

Your personal wedding site will allow you to keep everybody informed

By Judy Johnson

Let's say you had a friend who without a single peep of complaint looked after all the finicky details connected with the planning of your wedding so that you could concentrate on the big things.

Say this friend tracked your RSVPs, helped your attendants choose their dresses and not only kept a record of everybody who was coming to the wedding but helped you to arrange the seating plan. And when the wedding was completed your friend went on to show your photos to relatives and friends and took their orders for prints. What would you call such a friend? Super bridesmaid? Wonder woman? Gift from God?

Actually that "friend" would be your computer in combination with one of the useful wedding websites that are fast becoming a bride's expert assistant when it comes to wedding planning.

Your first reaction is probably one of skepticism. Computers? Websites? Don't they just mean another bunch of headaches coming along at a time when you are already up to your earlobes in problems and decisions?

In fact, a personal wedding websites can be a huge help to you. And the best of them are amazingly user-friendly to set up and use. And, best of all, many of them are free.

They fall into two basic types (see sidebar for examples). Some are uncomplicated digital scrapbooks, places where you can upload your photographs so everybody can share memories and comments. Others permit you to track RSVPs, arrange the seating at the reception and give your guests lots of details about your lives, your engagement and the progress of your wedding planning.

Getting started

Whether free or fee, most of the wedding sites offered on the Internet are amazingly user-friendly. Here's all that's required to set one up.

1. Select your website's visual style from the professionally designed themes that are offered on the supplier site. Consider co-ordinating the design with your wedding colours. Or choose something that goes with your personality. You can make a decision to go upscale elegant or down-home antique.
2. Pick the pages you want in your website. You might choose ones for your love story, engagement photos, wedding party biographies, an introducing-the-parents page, links for gift registries, wedding details, travel, honeymoon plans, RSVP, and a wedding guestbook where visitors to the site can add their wishes and comments.
3. Choose the features you want on each of these pages by completing the various forms/templates. Make it meaningful. In the comments beside her photo on the Bridal Party page, explain why you chose Melanie as your Maid of Honour. "Mel and I have been friends since kindergarten when she fingerpainted my hair purple and green."
4. Upload your jpeg photos. That's what you'll get out of your digital camera. Alternatively, you can scan your prints to the proper resolution.
5. Select your website address.

All that remains is for you to get the word out. Put your website address on your wedding invitations and other stationery.

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How to evaluate
a wedding website

- Read the testimonials.
- Take the free trial.
- Find out how long your website will be up and running. You will want it to last through the wedding planning months and for some time after your wedding day.
- How much space is there for uploading photos?
- Can you also upload videos? Music?
- What are the costs involved? Are there any extra ones?
- Can you change or add things once you see how you can make best use of your site?
- Is the site password protected?
- Can you keep some sections private for selected access, e.g. for the eyes of the bridal party only so that they can be informed about the progress of choosing their attire.

What a wedding website can do for you

- Share information on your love story.
- Provide travel information including directions, maps, accommodation suggestions, sightseeing for out-of-town guests.
- Introduce your bridal party, complete with photos and brief bios. Hint: This is a great place to introduce your parents to everybody.
- If your wedding will happen at an offshore destination, help your guests to make the most of their stay. Give them weather info and let them know what shots are required, what SPF is recommended, which foods to avoid and what precautions to take.
- Track RSVPs for the wedding, the shower and the bachelor party.
- Provide links to your various wedding registries.
- Get your guests involved. Ask for input on wedding favours after showing them a few samples on-line or ask them which songs they would request for the reception.
- Keep everybody up to date on the planning process by adding a "blog," an on-line diary of pre-wedding activities and thoughts.
- Show your bridesmaids the dresses you are considering and ask them for feedback. This will help to streamline the selection process. With attendants spread from Paris to Vancouver to Toronto, one bride asked her attendants to vote on-line for their colour and style choices.

The major sites

Most wedding websites are of two types. For the most part, picture sites are basically on-line scrapbooks where you can post pictures and/or videos along with identifying comments.

Comprehensive sites are somewhat more elaborate. Besides letting you post pictures and videos, they permit you to add lots of background information about you both. While they also have services that help you to keep track of guests by way of an RSVP function, some also let you create blogs so that you can keep people posted on where you are in your planning. Links to your wedding registries are another common feature.

www.dropshots.com

Type: Picture site.

Sample: www.dropshots.com/moorefamily/

Interesting feature: Claims to be the most user-friendly of the picture sites.

Cost: Per mo US\$4.95. Year US\$59.95. Life US\$99.

MSN Spaces (<http://spaces.msn.com>)

Type: Picture site.

Sample: <http://spaces.msn.com/armitawedding/>

Cost: Free

www.myevent.com

Type: Comprehensive site.

Sample: <http://justinandmaya.myevent.com/102/35.htm>

Interesting feature: Quiz available to test viewers on how well they know you.

Poll available to assess viewer opinions on various topics.

Cost: US\$9.95 per mo. US\$99 for 18 mo.

www.rweddingsite.com

Type: Comprehensive site.

Sample: <http://sample-couple.rweddingsite.com/>

Interesting feature: Remains live until six months after your wedding date.

Cost: One-time payment of US\$29.95

www.scrapblog.com

Type: Picture site.

Sample: <http://celebrityweddings.scrapblog.com/celebweddings/>

Interesting feature: Can be personalized with artwork, graphics, themes and blogging.

Cost: Free

www.2haveand2hold.com

Type: Comprehensive site.

Sample: <http://www.2haveand2hold.com/index.php?obj=pages&page=demolink>

Interesting feature: Includes a table planning module that accesses your list of invited guests.

Cost: C\$66 per year.

www.weddingwindow.com

Type: Comprehensive site.

Sample: <http://ronnyandshae.weddingwindow.com/index.cfm?fa=welcome>

Interesting feature: Will accept multiple RSVPs for different events such as your bachelor/bachelorette party, your shower or a pre-wedding party.

Cost: 6 mo. US\$59. 12 mo. US\$79