoy and feel the most comfortable planning. Whether that is themed weddings, destination weddings or over the top elegant weddings, there are numerous ways in which the budding entrepreneur can cover the whole gamut or diversify.

What is a Wedding Planner?

The duties of a wedding planner tend to vary from one planner to the next and even from one event to the next. Much of the scope of your duties can depend on whether you are full-service or not. For example, some wedding planners simply work the day of the event to make sure that everything runs smoothly and is coordinated so that the bride and groom can enjoy themselves. In this case, much of the work is done by the bride herself. Other wedding planners work the event from day one, perhaps even before the engagement is announced, handling almost every detail of the special occasion. These planners work with the families on the budget for the wedding, assist with flowers and decorations as well as invitations and catering – everything that is needed to ensure a beautiful and memorable wedding.

Wedding planners may also assist with the bridal showers, engagement parties and bachelor and bachelorette parties in addition to the rehearsal dinner. These planners have a hand in planning anything that is associated with the wedding.

All in all, the duties of a wedding planner can be quite widespread. As previously mentioned, the scope of those duties can vary from one client to the next; depending on the budget and desires of the clients. Just a few of the typical responsibilities of a wedding planner include:

- Conducting research related to the specified wedding
- Coming up with a design for the wedding
- Locating a site
- Making arrangements for décor, entertainment and food
- Arranging for transportation for the wedding
- Sending out invitations for the wedding
- Making accommodation arrangements
- Coordinating duties for wedding personnel
- Supervising on site

Regardless of which types of duties you choose to specialize in or whether you opt to offer a full-service wedding planning service, there is no doubt that there are plenty of opportunities available. The wedding planning industry has literally exploded in popularity in the last few years and that is for one reason. The estimated 2.3 million couples that get married in the U.S. alone each year are typically older and more settled in their careers. They lack the time needed to handle all of the details related to planning their dream

wedding. As professionals; however, they tend to have the budget needed to hire a wedding planner in order to assure their wedding will receive the magical touch it deserves.

Most wedding planners have one thing in common – they started out planning special weddings in their own lives and in the lives of friends and family. In some cases they may have worked for a wedding planning company before launching their own business; however, this is definitely not a requirement. It can be a good way to gain experience and exposure if you are new to the industry but it certainly does not preclude you from starting your own business if you have the drive and ambition to do so.

Some wedding planners make the decision to obtain a degree or a certificate in either management or wedding planning. Once again, this is not a requirement; however, it could help you to gain experience and credentials in your business endeavor.

How Lucrative is this Industry?

The wedding industry is growing by leaps and bounds. Since 2002, wedding expenses have increased by 20%

According to the Conde Nast Bridal Group, publishers of *Modern Bride*, *Brides* and *Elegant Bride*, the average amount spent on a wedding today is \$27,852. That is an increase of nearly 100% since 1990. In addition, the number of weddings has also increased since that time by more than 200,000 per year.

Today's weddings are even more personal and detailed than they once were. Modern couples are looking for special touches such as monogrammed gifts for their guests and other special touches that will make their wedding unique and memorable. More and more couples are moving away from the standard, traditional weddings and instead choosing weddings that will set them apart from their peers. Wedding planners are making it possible to achieve all of these little details to make weddings truly a dream come true for these couples.

Most full-time wedding planners gross between \$35,000 and \$55,000 per year for their services.

****Earnings Disclaimer** – Any earnings or income statements (or examples) are just an estimate of what we think you can earn. There is no assurance or guarantee you'll do as well as is stipulated above, as we do not know your background, your motivation, skills and experience.

What's the Size of this Opportunity?

The opportunity to begin an exciting career as a wedding planner is certainly large and seems to be expanding every day. Although the number of wedding planners has grown in the last few years in response to the increase of professionally planned weddings, the rapid growth of weddings indicates continued growth in the professional wedding planning industry in the future.

According to the Conde Nast Bridal Group, there are 2.3 million weddings planned each year. That is more than 44,000 weddings every weekend attended by 380 million wedding guests over the course of a year.

What Experience, Skills and Qualities do you Need to Succeed?

Developing a successful career as a wedding planner requires an immense amount of attention to detail and organizational ability. In addition, you will need to be able to stay calm under pressure and remain adaptable as changing circumstances require.

Today, weddings are growing more and more and they are becoming more of an event and experience than they once were. Weddings are no longer about just a few minutes in one day, but rather are expanding to encompass several days together. Weekend weddings are growing more and more popular as a result. Couples today are more interested in making their wedding an experience for their friends and families and are willing to spend the time necessary to ensure that outcome. As a result, wedding planners must be able to not only efficiently plan the wedding but all of the events that go along with the wedding as well. This means not just the ceremony and reception but all pre and post events as well. Successful wedding planners must be able to plan for all the details associated with these varied events and be able to staff these events.

One of the most important qualities many couples look for in a prospective wedding planner is the ability to trust them to plan the most important day of their lives. This means that you must always do what you say you're going to do.

Being detail-oriented is also tremendously important in the wedding planning industry. You must be able to think of all the little details that the couple might not think of on their own and how those details will be worked out and orchestrated.

Education and Experience Requirements



One of the most appealing qualities of becoming a wedding planner for many people is the fact that there are no specific education requirements for entry in the field. This means that while you can certainly obtain a degree in hospitality or even attend a special training program to become a certified wedding planner, it is not absolutely necessary to do so in order to get started.

That said; however, it should be understood that investing in educating yourself about the wedding planning industry can prove to be a wise move.

There are a number of educational programs that can help you to increase your knowledge about, and confidence in, wedding planning. Consider the following resources:

Cornell University

School of Hotel Administration

- Located in Ithaca, New York. Offers both Bachelor and Master's degree programs. Course offerings include both Wedding Management and Catering.

George Washington University

- Based in Washington D.C., offering a Wedding Management Certificate Program with courses such as Best Practices in Wedding Management, Wedding Marketing, Risk Management, Meetings and Conferences, Catering, Growing and Managing the Wedding Business. Master's Concentration in Wedding Management available.

Roosevelt University

- Based in Chicago, Illinois. Offers two bachelor degrees with majors in Hospitality Management and Tourism with an emphasis in Meeting Planning. A certificate program in Meeting Management that consists of five undergraduate courses: Introduction to Meeting Planning, Convention and Exposition Management, Applications & Techniques of Meeting and Conference Management, Issues and Trends in Meeting and Conference Management, Special Weddings and Exposition Management. A graduate seminar in Meeting and Conference Management is also available.

University of Nevada

- Based in Las Vegas. Undergraduate course offerings include Intro to the Convention Industry; Meeting Planning; Convention Sales & Service; Trade Show Operations; Exposition Service Contracting; Special Weddings Management; Exhibit Marketing & Management; Association Management; Catering Operations & Sales; Destination Marketing; Convention Facility Management; Sport & Concert Arena Management; Destination Management; Festival & Weddings Incentive Travel; International Exposition Management; Internship.

Austin Community College

- Based in Austin, Texas. Meeting and Wedding planning Certificate and Associates Degree in Hospitality Management with a specialization in Meeting and Wedding planning, Programs of Meeting & Wedding planning, Department of Hospitality Management.

Professional Certification Programs

Becoming a professional certified wedding planner can help to add legitimacy to your business and draw in more customers.

Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants

www.acpwc.com

- ACPWC offers a 5-day personalized training course, a 3-day extended weekend class, seminars and a home study program for Wedding Planners/Wedding Consultants and Church and Facility Coordinators.

Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP)

www.ises.com

- Earned through study module, exam and work experience.

Additional Reading Resources

- Behind the Scenes at Special Events: Flowers, Props and Design **by Lena Malouf**
- The Business of Event Planning: Behind-the-Scenes Secrets of Successful Special Events , **by Judy Allen**
- Dollars and Events: How to Succeed in the Special Events Business **by J. Goldblatt and F. Supovitz**
- Event Planning: The Ultimate Guide to Successful Meetings, Corporate Events, Fundraising Galas, Conferences, Conventions, Incentives and Other Special Events **by Judy Allen**
- The International Directory of Event Management **by J. Goldblatt and K. S. Nelson**
- Special Events: 21st Century Global Event Management **by J. Goldblatt**

Skills

People Skills

One of the most important skills you will need to have in order to succeed is people skills. You must be adept at working with a wide diversity of individuals and have the ability to make everyone involved in each wedding feel as though they are an integral part of making the wedding a success. It is important to keep in mind that while the wedding planning business is certainly booming, there are usually a wide range of wedding planners for prospective clients to choose from. You can give yourself a competitive edge over the crowd by developing a reputation as being sincere and in a word – friendly. Prospective clients are much more likely to hire someone that they feel comfortable working with and that they genuinely like. These skills can also prove to be helpful in dealing with vendors and suppliers as well. Remember the old cliché that you will catch more bees with honey than vinegar. You will often find that it is far easier to get what you need accomplished when working with contractors, if you are easy-going and easy to work with.

If you are the type of person who already likes to plan weddings and parties, it's safe to say that you are probably going to be enthusiastic about your job. This can also certainly go a long way in helping you to develop your career as a professional wedding planner. Wedding planners who are positive and upbeat about their jobs will generally create enthusiasm among others about the project and that can really help to get the ball rolling in the direction of a successful wedding.

Finally, the importance of discretion, honesty and reliability cannot be emphasized enough. These are the skills that will often keep prospective clients coming back; especially if you find yourself working with high profile clients. Avoid the temptation to spread information about your clients, even if you happen to gather some juicy tidbits. Keep to your word and do what you say you are going to do. Refrain from making promises that may be difficult to keep.



Verbal skills are also extremely important in the wedding planning industry as you will spend much of your time meeting with clients and vendors. Wedding planning is not for those who are shy and reticent! If you do not have extensive speaking experience, do not let that discourage you from beginning a career in this exciting industry; however. You can easily gain the verbal communication skills you need or improve your skills to become more marketable. Working with a vocal coach is an excellent idea but you can also ask your friends and family to work with you on improving your speech. You might also consider taking a speech course at your local college as well.

While you will need to spend a good portion of your time talking with different individuals, you will also need to have a good understanding of how to read non-verbal clues as well. Many times you can find out more from an individual by observing what they are not saying rather than what they are saying. Body language can provide quite a bit of insight into another's feelings regarding a particular subject.

Of course, being a good listener also ranks at the top of the list when it comes to desirable skills for highly successful wedding planners. To be a good listener you will need to be adept at not only hearing what the other person is saying but also understanding what they are trying to communicate to you as well as recalling it later.

To improve your active listening skills consider focusing on the following guidelines:

- Never make assumptions regarding what you may think another might be thinking or about to say. This can be incredibly dangerous in this industry and can only lead to confusion and embarrassment.

- Make a point to ask questions in order to clarify what you understand the other person to have said. One way to do this is to repeat what the other person has said.
- Remember that taking notes can be important and even crucial in helping to aid your memory regarding conversations; however, it should not interfere with your ability to listen to what the other person is saying. Provided that you have permission from the other party, it is far better to record meetings so that you can devote your attention to others.
- Finally, avoid interrupting others. Not only is this rude but it could prevent you from discovering the other person's needs and thoughts.

Organizational Skills



Organizational skills are also tremendously important to the success of a wedding planner, as you will frequently need to juggle several tasks at the same time.

This means that you will need to be tremendously detail-oriented. If you are not naturally a detail-oriented person, there are several tools that can help you in keeping track of the myriad of details that will be required in planning a successful wedding. Wedding planning software is a great tool that can be used in many aspects of managing the day to day details of the weddings you will be planning. A program binder is also essential for any serious wedding planner. With tabbed sections containing such information as contacts, vendors, contracts, etc., such a binder can be a life-saver.

You will also need to be highly adept at managing your time. Developing a priority list, time schedule and goal list with intermediate and long-term goals can all be beneficial in keeping the duties for weddings you will be planning moving along, as well as in assisting you in growing your business.

Wedding planners are, by nature, also generally highly creative. They thrive on being able to create something new and different that will please others. The most sought after trait of many wedding planners is the ability to provide something that is unique to the weddings they put together. To help foster this ability, it's a good idea to always keep a notebook with you, or a spot in your binder, where you can record ideas as they come to you. Stay on top of the industry by attending trade shows and reading industry related journals. Both of these measures can provide you with a wealth of ideas.

What Professional Associations Should I Join?

As with any other industry, when you become a wedding planner it is imperative that you present yourself as a professional. Membership with a professional association can often help prospective clients view you as a highly experienced professional, as well as open doors for new career opportunities.

- Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants
- Association of Bridal Consultants
- June Wedding, Inc
- Association for Wedding Professionals, Inc.
- International Special Events Society

What are the Types of Weddings to Consider?



There are many different types of weddings to consider working with as a professional wedding planner. Some wedding planners diversify and cover the broad spectrum, while other wedding planners specialize and perhaps only work with traditional weddings or themed weddings. In considering which types of weddings you would prefer to work with it can be helpful to learn a bit more about each one.

Traditional Weddings

This is the time-honored tradition that comes to mind when many people think of a wedding.

Small Weddings

Many couples are choosing weddings that are smaller in number but still involve a lot of unique and special touches.

Destination Weddings

A destination wedding occurs in a locale away from the residence of the couple. In some cases the wedding might involve just the couple (once frequently known as eloping) or it might include friends and family who travel with the couple to a far away location.

Unique and Themed Weddings

With this type of wedding a theme is selected for the wedding and everything associated with the event will revolve around that theme. For example, a

couple might choose to have a beach wedding and decorate with seashells. Other possible themes include:

- Western
- Medieval
- Victorian
- Valentine

Weekend Weddings

Increasingly, more couples are choosing to host weekend weddings as they are no longer marrying in the towns and cities where their families and friends are located. This provides an opportunity for guests to travel from out of town and in many regards the wedding becomes a family reunion. As such, the weekend is generally filled with activities. Such activities might include:

Welcome dinner or rehearsal dinner – This is typically held on Friday evening and provides an opportunity for everyone to get re-acquainted.

Luncheon – A luncheon, picnic or even barbeque can be held on Saturday afternoon. The event may be followed up with a sporting tournament of some sort such as tennis or volleyball.

Wedding – Of course, the highlight of the entire weekend is the wedding; which could be held on Saturday evening.

Brunch – The morning after the wedding, the bride and groom might meet their guests for a late brunch.

Farewell – Before departing on their honeymoon, the bride and groom may choose to bid their guests farewell on Sunday afternoon.

Should you Specialize in One Sort of Wedding?

Ideally, it's best to offer a wide variety of services; although you can certainly specialize in any type of wedding you wish or even in the types of services that you offer. Offering a full spectrum of services can ensure that you have a wider marketing base.

Part Two: Wedding Planning 202

Getting Started



Conduct a Clients Needs Assessment

Your first step in planning any wedding, regardless of what type of wedding it might be, is to meet with the clients and determine their needs. Your primary responsibility during this initial meeting will be to listen to what the client is saying. Ideally, at this juncture, it is best to record some notes of the meeting that you can refer back to later. Since you should be focusing your attention on the client, consider either bringing an assistant along with you who can take the notes for you or ask the client's permission to record the meeting.

The first subject that should be addressed is the client's idea of the wedding. In some cases you may need to help bring out the client's vision for the wedding by asking questions:

- What kind of wedding do you want?
- When do you want the wedding to take place?
- What is your budget for the wedding?
- Do you have a theme in mind for the wedding?

These questions will help you develop a clear picture of what your client expects from the wedding. In order to make sure you are both on the same page; however, it is a good idea to conclude the meeting by providing a summary of your understanding about the type of wedding the client wants. This will help to clear up any misunderstandings as well as to fine tune the wedding.

The initial meeting is also a good time to determine exactly how much latitude you will have regarding the decision-making process. It is critical that you determine this up front because not all clients will be the same. Some clients will want you to handle everything and have little involvement with the decision-making process, while others may want to be involved in the minute details of every decision along the way.

Your success as a wedding planner will depend on learning to respect the individuality of every client and their right to as much involvement as they want during the planning process. If you discover that you have a client who does want to be quite involved; however, it is also important to make sure the client understands at this point that there will need to be a timeframe in place in order for final decisions to be made. You may find it helpful for clients who do want to be quite involved, to limit the number of choices that you present to them.

After you have met with the client, take the clients needs assessment one step further and commit your notes to writing in a summary of what you discussed during the meeting. Ideally, this should be done on either the same day as the meeting or no later than the day following the meeting. This assures that everything is still fresh on everyone's mind.

Set Date



Choosing a date is one of the most important decisions that will need to be made early in the process of planning a wedding. In most circumstances the client will already have a date in mind for the wedding; however, this is not always the case. Some clients may prefer for you to choose a date that would be most suitable for the wedding. There are several key factors that should be kept in mind before selecting a date for a wedding.

Your own availability is one of the most critical factors in setting a date. Keep in mind that the final date for the wedding could impact whether you are able to take the client on or not. If you already have a wedding or weddings planned for the date in question, you simply may not be able to fit another wedding into your schedule. It is simply never a good idea to try to schedule too many weddings too closely together. You will end up exhausted and unable to perform a professional job – meaning your business will suffer. Always be aware of any prior commitments before you agree to any new jobs.

The scheduling of other weddings in the local area could also impact whether the tentative date selected is actually ideal for the wedding or not. Remember that weddings which are already scheduled could impact the availability of facilities and vendors.

Ideally, it is usually best to request that the couple choose two or three dates that would work for them. This allows sufficient flexibility for booking the reception site and ceremony site if they happen to be at different locations. Keep in mind that many venues tend to get booked about at least eight to nine months in advance, so the earlier these locations can be booked the better. Having multiple dates allows for flexibility and provides a better chance of being able to book the venue the couple prefers.

Depending on the nature of the wedding you may also want to take the weather and the time of year into consideration as well. This is particularly true if you plan to hold the wedding outdoors.

Finally, consider whether you will have enough time to make all of the arrangements in order for the wedding to take place at the requested time.

Who and How Many to Invite



The next subject that will need to be addressed is the guest list. It is imperative that this information be nailed down as early as possible because the number of guests you invite will directly impact many areas that will come later, including cost. Your client should be able to give you an idea in your first meeting of who they want to invite to the wedding; however, you may need to expand upon that, depending on the wedding.

When it comes to whom and how many should be invited to the wedding, be sure to take the following into consideration:

- Approximately how many people will be invited to the wedding?
- Will you make it available for children to attend as well? (This will automatically double or more than double your headcount for the guest list.)
- Where will the guests be traveling from? (Special accommodations may need to be made for guests who are coming from another country.)

Guest List Worksheet

In the event that you will be keeping track of the guest list and RSVPs as part of your services for the wedding, the following worksheet can help to ensure that everything is handled smoothly.

How to Set Up a Successful Wedding Planning Business

Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)	Notes:	
Save The Date Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
Invitation Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
RSVP Received: Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()	
Notes:		
Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)	Notes:	
Save The Date Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
Invitation Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
RSVP Received: Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()	
Notes:		
Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)	Notes:	
Save The Date Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
Invitation Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
RSVP Received: Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()	
Notes:		
Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)	Notes:	
Save The Date Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
Invitation Sent: Yes / No	Date Sent:	
RSVP Received: Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()	
Notes:		

Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)		Notes:
Save The Date Sent:	Yes / No	Date Sent:
Invitation Sent:	Yes / No	Date Sent:
RSVP Received:	Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()
Notes:		
Name:		
Address:		
Bride or Groom's Guest (circle one)		Notes:
Save The Date Sent:	Yes / No	Date Sent:
Invitation Sent:	Yes / No	Date Sent:
RSVP Received:	Yes / No	# Attending: Adults () Children ()
Notes:		
Total # of Adults () Children ()		
Page# ()		

Is There a Theme?

When you first meet with your client there is a good chance that he or she has not thought so far as a theme yet. It's always a good idea to ask, just in case they do have some thoughts on the matter already, but prepared to plan a theme for the wedding.

Many couples today are electing to have this type of unique wedding with a theme that carries through from the invitation to the reception. Determining the theme early on makes the process for planning the wedding much easier and narrows down the choices for everything from the venue to the colors to be used for the decorations.

Resources for theme ideas

www.weddingthemes.com

www.theknot.com

Set the Agenda

After you have chosen the date and the theme for the wedding it is time to begin working on a rough draft for the agenda. Regardless of what type of wedding you are planning, whether it is a traditional wedding or a destination wedding you will need to have an agenda in place to ensure everything flows smoothly.

Remember that everything will need to be included in the agenda; pre-wedding events, the ceremony, reception and post-wedding events.

Venue Considerations/Preferences

The venue is also of critical importance and should be addressed during the first planning stages of the wedding. This is because many venues may need to be booked early, deposits made, etc. If the theme will play a role in your preference for a venue this should help in beginning to narrow down choices.

Venue options include:

- Church or synagogue halls or lawns
- Banquet facilities (restaurants, fraternal lodges, country clubs, etc.)
- Hotel ballrooms or penthouse suites
- The grounds of historic or stately homes, mansions or plantations
- Arboretums or botanical parks
- Lakeside pavilions or boathouses
- National or state parks
- Yachts, cruise boats, marinas, historic cruise ships/battleships, wharves or docks
- Observatories, museums, private libraries or galleries

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- Country inns or B&Bs
- Condominium party rooms, lobbies of apartment or office buildings
- Discos, night clubs, lofts or warehouses where raves are held
- Orchards, vineyards or wineries
- Sports arenas, football or baseball fields, skating rinks
- Islands or lighthouses
- Airports, airfields, airplane hangars, air and space museums
- Ranches or racetracks
- Mountain or seaside resorts, cable car stations
- Historic taverns or hostelries, village greens
- Memorials or missions
- Yoga retreat centers or health spas
- Aquariums or zoos
- Skyscrapers
- Casinos
- Homes or buildings of architectural significance
- Train stations or transportation museums/displays
- Windmills, water mills
- Houseboats, canal barges

Considerations that may affect your choice of venues include:

- Special needs of the guests
- Weather
- Time of year
- Number of guests
- Catering availability

Space requirements will also play a key role in your selection of venues. Some choices may be more suitable than others simply because they offer more seating. Your preliminary agenda will prove to be quite useful in this phase of selecting a venue. For example, you may need to determine whether you need separate meeting rooms, exhibit space, etc.

Sample Checklist of the Clients Needs Assessment

Contract To: _____

Invoice To: _____

Wedding: _____

Client: _____

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Cell: _____

Wedding Date: _____

Wedding Time: _____

Budget: _____

Wedding Profile

Type: _____

Objective: _____

Activities to Occur: _____

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Guest Count: _____

ADA Requirements: _____

Demographics: _____

Getting Organized



Set a Wedding Management Timeline/Schedule

Most weddings require about a year to plan; although some may be slightly shorter or even longer.

Creating a timeline or schedule is also critically important to the success of the wedding. Generally, most weddings are planned in advance at least 6 months. The larger the wedding is, the more time it will typically require to plan. Factors which should be taken into consideration when planning your timeline include:

- The time of year
- The size of the wedding
- Location

As soon as you have this basic information you should begin working on a wedding management timeline or schedule to help make sure that everyone is kept on track during the planning phases. This timeline can be as simple or as elaborate as necessary depending on the complexity of the wedding and the number of people involved in the planning process. Keep in mind; however, that the larger the wedding and the more people are involved in the planning of it, the more detailed the timeline should be. Following is a sample wedding management timeline to help you get started.

Sample Timeline with Milestones

12 Months Before Wedding

- Determine date
- Choose a venue
- Set budget
- Create guest list
- Choose wedding party attendants
- Have engagement photo sent to newspapers
- Book reception site
- Book ceremony site

6 to 9 Months Before Wedding

- Begin selection of wedding dress and veils
- Begin selection of floral designs
- Meet with caterers and begin selecting menu
- Finalize flower and décor
- Select florist
- Begin selection of music
- Book a caterer
- Order wedding gown and veil
- Begin selection of attendant dresses
- Book wedding photographer and videographer
- Book DJ/Band
- Select officiant and begin discussion of ideas for ceremony
- Select three hotels with varying price ranges for out-of-town guests
- Reserve rooms for out-of-town guests

4 to 5 Months Before Wedding

- Begin selection of wedding invitations
- Begin selection of wedding cake designs
- Meet with bakers for wedding cakes
- Decide on attire for groom and groomsmen
- Confirm bridal gown and attendants gowns
- Place order for wedding invitations
- Book calligrapher
- Begin selection of wedding favors
- Confirm dates for pre-wedding events
- Select baker and finalize cake orders

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- Reserve rental equipment such as tables, chairs, linens, tents, etc.
- Book rehearsal dinner location
- Hire additional management staff as needed for the day of the wedding

2 to 3 Months Before Wedding

- Finalize guest list
- Send invitations to calligrapher
- Order wedding favors
- Purchase wedding accessories (candles, baskets, ring pillow, etc.)
- Schedule last tasting for menu
- Finalize menu
- Confirm tux orders
- Finalize getaway transportation
- Select music for the ceremony and reception
- Finalize rehearsal dinner plans (menu, etc.)
- Order rehearsal invitations
- Mail wedding invitations 8 weeks prior to wedding
- Schedule first bridal gown fitting
- Finalize ceremony readings and songs
- Order liquor/beverages not handled by caterer
- Meet with officiant to finalize ceremony
- Prepare a photo and video list
- Schedule bridesmaids' luncheon

3 to 4 Weeks Before Wedding

- Finalize music lists
- Design and order wedding program
- Check in with guests who have not yet RSVP'd
- Mail rehearsal dinner invitations

1 to 2 Weeks Before Wedding

- Final gown fitting
- Finalize Wedding Day Schedule
- Provide attendants with Wedding Day Schedule
- Confirm pick-up times and schedules for transportation
- Provide assignments for staff
- Rehearse ceremony with officiant and wedding party

Plot in all Key Activities and Timeframes etc.

The next step after preparing your wedding timeline is to work on developing a time frame that includes all of the key activities, along with the name of the person who holds the responsibility for ensuring that task is completed. It can also be a good idea to plot in due dates as well. This is known as an Assignment of Tasks or more frequently as a Critical Path.

This form can be easily created using a spreadsheet program, such as Excel, or with a special wedding management program which will automatically create such a form for you.

You can also refer to the sample form on the next page.

Sample Critical Path

Critical Path Jones-Hertz Wedding June, 2008				
Start Date	Due Date	Detailed Task List	Responsibility	Status
July 2 nd	July 15 th	Determine Date	Planner/Couple/Parents	
July 5 th	July 12 th	Set Budget	Couple/Parents	
July 17 th	August 1 st	Select venue for ceremony and reception	Planner/Couple	
August 8 th	August 15 th	Decide on type of meal	Planner/Couple	
August 20 th	August 28 th	Begin rough guest list	Couple/Parents	
August 15 th	August 31 st	Confirm booking for ceremony venue	Planner	
August 15 th	August 31 st	Confirm booking for reception venue	Planner	
September 1 st	September 7 th	Meet with caterers for tastings	Planner/Couple	
September 8 th	September 15 th	Select and book caterer	Planner/Couple	
September 20 th	September 30 th	Begin wedding gown selection	Bride/mother	
October 1 st	October 7 th	Begin music selection	Couple	
October 8 th	October 12 th	Select DJ/Band	Planner/Couple	
October 14 th	October 21 st	Select Florist	Planner/Couple	
October 14 th	October 21 st	Select Officiant	Couple	

Budget Considerations

Another important component in the success of the wedding you plan is the budget. It is imperative that a budget be developed early in the planning stages and every effort be made to stick to it. Of course, the latter isn't always possible, but the closer you are able to stick to your budget the more successful your wedding will be and the happier the client!

The first step in creating a budget is developing a list of estimated expenses. Keep in mind this first list will be an estimate only and the costs may change as you verify actual prices.

Items that should be on your list of estimated expenses include:

- Food
- Venue rental
- Transportation
- Accommodations
- Printed materials
- Floral and décor
- Music
- Gifts
- Attire

If you're not sure how much a particular item on the list might cost, go ahead and get a price quote from a vendor. This is still just an estimate and could change but it will help you in getting a ballpark idea of your final budget.

Remember that you will also need to make sure your own fee is included in the preliminary budget.

Sample Budget Planning Form

- Facility Rental
- Officiant
- Flowers (Ceremony/Reception)
- Ring Pillow
- Unity Candle
- Ring Bearer Attire
- Flower Girl Attire
- Guest Book
- Tent Rental
- Decorations (Purchased)
- Linens & Decorations (Rented)
- Liquor Bar
- Entertainment
- Catering
- Favors
- Bride's Dress
- Bride's Shoes
- Bride's Veil/Tiara
- Bride's Purse
- Bride's Lingerie
- Bridesmaid Dresses & Shoes
- Attendant's Gifts
- Groom's Tux & Shoes
- Groomsmen Tuxes & Shoes
- Transportation
- Coordinator
- Rings
- Photography & Video
- Guest Boarding/Hotel
- Makeup & Hair Styling
- Invitations & Misc. Stationery
- Going-away Outfit
- Other/Unexpected

- **Expected Total**_____

Once you have planned the budget you will need to develop a final budget of actual expenses and revenues for the wedding.

Sample Budget

**Jones/Harris Wedding
June 5th, 2008**

Ceremony Site Fee – St. Mark's Cathedral	\$300
Officiant Fee	\$300
Ceremony Accessories	\$180
Reception Venue Rentals (tents, tables, dinner service)	\$2400
Food & Service \$60 x 150 guests	\$9000
Beverages & Bartender \$16 x 150 guests	\$2400
Cakes	\$750
Dress/Alterations/Headpiece	\$2500
Bride's Accessories (shoes, gloves, jewelry)	\$300
Hair & Makeup	\$150
Groom's Tux	\$180
Groom's Accessories (shoes, etc.)	\$90
Bride's Bouquet	\$200
Bridesmaid Bouquets \$100 x 3	\$300
Groom & Groomsmen boutonnieres \$15 x 4	\$60
Flower Girl Flowers	\$45
Additional Boutonnieres/Corsages	\$150
Reception Decorations	\$1000

Ceremony Site Decorations	\$450
Ceremony Musicians	\$300
Reception Band	\$1500
Photographer	\$1500
Videographer	\$1500
Invitations	\$750
Other Stationery (Thank You, etc.)	\$150
His and Her Rings	\$750
Wedding Transportation	\$500
Bride/Groom Hotel Room	\$150
Attendant Gifts \$40 x 7	\$280
Favors \$3 x 150	\$450
Parent Gifts	\$150
Services of Wedding planner	\$4,200
Total Expenses	\$32,035

Backup or Emergency Contingency Plans

For everything in life, and weddings are no different, it is important to always have a backup or emergency plan. While we would all hope that weddings go off without a hitch, the reality is that something might go wrong and in that situation an emergency contingency plan can really help to save the success of the wedding. Making such backup plans truly distinguishes a professional from an inexperienced beginner.

One of the most important aspects in creating a backup plan is the ability to think on your feet and respond to those problems that pop up unexpectedly. This is because while experience may teach you to plan for some crises you cannot possibly think of everything and plan for it. Planning before the wedding actually takes place; however, can go a long way toward ensuring that you are in a position to handle problems if they do occur.

Putting together a crisis response plan can help you to effectively handle everything from small problems to large disasters that could otherwise spoil the wedding you have worked so long and hard to plan. When planning your emergency response plan, it is important to make sure that everyone from your staff, to staff at the venue as well as local emergency response officials are included in the plan. Ahead of time, make decisions regarding who will handle communications with attendees of the wedding as well as emergency response officials, as the situation merits for particularly large weddings.

Make sure, as well, that you have provided a way for everyone to communicate in the event of an emergency. Two-way communication radios can be a good way to do this but it is also important to ensure that everyone involved in the wedding has cards with contact information for everyone.

Emergencies generally fall into four basic categories. Therefore, it's a good idea to make sure that you have backup plans for these different types of emergencies that could befall the wedding.

These types of emergencies include:

- Weather
- Medical
- Maintenance
- Confrontations

Depending on the type of wedding that you are planning, you may or may not need to worry much about certain types of possible emergencies. For example, if you are planning an indoor wedding you most likely won't need to worry about the weather; however, with any type of wedding there is always the possibility of some type of confrontation occurring. Examples include a relative who has imbibed too much during the reception and threatens to cause a scene, or even possibly an ex who arrives uninvited.

Weather



One of the most difficult aspects of emergency planning for weather is that weather issues can threaten a wedding without any advance warning and can potentially wreak a lot of chaos and damage. One way to plan for such an emergency would be to consider taking out insurance in the event weather threatens your wedding. This type of insurance can reimburse your client, as well as you, for any losses that may occur in connection with weather destruction.

Medical

Medical emergencies should be a high priority if you are planning a large function, particularly if the wedding will be held outside. One way to handle planning for such a problem, would be to have first-aid and first-response personnel actually on hand at the wedding to treat potential problems such as minor cuts and burns, heat stroke, food poisoning, sunburn, etc. You may even wish to set aside a specific area that can be designated as a first-aid location for such treatments.

Maintenance

If the wedding will be held at a venue such as a convention facility, maintenance problems can generally be handled by the maintenance staff on-site. It's a good idea to make sure that you have the name of the person you should contact, in the event of maintenance problems well ahead of time. For other venues, make sure you keep a list of electricians, plumbers and locksmiths who are open 24-hours per day in your program binder.

Confrontations

Make sure you are prepared in the event there could be any potential controversy attached to the wedding you are planning. This can be handled by hiring uniformed security personnel to handle any potential problems at the wedding. This is especially true if anyone in the wedding party, or the guests for that matter, are well-known or have any celebrity status.

Sample "on the day" Schedule

Wedding Day

11:00 am - Bridesmaids' luncheon.

1:00 pm - Bride's makeup appointment.

2:00 pm - Bride's hair appointment.

3:30 pm - Bridal party meets at church to dress. Florist has bouquets, corsages, and boutonnieres waiting.

4:15 pm - Bride and groom meet at altar for private time.

(This couple has chosen to take all the photographs before the ceremony)

4:30 pm - All "posed" bridal party and family pictures are taken. Caterer begins set up, the cake is delivered, and the florist puts finishing touches on **buffet and cake tables**. The band will set up at reception site shortly

6:15 pm - Ushers assume duties.

6:30 pm - Prelude Music begins

6:55 pm - Candle-lighters' light candles. Grandmothers are ushered in, Mothers' are ushered in, groom's mother first Ushers unroll aisle runner

7:00 pm - Groom and officiant enter from vestry.

Processional begins with Bach's "Jesu Joy Of Man's Desiring."

Groomsmen enter in pairs, followed by bridesmaids.

Ring bearer and flower girl enter.

Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" begins. The bride's mother stands, congregation follows. Bride walks down aisle on father's arm. Ceremony begins.

7:45 pm - Recessional begins to Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" with bride and groom leaving first, followed by children attendants, honor attendants, and bridesmaids and groomsmen in pairs.

Mothers and other special guests are ushered out.

Bride and groom quickly return to front of church to usher guests out.

Parents of bridal couple receive in vestibule.

8:30 pm - Guests arrive at reception site after twenty minute drive.

Background music begins

Waiters pass trays of champagne and hors d'oeuvres.

Photographs would be taken and receiving line would form (if these agenda items had not already been taken care of at the church.)

Wedding party is announced.

Blessing.

Best man proposes toast.

Buffet or sit-down dinner begins.

(To keep the pace moving, the other traditional activities can be inserted in between meal courses.)

9:30 pm - Cake is cut and served to guests.

First dances begin.

Dance floor opens to all guests.

10:30 pm - Bride throws bouquet. Garter is tossed.

Bride and groom change into going-away clothes.

11:00 pm - Bride and groom say good-byes. Confetti is thrown as bride and groom make getaway.

Getting the Venue



What are the Requirements for the Venue?

Size

Several factors will determine which possible venues may be right for your wedding. Size will be one of the most important determining factors. Your preliminary agenda can be helpful in determining the minimum amount of space requirements you will need. Be sure to give consideration to minimum seating.

You should also give some thought to the type of room set-up that will be required for the wedding as some room set-ups require more space than others.

How to Find a Venue Locally or Interstate

Some of your best resources for locating local venues will come from tourism offices, chambers of commerce and even hotel chains in the local area. These resources can also prove to be helpful in locating venues in other areas, which you might not be as familiar with as well. The World Chamber of Commerce Directory can be a valuable resource.

www.chamberofcommerce.com

Preparing a Request for Proposal (RFP)



Learning to prepare a Request for Proposal or RFP is a critical skill for any wedding planner. This is something you will be doing quite frequently in order to obtain bids for a variety of services including venues, transportation, food, decorations, etc.

The RFP is a written document that will outline exactly what you need from the vendor and list the items or services that are specifically needed. In some cases you may be able to complete a form provided by the vendor in lieu of the RFP. That is not always the case; however, and you will need to learn how to develop a RFP from scratch.

Critical elements that should be included in a RFP include:

- Title
- Number of guests/attendants
- Dates
- Range of prices required
- Food and beverage requirements
- Number of rooms required and size, if applicable
- Requirements for room set-up and if staging is required

Special Occasions Wedding Management

Date: July 18, 2007

From: Stacy Planner

Fax: 1-555-555-1212

Telephone: 1-555-555-1212

To: (Name of venue coordinator/manager)

We are planning a wedding reception for our clients on Saturday; June 5, 2008. The reception will begin at 7:00 pm and last until 11:00 pm. The ceremony will be held in a separate location. Sleeping rooms will not be required.

We will be seeking space to accommodate 150 guests, set up banquet style.

Responses should be received by no later than August 1, 2007.

Thank You,
Stacy Planner
Special Occasions Wedding Management

Inspecting the Site

To determine whether a site might be right to serve as the venue for the wedding you will need to inspect it. This helps you to learn about the facility in a hands-on way and really get a feel for whether the site will work for your function or not. It is generally a good idea to make arrangements to inspect the site ahead of time by scheduling an appointment with the person who is in charge of renting the facility. This will typically be the facility manager. When you schedule this meeting, make a point to note the person's name as well as any other relevant contact information and be sure to get good directions to the site.

It's always a good idea to bring along the following items with you when you inspect a site:

- Wedding checklist with information about the wedding
- Tape measure
- Notebook and pencil/pen
- Camera – preferably digital
- Site inspection checklist

Sample Site Inspection List

Wedding: _____

Venue: _____

Venue Contact: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Arrival Time & Date: _____ Departure Time & Date: _____

Other Venue Contact Information (Catering, Security, Banquet Set-Up, etc.)

Name	Position	Contact
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Indoor Facilities

- Garden Facilities
- Maximum Guest Capacity
- Dance Floor
- DJ/Band Area

Time Allowed

- Rehearsal included
- Decorating time available
- Event duration
- Additional time possible
- Time of day restrictions
- Delivery days/times

Services

- Table/chair set up and break down
- Site clean up
- Food clean up
- Dressing rooms

Arrival – Front door

- ☐ Distance – How will guests arrive

- ☐ First Impressions

- ☐ Parking – # of spaces, cost, valet available?

- ☐ Guest Access – to wedding, separate entrance?

- ☐ Registration Area

- ☐ Rest Rooms – location, size, amenities

- ☐ Pre-Function foyer available? Secure/private?

- ☐ Entrance into wedding space

Room Specs – get space plan

- ☐ Floor plan
- ☐ Ceiling plan with rigging points
- ☐ Electrical plan
- ☐ Typical table layouts
- ☐ Typical exhibit booth layouts

Width and Length of Room(s)

Ceiling Height(s)

Electrical

- ☐ Location
- ☐ Size
- ☐ Cost

Service Access: _____

Staging – Qty, sizes and heights

Steps _____

ADA Ramp _____

Food Items

- Site catering available
- Off site catering allowed
- Kitchen use
- Cake Service

Bartender Fee _____

Alcohol charges _____

Soft beverage charges _____

Champagne charges _____

Catering – in-house/off premise

-
- ☐ Menus
 - ☐ Specialties
 - ☐ Service Styles

Tables and Chairs

- ☐ Banquet chairs – take picture

60" rd _____ 66"rd _____

72" rd _____

8" banquet _____ 6" banquet _____

Glassware and Flatware

Linens

Audio/Visual – in-house

Lighting Capabilities

Audio Capabilities

Projectors, screens, cameras

Restrictions/Regulations

- ☐ Confetti
- ☐ Fire Sensitivity
 - ☐ Vehicles
 - ☐ Candle Use
 - ☐ Pyrotechnics
- ☐ Helium Balloons
- ☐ Insurance
- ☐ Live Animals
- ☐ Signage
- ☐ Water Effects

Safety/Risk Management

- ☐ Sprinklers
- ☐ Fire responders
- ☐ Fire/Safety Plan

Business Center

- ☐ Location
- ☐ Access
- ☐ WIFI/Internet Access

Notes

Pre-Wedding Meeting with Venue Staff

While not all wedding planners choose to do this, some like to hold what is known as a pre-wedding meeting with the staff at the venue where the wedding will be held. This is typically done two or three days before the wedding is scheduled to actually take place. The pre-wedding meeting provides an opportunity for everyone involved in the scheduling of the wedding to get together and discuss plans to be sure everyone understands their role.

Set out Roles, Goals and Responsibilities

This is the perfect time to make sure that everyone is clear on who shall be responsible for which activities. You may even wish to follow up the meeting with a written letter detailing such information. Failure to set out roles and who will be responsible for ensuring each milestone is met at the beginning of the wedding planning process, can spell disaster down the road.

Getting Vendors



Many wedding planners find it easier to customize vendors according to each wedding. For example, they may begin by selecting the caterer, as that is typically the biggest vendor that you're going to work with for the event. After you have been in the business for a while you will have a list of companies that you have worked with in the past and had positive relationships with, and therefore will know which ones will work best for which events. In the beginning; however, you are going to need to establish these contacts. Contacting your local Chamber of Commerce can prove to be quite beneficial in this regard.

When it comes to actually choosing the caterer, as well as other vendors, it is ideally best to select two or three vendors and make those proposals to the couple based on the type of reception they have in mind. For example, the type of vendors you select may vary based on whether they want a seated dinner or perhaps only light hors d'oeuvres. After you have learned what the bride and groom want from your initial meeting with them you can then base your decision and recommendations on that information. As a result you will not always be working with the same vendors for every wedding.

In this regard, it is much like mixing and matching. You may use a certain caterer but choose another florist based on the style and design the couple prefers. Keep in mind that in the beginning you will need to establish these relationships with vendors. The best way to do this is to simply make the time and get out there to meet with the vendors and get a feel for services and prices.

What are the Sorts of Vendors Required

Vendors, or suppliers, are the individuals and companies that you will work with in order to provide services and merchandise for the wedding. Wedding planning companies may have some individuals who work in-house to handle a variety of these tasks; however, if you plan to become an independent wedding planner it will be your responsibility to build contacts in a variety of vendor fields and be able to make recommendations regarding which ones you believe perform the best work. In many cases you may also need to actually hire vendors as well as coordinate the activities of the many vendors required for the success of the wedding.

For a wedding to be successful a large number of different vendors may be required. Below is a list of the types of vendors which may be needed:

- Caterers
- Floral/Balloons
- Equipment rentals
- Photographers
- Videographers
- Security companies
- Sound systems

- Musicians
- Transportation
- Stationery printers
- Bartender
- Baker

How to Find Them

One of the most difficult tasks for many new wedding planners is locating reliable vendors. After you have been in the business a while you will have built up a network of vendors that you know you can rely upon; however, in the beginning you will need to begin working on making these connections.

Special weddings industry journals can prove to be a reliable source for locating vendors of just about any industry. *Special Weddings Magazine* (http://bg.specialweddings.com/buyers_guide) is an excellent resource when searching for vendors.

Of course, the Internet is also a veritable goldmine of information for vendors as well. Finally, don't forget to consider your local market as well when it comes to searching out vendors. Consider contacting your local Chamber of Commerce for information on local vendors for everything from catering to decorations.

How to Choose the Right Ones

You will need to make sure that you have always checked out any vendor before you recommend them to your clients. Failure to do this can have disastrous results. Therefore, it's a good idea to always make the time to meet with any prospective vendors before you make a final decision.

Of course, price is always important to the bottom line but in the grand scheme of things, it is far better to pay slightly more for a service that you know you can rely upon rather than get a good deal from a vendor who provides shoddy work. Elements to consider when reviewing vendors include:

- Price
- Turnaround time
- Specifications of the product

- Customer service
- Deposits required

Venue Considerations

When selecting a venue there are several factors that must be taken into consideration, based upon the type and size of the wedding you are planning. If you are interviewing a new venue to be considered for a wedding you are planning, the questions below can help you to determine whether the site is right for the event or not.

- Do you charge a flat fee, or by the hour?
- Is there a minimum number of hours we must pay for?
- Is there a reception package? What does it include?
- What is the minimum deposit? (*Anything from 10-50% may reasonably be charged.*)
- Are there any special permits required?
- How many people can the site accommodate?
- What is your cancellation (i.e., refund) policy?
- What rooms or facilities are available aside from the main hall?
- Is it cheaper on another day of the week or time of the day?
- Do you have your own caterer? Do you allow outside caterers to come in?
- Can alcohol be served on the premises? What is your policy on open bars?
- Is there a corkage fee?
- Is there a cutting fee for bringing in an outside cake?
- Do you provide the tables and chairs, dinnerware, linen?

- What decorations can be provided?
- Are there any restrictions on photography, music or decorations?
- How much electrical equipment can you accommodate?
- How many hours do we get? Is there an over-time charge if we run late?
- Do you have any other events scheduled right before or after us?
- Do you have liability insurance? (*Keep in mind that this is not a deal-breaker; you can obtain wedding insurance.*)
- Are there kitchen or cooking facilities? (*This is important because it can affect catering prices.*)
- Do you provide the wait staff, bartenders, parking attendants, checkroom attendants, etc.?
- Who will be present and in charge on the date of the reception? Is there a designated substitute?
- Is there a charge for parking? Do you offer (or insist on) valet parking?
- Is there a changing room for the bride and groom?
- How many restrooms are there? Will there be a janitor on site?
- What arrangements do you have for security? Medical assistance?

Always keep in mind that while a bare-bones site will generally be cheaper and may be more attractive to budget-minded clients, this also means that you will need to hire additional personnel as well as rent a wide variety of items. Many times the all-inclusive packages that appear to have the higher price tags may actually be cheaper. At any rate, make sure you find out whether your caterer can handle these tasks. In the event you need to rent items that require delivery and/or assembly to the site as well as pick-up, you will need to ensure that everything from times to rates is clearly spelled out in the contract. In addition, make sure the rental company will travel to the venue as well as supply a sufficient number of people to perform the job.

Transportation



Today, many couples are choosing to have select transportation to deliver them to the ceremony and reception as well as to spirit them away. While limousines are the standard favorites, many modern couples are also choosing more eclectic forms of transportation as well, so it's always a good idea to have some unique vendors on hand that you can recommend to your clients. Good examples include hot air balloons, horse-drawn carriages and even motorcycles. For ground transportation, make sure you have relationships with vendors who can provide transportation such as antique cars; Rolls Royce and Bentleys as well as the standard limousines.

Regardless of which type of transportation vendor you are interviewing for a couple, be sure to ask the following questions:

- How long has the company been in business?
- Do they have the proper papers (license, insurance, registration, etc.)
- Can you inspect the vehicle (inside and out)?
- What are the rates? Is there a minimum charge?
- What perks are included? (drinks, ice, fridge, TV, etc.)
- When does the clock start and stop running?
- Is there a mileage limitation?
- How much of a deposit is required?

- What is the cancellation/refund policy?
- Is the driver's tip included in the fee?

As with any vendor, always make sure you get all terms of the contract in writing including exactly which type of car the couple wants.

Catering



One of the most important decisions you will need to make with the couple is the selection of the caterer. This is also one of the most expensive items for the couple so it is imperative that proper care be given to this selection. While sit-down evening dinners have traditionally been popular, many couples today are opting for a wide variety of choices. Such options might include a midday reception with a brunch menu or even an early or mid-afternoon cocktail party style menu. A high tea menu might be called for in the event of an afternoon wedding while weddings held very late in the evening might involve a dessert reception.

Beyond the time of the day when the wedding is held, other factors that may affect the choice of caterer include the number of meals that are planned over the duration of the wedding events. For example, if a rehearsal dinner is planned you may choose to use one caterer for everything.

Of course, price is a factor for many couples and one aspect that can affect that is the style of meal served. Sit-down is traditionally more expensive than buffet and if the couple has voiced a concern over cost they can lower their expenses by reducing the number of servers needed.

When interviewing prospective catering vendors be sure to ask the following:

- How many wedding receptions has the caterer done? How many of the size you are planning?
- Does the caterer have a list of references you can see/contact?
- Does the caterer have the proper license?
- What kind(s) of insurance does the caterer carry?
- Where is the food prepared?
- Can you taste samples?
- Can you observe a wedding reception in progress?
- What is the caterer's experience with the menu you are considering?
- What menu does the caterer recommend for the season? For the time of day?
- Can the caterer accommodate vegetarians? Children?
- What are the charges? Is there a minimum charge?
- Can the company take care of the whole package? (waiters, dinnerware, tables, etc.) At what extra cost?
- Can the caterer take care of the liquor? Flowers?
- Do you have to provide any of the serving equipment?
- How is the fee calculated? (Usually it is per head.)
- How much of a deposit is required?
- What is the cancellation/refund policy?
- Are the wait staff's gratuities included in the fee? Taxes?
- Can the caterer provide the cake?

- If you provide the cake, is there a cake-cutting fee? (Make sure it is no more than you are paying anyway for waiters. If you have a buffet, family members can serve the cake, as an added homey touch.)
- What hors **d'oeuvre** do you recommend? Which entrees?
- What are your specialty dishes (or desserts)?
- When do you have to supply the final head count?
- What arrangement does the caterer suggest for feeding other vendors (part of the head count, same menu)?
- Who will be in charge on site?
- Is there any reason the caterer can foresee that the final cost might end up higher than the quote or estimate?
- When is the final payment due?

Be aware that since the caterer is the key person orchestrating food service at the reception, it is worth adding a sub-checklist of exactly what the caterer will provide, and where you might have to make other arrangements.

- Serving pieces (chafing dishes, platters, trays, etc.)
- Liquor, soft drinks, coolers
- Aperitifs, after-dinner drinks
- Sparkling wine or champagne
- Centerpieces (floral or otherwise)
- Glassware, stemware
- China, silverware
- Tablecloths, napkins (in the color you want)
- Tables and chairs
- Decorations
- Salt-and-pepper shakers, creamers, sugar/sweetener bowls

- Place cards (name cards)

Wedding Cakes



It is important to be aware that wedding cake specialists often differ from other bakers. Generally, regular bakers charge by overall size of the cake; however, wedding cake specialists typically charge by the slice. In the event that the wedding cake will be supplied by a separate vendor, you will need to obtain a separate contract which specifies all of the details including:

- Size
- Flavor(s)
- Whether a cake knife and other accessories are included
- Exact delivery and set-up arrangements

It's also a good idea to make sure that in advance of ordering you have viewed photographs of the different styles of cake, as well as tasted the cake and the icing.

If the cake is layered and tiered be aware that you can request different flavors as well as different colors for each layer.

Ideally, you should begin working with the couple about 6 months in advance of the wedding to select the cake. This allows for decisions to be made and to book a top notch baker; many of which become booked months in advance.

Be sure to ask the following questions when interviewing bakers:

- How much deposit is required? (deposits paid in advance are standard)
- Is there a delivery cost or is it included in the price of the cake?
- When is final payment due?
- What is the cancellation policy?

If you want colors matched, bring a swatch of fabric with you.

Flowers, Fresh – Beware! They most likely have insecticides on them and chemicals to keep them looking fresh.

Flowers, Icing and Sugar – These flowers may have wires or supports in them and must be removed before serving.

Decorations – Artificial pearls and other decorations must be removed before serving.

When it comes to the size of the cake this will primarily depend on the serving size and the number of guests. Make sure you ask the baker to show you some serving sizes to help you estimate the size cake required. Be aware that the number of invitations you have sent out does not equate the number of people attending. You will need to have a very clear estimate on the number of guests expected to attend. For example, if the couple is sending out 150 invitations this could mean there will be 300 or more people attending.

Other factors regarding the cake that should be taken into consideration include:

Fillings – Be aware that seeds, coconut, nuts, fruit etc. could be difficult for some people to handle especially if many of the guests are elderly.

- Consider carefully where the cake will be placed. Is the background good for pictures? If you are planning to have a fountain on the cake, is there a plug handy? Is the table sturdy? Is the table likely to be bumped?

- Who will cut the cake? Are you sure they have been briefed on the proper way to serve the cake?
- Who will provide the knives and serving plates?
- Do you have an emergency number if the cake is damaged on the day of the wedding?
- Do you have a smaller backup cake in case of disaster?

Photographers

When selecting photographers with the couple, make sure you take the time to sit down with the couple and determine which photographs they want to have taken at both the ceremony and the reception.

Some traditional “must have” photos include:

- Bride dressing for wedding
- Mother helping bride put on veil
- Bride looking in mirror
- Bride putting on garter
- Bride – Full Length
- Bride – Half Length
- Bride – Close Up
- Bride with mother – Full Length
- Bride with mother – Close Up
- Bride with father – Full Length
- Bride with father – Close Up
- Bride pinning on father's boutonniere
- Bride with Both Parents – Full Length
- Bride with Parents – Close Up
- Bride with Grandparents – Full Length
- Bride with Grandparents – Close Up

- Bride with sisters – Full Length
- Bride with sisters – Close Up
- Bride with brothers – Full Length
- Bride with brothers – Close Up
- Bride with immediate family
- Bride with Maid of Honor – Full Length
- Bride with Maid of Honor – Close Up
- Bride with her attendants – Full Length
- Bride with her attendants – Close Up
- Bride & flower girl/ring bearer
- Father helping bride out of limo
- Groom getting ready with his groomsmen (tying bowtie, putting on boutonniere)
- Groom and his father
- Groom all ready to go
- Wedding rings with the invitation
- Bride getting out of the limo
- Guests arriving at the site
- Groom waiting for the bride
- The processional
- Bride and groom at the alter
- Bride and groom holding hands (close up of hands)
- View of the wedding party at the alter or canopy from the back
- Bride and groom exchanging vows
- Bride and groom exchanging rings
- The first kiss
- Bride and groom being announced to the guests
- The recessional
- Bride and groom leaving ceremony site
- Bride looking at her bouquet

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- Bride with her mother
- Bride with her father
- Bride individually with each bridesmaid/flower girl/ring bearer
- Bride with all of her bridesmaids/flower girl(s)/ring bearer(s)
- Bride with her entire family
- Groom with his mother
- Groom with his father
- Groom individually with each groomsman/flowergirl/ringbearer
- Groom with all of his groomsmen/flower girl(s)/ring bearer(s)
- Groom with his entire family
- Groom with the bride's father
- Bride and groom
- Bride and groom with each family and then everyone together
- Bride and groom and the entire wedding party
- Bride and groom signing the marriage certificate
- The reception site before the guests arrive
- Shots of decoration details (place cards, table settings, champagne glasses)
- Buffet table, if applicable
- Entrance of newlyweds
- Receiving line
- Guests signing the guestbook
- Each toast
- Bride and groom at head table
- First dance
- Bride dancing with her father
- Groom dancing with his mother
- Lots and lots of candids
- Special family portraits to use as gifts

- Shots of groups from specific parts of your life (first neighborhood, high school, college, relatives)
- Musicians
- Cake table
- Newlyweds cutting (and feeding each other) the cake
- Dessert table, if applicable
- Bouquet toss
- Garter toss
- Bride and groom waving from getaway car

Photographer Interview Questions

- What is the name of your company?
- Are you licensed & insured?
- How long have you been in the business of photographing weddings?
- Do you belong to any associations or organizations?
- Will you be the person taking the pictures?
- If you are not the person, who will be taking the pictures?
- How do you describe your approach and style of photography?
- Do you offer different types of photography? (ex: black & white, color, portraits, videography)
- Do you have a portfolio so I can view your work?
- Do you have references?
- How will the person dress who will be photographing the wedding?
- What kind of camera and equipment do you use?
- In the event that my photographer is unable to shoot the wedding as planned, will I be notified? And by whom? Who will take his/her place?
- Do you bring back-up equipment?
- Do you offer just one standard wedding package, or can I get a price list of the different packages you offer and what they include.
- How many photographs will you take all together?

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- How much are reprints?
- Are the proofs included in the package?
- How long will you stay at the ceremony and reception?
- Will my client be required to feed the photographer?
- If yes, who takes pictures while he/she is eating?
- What is your payment policy?
- Deposit of how much?
- Due by?
- What is your cancellation policy?

Reception Venues

As the reception is one of the most important aspects of the wedding event, you will want to take special care in the selection of reception venues. The following reception checklist will help you get started.

What is the rental fee? \$ _____
How many hours does this include? _____
What exactly does the fee amount for # 1 include?
Comments:
What is the over-time fee if we want the wedding for a longer period of time?
Comments:
Does this price include the wait staff & bartender(s)?
Comments:
What is the maximum attendance the room or area can handle? _____
For a seated dinner? For a buffet? For an hors d'oeuvre reception?
Is the reception site to be shared with another wedding group? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
How are the facilities divided? How is privacy ensured?
Comments:
How many hours does the rental fee reserve the space?
Are there charges for Over- If Yes, how much? When do they begin? time? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No _____
Comments:
Are there any restrictions on when the site is available? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Comments:
Any price discounts for certain time periods/days of the week? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Comments:
Are we able to add additional decorations to the site if we'd like? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Comments:
Do these decorations need to be verified before hand? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Comments:

Do you have a wedding consultant at the facility you use? Or I could check into?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Are there any regulations concerning the music?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Are there regulations on flowers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Are there regulations on photography?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

What are the colors of the facility?

Comments:

Do you have an in-house caterer or preferred list of caterers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is the food made on the premises?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Can I bring in the caterer of my choice?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your facility have a liquor license?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What are your liquor requirements?

Comments:

Is the bartender provided in the above price? ☐ Yes ☐ No If not, what is the extra bartender fees?

Do you have air-conditioning (for warm weather weddings)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Adequate heating (for winter and early spring nuptials)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Do you have any liability insurance in the event a guest is injured? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Can your site be used for the ceremony if the couple chooses to be married there?

☐ Yes ☐ No

How large is your dance floor? _____

Are there additional fees for services such as parking attendants, security, doormen, etc.)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Can I get a confirmation of this reservation in writing that outlines all the details of my wedding & room assignment? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

What are your deposit/refund/cancellation requirements (policies)? Can I get them in writing: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Deposit:

Cancellation:

Refund:

Comments:

Is a security deposit required? ☐ Yes ☐ No How much is it? _____
When can I expect a refund?

Comments:

Are there rooms available where the couple can change into wedding attire, going-away clothes? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Is there adequate parking for guests?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Valet parking: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If there is no valet, is the guest charged for parking?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Can these charges be waived?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

What is the name of the banquet manager? _____

Will he or she be on hand that day? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If not, who will be in charge? _____

Comments:

Do you provide tables? ___Yes ___No	Linens? ___Yes ___No	Chairs? ___Yes ___No
How many people can fit comfortably at each table? _____		
Is a table skirt provided for the main/head bridal table? ___Yes ___No	Colors Available? _____	
Comments:		
Do you have a floor plan available so I can sketch the reception layout? ___Yes ___No If not, can I get one? ___Yes ___No		
If one is unattainable can you draw me a quick diagram so that I will know where the bridal party table, cake table, and gift table will be located?		
Comments:		
Do you have a company in house that you deal with strictly for ice sculptures? ___Yes ___No		
If so, can I sit down with them and look at ice sculpture choices? ___Yes ___ No When? _____		
If you don't deal with anyone specific, can you recommend somebody?		
Comments:		

Musicians

To assist your clients in planning the music for both the ceremony and the reception, use the following checklist/interview sheet. This sheet can be used for both bands and DJs.

- What is the name of your band?
- Is the time and date available?
- How would you describe your style?
- Do you have references?
- Are you insured?
- How many members are in the band?
- How many of them sing?
- How many types of instruments are played?
- How long has this band been in business?
- How long has this group been singing together?
- Is this band experienced with weddings?
- How long have they been singing for weddings?

- How far in advance must I book your band?
- Is a deposit required? How much? Due by?
- What is your cancellation policy?
- Will my clients be expected to feed the band?
- Does the band play live somewhere so I may hear them?
- How many songs are on the band's song list?
- Is there an extra fee for over-time?
- Can my client submit a request list of songs?
- How will the band be attired?
- How often does the band take breaks?

When hiring musicians it is important to keep in mind that music will be needed for several important periods during the ceremony and the reception.

Popular selections for each important part of the ceremony include:

The Prelude

This is the music that is played while the guests congregate at the church, waiting for the bride to arrive. It should set the tone for the ceremony.

- Canon in D by Pachelbel
- Holsworthy Church Bells by Wesley
- Voce Sapete by Mozart
- Nimrod from Enigma Variations by Elgar
- Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring by Bach
- Greensleaves by Williams
- Sheep May Safely Graze by Bach
- Ave Maria by Schubert
- Ave Maria by Gounod
- The Swan by Saint Saens

The Processional

This is the music that is played for the arrival of the bride and the procession of the bridal party down the aisle. Typically, one piece of music is selected; which should be quite regal and long enough to last throughout the journey of the bridal party down the altar.

- Wedding March from Lohengrin (aka Here Comes The Bride) by Wagner
- Arrival of the Queen of Sheba by Handel

- Trumpet Voluntary (Prince of Denmark's March) by Clarke
- Grand March from Aida by Verdi
- Trumpet Voluntary by Stanley
- Trumpet Minuet by Hollins
- Trumpet Tune by Purcell
- Trumpet Tune by Charpentier
- I Was Glad by Parry
- Hornpipe from the Water Music by Handel
- The Rejoicing from Music for the Royal Fireworks by Handel
- Morning from Peer Gynt by Grieg
- Spring from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi
- Winter from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi

You may also wish to choose a music selection that will be played while the couple is signing the registry or lighting the unity candle. Excellent choices include:

- Ave Maria by Gounod
- Air on the G String by Bach
- Sheep May Safely Graze by Bach
- Canon in D by Pachelbel
- Ave Verum Corpus by Mozart
- Flower Duet from Lakmé by Delibes
- Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring by Bach
- Exsultate Jubilate by Mozart
- Three Clock Pieces by Haydn
- Clair De Lune by Debussy
- Air from the Water Music by Handel
- The Lord Bless You And Keep You by Rutter
- Ave Verum Corpus by Mozart

The Recessional

This is the music that is played as the couple walks down the aisle. It should be celebratory and triumphant. Options include:

- Wedding March from a Midsummer Night's Dream by Mendelssohn
- Toccata from Symphony No 5 by Widor
- Trumpet Voluntary (Prince of Denmark's March) by Clarke
- Overture from The Marriage of Figaro by Mozart
- Pomp and Circumstance March No 4 by Elgar

- The Rejoicing from Music for the Royal Fireworks by Handel
- Bridal March by Hollins
- Hornpipe from the Water Music by Handel
- Carillion De Westminster by Vierne

Floral



When interviewing florists it is important to find out the following information:

- How long have you been in the business of designing arrangements for weddings?
- Do you belong to any organizations?
- Can my client use fresh flowers/silk flowers/or both?
- Will the selected flowers be available during the time of year planned for the wedding?
- Do you have any photos of previous weddings you have done?
- Do you provide references?
- Do you hand tie and wrap each bouquet?
- Are you familiar with the reception site?
- How far in advance do you set up for the ceremony and reception site?
- After you drop off the flowers, do you stay and help distribute the corsages? Is this included in your fee?
- What is your delivery policy?
- What is your payment policy?
- What is your cancellation/refund policy?

The following checklist will help to assure that all of the many floral needs are covered for your clients' wedding.

Bouquets

- ____ Bride
- ____ Bride's Throw Away
- ____ Bridesmaids # ____
- ____ Maid/Matron of Honor
- ____ Flower Girl Bouquet or Basket

Boutonnieres

- ____ Groom
- ____ Best Man
- ____ Ushers # ____
- ____ Ring Bearer
- ____ Bride's Father
- ____ Groom's Father
- ____ Grandfathers

Corsages

- ____ Bride's Mother
- ____ Groom's Mother
- ____ Grandmothers

Ceremony Flowers

- ____ Main Altar
- ____ Aisle or Pew Decorations

Reception Flowers

- ____ Head Table Centerpiece
- ____ Table Centerpieces # ____
- ____ Gift Table Centerpiece
- ____ Buffet Table Centerpiece

- ____ Bar Centerpiece
- ____ Fresh Flowers for Cake
- ____ Arrangement next to Seating Cards

Rehearsal Dinner

- ____ Table Centerpieces # ____

Other

- ____ Aisle Runner
- ____ Floral Headpieces

Also Consider

- ____ Thank-you Bouquet for Bride's Parents

Price Negotiation

Negotiation can be a particularly important skill for any successful wedding planner. Without this tool you could wind up paying far more than necessary for supplies and services and in the end, that could cut into your bottom line and the success of your business. For those who are reticent about negotiating, it should be kept in mind that in many countries throughout the world negotiating is considered the only way to handle business. It is only in some countries, such as the United States, that we calmly accept the first stated price without considering whether the vendor might accept a lower price.

Some basic negotiating techniques will serve you well in many areas of your wedding planning business. If you are not experienced with negotiating, do not allow that to deter you from trying. This is certainly a skill that can be learned and with time you will be able to hone it into an art form.

The first step in negotiating on any price is to be prepared before you actually begin. This allows you to anticipate the price the vendor is likely to present to you and then provide your own counter-offer. Know the going rates for whatever type of service you are seeking and be prepared to negotiate a lower price.

Persistence and patience can also certainly have their role in the negotiation process as well. You must be willing to wait it out while the vendor considers the counter-offer you have made rather than folding too soon.

Don't be afraid to be tough when it comes to negotiating both price and terms with your vendors. Be up front and frank by telling them they will need to do better than the price that has been quoted.

Finally, don't forget that even if you are unable to negotiate the price as low as you would have liked, you might be able to negotiate in another area to strike a more favorable deal, such as shipping times and other terms.

Managing and Coordinating your Vendors' Deliverables

Once you have all of your vendors lined up for the wedding, you will then need to make sure that you stay on top of things to ensure that all of those deliverables are managed and coordinated effectively. Start the process off right by ensuring you have one contact person for each vendor from the very beginning. This in itself can eliminate numerous problems down the road. Along the same lines, take the time to make sure that all of your vendors have your contact information as well, including cell phone number, in case there are any unexpected problems.

Developing schedules and checklists like the following samples can also help to keep things rolling smoothly.

Catering and Banquet Checklist

- ☐ Get estimates/proposals
- ☐ Set up taste testings
- ☐ Select caterer
- ☐ Select menus
- ☐ Choose format (formal, informal, etc.)
- ☐ Contract signed
- ☐ Deposit paid
- ☐ Finalize menus
- ☐ Discuss special needs (diabetic, low-fat, vegetarian, etc.)
- ☐ Head count
- ☐ Confirm, menus, seating
- ☐ Settle payment method

Restaurant Vendor Checklist

- ☐ Get estimates/proposals
- ☐ Choose menus & beverages
- ☐ Set up taste testings
- ☐ Select restaurant
- ☐ Confirm menus and seating
- ☐ Settle payment methods
- ☐ Place deposit
- ☐ Arrange transportation for guests
- ☐ Arrange parking
- ☐ Check on smoking allowed

Hotel Checklist

- ☐ Rooms booked
- ☐ Rooming list completed
- ☐ Verify check-in requirements
- ☐ Confirm rates
- ☐ Contracts signed
- ☐ Check amenities
- ☐ Hotel shuttle available?

Equipment Checklist

- ☐ Check materials and decorations
- ☐ Check technology/audio/visual requirements
- ☐ Check lighting and temperature

Planning for the Reception

When planning a reception it is important to understand there are many different types of receptions to choose from. Generally, the style of reception matches the theme and style of the wedding. Factors that can affect the style of reception include number of guests and the size of the couple's budget.

Below are different types of receptions to consider:

Breakfast or Brunch

This type of reception follows a morning wedding ceremony held at 9 or 10 a.m. Such a reception can be served buffet-style or the couple may elect to have a seated breakfast or brunch.

Foods generally served at a breakfast or brunch buffet include:

- Assortment of fresh fruit
- Croissants
- Rolls
- Quiches
- Variety of cold cuts
- Assortment of cheeses
- Hot coffee, tea

For a sit down breakfast or buffet reception, good choices include:

- Omelet or eggs Benedict
- Rolls or toast
- Fruit
- Hot tea, coffee

With either choice pastries or a wedding cake could be served. The couple may choose to serve alcoholic beverages such as Champagne, champagne-punch, wine or Blood Mary's.

Luncheon

A luncheon is somewhat similar to a brunch wedding reception. It may be served either buffet-style or sit down reception. This type of reception would follow a late morning or high noon ceremony and can be served between 12 and 2 p.m. A buffet luncheon menu might include:

- Salads (such as chicken, fruit, potato, vegetables, pasta)
- Assortment of cold cuts
- Variety of cheeses

With a sit down luncheon, the reception generally starts with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and champagne. After the guests are seated, a soup or salad may begin the luncheon, followed by an entrée of chicken or beef with rice and vegetables. Tea and coffee are served with the wedding cake. Today, many modern couples are also choosing to offer a cappuccino or espresso bar. Chocolate cups filled with cordials are also quite popular.

Tea Reception

A tea reception is typically held between 2:00 and 5:00 p.m. Ideally it is not started any later than 3:00 p.m. Tea, coffee or punch may be served along with wine and/or champagne, if the couple chooses. Finger foods are served such as tea sandwiches. The meal is finished with wedding cake. This type of reception is generally the least expensive and works well for small budget weddings with a large guest list.

Cocktail Reception

This type of reception is held between 4:00 and 7:30 p.m. In the event only cocktails are served, dinner does not follow and the reception should begin by 6:00 p.m. at the latest.

Wine, punch, champagne and beer are typically served; although the couple may opt for an open bar, depending on their budget. Hot and cold hors d'oeuvres may also be served buffet-style.

Dinner Reception

Dinner wedding receptions begin between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. Hors d'oeuvres and cocktails may be served during the first hour with a sit down or buffet

dinner following. To keep expenses down, wine and beer instead of a full bar may be offered.

When selecting a style of reception with the couple it is important to keep in mind that the style selected will contribute to the atmosphere of the reception. For example, a sit down dinner typically has a more formal feeling. This type of reception makes it much easier to get guests' attention for portions of the reception, such as cutting the cake. The disadvantage to this type of reception is that many feel it discourages people from mingling.

Buffet wedding receptions are less expensive because they do not require as many servers. This type of reception is also less formal and allows guests to mingle more than a seated dinner. You may work with the couple to assign seats or allow the guests to sit where they choose. The buffet table is arranged with a variety of food and can be either round or oblong, with the food placed around the edge. It may also be rectangular with food served from behind one side, or with food displayed along both sides. The way the tables are arranged will be determined by the area available and the number of guests. Try to avoid making the guests wait in a long line. For a larger number of guests have two buffet tables; one at each end of the room.

Another option would be to set up what are known as food stations. This consists of smaller buffet tables, which are set up around the room, or in different areas of a garden. Setting up each station as a theme with a different type of food is quite popular now.

Regardless of which type of reception is selected, it is important to keep in mind that adequate planning is required in order for the reception to be handled with ease. A guest list will need to be confirmed early enough to allow a seating chart to be developed and place cards assigned. The following seating forms will help in the process.

When planning seating, remember to keep the following in mind:

1. Keep small children next to their parents.
2. Sit guests with people they will be comfortable with.
3. Remember that in most cases, it will be necessary to put some people with other people that they do not know. When this happens, do your best to sit them with others who are like them, or are around their same age.

Wedding Reception Seating

A seating chart can be quite helpful for you in the organization of seating matters as well as assisting guests in quickly locating their places at the tables. The chart should be large enough that guests can quickly view it at the reception and find their seats. For an extra touch of class and elegance you may even wish to have a print shop or artist compose the chart. At the reception, it should be placed in a convenient location at the entry on an easel.

A graph can be used to determine table set-up as well as location of the head table and an area for musicians, along with the cake and food care, bar service and any other specifics that are needed.

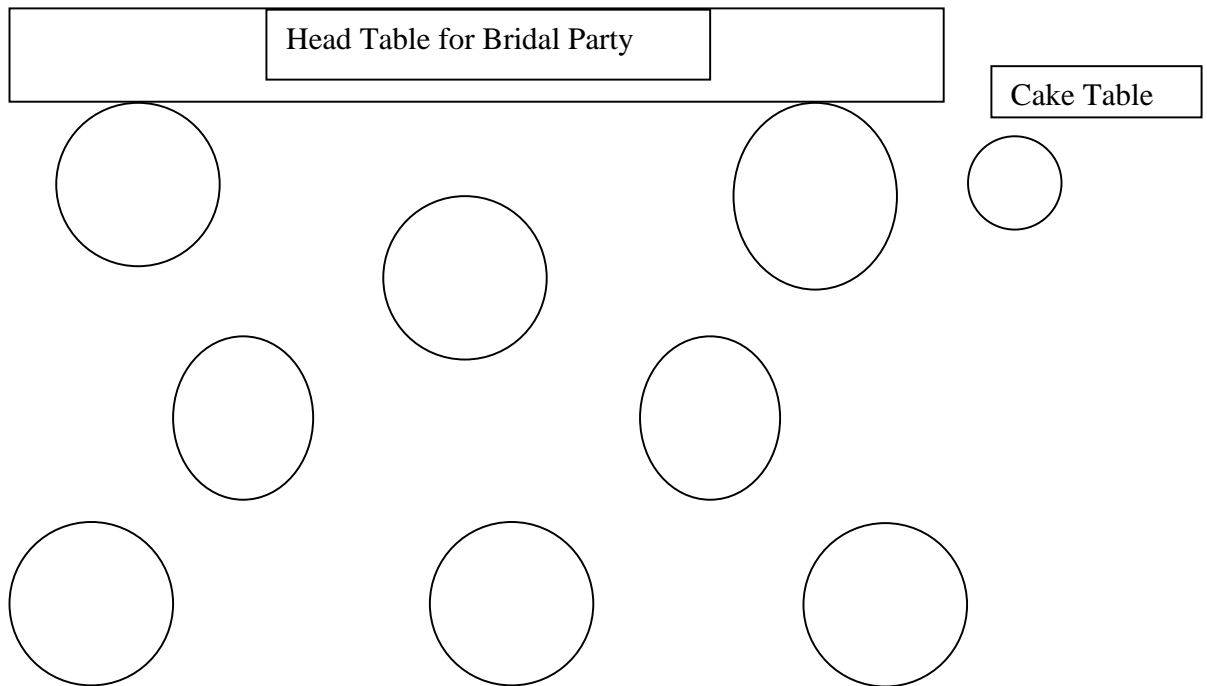
There are two basic types of seating to consider for the reception:

Banquet Seating. This type of seating refers to a sit down dinner. As a general rule of thumb, you should allow approximately 8 to 10 square feet per person. A 48 inch table will seat 6 people; while a 54 inch table can accommodate 6 to 8 people. A 60 inch and 72 inch table will seat 10 to 12 people. You can estimate about 4 to 5 feet between tables to allow for enough movement.

Reception Seating. When there are few tables and chairs at the reception, this type of seating arrangement works out well. This type of seating arrangement will increase the capacity up to 50% by using smaller tables and chairs.

Seating Charts and Diagrams

While there are an infinite number of seating charts and diagrams that can be developed based upon the size of your venue and the number of guests attending, the following presents a standard diagram. Be sure that you develop this as the guest list is confirmed to ensure smooth flow of traffic during the reception.



When designing your floor plan, keep in mind you will need tables for the following:

- Head Table
- Guests' Tables
- Registry Table
- Food Buffet
- Cake(s)/Dessert Table
- Beverage Table
- Gift Table

It is also important to give some thought to the room size you will need for the reception. This is generally based on the seating style utilized and the number of expected guests. You can use the following chart as a guideline.

Room Size Needed

Seating Style	20 guests	50 guests	75 guests	150 guests
60" Round Tables	240 sq ft	600 sq ft	900 sq ft	1,800 sq ft
75" Round Tables	241 sq ft	602 sq ft	904 sq ft	1,808 sq ft
Theater Style Seating	180 sq ft	450 sq ft	675 sq ft	1,350 sq ft
School Room Style 18" Tables	290 sq ft	725 sq ft	1,088 sq ft	2,175 sq ft
School Room Style 30" Tables	350 sq ft	875 sq ft	1,312 sq ft	2,625 sq ft
Reception Style	190 sq ft	475 sq ft	712 sq ft	1,425 sq ft

The following table number charts will help you get started in assigning seating for the reception.

Table Number _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Table Number _____

1. _____
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Table Number _____

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Table Number _____

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Table Number _____

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The Receiving Line

If the couple for which you are planning the wedding is not accustomed to formal events, you may need to coax them somewhat in regards to the receiving line. The purpose of the receiving line is to allow the hosts and other members of the bridal party to officially welcome and be introduced to the guests. The receiving line should take place in the following order:

- The Bride's Mother
- The Groom's Father
- The Groom's Mother
- The Bride's Father
- The Bride
- The Groom
- The Maid of Honor
- The Best Man

The advantage of this receiving line is that the first two people are from both families so that guests are quickly recognized and easily introduced. For example, the bride's mother can introduce each guest from the bride's family to the groom's father and vice versa.

- Bride's mother
- Bride's father
- Groom's mother
- Groom's father
- Bride
- Groom
- Maid of Honor
- Best Man

Although this receiving line appears more logical (the hosts greeting the guests first) it does mean that guests from the groom's family are not able to be introduced to the bride's mother and father. However, this problem is overcome if you are using a master of ceremonies (MC) who will announce the names of your guests just before they are greeted by the bride's mother.

A popular variation on the above receiving line (where the bride's parents as hosts are first in the line), is the traditional Jewish receiving line:

- Bride's mother
- Bride's father
- Bride
- Groom
- Groom's mother
- Groom's father

In the event there are a large number of guests and the receiving line would take quite some time, it could be shortened as below:

- Bride's mother
- Groom's mother
- Bride
- Groom

In the case of divorced parents, who do not wish to stand next to each other, the following modified version of the traditional receiving line, where the parents alternate, provides a simple solution.

- Bride's mother
- Groom's father
- Bride's father
- Groom's mother

- Bride
- Groom
- Maid of honor
- Best man

On the Day

What Needs to Happen and When

The big day has finally arrived and it's time to put everything you have been planning for weeks into action. While you are likely to feel nervous on the day of your first wedding, and even at subsequent weddings from time to time, it's important to keep those jitters in check and focus on details.

Your first job of the day will be to ensure that everyone who has a part in the day's activities has an itinerary. This allows you to be sure that everyone knows where they need to be, when and what they need to do at appropriate times.

It can also be helpful to provide everyone with communications equipment to facilitate the communications process throughout the day. This is particularly beneficial if the wedding will be held at a large facility. Cell phones are an excellent idea; however, two-way radios can prove to be critical. Make sure they are well charged the day before.

For yourself, be sure that you have your binder with all the program information with you. Ideally, you should keep it with you all day so that you can always know what needs to be done at any given time.

Try not to stress too much if something unexpected happens. In all honesty, a wedding would be atypical if something unexpected didn't occur. The key is to make sure that you are prepared for all eventualities. The way to do this is to have an assistant who is well versed and can step in at any juncture of the wedding and keep things running smoothly in the event you need to handle something else.

Prepare the Agenda for Wedding Party

Once you have defined a day as well as a theme for the wedding it is now time to direct your attention toward preparing an agenda for the wedding party. An agenda is an essential element critical to the success of any wedding, regardless of size. While a general outline is a good way to get started you will want to work your way toward creating an entire agenda that will allow sufficient room for all aspects of the wedding including arrival time, ceremony and every aspect of the reception.

Below you will find a sample wedding reception agenda to help you get started.

Sample Reception Agenda

Williams/Gordon Wedding

Glen Oak Resort

Magnolia Room

Saturday; May 12, 2008

7:00 – 11:00 pm

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 7:00 pm | Welcome guests as they arrive. |
| 7:30 pm | Make announcements pertaining to food service |
| 8:30 pm | Make sure couple's play list is adhered to by the
musical entertainment |
| 8:45 pm | Announce the couple's first dance |
| 9:00 pm | Call on the persons making speeches and giving
toasts |
| 9:30 pm | Call the guests' attention to the cake-cutting
ceremony |
| 10:30 pm | Call the guests' attention to the bouquet and
garter toss. |
| 11:00 pm | Signal the farewell at the party's end. |

Post-Wedding Evaluation

Assess what Worked and what Didn't

While it can be extremely tempting to sit back and prop up your feet, breathing a sigh of relief after the wedding is concluded, it should be understood that just because the last guest has departed there is still work to be done in order to finalize the wedding. Certainly, take a deep breath and celebrate your success; however, remember that it is now time to direct your attention to evaluation and follow-up. These two phases are equally important in determining what worked in your wedding planning and what did not so that you can improve upon future weddings.

Evaluate Client's Perspective of the Wedding's Success

While it should be understood that in order to effectively evaluate the success of the wedding you will need to canvass at least a cross-section of everyone; including vendors, exhibitors and attendees, your ultimate feedback will come from your client. You will need to take care in gathering information and evaluating your client's perspective of the success of the wedding.

One way to do this is with a post-wedding meeting, somewhat similar to the pre-wedding meeting you held with the client in the initial planning stages. This is a prime opportunity to find out exactly what worked for the client and what did not.

After you have gathered critical information, don't forget to hold a meeting with your staff to go over the information that has been collected. Remember that while mistakes can and will happen in any wedding, the point of this meeting is not to assign blame but rather to look for areas that can be improved and look for effective ways in which to accomplish that.

Send out Thank You Cards

After the wedding is concluded don't forget the importance of following-up with thank you cards for your vendors and clients. Whoever helped in putting the wedding together, including volunteers and staff members, should receive a thank you note for their role in the success of the wedding. There are a number of different ways you can express your appreciation, including a handwritten thank you note as well as flowers; however, the important key is to make sure that each thank you is personal to each person. Avoid generic pre-printed thank you notes.

Part Three: Starting Your Own Wedding planning Business

Business Basics

Research the Business Opportunities

While there are certainly a large number of opportunities for employment within the wedding planning industry, a large majority of wedding planners eventually decide to start their own business. This is because starting your own business provides a number of benefits including the potential for a higher income and the freedom to operate your own business.

Before you actually start your own business; however, it is important to make sure that you have thoroughly researched the industry along with business opportunities in your area. This information will not only be critical when preparing a business plan, which will be needed at many junctures along the way, but will also help you better structure your business.

Your research should include several critical areas including local opportunities, along with competitors already in your local area and risks you may encounter along the way.

Prepare a Business Plan

Once you have completed your research you will then need to commit your plans, ideas and research to paper in a business plan. A business plan not only functions as a type of guide for getting your business off the ground but is also critical in gaining important resources, such as funding, for your new business. A solid business plan should contain, at a minimum, the following information.

The **types of services** you will provide – It is important to be specific in this regard. Remember that the wedding planning industry can cover a wide variety of services. If you plan to cover a wide range of weddings that is fine; however, if you plan to only cover a specific type of wedding in the beginning, such as traditional or destination weddings, this should be specified in your business plan. In your business plan you should specify the following:

Hourly Wedding Coordination

- Consultations as necessary
- Assistance with planning of the wedding.
- Wedding venue assistance
- Reception venue assistance
- Attendance at caterers meeting if requested.
- Attendance at cake designers meeting if requested.
- On-site coordination at wedding rehearsal if requested
- On-site coordination the day of the wedding
- Vendor contract review and suggestions
- Collection of bride and groom's personal items and delivery of them to a designated location after the reception.

Rehearsal & Wedding Day Coordination

- Initial Consultation
- One in-person consultation approximately 1 week prior to wedding date to finalize details and your expectations
- Attendance at wedding rehearsal for up to 2 hours
- On-site coordination the day of the wedding for up to 12 hours
- Vendor contract review and suggestions
- Collection of bride and grooms personal items and delivery of them to a designated location after the reception.

Week-Long Wedding Coordination

- Initial Consultation
- Phone and email consultation for 2 weeks prior to the wedding date
- One in-person consultation approximately 1 week prior to wedding date to finalize details and client expectations
- One in-person consultation approximately 3 days prior to wedding date to finalize details and client expectations
- Attendance at caterers meeting if applicable
- Telephone follow up with vendors as needed prior to the wedding date
- Attendance at wedding rehearsal for up to 2 hours
- On-site coordination the day of the wedding for up to 12 hours
- Vendor contract review and suggestions
- Collection of bride and groom's personal items and delivery of them to a designated location after the reception.

Expanded Wedding Coordination

- Initial consultation
- Unlimited phone and email consultations.
- Unlimited phone, email and in-person consultations during the week of your wedding.
- Attendance at caterers meeting if applicable.
- Attendance at cake designers meeting if applicable.
- Telephone follow-up with vendors as needed prior to the wedding date
- On-site coordination for wedding rehearsal
- On-site coordination the day of the wedding
- Vendor contract review and suggestions
- Collection of bride and groom's personal items and delivery of them to a designated location after the reception.
- Bridal suite decoration services

Full Service Wedding Planning & Coordination

- Initial Consultation
- Assistance with planning of wedding.
- Wedding venue assistance
- Reception venue assistance
- Complete coordination and mediation with all wedding vendors used for wedding throughout the different stages of the wedding, from planning through completion of the reception and honeymoon.
- Assistance with maintaining the wedding within budget.
- Assisting with keeping all aspects of the wedding on time and properly flowing together.
- Attendance at caterers meeting if applicable.
- Attendance at cake designers meeting if applicable.
- Telephone and in-person follow up with vendors as needed prior to the wedding date
- On-site coordination for wedding rehearsal
- On-site coordination the day of the wedding
- Vendor contract review and suggestions
- Collection of bride and groom's personal items and delivery of them to a designated location after the reception.
- Bridal suite decoration services

Location for your business – You must be specific about where the business will actually be located. If you do not have the funds for renting a facility in the beginning and plan to base your business from your home, that is fine.

Who your clients will be – This will be largely tied in with the types of weddings you plan to cover.

Competitors – If you have thoroughly completed your research before drafting your business plan you will have no problems detailing wedding planning entities that already exist in your local area.

Vendors for products and services – Your research phase should have clearly identified vendors for the products and services you will need in your wedding planning business. Remember that you want to have vendors lined up before you actually start getting business.

What you will charge – Don't wait until you book your first client to determine what you are going to charge. Make sure that you have researched the going rates in your local area for planning a variety of weddings. You want to appear well educated regarding the rates when you issue bids to clients.

Advertising and marketing – This is also a critical area. Anyone with a vested interest in your business, including prospective lenders, will want to know how you plan to get clients. You must have a solid advertising and marketing campaign that you can direct them to.

Funding – Finally, you will need to quote a specific amount of money that you will need to get your business off the ground and running. Frequently, many people tend to estimate far too low on this amount. Make sure that you have everything covered that you will need to start your business plus a little extra to account for unexpected items and emergencies.

Remember that developing a business plan is a critical phase in starting your business. While it may seem to take a bit of time and even be a bit mundane when you would rather be actually starting your business, few lenders will take you seriously without a complete business plan.

Even if you are able to finance your venture on your own without taking out a loan, a business plan can help you to gain a clear idea of where you are going and how to get there. It can also prove to be beneficial in helping you

to identify the resources you need to start your business and also to avoid any surprises down the road.

Sample Business Plan

Executive Summary

Special Occasions Wedding Planning is a full-service company that provides complete consulting services for weddings. Our consultants are experienced and dedicated professionals with many years of wedding planning experience. Special Occasions is unique in that we give our clients our undivided attention. We listen to their needs and work with them to create the wedding of their dreams. Our clients' wishes become our commands. Our services include weddings, honeymoons, receptions, anniversary consultations, budget planning, answers to etiquette questions, as well as full-service referrals to florists, hair stylists, entertainers, musicians, etc.

Objectives

Our goal is to ensure that every detail of our client's wedding is pleasurable and memorable. Therefore we offer a host of packages and services specifically tailored to the needs of each client. We are confident that this business venture will be a success and we estimate that our net income will increase more than 10% by the second year.

Mission

Special Occasions is a full-service company that provides complete consulting services for a variety of weddings. Our consultants are experienced and dedicated professionals with many years of wedding planning experience. We listen to our clients' needs and work with them to create the wedding of their dreams.

Keys to Success

The keys to our success are as follows:

1. Service our clients' needs promptly and efficiently.
2. Maintain an excellent working relationship with vendors.
3. Maintain a professional image at all times.

Company Summary

Special Occasions is a start-up company that provides full-service wedding planning. We are experienced and professional consultants and will use our expertise to help create memorable and stress free weddings for our customers. By doing this, our clients can sit back and enjoy their wedding. We create weddings suited to the client's unique style.

Company Ownership

This business will start out as a simple proprietorship, owned by its founders, Stacy Planner and Michelle Occasion. As the operation grows, the owners will consider re-registering as a limited liability company or as a corporation, whichever will better suit the future business needs.

Start-Up Summary

The company founders, Stacy Planner and Michelle Occasion, will handle day-to-day operations of the plan and will work collaboratively to ensure that this business venture is a success.

We estimate that our start-up costs will be \$8,000 (including legal costs, logo design, advertising, direct mail, and related expenses). An additional \$5,000 will be required in the bank account as an operating capital for the first two months of operation. The start-up costs are to be financed in equal portions by the owners' personal funds (i.e., Stacy and Michelle are investing \$6,500 each).

How to Set Up a Successful Wedding Planning Business

Start-up

Requirements	
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Start-up Expenses	
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Legal	\$700
Stationery etc.	\$450
Brochures	\$450
Insurance	\$350
Research and development	\$200
Expensed equipment	\$2000
Licenses and Taxes	\$250
Communications	\$100
Other	\$500
Total Start-up Expenses	\$8,000

Start-up Assets Needed	
------------------------	--

Cash Balance on Starting Date	\$5,000
Other Current Assets	\$0
Total Current Assets	\$5,000

Long-term Assets	\$0
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Total Assets	\$5,000
--------------	---------

Total Requirements	\$8,000
--------------------	---------

Funding	
---------	--

Investment	
------------	--

Stacy Planner	\$6,500
Michelle Occasion	\$6,500
Total Investment	\$13,000

Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$0
Current Borrowing	\$0
Other Current Liabilities	\$0
Current Liabilities	\$0

Long-term Liabilities	\$0
Total Liabilities	\$0

Loss at Start-up	(\$3,000)
Total Capital	\$5,000
Total Capital and Liabilities	\$5,000

Company Locations and Facilities

Initially this will be a home-based business; however, by 2010, we intend to expand our facilities into a well-equipped and operational office.

We are a full-service wedding planning group and provide the following services: etiquette advice, wedding scheduling, discounted invitations and products, vendor confirmation, rehearsal attendance, supervision of both ceremony and reception setup and budget planning.

Market Analysis Summary

Nearly \$35 billion are spent every year on weddings, events and meetings. Therefore, professional wedding planning consultants are a commodity. Special Occasions is full-service wedding planning company that offers a

variety of services to our clients. We pride ourselves on being professional and courteous at all times and we have packages to suit everyone's needs.

We will primarily advertise to brides and grooms.

Sales Strategy

The company's sales strategy will be based on the following elements:

- Advertising in the Yellow Pages – two inch by three inch ads describing the services will be placed in the local Yellow Pages.
- Placing advertisements in the local press.
- Developing affiliate relationships with other service providers (florists, hair stylists, caterers) that would receive a percentage of sales to the referred customers.
- Word of mouth referrals – generating sales leads in the local community through customer referrals.

Management Summary

Our wedding consultants are Stacy Planner and Michelle Occasion. Collaboratively they have planned and serviced over 250 weddings. They are knowledgeable about all areas of planning and decorating, as well as budgeting. Stacy has a BS in Communications and a minor in Interior Decorating. She has been a wedding consultant for five years and became interested in providing consultant services when she successfully planned her first six weddings for family and friends. Since then, Stacy has received extensive training in wedding planning and her certification from the National Association of Wedding Consultants and Professional Wedding Planners. Michelle has a Bachelor's degree in Management.

Personnel Plan

Initially, Special Occasions personnel will include only the two owners, both of whom will be working full time. As the personnel plan shows, we expect to hire an additional wedding planner in the next year. This person will work full time, but will not be included in the management decisions.

The following subtopics represent the financial plan of Special Occasions.

General Assumptions			
	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
Plan Month	1	2	3
Current Interest Rate	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Long-term Interest Rate	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Tax Rate	25.42%	25.00%	25.42%
Sales on Credit %	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%
Other	0	0	0

Projected Profit and Loss

Our projected profit and loss is shown in the following table.

Pro Forma Profit and Loss			
	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
Sales	\$95,300	\$114,360	\$125,796
Direct Cost of Sales	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other	\$0	\$0	\$0
	-----	-----	-----

How to Set Up a Successful Wedding Planning Business

Total Cost of Sales	\$0	\$0	\$0
Gross Margin	\$95,300	\$114,360	\$125,796
Gross Margin %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Expenses:			
Payroll	\$0	\$0	\$0
Sales and Marketing and Other Expenses	\$4,550	\$1,000	\$2,000
Depreciation	\$0	\$0	\$0
Leased Equipment	\$0	\$0	\$0
Utilities	\$0	\$0	\$0
Insurance	\$0	\$0	\$0
Rent	\$0	\$0	\$0
Payroll Taxes	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other	\$0	\$0	\$0
	-----	-----	-----
Total Operating Expenses	\$4,550	\$1,000	\$2,000
Profit Before Interest and Taxes	\$90,750	\$113,360	\$123,796
Interest Expense	\$0	\$0	\$0
Taxes Incurred	\$22,918	\$28,340	\$31,465
Net Profit	\$67,833	\$85,020	\$92,331
Net Profit/Sales	71.18%	74.34%	73.40%

Choose and Set up a Business Name

Careful consideration should be given to the choosing of your business name. This is the first information many prospective clients will have regarding your business so you want to make sure you set a good first impression. Toward that end the selection of your business name should aim for several targets:

It should **describe your business and the services you offer**. Clients should not be left with any doubt that your business is in the wedding planning industry.

It should also be **unique**. You do not want to run the risk of having your company mistaken for another business. Creating a unique business name also helps you to stand out from the crowd and assures that clients will remember you.

Make a point to choose a business name that is **easy to pronounce**. Clients tend to shy away from businesses that have names which are difficult to say.

Finally, your business name should also be **available for use**. Keep in mind that as much as you might like the name of another business you cannot simply take the name for your own. Using another company's business name for your own could spell legal problems that can be quite costly.

After you have selected a name for your business you will need to handle the matter of having it set up. In most areas you will need to file it as a fictitious business name if you have chosen something other than your own name. This usually does not require much paperwork and only a small fee is involved in the processing; however, it is a matter that must be tended to immediately. To avoid wasting money before you file the actual paperwork, it's a good idea to make sure you have performed some research to be absolutely certain that no other business is already using the name. This can usually be done in a short amount of time online.

Keep in mind that if you have chosen a name that is really creative, you have the option of having it trademarked. This is not a requirement but one that would absolutely protect the name. If you wish to go this route, you will probably need a lawyer to handle the details. The process can be costly and can take some time, so be prepared.

Legal Issues to Consider

The next order of business will be to choose a legal structure for your business. This is another matter of necessity that should be handled early in the process of starting your own business. You will have several options to choose from and each one provides various advantages and disadvantages so be sure to weigh each option carefully based on your needs.

Sole Proprietorship – This is the least expensive business structure and therefore one of the most popular; however, you should know before settling on this structure that it will not provide you with many of the legal protections that are offered through other options such as a corporation. There is less paperwork involved in organizing your business as a sole proprietorship, making it much simpler and easier to arrange during the hectic early days of starting your business. It also provides you with the ability to report any income from the business on your personal tax return. The one major disadvantage of this business structure is that you will be personally liable for any debts arising from the business.

Partnership – If you are going into business with someone then the partnership is a good option to consider. It is far easier and less expensive for partners to form this type of business than a corporation; however, once again you would be legally responsible for any business debts. In this case, the legal responsibility for the debts would fall to all partners.

Be aware that if you do choose a partnership it's a good idea to spell out everyone's responsibilities in the planning stages rather than waiting until later. This includes the duties of each partner, how day-to-day decisions for the business will be made and the percentage of the business that each partner will own.

Corporation – You can organize your business as a corporation regardless of whether you are working with partners or on your own. The two major advantages of incorporating are that you will not be held personally liable for debts arising from the business and some prospective clients may take your business more seriously. The process of incorporating your business; however, can be quite complex and costly. Usually, it's best to hire an attorney to handle the matter for you. You should also be aware that you will be held to more regulations as a corporation than with other legal structure options.

Limited Liability Company – This option provides a cross between a corporation and a partnership. Benefits include limited personal liability.

Other Legal Issues

Other legal matters which should be taken into consideration include business licenses. Much of this will depend on the area in which you start your business and the legal requirements for that local area. You will also need to consider whether you will require a resale number for your business.

A resale number could be beneficial if you plan to buy items at wholesale prices and then resell them to your clients. Keep in mind that not all wedding planners do this. Some simply buy the items they need for their client's using funds provided by the client and let the matter rest.

In the event that you do intend to purchase items at wholesale and then resell them; however, you will probably be required to have a resale number. This is because you will need to collect sales tax on the items you sell and then remit that tax to the appropriate entity; whether that is city, county or state. A resale number allows you to do that. Resale numbers are also frequently known as a sales tax permit, tax number or resale permit.

Contact your local tax office for information on completing an application to attain a permit.

Once you have your permit you will typically need to show it when you make wholesale purchases. Be aware that you will also need to complete a form on a regular basis (this is typically either monthly or quarterly) that details the merchandise you have purchased during that time period. On that form you will calculate the tax that is owed and send in a check for the amount of tax owed. Keep in mind that you must file these forms by the specified deadline or you will face potential fines as well as interest.

The tax you pay will be on the resale value rather than the wholesale value. Typically, the resale value is double the wholesale value.

Insurance Issues to Consider

When starting your own business there will be several types of insurance you will need to consider in order to protect yourself and your business.

Property Insurance – This type of insurance will protect the contents of your office in the event of destruction such as fire, burglary, etc. It works similar to your home insurance except that it is specific to your business. In fact, if you are operating your business from home you may even be able to obtain a rider for your existing homeowner's policy that will protect your office equipment for very little. You should; however, also consider coverage for what is known as intellectual property. This covers matters such as invoices, bills, designs, etc.

Errors and Omissions Insurance – This type of insurance is specifically designed to protect you in the event that you forgot to do something or neglected to handle something.

Disability Insurance – Disability insurance is certainly not a requirement and if funds are tight in the beginning it may not be something you wish to fund; however, later on it could prove to be quite useful. You may also wish to consider other types of personal protection insurance such as health insurance, life insurance and dental insurance.

Your Business Office



Home Based vs Renting an Office Space

Finding a place to locate your business will also be an important decision. Your two choices are to either rent space for your business or work out of your home. Of course, there are benefits and drawbacks to both; however, a large majority of wedding planners choose to operate their business from home, at least in the early stages, because of the convenience and cost-saving factors.

There is no doubt about the fact that basing your office from home can be a tremendous time saver. Not only are you saving time on the commute to and from an office but it also allows you to be more productive and combine activities. Instead of coming home from the office and facing a stack of household chores, you can dovetail those chores in with your regular work schedule.

The money saving factor also cannot be emphasized enough. In addition to the fact that you will not need to expend money on rent, you will also be able to take advantage of tax breaks by locating your office in your home. A percentage of your mortgage payment and property taxes can be claimed on your taxes along with maintenance costs and utilities. Be aware there are some rules for this; however. There are different methods for calculating the percentage of those costs you can claim but most people find it easiest to dedicate one room in their house to their business. This is acceptable provided that you utilize it for no other purpose. For more information on this subject read the IRS Publication 587.

Before you make a final decision regarding whether it would be best to base your business out of your home or rent a space, make sure you check on local zoning as this can have a large impact on whether you can base an office in a residential area. Some zoning restrictions may prevent you from placing a business sign in your yard and also may prohibit parking, etc.

While basing your business at home can provide a number of advantages, it should be understood that doing so will require some adjustments, particularly if you have a family. Like any business you will need to take special care in setting regular business hours. This can prove to be more difficult than one might think because it can be easy for your personal life and business life to cross into one another, either by clients intruding on private business time or family and friends making the mistake of thinking they can interrupt business simply because you are at home.

Renting a space can provide one major advantage and that is professionalism. Many clients will tend to take your business more seriously if you are set up in a separate location rather than your home. Having a separate office also makes it much easier to draw the line between your professional life and your personal life. Of course, this is also a major, on-going investment that you will need to carefully consider. It could be that in the early stages you simply will not have sufficient funds to rent an office. If you find that you can afford it; however, keep these considerations in mind:

- Location – Like any piece of real estate location is imperative. You will want to look for an office that is conveniently located to your home but also makes it easy to travel to any vendors or suppliers you may visit frequently.
- Space – Make sure you opt for an office that provides sufficient work space as well as a storage area and a place to meet with clients.
- Price – Rent only what you can afford and avoid those locales you know will stretch your budget to the breaking point.

Your Tools of the Trade

Telephones



Like any business you will need to have telephones for communication purposes. Unlike twenty years ago when one telephone would suffice for business communications, today's successful business entrepreneur, especially one in the wedding planning industry, will need multiple phones and several types of phones.

Of course, you will need the traditional land line that operates as a business phone on which clients can reach you, but you will also need the following:

- Fax line
- Dedicated computer line (DSL)
- Cell Phone

You may even wish to have more than one business line set up, especially if you will have at least one employee. This prevents your number from being continually busy and makes work much easier for everyone involved. Be sure to specify that your first line act as a rollover line.

When having your business line installed, you should be aware that you will need to pay a bit more for the line than you would pay for a residential land line. That said; however, you will gain the advantage of being listed as a business in the phone book and that is invaluable advertising.

Many people may shy away from the idea of installing a separate fax line because it will cost more; however, the convenience is worth it. Certainly you could simply send faxes from your computer; however, this may not always be convenient if the document you wish to fax isn't in your computer and scanning it takes time. Compared to the hassle of this approach, the cost of having another line installed to serve your fax machine is quite minimal. A cell phone is also a must for any successful wedding planner as you will likely be spending significant amounts of time away from the office, meeting with clients and vendors.

Office Equipment



Computer

Today, a computer is vital to almost any business. This should be at the top of your list for necessities in starting your own business. For the most part, most computers will already come with any generic software you will need, including Microsoft Office; however, you may also wish to obtain other types of software that can make the operation of your wedding planning business much easier. A bookkeeping program such as QuickBooks can be helpful as can professional wedding planner software packages. Meeting Planner Plus is a particular favorite of many wedding planners, offering budgeting, timeline, room layout and tasks features.

While the choice between a laptop and a desktop is a personal one, many people are opting for a laptop with a docking station. This allows you the reliability of having a desktop computer and the convenience of a laptop that

you can take with you anywhere; an important consideration for a busy wedding planner on the go.

Copier

A copier is also an essential tool for any business and should be on site to make copies of contracts, etc. While at one time copy machines were large and expensive, today it has become much easier for practically anyone to have a copy machine. You might wish to consider purchasing an all in one unit that will serve as a printer, copy machine and scanner. Some units will also work as a fax machine as well.

Printer

You will need to have at least one printer in your office. If you are to have only one printer, set aside a portion of your budget to purchase one that will produce crisp, quality prints; particularly photo prints.

Furniture

You will also need to furnish your office. Regardless of whether you are renting a space or working from home you will need:

- Desk
- Chair
- File Cabinet
- Chairs for clients

Depending on the amount of space that you have, you may also wish to include a conference table to meet with clients and staff as well as a sufficient amount of additional chairs for staff and clients.

Stationery

You have a number of options when it comes to having stationery printed but be aware that you should make a point to have professional stationery. While this is a business supply this is the first communication many clients will receive from you and it should set a good impression of you and your business. Your business stationery will be used for a variety of communications including interaction with clients and vendors.

One of the least expensive options is to print stationery on your own computer. This is both convenient and inexpensive.

Of course, if you want to step things up a notch it can be worth it to invest in having a nice set of stationery printed by professionals. The cost will be more; however, the impact of having professional stationery can pay off in multiple ways.

Employees or Contractors



Do you Need an Employee or a Contractor?

Many wedding planners start out on their own; however, as their business grows they may find reason to hire help. Depending on the type of help you need you may need to hire either an employee or a contractor. Understanding the differences between the two is an important first step in becoming an employer.

First, it should be understood that if you hire an individual who is to be an employee then you will be legally responsible for paying payroll taxes as well as the possibility of unemployment and worker's compensation benefits. While this can seem as though it is a disadvantage, before you discount the idea of hiring an employee it should be noted there are benefits to hiring employees as well. For example, if the individual is your employee you can train them to perform tasks as you would like them handled and you will have the right to direct their work. This means you can require the work to be performed at specific hours as well as at specific locations.

This is quite different than if you hire a contractor. With a contractor you will not be responsible for paying payroll taxes, unemployment benefits or worker's compensation. Of course, you also will not be training the contractor and must rely on the fact that they have attained their skills elsewhere. You will have no right to dictate when or where the work is performed. Of course, you will retain the right to agree on the final result of the work, and to some

degree possibly even where services will be performed but this is not the same as requiring an employee to be at your place of business for a specific number of hours per day.

If you are considering the differences between employees and contractors it is also important to point out that when you hire an employee, that individual will likely only be working for you. This is quite different than hiring a contractor who very well may have other clients at the same time they are working for you.

Of course, one of the major advantages to hiring a contractor is that you only need to pay them on a per contract basis. With an employee you must pay them for every hour they are on the clock.

Other legal matters that should be taken into consideration include the fact that while you can fire an employee this is not so cut and dried with a contractor. Generally, you will have signed a contract with a contractor and in order to avoid the possibility of a lawsuit, you will need to take care in how you handle terminating that contract.

If you do decide to hire an employee always check with your state's labor department to make sure you fully understand the ramifications of salary, health and safety regulations, unemployment insurance and worker's compensation.

Financial Considerations



Do you Need Start up Funding?

The amount of money that you will need for start-up funding will largely depend on how you begin your business. For example, if you start out slow and run your business out of your home you may only need a little money to get started. There are a couple of different ways you can handle purchasing items you need for your client's weddings without spending any money out of your own pocket. For example, you could either require a deposit up front from the client to cover those expenses or you could simply request that the vendor bill the client directly.

Most of the funding you will need up front will be dedicated to what is known as working capital. This covers costs such as promoting your business and office related expenses. When considering how much money you will need to start your business, it is important to keep in mind that it may take a little time before fees from clients begin to come in. In the interim you will need sufficient funding to keep your business running.

The amount of funding you will need will also depend on whether you plan to continue working for a while at your regular job after you start your business or whether you plan to quit cold turkey and put everything into the business. That is entirely a personal decision; however, if you do plan to quit your job and dedicate all your time to your business you will also need to plan on covering living expenses for a period of time as well. The general rule of thumb is to allow for six months after you start your business.

The following start-up costs budget will give you an idea of how much money you may need to begin your business. Remember that this budget is entirely discretionary and will vary from one individual to the next depending on your personal requirements for your business.

Start Up Costs

Expenses	Low Range	High Range
Rent	\$0	\$2,300
Equipment	\$5,000	\$17,000
Inventory	\$0	\$500
Licenses and Taxes	\$250	\$350
Communications	\$100	\$250
Payroll	\$0	\$4,000
Advertising	\$500	\$2,000
Legal Fees	\$650	\$1,500
Insurance	\$800	\$1,700
Misc.	\$700	\$1,500
Total	\$8,000	\$31,100

Depending on how much money you determine you may need for your business, there could be a variety of sources available to you for possible start up funding. For example, you may find that you have enough money to start your business in your personal savings already. In the event that you are not able to fund your new business venture through savings or credit already available to you, it will then be necessary to consider other options.

Family members are often the first consideration for many business entrepreneurs. While family members can prove to be valuable resources for funding, it's a good idea to consider the funding as nothing short of a loan or you could run the risk of developing misunderstandings and hurt feelings later on. Just as you would when borrowing money from anyone else, commit all the terms of the loan in writing including how much money is being borrowed, when it is to be paid back and information regarding any interest that applies to the loan.

Other possible funding sources include banks. Making sure you have a strong business plan prepared ahead of time can go a long way in helping to pave the way toward receiving a business loan.

How to Keep Account of your Finances

Keeping track of your finances is critically important to running any successful business and wedding planning is no different. The first step in handling your finances is to open a business account at a local bank. You should never combine business and personal funds. Start off on the right foot by opening that separate account. This account should only be used for depositing funds from clients and paying bills related to the business.

The next step is to create a system in which you can keep track of your accounts receivable and accounts payable. This can be done with a ledger or you may choose to use a bookkeeping program such as Quicken.

In your personal binder, that you should get in the habit of carrying with you everywhere, you will need to include a couple of items that will also make the process of keeping track of your finances much easier and less confusing.

First, always carry some type of small journal or notebook with you that you can record mileage information in. You will be spending a lot of time traveling from clients to vendors and prospective wedding sites, so you will be racking up a lot of miles. When tax time arrives you will certainly want to claim that mileage and in order to do so you need to get in the habit of being vigilant about recording it.

Next, you need to carry a sturdy or zip bag with you in which you can retain receipts for business items you have purchased. A zippered bank bag works well for this purpose. And, of course, always always ask for a receipt.

Tax Considerations

One of the biggest downfalls of many entrepreneurs, regardless of industry, is failure to consider taxes. You must give proper consideration to taxes or you will quickly find yourself in trouble. Even before you earn your first payment you should be thinking about taxes.

Taxes that you will need to consider include:

- Personal income tax
- Payroll taxes (if you have employees)
- Corporation taxes (if you are incorporated)
- Taxes on product sales

In regards to your personal tax returns you will need to file a Schedule C, if your business is owned and operated in the U.S.

If you have hired employees you will need to file for what is known as an Employee Identification Number or EIN. This is used when you report payroll taxes and can also be used to make sure you are charged the wholesale rate when purchasing items you intend to resell.

As we discussed in a previous section you will also need a tax resale number or sales permit if you plan to buy items at a lower wholesale price and then resell them to your clients.

Your Income



How to Get Paid

The best step you can take in making sure that you get paid and get paid on time, is to develop a contract with your client that outlines exactly what your fee will be and when it will be paid. Keep in mind that it is quite normal to request a deposit when the job is awarded. This is a non-refundable deposit and is typically paid after your initial consultation, provided the client has decided to hire you, of course. Many wedding planners charge a 50% non-

refundable deposit and require the remainder of the balance to be paid on the day of the wedding.

It is quite common for wedding planners to bring a final invoice to the wedding and be paid at the conclusion of the wedding. In some cases; however, you may need to invoice the client after the wedding to cover incidental fees, but this is usually a rarity. Either way your invoice should include specific information such as the following:

- Client name/contact information
- Invoice date
- Services provided
- Applicable taxes
- Expenses you have paid
- Total amount due
- Terms of payment (such as payable within 30 days or due on receipt)

How to Determine your Fee

As you begin planning the set up of your new business you will naturally want to give some consideration to how much you should charge for your services.

There are several different methods that can be used for determining your fee including hourly, flat and what is known as cost-plus.

The hourly fee is quite common among wedding planners. With this type of fee service you would charge an amount per hour for the number of hours you spent on the wedding.

With the flat fee method, which is also frequently known as a project fee, you would provide a flat fee to the client at the beginning of the project. This is commonly used when planning a large wedding.

The cost-plus fee is based on the final cost of the wedding with your fee arriving from a percentage of the total cost of the wedding. This type of method works similar to the way one would figure a tip on a restaurant bill. For example, if the total cost of the wedding was \$20,000 and you and your client had agreed to a 15% fee for your services then your fee would be \$3000.

Industry Standard Fees

Industry standard fees and charges can vary widely depending on the type of weddings you are planning and where you are located geographically.

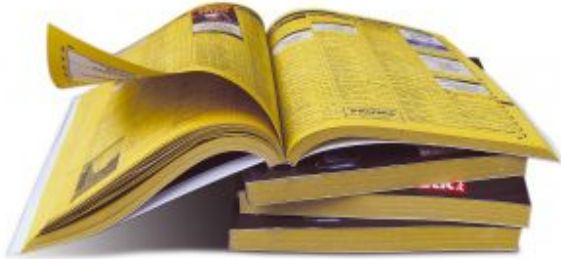
With the cost-plus method, fees tend to range between **10 and 15%**. This type of method does not always work out well for the wedding planner; however, if the wedding is small. This is why it is commonly only used for large weddings. As you can see if you are planning a small wedding for \$5000 and charge an average 15% fee then your income would only be \$750. In that case, you may find you need to either charge a much higher percentage service fee or use another method.

When using the hourly fee, rates also tend to vary widely. Beginning wedding planners commonly charge about \$25 per hour while more experienced wedding planners can charge up to \$150 per hour. The industry average falls at about \$50 per hour.

A flat fee can be difficult to determine because it is often tied in with the size of the wedding. For example, if the wedding is quite large it is not at all uncommon for the wedding planner's fee to be thousands of dollars. For a small wedding; however, you would charge less. Ideally, it's best to steer away from charging a flat fee until you have quite a bit of experience and can accurately determine how long you anticipate it will take for a wedding. Otherwise you could find yourself tied to a flat fee and spending far more time than you anticipated on a wedding.

Part Four: Promoting your Wedding Planning Business

The Most Important Part of your Business



If you don't promote your business, your business will fail

Promoting your business is one aspect of owning a business that you cannot afford to neglect. In fact, promotional and advertising costs will likely be one of the first expenditures you make in your business. Because of the long-term benefits you will receive from promoting your wedding planning business it should really be viewed as an investment – an important one.

Promotional Budget



Set Aside a Budget for Promotional Expenditure

Once you have determined who your target audience is it is time to turn your attention toward setting aside a budget for promotional expenditures. Remember that at first this may be one of your largest expenditures; however, it will be well worth the investment. It is imperative to make a point of setting aside some funds when you are determining how much your start -

up costs will be. This should be a priority. If you fail to include it as a priority you will likely only throw money toward advertising when a few extra dollars come your way. This can prove to be dangerous for a business you hope to grow and expand.

How Much at First

The amount of money that you set aside for promotion and advertising at first, will depend somewhat on exactly how you plan to promote your business and your local area. At a minimum you should plan to put \$500 toward promoting your business; however. This will allow you to promote in several different ways. If you have additional money, you may plan to spend upwards of \$2000 toward promotional and marketing efforts.

So, how will that promotional budget be spent? Let's take a look at a few ways in which you can advertise and promote your new wedding planning business.

Promotional Tools

Brochures & Business Cards



One of the first promotional tools you will want to make use of are printed items such as brochures and business cards. These are excellent tools to utilize because they are easy to carry with you and do not become quickly dated.

Business cards are relatively inexpensive and you can purchase them in bulk. You will probably be amazed at the number of opportunities you will have to hand your business card out so make sure you order a large amount.

You can either have your business cards printed by a professional printer or if you are really on a shoe string budget you can do it yourself using a special business card stationery and your computer. Do consider the fact; however,

that do-it-yourself cards often lack the polish and professionalism of custom printed cards. If you are presenting yourself and your business as professional it is worth it to invest the small amount of money required to have professional cards printed. Most printers charge about \$20 for an order of professional business cards.

Brochures are also a must have in your toolbox of promotional items. All the vendors that you utilize should have one of your brochures. In addition, you can provide them to companies and clients as you begin to build your business. At a minimum your company brochure should contain the following information:

- Company name
- Contact information
- Photos of weddings you have handled (make sure you have signed releases)
- A list of the services you provide
- Testimonials
- A photograph of you

Keep in mind that all photographs used in your brochure should be crisp, clear and professional, including the photo that you include of yourself. No candid shots here. If necessary, invest the money needed to have a professional portrait taken. You can use the photograph in a variety of other marketing techniques and it will more than pay for itself.

Ideally, opt for a tri-fold brochure that will fold neatly into three sections. This looks much nicer and more professional. If you are on a tight budget, at least in the beginning, you could choose to use a one page flyer; however, you should move to a 3-panel brochure as quickly as funds allow.

Like business cards you can print your brochures directly from your computer if you have the software and knowledge to do so; however, in all honesty, if you are going to be printing a large bulk of brochures it is really more cost effective to simply hire a printer to handle the job for you.

Portfolio



A portfolio is an absolute necessity for any wedding planner. The portfolio contains examples of your past work along with other information that could be useful in promoting your business such as:

- Testimonial letters from former clients
- Newspaper clippings regarding weddings you have planned
- Materials from previous weddings such as flyers, brochures, news-releases
- Photographs of past weddings
- Thank you/congratulatory letters

In the beginning it may seem as though you will have a difficult time of putting a portfolio together, particularly if you have limited actual wedding planning experience. You must persevere and put together that portfolio; however, because it can be critical in landing clients. Even after you have developed your business and word of mouth has spread about how good your services are, you will still need to frequently rely on your portfolio to show examples of your work to interested clients. This means that you will need to set aside time occasionally to keep your portfolio updated. You will need to remove some of the older items and replace them with newer items as well as items that reflect how your business has grown.

Photographs to include in your portfolio should be relatively easy to arrange provided that you have made an effort to have photos taken of every wedding that you plan. This is why it can be a good idea to always make sure there is a photographer on hand or at the very least invest in a good quality digital camera that you can bring with you to record photos of the wedding. Keep in mind that as your business grows you certainly won't want to include every photo you take but it's still a good practice to take as many as possible.

It's quite likely that in the beginning you will be forming your portfolio from weddings that you have handled for family and friends. That is quite okay as this is how most wedding planners get started. Just simply make sure you have some good quality photos of the wedding and you're set to go.

Ideally your portfolio should include no more than 25 photographs but at least 15. This provides a solid reference for interested clients to browse through without overwhelming them with sheer numbers. After all the idea here is to impress them, not lose them. Try to opt for a collection of photos that shows the variety of weddings you have planned. If this isn't possible in the beginning, don't worry; you can expand your portfolio as your business grows.

Next, you will need to include some letters of testimonial and reference from previous clients. Once again, you may need to be somewhat creative in the beginning. Later, it will be much easier to gather these letters but in the beginning simply make a point to ask for a letter of reference from individuals whose weddings you have successfully planned – yes, even if it was your Aunt Jane. The letter doesn't have to say it was for a relative; it should simply cover the facts that a prospective client would be interested in, such as:

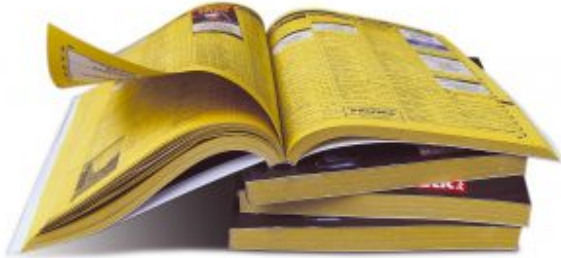
- The services you provided
- Creative ideas you introduced into the wedding
- How successful the wedding was

Finally, pull your portfolio together by including any other relevant information as it becomes available, such as sample brochures and flyers you designed for weddings, newspaper clippings, etc.

Ideally, your portfolio should be contained in a nice, professional 3-ring binder. Avoid inexpensive binders that will only look cheap and fall apart quickly. Splurge and spend some money for a good quality binder that will represent you and your business well. Purchase some plastic sheet protectors, preferably non-glare, to hold the materials that you will place in your portfolio. A good quality 3-ring portfolio will run between \$50 and \$75.

If you wish you could also place your portfolio in a professional portfolio case. Plan to spend upwards of \$100 for a nice leather case.

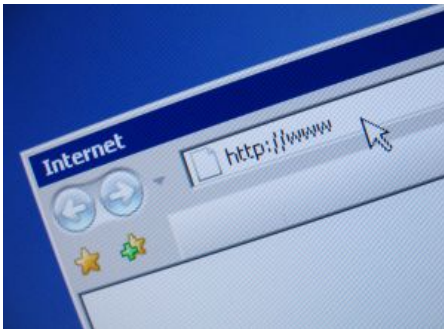
Advertisements



Advertisements are another essential to getting your new business off the ground and started in the right direction.

As with any business you should consider taking out an ad in the yellow pages. You need not spend a lot of money on this; in fact it's not even necessary to spend a ton of money on it. The point is to make sure you are there. A small display ad, about 1/8 of a page should suffice just fine.

Your Web Site



Today a website is a promotional tool that you can't afford to ignore. Having your own website gives you the opportunity to interact with prospective clients 24-hours a day. Even if you've never published a single web page you need to investigate having a professional website published for your business.

There is a common misconception that having a commercial website takes a lot of time, money and expertise. This is actually not true. You need not spend a lot of money and if you are not sure how to do it on your own there are plenty of ways that you can get a site up and running relatively easily.

If you want to give it a try yourself you probably already have the software necessary on your computer to handle the job on your own. This can be accomplished by using a program such as Netscape Composer or Microsoft Front Page. Actually, you can even do it using Microsoft Publisher. All of these options are designed to be easy to use and will provide a nice website, even for commercial use. If you haven't used them to design a website before, they all have a built-in tutorial and templates that can walk you right through the process.

Once your website is designed you will need to upload the files to your server. This means, of course, that you will need to have domain hosting and your domain name already in place. Many hosting companies provide full-service and will help you with that process as well.

It should be noted at this point that there are a LOT of web hosting companies out there. Some are free, some are cheap, some are reasonable and some are expensive. While you may be operating on a limited budget when you first start out you should try to avoid using any free web hosting services. The service is not reliable and you, and your customers, will have to deal with annoying ads on your site. It hardly presents the picture of professionalism. There are plenty of other companies out there that offer services for a very reasonable monthly fee, including GoDaddy.com.

To be sure that your website covers everything that would be of interest to prospective clients be sure to include the following on your site:

- All the information that is included in your brochure: photographs of past weddings, etc.
- A section that describes your approach to wedding planning and even which types of weddings you might specialize in. This can go under the About Us page.
- Full contact information including name, phone number, e-mail address and regular address
- List of services provided

Marketing Strategies to Acquire New Clients



The best marketing strategy you can utilize to find new clients is networking. It should be kept in mind that networking may not pay off in immediate result but is instead a process that is designed to pay off in gradual dividends. The idea is to build relationships and then at some point in the future when one of your contacts needs a wedding planner you will be the first person they think of.

In many cases you can actually network within your target market while you handle other tasks as well. For example, you will already be meeting with a variety of vendors as you establish your business. On one hand you are developing a list of reliable vendors that you can use in future business but on the other you are also engaging in relationship building that could pay off in future clients as well. After all, everyone is either a prospective client or knows a prospective client – even your vendors. You will likely find that as time goes on referrals from your vendors will provide a rich and constant source of business. Therefore, always make sure you are friendly and professional when interacting with vendors and armed with promotional items such as brochures and business cards.

This includes attending various bridal shows that take place and in general making sure that your name is out there. Be sure to have a large supply of business cards with you at all times so that you can pass them out at these events and other occasions. Other excellent ways to network include going to:

- Local dress shops
- Florists
- Printers

As previously mentioned, trade shows are an excellent source of prospective business. As your business grows and develops it is important to stay on top of emerging trends in your industry and one way to do this is to attend trade shows. At such conventions and shows you can find out about changes in the

industry, meet with prospective new vendors and develop contacts that could lead to future business.

Membership organizations such as civic and service clubs like the Kiwanis and Rotary, business organizations like your local Chamber of Commerce and social clubs should also be considered as fertile ground for networking.

While you will need to pay a membership fee to participate in these organizations, they will often provide a great return on that investment many times over. Keep in mind that with these types of organizations, it's simply not enough to show up; however. For this to really work, you will need to get involved. Volunteer for committees, run for election and in general, be active.

Anything you can do to get your name out there is an excellent idea, while at the same time working to force a relationship with these vendors. If they know you, in the future they can refer clients to you.

In addition, it's a good idea to keep in mind the importance of word of mouth. Obviously, it's not appropriate to pass out business cards at a wedding that you are planning and coordinating; however, do remember that if you do a good job then the bride and groom will certainly recommend you to their engaged friends. In fact, many wedding planners state that they receive the largest number of their jobs from people who were at a wedding they planned and coordinated.

Finally, don't forget to check with the bride and groom during your wrap-up meeting with them to make sure they will act as a reference for you.

Also, don't forget such great opportunities as giving speeches at relevant organizations and even teaching classes through the continuing education division of your local college or university. If you're not comfortable with speaking in public, as with most people, consider signing up for a course at your local college or joining Toastmasters.

Selling Yourself

To a degree, when you are marketing your wedding planning business you are actually selling yourself. To do that effectively, you should focus on a few key guidelines.

First, avoid the temptation to let prospective clients know you are new to the game. This may be true but you certainly do not have to broadcast it. Even if your experience only includes planning weddings for family and friends there is no need to shout that to the world. Focus on marketing yourself as a professional.

Always, always keep the focus on the benefits you can provide to the client through your expertise. Clients do not want to know how hiring you can benefit you; they want to know what your services can do for them.

Always maintain professionalism. This means discussing what you can do for the client with a definite sense of expertise and confidence.

How to Respond to a RFP

At times you may find yourself in the position of needing to submit a proposal. This may occur when a prospective client is considering more than one wedding planner. Your proposal should outline what you can do for the client.

Several key items should be included when you are responding to a Request for Proposal (RFP). Your proposal should include:

- A summary of past experience
- References from former clients
- Proposed timeline for the wedding
- Price quote and payment schedule
- List of resources
- Included deliverables
- Applicable exclusions
- How you plan to make the wedding unique

You may be able to pull much of this information from your portfolio, particularly your summary of past experience which you likely include on your brochures and other marketing materials as well as references and testimonials from former clients.

When it comes to the timeline you need to communicate to the client that you have a complete understanding of the requirements for the wedding. You can do this by recapping information provided in the RFP and indicating when you will begin work on the project, if selected, and some information regarding milestones along the way to completion.

You should always include information about exactly what will be included in your services and what will be excluded, if anything. There should be no misunderstandings about this. Possible deliverables and inclusions might include:

- Development of timeline and critical path
- Development and management of budget
- Design of wedding program
- Identification and location of a venue
- Selection of food and beverages
- Receipt of RSVP for guests
- On-site management
- Post-wedding management

If you will not be responsible for items such as recruitment of sponsors or travel arrangements, you should state this in your proposal.

Always make sure when you are preparing your proposed fee for the proposal that you have been realistic and included a sufficient amount. It is bad business to quote one price and then come back later and increase it. Be clear about what is included in the pricing and how invoicing will be handled, including any up front non-refundable deposits. If you are planning to charge an hourly fee you should also include estimates for the number of hours each component of planning the wedding will require. Examples of likely components include:

- Development of timeline and critical path
- Development and management of budget
- Design of wedding program
- Recruitment of musicians/entertainment
- Negotiation for venue, food and beverage
- On site management

Customer Service



This is Key

The importance of customer service to any business, but particularly one that effectively deals with people on a daily basis cannot be emphasized enough. The quickest way to destroy your business before it has even had an opportunity to get off the ground is to provide poor customer service. Conversely, the key to boosting a business into becoming a success is making sure you provide customer service that goes above and beyond what the customer expects.

Winning Customer Service Tips

- Always maintain a professional, friendly attitude
- Do what you say you are going to do – stick to your word
- Never make promises you can't keep
- Focus on what you can do for the client not vice versa
- Listen to your customer and their needs
- Always make an effort to go above and beyond

Your Professional Image and Approach to your Business

Your professional image and how you approach your business can be critical to the success of your business. Regardless of what type of industry you have worked in previously it should be kept in mind that wedding planning is a professional industry and you need to present yourself as a professional in your attire and demeanor.

The first way to do this is to make sure that you have a professional location to meet with prospective clients. Even if you are working out of your home you can usually create a spot in which you can meet with your client. If for

some reason that solution is not feasible and you do not want your client tripping over toys, then by all means, arrange to meet with your client at a location where you can have some privacy. A private room at a local restaurant works well for this purpose.

To further your professional image, always make sure that you are prepared for your meetings with clients. You should always have your portfolio with you along with plenty of brochures and business cards, a calendar, blank contract, a calculator and sample budgets.

Take some time to ensure that you have a wardrobe that will enable you to dress the part. If you do not already have a suitable wardrobe this may be an expense you will need to incur in the beginning but it will be worth it. For initial meetings with clients, women should opt for skirts or pants with a jacket. Go for darker, more conservative colors. A two-piece business suit will work fine for men. Be sure your shoes are spotless and well shined.

Avoid wearing too much cologne or perfume, as this could aggravate the allergies or asthma of some prospective clients, or simply be too overwhelming.

Finally, let your enthusiasm for what you do shine through!

Appendix

Agenda Plans for Engagement Party

Activities	Time Allotment	Person Responsible	Notes
Door greeter & registry			
Fellowship time			
Greetings & Special thanks to family and friends		Father of the Bride	
Announce engagement		Father of the Bride	
Recognition of other special people		Family members and bride and groom	
Special toast, speech or presentation		Parents of the bride	
Any other traditional ceremonies			
Photo session		Bride and groom	
Reception			

Agenda Plans for Bridal Showers

Activities	Time Allotment	Person Responsible	Notes
Door greeter & registry			
Fellowship time			
Greetings and special thanks			
Ice breaker or game			
Gift opening			
Refreshments			
Present guest favors			
Photo session			

Agenda Plans for Bridesmaid Luncheon at Home or Special Location

Activities	Time Allotment	Person Responsible	Notes
Door greeter & registry			
Special introductions			
Fellowship time			
Greetings and special thanks		Bride	
Presentation of gifts to attendants		Bride	
Gift opening			
Refreshments or meal			
Special toast			
Discuss wedding specifics			
Photo session			

Agenda Plans for Rehearsal Dinner

Activities	Time Allotment	Person Responsible	Notes
Door greeter & Registry			
Fellowship time			
Greetings and special thanks		Groom's father	
Special introductions			
Special toast by fathers			
Presentation of gifts to attendants			
Gift opening			
Meal			
Photo session			

Agenda Plans for Commitment Ceremony, Renewal of Vows Ceremony, Civil Unions

Activities	Time Allotment	Person Responsible	Notes
Door greeter and registry			
Fellowship time			
Greetings and special thanks to family and friends		Spokesperson or minister	
Prayer		Spokesperson or minister	
Special scripture or poem reading			
Candle lighting ceremony			
Musical selection		Vocal or instrumental	
Reaffirmation of vows/affirmation of commitment		Spokesperson or minister	
Exchange or rings or gifts			

How to Set Up a Successful Wedding Planning Business

Signing of certificate			
Benediction or conclusion			
Presentation of the couple			
Photo session			
Reception			

Resources

Professional Affiliations

International Special Weddings Society

410 N. Michigan Ave

Chicago, Illinois 60611-4267

(312)321-6853 Fax: (312)673-6953

Email: info@ises.com

Website: www.ises.com

This group is very big on membership development and networking.

International Festival and Wedding Association

2601 Eastover Terrace

Boise, ID 83706

(208)433-0950 Fax: (208)433-9812

Email: nia@ifea.com

Website: www.ifea.com

Professional Convention Management Association

www.pcma.com

Help with Venues

World Chamber of Commerce Directory

www.chamberofcommerce.com

OfficialTravelGuide.com

www.officialtravelguide.com

Help with Vendors

Special Weddings Magazine Buyers Guide

http://bg.specialweddings.com/buyers_guide

Wedding Solutions Magazine National Source Book
<http://www.wedding-solutions.com/articles/NatDir2006/home.html>

Help Locating Speakers and Entertainment

Speakers Platform
www.speaking.com

Speaker Bureaus by Country and State
www.findspeakersandbureaus.com

PartyPop – locating entertainment vendors
www.partypop.com

Contact Any Celebrity – locating celebrities for weddings
www.contactanycelebrity.com

Theme Resources

Party411
www.party411.com

Shindigz
www.shindigz.com

Stumps
www.stumps.com

Reading Resources

Magazines

Special Weddings – Monthly trade magazine
www.specialweddings.com

Wedding Solutions – Contains industry news, advice, trends, etc.
www.wedding-solutions.com

Meeting Professionals International
www.mpiweb.org

Meetings & Conventions

www.meetings-conventions.com

Resources for Starting a Business

Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov

Searching Business Names

www.sba.gov/hotlist/businessnames.html

Help on Business Licenses

www.sba.gov/hotlist/license.html

Help with Insurance

National Association for the Self-Employed

www.nase.org

Business Start-up Financing

www.sba.gov/financing

Meeting and Wedding planner Software

Meeting Planner Plus

Register 1-2-3

<http://certain.com>

CVent

www.cvent.com

EZVentPlanner.com

www.ezventplanner.com