

In This Chapter

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Chapter

1

Taking Your First Steps Toward the Altar

You wouldn't go out and buy the first car you saw without doing some research on its qualities or gas mileage; you might even consult *Consumer Reports* for expert tips. Likewise, you wouldn't have brain surgery without first consulting and interviewing several doctors. And you wouldn't go looking for the perfect home without the help of a reputable real-estate agent. The same is true for the wedding industry. You need to understand what's out there and what's available before you start spending those precious dollars.

So before you make that first purchase, you need to understand what the wedding industry is all about and how to get yourself organized. In this chapter you'll also find the best online resources to help you along your path to wedding bliss.

Understanding the Wedding Industry

The first thing you need to know about weddings in this country is that the wedding industry is big business. In 2002, the most recent figures available, the wedding industry grossed between \$72 and \$106 *billion*, second only to the holiday season in retail! That figure doesn't cover just the wedding itself. It also covers things like the rings, the honeymoon, and setting up your new home.

Understanding how big the industry is might give you some perspective on why you don't want to rush right out and reserve the first reception site you see. This wedding process will cost you some money—you don't have to break the bank to have the wedding of your dreams, but you do have to plan wisely. (I'll tell you how to set up a budget you can live with in Chapter 2.)



This couple has just set the date. (Photo by Jeff Hawkins Photography)

Finding a System to Keep Yourself Organized

The number-one suggestion I make to the brides I work with is to find and use some kind of organizational system. It doesn't matter what this is, whether it's a three-ring binder, a CD-ROM program, or a folder with pockets. (Obviously, this book will be a big part of your system, and it should be.) The type of system you choose to use really doesn't matter. What matters is that you use it. Keep everything that relates to your wedding in this planner: receipts, contracts, material swatches, a calendar with appointments marked, phone numbers of all your vendors, and reminder lists. Make sure you have this planner with you whenever you visit a vendor. Even if you're not an organized person, force yourself to become more so. Your planner should be so much a part of your being that when you are without it, you feel like you are missing something. I cannot stress this enough. If you are organized, you will be able to enjoy the whole planning process so much more.



Teddy's Tips

Be patient with yourself! Taking some time now to read and understand what you need to do will pay off later. Keep every receipt, and keep them together in one place! You never know when you might have to produce one quickly.

Bridal Shows

So you've figured out a system you're comfortable with and one that you will use. Now what? Depending on how much time you have, you may want to attend a bridal show in your area. Bridal shows are great ways to meet the vendors from your area whose services you will be using. These shows are usually promoted by area merchants to let the community know what wedding services are available in the area. The usual format for such events might include time to talk with individual vendors, a fashion show by area bridal shops, and sometimes drawings for door prizes the vendors provide.

What to Expect

The whole idea behind bridal shows is twofold: You get to see what's available in your area, and the vendor gets your name and address for possible contact. The bride and groom, or the parents of a bride or groom, can browse the different vendors (jewelers, caterers, florists, and photographers, to name a few) and get a feel for what they have to offer. Sometimes, you will be able to tell whether a vendor can provide what you need by just looking at the booth setup. If crepe-paper streamers and balloons decorate the booth and you're thinking more in terms of satin ribbon and crystal, then you should look at other displays.



Bouquet Toss

One reason the diamond is a popular stone for engagement rings is because the ancients believed that its sparkle arose from the flames of love. Ancient people also believed that the bride should wear a diamond on the third finger of the left hand because that finger was said to have the only vein that runs directly to the heart.

How to Get the Most from a Bridal Show

Brides who get the most from these shows talk to the folks behind the booth tables and hear what they have to say. Is it a hard-sell? Does the product look like something you would want to have at your wedding? Are the vendors personable? Do they seem to know what customer service means? Pick up any handouts or brochures they offer, and make notes in your planner on items you particularly like. When you get home, you can spread out your notes and brochures and see what's available. This can give you a good starting point.

The real reason the vendors at a bridal show agree to give up an entire Sunday is that they receive a list of all attendees at the show. You probably will receive some flyers or direct-mail pieces from some of the vendors following the show. Many times, you will receive additional coupons or discounts from these vendors after the show.



Wedding Woes

Watch for professional behavior from vendors: appearance, mannerisms (gum chewing—yuck!), good grammar, eye contact, and so on. How do they present themselves? If they act bored or uninterested when you speak with them, how much effort and enthusiasm are they likely to put into your wedding?



This happy couple is walking on air. (Photo by Jeff Hawkins Photography)

The Role of the Bridal Consultant

Working one-on-one with the bride and her family from the engagement to the honeymoon, or any point in between, the *bridal consultant* can ensure that all aspects of your wonderful day happen as you had planned. Some couples hire consultants as soon as they announce their engagement. I've actually had mothers call me for advice and counsel before their daughters even have a ring, much less have a date chosen. Other couples choose to hire a consultant near the end of the process—six weeks or so from the actual wedding day—to pull together those loose ends and to oversee the rehearsal and wedding day activities. The bottom line here is that you should decide just how much you want to involve the bridal consultant. You're the boss; the final choice should always be yours.



Nuptial Notes

A **bridal consultant** works directly with the bride and groom, or the couple's parents, to help facilitate the wedding. Most bridal consultants have independently owned businesses. Their expertise is in finding the right vendors to meet your budgetary needs and keeping you on track with your check-off list as you count down the days until the wedding. The bridal consultant is there to help you have *your dream wedding* at the best possible price.

How to Find the Right Consultant for Your Wedding

You can look in the Yellow Pages as a first step in locating a competent bridal consultant, as long as you review the listings carefully. The best method, however, is to ask friends and family for names of consultants they have worked with. Many vendors will also recommend bridal consultants in their area they have worked with and whom they feel comfortable with. In addition, the church may have worked with bridal consultants they felt especially good about having at the wedding.

Look for a bridal consultant who is a member of an organization of wedding professionals. This generally indicates that the consultant is continually learning, attending conferences to further her knowledge, and keeping aware of changes and trends in the wedding industry. You should always ask the bridal consultant for references.

The Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC)

You can also get the names of consultants in your area by contacting certain trade associations, such as the Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC). This is the largest organization for

bridal consultants in the world. In 1982, ABC had just two members worldwide; as of April 2003, it has a worldwide membership of more than 3,400 members, and that number climbs higher each year.

This association is located in Connecticut call them (860-355-0464; fax 860-354-1404) or e-mail (Office@bridalassn.com) and they will be happy to give you names of members in your area.

You might decide that you just want to bend a consultant's ear for a couple hours to help you get started. I've had several brides who were getting married away from my area make an appointment to get some advice about how to begin. That's fine. If that's all the help you think you'll need, then definitely take that route.



Bouquet Toss

There are no "wedding police" out there. If you truly want to do something at your wedding or during the planning stages that may not be proper etiquette, get some impartial advice. Try to determine whether the custom truly is not in good taste or whether it simply wasn't a custom practiced at the turn of the century. It may be one no one would bat an eye at in the year 2003 and beyond.

Using the Internet: Show Me Your Sites!

The Internet has grown so much since I last updated this book in 2000 that the changes are hard to keep up with. The websites you can choose from are endless, and the mass of information can boggle the mind.

Michael Connors of WdWEB.Company—Wedding Detail—Party Detail, in Traverse City, Michigan, has been in the wedding business for the past 17 years. He knows the websites you should know about like the back of his hand.

In the following sections, Michael shares which are the most popular sites to browse and offers “must-see sites” for each item of the planning process I discuss. Please understand that websites change very frequently. As of this writing, all of these sites were active and well established.

Bridal Shows

Three main websites that feature wedding shows are ...

- ◆ www.bridal-shows.com
- ◆ www.bridalfashionshows.com
- ◆ www.bspishows.com

Bridal Consultants

The Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC) has made it easy to find a consultant in your area by allowing you to send in an e-mail request. They will locate a consultant near you and send you his or her information.

- ◆ www.afwpi.com
- ◆ www.bridalassn.com

Wedding Portals/Directories

Wedding portals/directories are the easiest way to find information on weddings. A portal is like a mall, but everyone in the mall or “portal” is in the same type of business—the one-stop shopping for weddings. Caterers, bridal shops, coordinators, clergy, and so on, from your area are all located in the same place. This allows you to stop searching the web and start concentrating on viewing products and contacting professionals. Michael’s must-see sites are as follows:

- ◆ www.theknot.com
- ◆ www.weddingchannel.com
- ◆ www.weddingdetails.com
- ◆ www.weddingnetwork.com

Honeymoons on the Web

The Internet has opened the door to finding fun and exotic places for your honeymoon. Many locations you may have never heard of before. The Internet also puts pictures, videos, and detailed information right at your fingertips, making your choice much easier. Some sites to visit are ...

- ◆ www.honeymoondetails.com
- ◆ www.honeymoons.com
- ◆ www.unforgettablehoneymoon.com

Wedding Stores Online

There are several sites that have thousands of products, from favors to centerpieces and everything in between. By checking out these sites, you will come up with a multitude of ideas, products, and options to fit your budget and taste. Once you decide on your wedding theme and colors, it will be very easy to visit these online stores and order without having to drive around the state. To make good use of these sites, make a list of products you want to order, their prices, and the website; then make another notation on this list that shows when you ordered an item and a phone number for that order. Sites to see include the following:

- ◆ www.modernbride.com
- ◆ www.theweddingshopper.com
- ◆ www.weddingdetails.com



Bouquet Toss

You think you have problems? How would you like to select a new wedding ring every year? That’s what the primitive brides had to do. Their rings were circles of hemp or rushes woven together into the shape of a circle. Because the fibers disintegrated over a period of time, women had to replace their rings every year!

Personal Bridal Pages

Should you have a web page? The answer is YES! It will save you time and money and will help you communicate better with your family and friends. Imagine your page with a picture of the two of you and a little background information. Then add a brief synopsis of your jobs, hobbies, and heritage so that friends and family can get better acquainted with you. Post your wedding date, time location, and reception information and include a map (a must for out-of-town guests). Also, include where you are registered for gifts. Many national chain stores are online and linked with their stores all over the world. Two websites that allow you to set up your own personal web page for your wedding free of charge are the following:

- ◆ www.theknot.com
- ◆ www.weddingdetails.com

These two sites also offer wedding advice via e-mail.



He just popped the question, and she said "yes!"
(Photo by Jeff Hawkins Photography)

Online Bridal Registry

It has never been easier to register online. With thousands of items to choose from and all those extra ones you want to register for, you can't miss. Online registry offers you the convenience of registering where you like without having to worry about whether or not a certain store is in your area. Perhaps you would like to add a glass vase from Macy's in New York to your list, but most of your friends and family live in Idaho. Online registry is the answer, allowing friends to order conveniently and safely over the Internet. Check out these registry sites:

- ◆ www.a-weddingday.com
- ◆ www.alifetime.com
- ◆ www.giftpoint.com
- ◆ www.theweddingshopper.com
- ◆ www.weddingnetwork.com

Wedding Planning Sites

These websites offer links to all areas of planning, from consultants to florists to photographers.

- ◆ www.theknot.com
- ◆ www.weddingchannel.com
- ◆ www.weddingdetails.com

Destination Weddings

These sites offer help with planning a wedding in another location. As you'll learn in Chapter 18, a destination wedding is a wedding you plan from one area and all of your guests travel to the wedding. It is usually held in a vacation location such as Disney World or Hawaii, someplace special.

- ◆ www.unforgettablehoneymoon.com
- ◆ www.weddinglocation.com

Invitations

These websites can connect you with help in choosing your invitations, programs, place cards, and other wedding papers. You'll read all about it in Chapter 12.

- ◆ www.ed-it.com
- ◆ www.elite.com
- ◆ www.invitesgalor.copm
- ◆ www.mvsweddinginvitations.com
- ◆ www.regencythermo.com



Wedding Woes

I highly recommend ordering invitations from an expert vendor in the field with whom you can sit down and discuss the order in person. There are too many chances for mistakes if you order invitations online or over the phone. And then, it's your word against the vendor's as to who made the mistake.

Wedding Traditions

Weddings that call for unusual special effects or costumes to carry out the wedding theme can be found at the following websites. Yes, the second site is real and it *is* about costumes. Halloween weddings are fun, fun, fun, as you'll see in Chapter 17!

- ◆ www.medieval-weddings.net
- ◆ www.scarycostumes.com
- ◆ www.weddingdetails.com/lore

Tuxedos

Refer your groom-to-be and his groomsmen to the following sites for information on tuxedos:

- ◆ www.afterhours.com
- ◆ www.fubu.com
- ◆ www.tuxedos.com

Gown Preservation

When the big day is over, check these sites for information on preserving your wedding gown:

- ◆ www.wedclean.com
- ◆ www.weddinggownspecialist.com



Pure romance. (Photo by Jeff Hawkins Photography)

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ The wedding industry has become big business, grossing many billions of dollars every year.
- ◆ Use a system of organization—a CD-ROM program, a notebook, or a folder—to hold your receipts, brochures, fabric swatches, vendor phone numbers, appointment calendar, and so on.
- ◆ Attending a bridal show can be a good way of learning about wedding vendors and comparing prices and services.
- ◆ Working with a bridal consultant can help you make sure all aspects of your big day go as planned.
- ◆ Check out the Internet for information regarding anything and everything to do with your wedding.