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How to Have a Dream Wedding on a Budget

By Rachel Greenberg

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No one wants to pay more than they have to for anything, especially something as costly as a wedding. And if you're like me, and you had to foot your own bill, then you certainly want to keep costs down. I was afraid it couldn't be done, especially since my husband and I live in one of the most expensive regions of the country. But my wedding is proof that it can be done, and here's how:

Reception Venue

Look for non-profit organizations that host wedding receptions, since their rental fees are extremely reasonable. And many of them – the American Legion is one example – have gorgeous, well-maintained facilities. If you prefer an outdoor wedding, then skip the country club and go to a state or national park, where you can get beautiful landscapes at a fraction of the cost.

Catering

Many rental halls offer full-service catering, which includes linens and tableware, wait staff, all food prep and cleanup, etc. But unless you're at a non-profit (which hopefully you are, if you followed step #1), then this can be extremely expensive. Try to find a smaller catering company that typically does at-home meal service, since they know how to do things on a budget. And they are sure to give you excellent customer service.

Alcohol

You must, must, must buy your own alcohol. If you purchase it through your rental hall at retail price, you will be paying through the nose. If you have followed step #1, then you have most likely found a place that will allow you to bring your own alcohol, or will give it to you at a non-profit price. This is the only way to go.

Flowers & Decorations

Eliminate additional expense by keeping everything simple. There really is no need to have little party favors at each table, since hardly anyone remembers or appreciates those items anyway. And go easy on the flowers - having a few simple arrangements strategically placed can be very sophisticated and elegant.

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Music

With the abundance of music available for (legal) download via the internet, it's easier than ever to create your own CDs to play at the wedding. It's great to have creative control over the music and it gives you and your future spouse a project you can work on together. A lot of rental halls will have equipment available for you to play your CDs, but you can also rent this equipment fairly inexpensively.

Invitations

Save on invitations by only ordering paper invitations for family members. Everyone else, including your friends and extended family, can be invited via email. You may think it's tacky, but it's really the best way to get an accurate headcount. It's much easier for people to respond to an email than to have to mail back a response via snail mail. But still use the paper invitations for your family, since this is the

more traditional route. You can get very inexpensive invitations these days through various printing websites.

In addition to the recommendations I have listed above, there are many other little ways you can save. For example, going to discount bridal stores for your dress, getting a friend to make the wedding cake, etc. – but I have found that trying to micro-manage every little item on your checklist will make you crazy. So just keep it simple with the big items that I listed above, and you will have the ultimate dream wedding - a beautiful venue, excellent food, plenty of beverages, your favorite music, all on a budget!

Rachel Greenberg has a background in business and finance, and she received her MBA from Duke University in 1999. She writes fun and informative pieces for her website <http://www.bargainfamily.com> – which she created with her husband Lee. The website provides advice and recommendations for families on various products and services for their homes, lives, and businesses.

Finding a Wedding Planner

By Briana Liebmann

Are you in love with the dream of the perfect wedding yet overwhelmed with all the details and responsibility put upon you to plan your dream day yourself? A reliable wedding planner can help make the day you'll always remember a wonderful experience instead of a memory worthy of a nervous breakdown.

Also called wedding consultants or coordinators, wedding planners are the bride's right hand down to every detail in the ceremony and reception. She can be there the moment after the ring is on the finger to the last guest at the reception. The bride has the choice to give as much or as little responsibility to the planner as she desires.

But how do you know if you should hire a wedding planner? Here are a few examples where a wedding planner can help:

The first and probably most important aim of a wedding planner is to relieve as much stress for the

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bride as possible while still making her feel in control of the event.

If you are planning on a budget, your wedding planner will be sensitive and also be capable to balance the expenses. A good planner will prioritize what needs more or less monetary attention. Also, you will more likely go over your budget if you plan alone. Your wedding planner will not only make you stick to your prearranged budget, but also knows many vendors and can find special deals you would otherwise not be able to attain.

A wedding planner will be flexible enough to accommodate your dreams for your perfect wedding, they should have the creativity to both encourage and execute your unique ideas. This is your wedding. You know what will make it memorable, and your planner should help make this dream come true. However, these professionals know what is and is not acceptable for a wedding ceremony. A good wedding planner will be honest about your not so great ideas such as the best man's beer funneling contest.

If the ceremony is planned out of state, a planner in that area will be familiar with geography and will know the best vendors for that area.

One of the most important qualities of your perfect wedding planner is a shared sense of taste. Ask her what type of weddings she likes and ask to see samples of her past events. The right planner can narrow down choices in a certain category depending on your taste. Instead of thousands of invitations, a wedding planner will weed out the obviously unsatisfactory ones and let you choose from the top three.

Finally, wedding planners know all the questions everyone else forgets to ask. If the ceremony is outside, she will remember where the bathrooms are or if portable ones need to be rented. It is the wedding planner's job to leave no corner untouched.

There are many online resources you can use to search for the closest planners in your area. Remember to interview each applicant to see if they are qualified and if you both see eye to eye. Once

your perfect wedding planner is hired, relax and know your big day is in good hands.

Briana Liebmann is a regular staff writer for

, an original content article

database.



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