

Wedding Planner

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Inspired by the Association of Bridal Consultants



DESIGN IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY TRENDSETTERS. . . NETWORKING BEST PRACTICES. . .
EXPLORING ROI. . . SURVEY RESULTS ON SERVING SAME-SEX COUPLES

ASK THE EXPERTS



Frank J. Andonoplas, MWP™
Frank Event Design



Merryl Brown, CWP™
Merryl Brown Events



Donnie Brown
Donnie Brown Events

Q. HOW DO YOU THANK YOUR REFERRAL BUSINESS? LOOKING FOR SOME DIFFERENT IDEAS, SINCE MANY OF THE REFERRALS COME FROM THE SAME PEOPLE OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

- Alexis Eliopoulos O'Mara, MWP™, Unique Weddings by Alexis, Boston

"There is a local gifting company that I like to use that has their finger on the pulse of new and fabulous items, and they do very elegantly packaged baskets with assortments of items, tailored to the recipient's tastes. This is convenient for me because they hand-deliver locally, and I can dictate the handwritten note. Sometimes, I do gift certificates to top local restaurants. One other item that I love to give as a thank you gift is the chicest candy ever from www.sugarfina.com—check out the candy trunk—this one is a showstopper!"

- Merryl

"You have to be very careful when giving gifts to venues and other vendors. Some might take this as a bribe. Many hotels forbid this. But to say thank you, I'd try to find out what they enjoy and go from there. Find out where they like to shop or dine. Dinner gift certificates (are nice); who doesn't enjoy a nice night out? If they are into cooking, a gourmet cooking shop gift certificate or cooking lessons are great ideas."

- Frank

"Honestly, the best gift you can give is to do a good job—and to make the referrer proud that they sent the client to you and got glowing reviews. But often, when we have companies that refer consistently, we have been known to do these things: 1. a Neiman Marcus gift card; 2. a homemade cake or pie; 3. a happy hour date for cocktails and appetizers; or 4. a spa certificate for a massage."

- Donnie

Q. WHAT STEPS WOULD I TAKE TO BECOME A SANDALS AND BEACHES VACATION SPECIALIST?

- Angi Bremicker, PennFoster student

"Come to the ABC Annual Conference, and take the Sandals certification course."

- Donnie

Q. SHOULD THIRD PARTY SUPPLIERS HAVE DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COUPLE? AS WEDDING PLANNERS, ALL SUPPLIERS SOURCED, RECOMMENDED, AND COORDINATED BY US HAVE NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COUPLE. RECENTLY, WE FOUND THAT THIRD PARTY PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO WE SOURCE, RECOMMEND, AND COORDINATE ARE INITIATING DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COUPLE, ESPECIALLY FOLLOWING THE WEDDING, CUTTING US OUT OF COMMUNICATIONS INCLUDING NOTICE OF THE DELIVERY, DELAY, OR PROBLEMS WITH PHOTOS. WE PREFER TO BE THE SOLE CON-

TACT FOR COUPLES AND MANAGE THEIR EXPERIENCE FULLY. AT THE VERY LEAST, WE ASK TO BE COPIED INTO COMMUNICATIONS BUT, WHEN ASKED, ONE PHOTOGRAPHER SAID, "I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANT TO CONTROL EVERYTHING." WE THINK WE ARE JUST DOING OUR JOB.

- Melina, Cinque Terre Wedding

"I would not use these vendors again. This is very unprofessional behavior. If you are the event producer, they need to go through you or at the very least, cc you on all correspondence. You need to find your 'A Team' and your 'B Team,' and stick with these loyal vendors as much as possible. In time, you will be a well-oiled machine and will always work hard to support the client and one another."

- Merryl

"I agree, but in some cases, it is okay to have LIMITED discussions with vendors but not suppliers. No need for them to know who is providing rentals and linens. But to talk about what kind of photos they like, what the cake should look like, and what flowers will be used in arrangements can be important. Also, it protects you from not giving the correct information to that vendor. This way, the vendor would be at fault since they did not follow the instructions from the client who they discussed this with directly."

- Frank

"We never source companies that require personal contact, such as entertainment, photographers, videographers, etc. These relationships are intimate and require contact with the couple to achieve the perfect product. We source rental items, such as luxury lounge furniture, draperies, linens, chairs, lighting, etc. Those items don't require any personal contact with the client."

- Donnie

Q. REAL WEDDING STORIES ARE A BIG PART OF WEDDING PR, AND SUPPLIER LISTS ARE OFTEN MENTIONED. AS WEDDING PLANNERS, ONE OF OUR KEY POINTS OF VALUE IS OUR BLACK BOOK OF SUPPLIERS. WE ARE HESITANT TO OPEN THIS BOOK UP TO THE INTERNET. RECENTLY, PHOTOGRAPHERS HAVE BEEN WRITING BLOG POSTS ON OUR WEDDINGS THAT THEY HAVE WORKED ON AND ARE LISTING OUR SUPPLIERS. THIS HAS ALSO HAPPENED WITH COUPLES DOING THEIR OWN WEDDING PR. THE RESULT IS THE PUBLICATION OF A RECIPE FOR A DIY WEDDING, ALLOWING THE PUBLIC TO USE OUR TRADE INFORMATION, WHICH IS USUALLY CONFIDENTIALLY SHARED WITH OUR COUPLES ONLY. IS THERE SOME KIND OF ETHICAL CODE OF CONTACT THAT CAN BE DRAWN ON TO PROTECT THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF A WEDDING PLANNER'S BLACK BOOK OF SUPPLIERS?

- Melina Nicholson, Cinque Terre Wedding, Italy

FROM WHAT BLOGS/WEBSITES DO YOU GET INSPIRATION FOR WEDDINGS AND EVENTS, AND WHY?

"This is a tricky subject. We always list our vendors, because we want to honor and celebrate their hard work. We do know that some people (other event producers and brides) gather that data, and try to replicate what we do by going to them directly and cutting us out of the mix. Our feeling is, those who want top-quality work will call us, and those who want to do it themselves are not our target client anyway. That said, if you don't want vendors tagging the vendor list on their social media posts, put that in writing, in advance of hiring them. Have them sign a document agreeing that they can post images as long as they credit you, but they may not post your vendor list, as it is proprietary information. It should also state that it is their responsibility to make sure that their entire team is aware of this rule. Just prior to the event, when you send out the timeline to your vendor team, gently remind them of this. If someone does post and tag the team, message them and ask them to untag all vendors immediately. When people are used to working with you, there will not be as many mistakes made, in general, because they will know what your expectations are at the outset."

- Merry!

"In as much as I am a firm believer that our vendor lists are gold, and make us who we are, and 'that is information for which I charge,' vendors need to be recognized for their work in features like this, and deserve the credit and PR as much as we do."

- Frank

"Your list of suppliers doesn't remain secret for very long. It isn't whom you have on your roster; it's whom you pair the couple with. We keep four to six companies per category on our roster. We pair the vendors with the couple based on a variety of factors, i.e.: cost, value, personality, and of course, the couple's priority of a vendor. In reality, most of the value a planner brings to a couple is the hard work and expertise at taking a vision and making it a reality without stressing them in the process. If you do, you earn your money. No DIY wedding is perfect or stress-free. Even with an assortment of your vendors doing it. The missing link is you as the planner. And that should not be discounted for what it is."

- Donnie

Do you have a question? Ask our experts by emailing your question, along with your name, designation, business name, city, and state to editor@weddingplannermag.com. Be sure to put "Ask the Experts" in the subject line.

"I find the most inspiration from a local blog, Apple Brides. It is focused on weddings in the Inland Northwest, and I love to see features from vendors I know and work closely with. It perfectly reflects the aesthetic of many of my clients who are planning destination weddings among the many lakes and mountains in our area. I also find inspiration from Aisle Society, a blog that pulls the best of the best from their member blogs around the country, I love seeing the trends and ideas from different places all by going to one blog."

- ROBYN BRUNS, AWP™, RED LETTER EVENT PLANNING, COEUR D'ALENE, ID

"I often say designing a wedding is often like building a house, so I regularly use images from furniture websites, such as Z Gallerie or Restoration Hardware for style inspiration. The way the colors and textures are positioned is interesting, and the details (like flatware or chairs) are easy to visualize since they're so literal. To take an inspiring photo from their site and translate it into an entire wedding design is a piece of cake!"

- CRYSTAL SALAZAR, CHERRY BLOSSOM PLANNING FACTORY, NORFOLK, VA.

"When I turn to blogs/websites, I traditionally visit Biz Bash, which offers many ideas and thoughts for what is new in the industry's marketplace. I think it is a great resource to utilize as a planner. I receive newsletters weekly to see what is trendy and new in tent rental, technology, culinary, and so much more. Also, I 'LOVE' my Emily Post Newsletter. This publication guides you on the proper etiquette for events, employees, business practices, and provides you with the knowledge to guide clients—from how to address their guests' mailing envelopes to ceremony processional for all the different faiths, and so much more."

- DEBRA THOMPSON, PWP™, WEDDINGS BY DEBRA THOMPSON, LLC, WESTCHESTER, N.Y.

"I use Love, Madison Weddings (www.lovemadisonweddings.com) for wedding inspiration all the time! Their content is always up-to-date, creative, and original. They offer a wide array of ideas and galleries from real weddings, and they really take a deep look at current trends. The owners of the blog are a super sweet, knowledgeable couple, and they focus on presenting content that is relevant to their audience. Their website aids me in being the best wedding coordinator I can be."

- STEPHANEE HUGHSON, WEDDINGS BY PLANS IN PARADISE, CAMBRIDGE, WIS.