

How to Get the Most From a Bridal Show

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Attending a bridal show can be most helpful in planning your wedding. They are exciting, festive and full of terrific ideas. You will be able to meet and ask questions from many wedding professionals all under one roof. You will want to gather information, compare prices and services, register for prizes, see the latest fashions, get great new ideas and just have fun.

Where else but at a bridal show can you preview ceremony and reception locations, peruse photographers' portfolios, see and hear entertainers and see if your personalities click with a Minister and their ceremony? You will most likely benefit the most from visiting a bridal show that is in your city because the vendors you require will be more accessible.

Here are some tips that will help you get the most from your bridal show experience.

Pre-register before the show. When you register before the show, some shows offer a discount toward the purchase of your ticket. It saves you time at check-in, and often a few bucks.

Research the show ahead of time to see what vendors will be there. Look specifically for the one's you need. Many vendors offer discounts on their services if you book them at the show. Making a checklist of required services, accessories, the most important elements needed to complete your wedding plans and design questions that will streamline your efforts and help speed things along.

Decide to concentrate on one vendor (Wedding Officiant, floral designer, photographer, DJ, etc.) and do your research ahead of time. At the show, gather info from other vendors too, but spend most of your time talking with the ones whose services you need. If the bridal show has a wedding fashion show, check the times of the shows when you arrive, so you don't miss out. Arrive early. Seating is often first come, first serve.

Bring a list of questions to ask. Don't just rush by booths that have services you still require. Don't just listen to sales pitches. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions. That's what the vendors are there for. They want to help you and you are under no obligation to buy from them, so find out everything you need to know.

If their product or service is one you need and they are busy talking with someone else, stand close and just listen or wait until you can ask any questions you may have.

It may seem a little overwhelming at the show, but most vendors love to spend time with you and answer your questions. They will talk to you about their products and services in as much detail as you want. However, the shows are very hectic and noisy, so if you find a vendor that you like, it's best to set up an appointment and meet with them later.

Start a conversation with the people at the booths. Don't be shy. You will know right away if they are someone you would want to work with in planning for your special day. It is very important that you "click" with the vendors you choose.

Bridal shows are big. The Bridal Fashion Debut has more than 500 exhibitors and is the largest bridal show in America. Come early. Don't be in a rush. Plan to spend a minimum of 4 or 5 hours in order to see all the exhibits. Take your time. Make a day of it. Don't hurry!

Walk up one aisle on one side and check out the vendors, then walk down the other side of the same aisle to make sure you do not miss anyone. You may miss the very wedding service you were looking for if you try to wander from side-to-side down the same aisle.

Visit every booth, or at least check them out, even if the exhibitor offers something you're not interested in right now. You might decide in the future to include their services and you'll have the information readily available.

Keep your eyes open for ideas to incorporate into your own wedding, such as a type of flower arrangements, color combinations (in photographers' sample albums, for example), and favors. Also, try to chat with other brides if you can - you may meet someone you could develop a support network with for this sometimes-difficult process of wedding planning!

A great idea is to bring a camera. Snap a photo of the Wedding Officiant you spoke to, a cake that looked especially delicious or take a picture of an exhibit that you want to remember. Use these photos to jog your memory about something that grabbed your attention.

Bring your fiancé with you for at least one trip to the event, and then go again with your Mother, your maid of honor, future mother-in-law or girlfriends. Going twice allows you to really take in everything you need to see.

Do your best to stay together or at least, have cell phones handy so you can arrange to meet at a booth where the vendor is especially of interest. If you are the bride and the groom is somewhere else, it may be difficult to make a choice later about a specific service unless both of you are present to hear the information.

If you are the mother of the bride and are gathering information for the bride and groom, make notes on the business card, brochure or flyer that you think might interest them the most. Bringing a small notebook and pen to make special notes is helpful.

If a vendor gives you information that you especially like and want to follow up with at a later date, put that information in a special bag, not with all the other stuff you may collect. Don't weigh yourself down with unnecessary items. Bring what you need for the day to keep your shoulder free from bag weight. Leave your purse at home in favor of your own lightweight carrying bag. Some vendors will give you one, however, use your "own" bag to separate vendor information that is of special interest to you and use the vendor bag for everything else.

Another idea is to bring a red pen and mark the vendors information in a special way that will indicate your level of interest, e.g., "Call this one!" Make notes on business cards, the brochure or flyer for easy reference later.

Bring a small notebook and pen. You never know what tips or ideas you'll discover and want to write down. You will never remember which vendor told you what. It is possible to see 16 photographers, 8 videographers, 10 bakers, 12 Disc Jockey services and several ministers. There's so much to see that by the time you get home, you may forget.

Bring your PDA or personal planner so you will have your bridal shower, rehearsal, wedding and other important dates handy. It can also be helpful if you choose to make an appointment with one of the vendors. Ask about the exhibitors' availability if you are interested.

Be sure not to make speedy judgments on whether the information offered might be of interest to you. Take one minute to listen to their offer and if a vendor offers you literature you do not want, don't take it. Be polite. Just say "No, thank you" and walk on. Vendors appreciate your candor because they spend a lot of money on their wedding flyers, promotional pieces, etc.

Some vendors offer drawings for prizes. Prevent writer's cramp! Bring address labels to save time in filling out registration blanks. Computer savvy? Make your own labels (or business card) on your computer.

It is helpful to include your name, the grooms name, complete address, your wedding date and location, phone numbers and e-mail address. This is very helpful to the vendor when you request additional information. If you don't bring labels, print very clearly when registering for anything.

Don't register for everything! If you know you will not need the service, don't register otherwise you may be receiving unneeded information from their mailing list for many months to come. You don't have to give your contact information out to everyone - provide it only to those vendors that make your short list.

Most shows offer a Bride and Groom sticker when you register. Please wear it! It can become confusing for vendors to identify everyone that attends, and if they know you are the bride they are more likely to give you that little bit of extra attention.

Material swatches and ribbons that suggest the colors of your wedding are helpful when speaking with florists, bakers, balloonists, gown shops and other professionals. Know the size of your wedding party, your color scheme, and the location of your reception facility.

Bring your credit card - not your checkbook - in case you want to book any services or give a deposit to hold a date. You will often find discounts that are available only at the show. If you are comfortable with the vendor, by all means, go for it. A word of caution. . although most vendors are reputable, if a wedding vendor goes out of business before your wedding you can usually get your money back if you use a credit card but you will be out of luck if you pay by check. Proceed with caution and choose wisely. Read the fine print.

If you see one of the vendors you have already hired at a show, ask them for referrals to other reputable vendors you may need. They may have worked with them at previous weddings and can make a valuable referral. Wedding venues often have "preferred vendor" lists available upon request.

Don't be afraid to tell someone that you already have booked his or her service with another vendor. Take a minute and visit with them anyway. Who knows? You make pick up a tip or suggestion you or your vendor hadn't considered.

You should always feel comfortable with a vendor's attitude toward your event. Personality and communication play an important role as well. Chat with the vendor to see if you feel comfortable with their personality, and if they will be easy to work with. Notice which vendors "listen" to your needs and ask what "you" want.

Most vendors respect your decisions and would never push their services on you if you already have another provider. Vendors respect each other. Don't worry; it takes a lot to hurt our feelings.

Leave the children at home! Hire a baby sitter. You will be glad you did. You will not be able to focus on the wedding vendors if you are struggling with your baby stroller trying to push your way through the crowd and maze of wedding vendor booths.

People often walk fast past booths because they fear the vendor will pounce or be overly aggressive. Some are. If a vendor tries to "pressure" you into booking their services or placing a deposit with them "right now," keep walking! Do not accept any pushy sales pitch to sign now.

Bring bottled water and a few snacks so you don't spend most of your time in line at the concession stand (that will also save you a few bucks). This will give your tummy room to enjoy the cake tasting and other catered food samples.

Plan a "rest break" about every hour. Pick up free samples, magazines, sample menus, business cards, brochures, and catalogs to take with you and review them later in the privacy of your own home.

Bring some cash for parking. Sometimes you do have to pay for parking. Don't be caught unprepared. If you didn't pre-register for the show, bring cash. Some shows only accept cash at the door.

Wedding shows are not supposed to be stressful or overwhelming. There is so much to see and so many vendors. Taking your time to view each exhibit will help reduce the stress. Remember wedding planning is preferably done over time, not in one day. It's one decision at a time.

Many of the exhibitors book up rather quickly on choice wedding dates; so don't wait too long after the show before you decide to call to utilize their services. Generally speaking, there is a rush of appointments and often their calendars fill quickly immediately after a bridal show. The top vendors often find a year's worth of business booked at the show or within six to eight weeks of the show. Act quickly. Don't procrastinate or you may end up with your second or third choices.

Remember, you cannot have a wedding without a ceremony! Lots of couples wait until the last minute to book the minister. To be certain that you can book the minister you want on the date and time you want; first, choose your wedding date, second, book the wedding venue, and third, book the minister. Those of us who are busy performing ceremonies often book wedding dates as much as 6 months or more in advance.

When you go in with a plan of action, you most likely will get most of your planning done in one afternoon or at least gather enough information to make an informed decision when reviewing the info at your leisure.

Be sure to dress casual and wear comfortable shoes. Leave your heels at home. You will be doing a lot of walking. Be prepared for sore feet.

Grooms take note! You may want to make arrangements for a foot massage for your future bride or arrange a visit to the hot tub when the day is through.

Larry's Note: Be sure to visit Larry James at the CelebrateIntimateWeddings.com booth at the Bridal Fashion Debut!

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