

Bridal Shows

You are engaged and have to plan a wedding. If you are confused about where to you start and how to go about planning your dream wedding, you are not alone. Bridal shows are one avenue you should examine. We recommend that both, brides and grooms attend Bridal Shows sometimes called Bridal Expos. Whether your local Bridal Shows are large or small, in hotels, convention centers, wedding facilities or elsewhere, plan to go. You will get a chance to meet wedding vendors, professionals and service providers. At the show, you can see, touch, feel and if there are caterers and bakers presenting, even taste their offerings. Each of them will be competing for your business. Most everyone will offer you "Show Specials" for signing up with them at the show such as savings, buy or rent a certain number and get one free etc. If they do not succeed, some will ask you to write down your and your wedding information so that they will be able to contact you later, while others will do so through a raffle.

What to do before you go

Check if the show producers offer a pre-registration discount.

1. If you can find out which vendors will be participating in any given show before you attend it, you can list those you are interested in and visit them first. Visit the ones who may be of some interest to you next and the rest only if you are not too tired and have time.
2. Prepare Information labels on your computer. This will save you time at the show as you will not need to write the same information over and over during your visit. Each label should include:
 - ✓ Your name,
 - ✓ Your address or your P.O. Box.*
 - ✓ Your phone number,*
 - ✓ An email address that you set up strictly for wedding info you will receive.
 - ✓ Your wedding date.

* When you register as a guest of the Bridal Show, you may receive free gifts and prizes donated by exhibiting wedding vendors. As part of their show participation contract, the vendors will receive your contact information so they can add you to their calling, mailing and Emailing lists and contact you at a later date. If you do not want the vendors to know your address, rent a P.O. Box. If you do not want the vendors to call you, either omit your phone number; give them a number you do not always answer or let the answering machine pick up.

3. Plan to spend at least 3-5 hours at the show. Leave ample time to walk the show, visit and talk with various vendors, watch fashion shows and participate in contests.
4. Though some cake and caterer appetizer samples may be offered, they will at best be considered small snacks. You may want to eat before you go. Also, bring a beverage with you.
5. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes. You do not have to impress the vendors. They have to impress you.

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What to bring

Do not go alone but do not bring more than 2 people with you. Though it is called a Bridal Show, it is important that both of you, bride and groom, attend. If the groom is apprehensive, the bride should bring her or both Mothers, the maid of honor or a Bridesmaid. They will appreciate being asked to be included in the planning process and can be of great help.

Still not sure if this vendor is truly the one you want? Ask if they would be willing to extend the special price to you for any length of time after the show. Most vendors won't have a problem working with you. If they say no, it makes you wonder why you need to do it RIGHT THERE AND THEN! Say thank you, and pass on by. Maybe it wasn't meant to be.

Be sure to bring a notebook and pen to write down information, answers to questions you ask, and quotes for services. Use the notebook only for those who do not offer a brochure. Taking notes on the actual brochure handed out by each vendor helps you connect a face and display you saw at the show. In addition to brochures, be sure to pick up their business cards as they are small and can be organized in a business card holder.

Just in case you do not receive a tote or shopping bag at the show, bring a large purse or tote bag to carry the brochures, gifts, etc.

Bring a cell phone. If your phone has a built in camera, great, if not, bring a camera and snap pictures of gowns, Tuxedo outfits, flower arrangements, table settings, favor ideas and other wedding items you liked. If you come across wedding gowns you are interested in, be sure to write down the designer's names in your notebook. It will help when you call the bridal salon presenting at the show, when searching the Internet, or both.

You may bring your check book or credit card for –just in case, but **do not** place any deposits.

Do not commit to hire any vendor, wedding professional or service provider on the spot. **Before** you do, you want to go over their literature, interview them and at least two more vendors in their field, at their places of business. This planner provides you with questions to ask and contracts to review. You want all your questions answered to your satisfaction, you want to have a contract you understand, that puts all the specifics in writing and that you agree with. But most importantly you want to be sure you have a good rapport and like working with the vendor. This cannot be done at a show.

At the show

If you did not bring an information sticker, be sure to fill out any contest entries or door prize drawing slips, clearly preferably in print!

When you visit with vendors, collect their business cards, brochures and other hand-outs. Ask questions. You want information and you want to be sure that you fully understand it.

Do not succumb to high pressure sales pitches. If a vendor is pushy, collect all the information and note this attitude right on the brochure or business card. Do not hire this vendor. You do not need stress and you do not like to be pushed. Be very polite and if both, you and your fiancé are present, use your parents as people you must consult with. If your fiancé is not present tell the vendor that you can not commit without consulting him or her. This always works! Even the pushiest vendor cannot argue with this logic.

Quite a few brides and grooms wrote to A-wedding Day after reading our **do not book vendors at the show** statement.

They were rather confused because most bridal planners suggested that they take advantage of the show specials and book vendors. The following experiences we encountered may clarify the point.

Bride's Name: _____ **Groom's Name:** _____ **Wedding Date:** _____

What Vendors Should We Expect to Meet At the show?

- **ATTIRE:** Bridal shops and salons offering wedding gowns and dresses for the ladies in the wedding party; Tuxedo shops for the groom and the men in the wedding party.
- **FOOD:** Caterers, Bakers and wedding cake specialists – Usually offer cake tastings
- **RECEPTION:** Hotels, Banquet halls and Reception venues
- **CEREMONY:** Officiants – usually non-denominational

GENERAL VENDORS:

- Florists
- Travel agents – offer ideas and services for destination weddings and honeymoons
- Transportation
- Photographers
- Videographers
- DJs
- Bands, **Solo Musicians** – harpist, violinist, **Group Musicians** – Chamber, quartet, etc.
- Beauticians and Make-up artists
- Others.

If they booked vendors at the show

The Photographer

My granddaughter got engaged and was planning her October wedding. As I often attend bridal shows, I invited her to come with me. She was delighted and we went to a Bridal Show in Southern California. This was her first bridal show experience. We went from booth to booth and I stood to the side and observed her interact with the vendors. I was grateful that she always told them that she wanted to visit all the booths before booking. Having stopped to talk to four photographers and collect their information, we went to the booth of the fifth. The two ladies at the booth answered all her questions and added something no one mentioned and my granddaughter never thought to ask. **You keep the copyrights!**

My granddaughter was very surprised! She asked if this was not the norm only to find out that most photographers keep the copyrights to each and every picture they take. WOW! So she asked the ladies why they did not keep the copyrights and was told that they considered it unethical. "Why?" My granddaughter asked. The answer was simple but true. We feel that we are like a ghost writer. Though he or she does the writing, the person who commissioned him owns the copyrights. Since you commission us to photograph your wedding, you tell us what pictures you want and pay us for the job, you own the pictures and the copyrights. As soon as we left their booth, my granddaughter tracked back and visited the former photographers who were surprised and uneasy by the question. She found out that all of them insisted on owning the copyrights. So, if she hired them, and needed a copy of a photo from her own wedding, she would need to purchase it from them, because no copying place will touch copyrighted material for fear of breaking the law. This was quite an eye opener. She and her fiancé will probably contact the ladies from the fifth booth as one of their possible photographers.

The Wedding Venue

We also visited with venue representatives. They all had beautiful pictures of weddings held at their banquet facilities. A few were honest enough to state that prices depend on the décor the menu and the number of hours the venue will be occupied. They handed my granddaughter their brochures with the various price lists and invited her to visit them at the venue.

However, others wanted a commitment on the spot. My granddaughter heard remarks such as "If you book today we'll charge you only \$XX.00 per person." (There was no other disclosure). – "October is in high demand. You must book now to reserve your date. A deposit of only \$XXX.00 will hold the place for you. "If you book today, we'll give you..... for free." " If you book today, we'll give you a discount of XX%" etc. My granddaughter does not plan her wedding alone and her planning partner, her fiancé, was not with us. Though a good excuse, she obviously would not have booked anyone anyway. She did take every brochure.

Well upon opening a brochure of one of the venues that charges **only so much per person, offers a free coffee, tea and water, and was ready for her to book**, we discovered the following:

- The deposit is **non-refundable**.
- The price per person was for a minimum of 100 guests.
- The meals included a salad, an entry, seasonal vegetables, rice or potato, rolls and butter, coffee, tea and water. No dessert.
- Bar fee \$175.00 for 5 hours
- Drinks: California wines \$4.00 - \$7.00 glass – Beer \$2.50 for domestic and \$3.25 for imported – Soda \$1.50 glass - Fruit Juice \$1.50 glass – A Bottle of domestic wine \$16.00 – Toasting champagne \$1.50 per person for the House champagne or \$12.00 per 750 milliliter bottle.
- \$175.00 set-up and clean up fees.
- \$225.00 Security fee.
- \$200.00 cake cutting fee.
- All equipment and items other than the microphone have to be rented for an additional charge.
- All prices subject to an 18% service charge.

If my granddaughter booked this vendor at the show, she and her fiancé would be in for quite a rude awakening. Wouldn't they?