

# Seven Things You Must Know Before Hiring a Professional Wedding Photographer

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## Introduction

Your wedding day is the biggest, most important day of your life.

It's a day where EVERYTHING changes, and you say "yes" to spending the rest of your life with that special someone. Because you want everything to be simply perfect, it can be stressful putting together the logistics.

Who should do the catering? What should be on the menu?

What kind of flowers do you want?

How many bridesmaids and groomsmen should be up there with you?

How many people should you invite?

As you know, these are just a few of the questions engaged couples have to consider.

Fortunately- this report will help you with one of those decisions. When it comes to hiring a professional photographer, there are a few things you should know before you make that down payment.

The first, and probably most important, is simply *why* you should hire a professional.

# Why You Should Hire a Professional

“My friend has a pretty nice camera!”

“My uncle is just getting started and can do it for free.”

“Your iPhone will work just fine.”

Any of these sound familiar?

Just about everyone hears these types of comments while trying to decide on the photographer. The idea of helping out a friend or saving a few hundred dollars can sometimes sound appealing.

But... you get what you pay for.

## Equipment

Most amateur photographers don't have nearly enough equipment. A true professional will show up with multiple lenses, strobes, multiple memory cards, artificial lighting and more. They'll truly be ready for anything that comes up, no matter what happens.

## Experience

Another example is experience. A seasoned professional will know exactly where to look and how to get all the right angles. They also won't constantly be looking for that perfect shot, because they tend to come naturally when you've been in the business for a few years.

Wedding photography is NOT easy. It requires dozens of weddings to become a proficient wedding photographer, and hundreds to become an expert.

## “Did You Get That?”

A true photographer knows how to use the light to their advantage. They can use anything, from a few simple leaves to the most glorious chapel to their advantage. They don't let anything beautiful go unnoticed.

Meanwhile, someone without much experience will typically focus on only a few parts of the wedding and reception, like the bride and groom. While these photos are extremely important, they might not notice many other great shots they could've taken of family and friends.

## Let's Do Business

One drawback of working with amateur photographers is a lack of business sense on their part. This is especially true if they're your friend or family member.

When you hire a professional wedding photographer, there's no gray area. They'll always be on time, if not early. They will sit down with you to establish written contracts- no "he said, she said" stuff. Communication is key to any successful relationship, and your photographer will go the extra mile to keep you updated as everything unfolds.

You'll know *exactly* what you're getting. You can rest assured that there won't be any surprises, the photographer won't show up late, and you'll get a great end product.

## Beyond the Wedding

Finally- a professional wedding photographer doesn't stop after the wedding. Instead, their job is only about halfway over. Their next task is to spend hours sorting through the photos making edits, and then loading them to a website or CD for your review.

Remember- their job is to make you happy. Period.

They won't be satisfied until you're happy with the product they give you. They'll help you decide on the right package for you, and should also keep your photos on file in case you'd like to upgrade to a different package later.

The bottom line is that a professional wedding photographer is there for YOU. Take advantage of that!

## Why Not Have Friends and Family Take Photos Instead?

As we discussed earlier- we're aware that it can be very tempting to have friends or family take photos.

Sure, you'll save a few dollars. And maybe your friend will be very thankful to add your testimonial and photos to their portfolio.

But here's the thing.

### You Only Get ONE Wedding

Your wedding is a special day. *The Special Day.*

It's probably the only day in your lifetime where you'll have hundreds of your closest friends and family together, in one place, celebrating you.

Supposed to be the happiest day of your life, your wedding is something where everything should go as well as possible, right?

Well, do you really want to take the risk of having an amateur capture this important day for you?

Because even though we recognize there are a few minor advantages, the disadvantages are far heavier.

Here are a few things that might happen if you have a loved one take photos.

### Not Enough Memory

One common mistake with new photographers is not having enough memory. They'll often say "I have enough- I can hold 150 pictures."

The problem is that in reality- that's nothing. A good photographer will take hundreds of pictures *per hour.*

That's because you have to take multiple shots at a time to really get the best photo. If you just take 1 or 2, there's a good chance it wasn't the best you could've taken.

If your photographer can only take up to 150 pictures, they won't be able to capture the true essence of your wedding.

## **Candid Camera?**

Although every wedding has photos of the bride and groom with the family- a lot of the best photos are candid shots.

Maybe it's small children cutting a rug on the dance floor.

Or the groom's reaction to seeing the bride in her dress for the first time.

Parents watching their beloved children at the altar also makes for an amazing shot.

But these are all candid pictures- where the people being photographed aren't posing on purpose. Someone who isn't a professional will likely miss a lot of these amazing moments.

And even if they do capture these emotions, there's an extremely good chance that they won't have the right angle or type of lens for the photo.

Meanwhile, a professional will know exactly where to stand, what to look for, and how to get the most out of these candid shots. They'll make sure you can easily see how happy that groom felt, the awkwardness of the ring bearer, and the crazy dance moves that cousin of yours is showing off.

## **Don't Mix Business with Pleasure**

Have you ever heard that you shouldn't get into business with friends or family? There's a reason for that.

When you expect something big from a loved one, it can lead to a damaged relationship if things don't go well. This is especially true when it comes to money, or something as big as your wedding.

Or both!

A friend will see you as more forgiving if they're late, don't take enough pictures, aren't very creative, etc. They'll hope that you will be okay with them "doing their best", even if it's not at all how good you'd hoped for.

Instead, it's better to never get into this kind of situation in the first place. Don't have friends or family take pictures at the most important day of your life! You want them to enjoy themselves, not feel obligated to work for you.

## How to Have a Realistic Budget

Wedding photography isn't easy. It requires a lot of planning, high quality equipment, experience and a team of people. Photography generally isn't a one-man show.

The best photographers realize this. They recognize the value that their services provide to the bride and groom, and aren't afraid of asking for what their time is worth.

Generally, a realistic budget is at least \$1,000, and can go up to \$5,000 or more. This often includes:

- Planning
- Engagement photos
- Rehearsal dinner photos
- Ceremony photos
- Reception photos
- Proof development
- CDs, wedding albums, magnets, etc.

Most professional wedding photographers have different packages, and you can choose the package that works best for you. Maybe you've decided to skip the engagement or rehearsal dinner photos. Or maybe the wedding album isn't in your budget right now, so you'll plan on paying for it at a later date.

### **“But That's So Expensive!”**

Typically our response to that is this: if you think hiring a professional is expensive, try hiring an amateur.

We've already discussed this several times- amateurs tend to take lower quality photos, you won't get as many, and in general you won't be as satisfied.

That's why we recommend that our clients set a budget of at least \$1,000 for a professional photographer. Anything less and you're likely to get a 1-person team with lower quality equipment, less experience, and a less professional attitude.

### **Going Somewhere?**

Photographers working outside of their local area usually require some kind of travel fee. Depending on how far away the wedding is from their home, this fee can be substantial to cover

necessary food and lodging costs. If airline tickets are required to travel to the destination, expect to cover those as well.

## Understanding the Different Styles and Capabilities of the Photographer

Each and every photographer has their own way of doing things. This ranges from camera brands to style specialities and everything in between.

Before you select the best photographer for you, you should first consider the type of style you're looking for and how capable they are.

### What's Your Style?

There are a few different types of wedding photography styles.

**Traditional** wedding photography is very formal. Most images, especially with the bride, groom and family are posed. The photographer also works on a strict timeline without much flexibility. Most older generations prefer this style, although it can be seen by some as very stiff and rigid.

**Conventional** photography is much less formal. The photographer isn't intervening constantly, unlike traditional. Instead, they're trying to capture all of the fun and joy going on. This opens up the door for more spontaneity and "being yourself".

**Documentary** style photography is the most relaxed method. It's very common with brides right now because it basically allows the photographer to take pictures of everything as it happens. There are very few posed photos, if any. This method also opens up the door for seeing a lot of the best shots on the dance floor, random pictures of your guests, etc.

**Artistic** wedding photography relies heavily on how artistic and creative the photographer can be. This often involves incorporating props and combining posed photos with candid shots as well. Artistic photography can lead to some amazing shots, but some shots are also likely to be duds.



In reality- many brides and their photographers choose to use a combination of these methods. For example they may have many posed shots of the family together, but the reception usually leads to more conventional or documentary-style methods.

## **Are You Capable?**

Before you make a purchase on Amazon.com, you look at the reviews, right?

I know I certainly do. Learning from the experience of others has always been a valuable tool, and the internet makes it easier than ever.

Likewise, you should ask for references and/or testimonials from your potential photographer. If they've been in business for a long time, they should have dozens, if not hundreds of testimonials from their previous clients.

Besides just testimonials, take a few minutes to review the photographer's portfolio. This is generally the best way to identify a photographer's capabilities. If most of the photos look sub-par or too similar, the photographer may not be very experienced.

Likewise, if they can show a variety of different styles and types of pictures, the photographer is probably capable and a good choice for your wedding.

# How to Know Who is the Best Photographer for You

We've already discussed several things to consider. Cost, style and experience are just a few major factors in choosing a wedding photographer.

Here are a few other things to think about.

## Do You Like Them?

This may sound a bit petty or silly, but it's actually extremely important. Does your personality mesh well with the photographer? Or did you start butting heads as soon as you met each other?

Let's face it- there are certain personalities that are difficult to get along with. If you're a fun-loving person and meet with a real stiff- you probably won't get along.

Likewise, if you want a very traditional wedding and meet a photographer who's way too artistic and "visionary"- things probably won't work out.

Think about the personality of your best friends when you start looking for a photographer. Chances are, if you can find a photographer with a similar outlook on life, you'll get along just fine.

## Local Expertise

Even though a professional photographer can excel anywhere, anytime- there is something to be said for a photographer who knows your local area.

For one thing, they can recommend excellent venues, catering companies, or engagement picture locations. They're some of the best experts you can talk to, as they work at these places every single weekend.

Locals are also much more accessible than someone who lives out of town. If you want to stop by their office or meet for a last-minute photo shoot, having someone close by makes it 100 times easier.

## Recommendations... Beware!

When a loved one recommends a professional photographer- take their recommendation with a grain of salt. Even though they (usually) have your best interest at heart, they may not have great discernment when it comes to picking a good photographer.

Just because your friend recommended them doesn't mean you should instantly pick them. Instead, be sure to carry out your due diligence. Look at the photographer's portfolio, have a face-to-face meeting with them, and see what you think.

Don't feel bad if it doesn't seem like a good fit for you. This is business, and it's your wedding- the most important day of your life! It's okay not to take up a friend's recommendation. You just need to make sure you pick a good photographer for you.

# Questions You Must Ask Before Choosing a Photographer

The first time you talk to your photographer, have a list of questions you'd like to ask them. This will help save you a lot of time and make sure that you don't forget anything.

Here's a small list to help get you started.

- 1. Do You Have \_\_\_\_\_ (your date) Available?**
  - a. If the answer's no- and you don't want to change it- move on to the next photographer at this point.
- 2. How Long Have You Been in Business?**
- 3. Can You Describe Your Main Style?**
- 4. How Many Weddings Have You Shot?**
  - a. Be sure to be specific with this one. In addition to asking how many, ask how many weddings *similar to your style and size* that they've shot.
- 5. How Far in Advance do I Need to Book Your Service?**
- 6. What Makes You Different from Other Wedding Photographers?**
- 7. Can I View Your Portfolio?**
  - a. Make sure the portfolio includes recent photos. If the photographer recently switched styles or cameras, but their website doesn't reflect it, you won't get an accurate representation.
- 8. Do You Use Digital Format, Film, or Both?**
- 9. What Type of Equipment Do You Use?**
- 10. Can You Create Slideshows, Albums, CDs, etc.?**
  - a. Here's another place to be specific. If you or your family wants a certain format, make sure you ask about it
  - b. How long after the wedding can I order more photos, albums, etc.?
- 11. What Information Would You Need from Me?**
- 12. Are You the Main Photographer? Also, How Many Assistants will You Use on My Wedding Day?**
- 13. Do You Have Backup Equipment Such as Cameras, Memory Cards, etc.?**
- 14. Do You Have Other Events Booked the Same Day as My Wedding?**
- 15. Do You Charge Extra if the Event Goes Longer than Planned? If So, How Much?**
- 16. When Will I Receive a Written Contract?**
- 17. How Much of a Deposit is Required, and When is it Due?**

**18. What is Your Refund or Cancellation Policy?**

**19. What Types of Packages Do You Offer?**

**20. Can I Customize a Package to Meet My Needs?**

There are a number of other questions to consider, but these should help get you started.

Think about any specific things you'd like or not like for your special day. Also, don't be afraid to call or email back later with more questions that you came up with. It's ALWAYS better to know as much as you can with something as complex as wedding photography.

## How to Make Sure Everything is Well Planned and Goes Smoothly

The questions mentioned in the last section will help immensely in choosing your photographer. It will also help you get started in the planning process, because you'll know how they operate, what they require from you, etc.

That said- there's always a chance that something can go wrong. In fact- count on *something* going wrong at your wedding! But you should still do everything you can to verify that your photographer knows what you want and is ready to go.

### Get All Agreements in Writing

The phone is a great device, but don't rely on it. Verbal agreements aren't worth very much at the end of the day- especially in business.

Make sure that all major agreements- especially your contract- is in writing. You also want to make sure that you have a digital copy as well as physical copies. This prevents misunderstanding between the parties can be used in the future to resolve disputes should they occur.

Note that minor agreements via email, such as where and when to meet for an engagement photo session, are perfectly fine.

### Trust, but Verify

Yes, you should trust that your photographer will be at the right place at the right time with all of the right equipment...

But make sure to call them the day prior to the event to make sure everything is in place. Walk through the event step-by-step to make sure you agree on what should happen, what is required, etc.

By calling the day before, it gives the photographer to make any necessary changes in time for the big day.

## **Lean on Your Wedding Planner**

If you have a wedding planner, ask them to work with the photographer throughout the planning process. Regardless of whether or not you like your planner, they're always going to be your biggest advocate. They're putting a lot of time into planning your wedding. By having the photographer and planner walk make plans together, you're minimizing any confusion that might occur on wedding day between the 2 parties.

## Conclusion

Your wedding day can be the happiest, best day of your life.

Unfortunately, it is often one of the most stressful things to plan!

Luckily, choosing a good professional photographer doesn't have to be too bad. If you follow some of the tips we covered in this report, you'll be fine.

One final recommendation is this- do **not** go with an amateur photographer. You only get 1 wedding- 1 chance to do it right. If you hire a non-professional just to save a few bucks, chances are high that you'll regret it later on.

Good luck in your search, and please let us know if there's anything we can do to help you have that perfect wedding you've always dreamed of!