

Ten Tips for Finding the Right Wedding Photographer

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Congratulations on your engagement!

Now, here's a question: Have you ever looked for a wedding photographer before? Chances are that you haven't. Even if you are planning on getting married for a second time, it's probably quite some time since your previous wedding, and you will remember very little about making the arrangements.

This booklet will help you pick the best wedding photographer for you. Selecting the right photographer can be confusing and sometimes stressful, so you want to be sure you make the right choice.

You only have one chance to make the right decision!

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1. People Often Say – “All Photographers Are The Same”

No two people are ever the same so why should all photographers be? To illustrate this, think about a show you like to watch on television. Do any of the actors have the same style or the same strengths and weaknesses?

Remember how your favourite actor may look absolutely charismatic and engaging in one movie but deadpan and unattractive in another? And although you know that their acting skills are not short of genius, the clue may be in the way the camera man and director have captured the actor through the lens. Good direction, communication, rapport, lighting and camera angles play a big role in how well an image is captured. A successful photographer understands the clients' requirements and knows how to capture intricate and delicate moments.

There are many different fields of photography; press, wedding, portrait, glamour, wildlife, landscape, commercial, PR, pets, food, architecture, fashion and many more. And within each field there are many disciplines to excel at, or not. Take wedding photography. There's candid, groups, traditional, photo-journalist, formal, bridal portraiture. Some of them you will want, some you won't.

If you want an album full of family group shots and formal pictures of the bride and groom, look for photographers who showcase great photographs of that type of work. Don't waste your time talking to a photographer who only shows reportage. I know of photographers who will spend a couple of hours taking group shots and those who will want to take pictures of the bride and groom alone, away from the reception for an hour or so. There is nothing wrong with either of these two ways of working, or any other way, as long as it fits in with the day you want. So give some serious thought to what you want and do some research to find photographers who offer that.

2. Is The Cheapest Always The Best?

Are you the type of person who always buys the cheapest product? Or are you the type of person that always has to have the best? Or do you fit somewhere in between these two extremes? You can get a pair of Matalan own brand jeans for about £10 but is that the best deal? A pair of Armani jeans will cost you about £170; Is that the best deal?

Well, neither of these brands comes close to being the best sellers. Levi, Wrangler & Lee dominate the market without being either the cheapest or the most expensive. A pair of 501s will cost you about £35, so why spend the extra £25? Why spend an extra £160? Which company do you think offers the best value? And that is the key word when it comes to any purchase you make, **you want to get good value for money.**

Value = Quality + Service + Price

It is impossible for any company in any industry to offer the highest quality, the best service and the lowest price, all at the same time. To offer top-notch service you have to employ great staff. OK staff just won't do it! They have to be great at what they do, and that comes at a price.

You have to train them well, and to keep staff you have to pay them well. If you don't want to be giving people refunds all the time, you have to offer quality products & quality products cost more, as we found that out earlier.

So **because your costs have increased you have to charge more, or go out of business** and that doesn't do anyone any favours. So what problems do you think you could end up with because you hired a dirt-cheap wedding photographer? Well let's see:

1. Cheap wedding photographers don't stand behind their work if they make a mistake. Or worse still **you could end up with no pictures** because they messed up. Or maybe you only get a few photographs when you were expecting dozens. As with all things, **"you get what you pay for"**. How much are you prepared to pay for a bad experience and pictures you don't like?
2. The second problem is, **low price usually means low quality**. The best wedding photographers in the world, such as Yervant or Jerry Ghionis , charge in the region of £10,000 per wedding. Do you think the photographer down the street who charges £250 does so because he doesn't want to earn £10k? You can be sure he wants to, but he also knows his work is not worth that amount. In fact he thinks he's worth about £250. If he values his products & service this low, who are we to argue? Quality is important not just for the captured images, but also how they are presented. If you don't want your wedding photographs in a £4.99 album sourced from the local supermarket, you need to think about investing more.
3. Then there are the added extras. Let me give you an all too common scenario:
Bride: "How much do you charge for weddings"
Photographer: "Our wedding packages start from £300"
Br: "Wow that's cheap, can you reserve my date, 21st July?"
P: "Our starter package is not available for weekend weddings. You'll need our bronze package, that's £400.
B: "That's fine, book me in please".
P: "Sure, that will be £400 please."
B: "I have to pay everything in advance"?
P: "For that package yes"
B: "Not sure I'm happy with that".

P: "No problem. With our silver package you can pay 25% now, 25% in 3 months, 25% 3 months before the wedding and the rest on the day in cash. And you get an extra hours coverage"

B: "Sounds complicated, erm..., how much is that package?"

P: £500

B: "Still pretty cheap, ok. When would we get our proofs"?

P: "You don't get proofs with that package, I pick the photographs for your album so you don't need any."

B: "I would rather select the photographs myself".

P: "No problem, just go for our gold package.

B: "How much is that"?

P: "£700, plus you get an extra hours coverage".

B: "Still pretty reasonable. Ok. What time will you stay at the reception till? I want pictures of my first dance."

P: "You don't get reception coverage in that package, you'll need our platinum package. That is £900."

B: "Which includes photographs at my home"?

P: "Our diamond package does, that's £1000".

B: "What time would you be at the church, we're getting married at All saints?"

P: "Oh, that's out of my standard area, so there is a £50 charge for travel expenses.

B: "Can you show me what albums I can choose from"?

P: "Sure, they start from £150"

B: "So your packages don't include albums?"

P: "Our elite package does".

B: "How much"?

P: "£1500, but it includes travel expenses too, and an extra hours coverage"

B: "Right, ok. And would we still have to pay in 4 parts"?

P: "No. With our elite package you pay half now, half on the day, in cash".

B: "Can we give you a cheque on the day"?

P: "Erm..., no, sorry."

B: "Don't you trust me"?

P: "Erm..."

B: "Goodbye!"

OK, I may have exaggerated things a little (he may have accepted the cheque), but this does happen! You'd be shocked by how quickly a cheap £300 deal can end up costing £1000 or more. And you could get a decent photographer for that much! 😊

3. Remember Just Having The Right Gear Is Not Enough To Get Great Results

Many photographers have state-of-the-art equipment, but that does not mean they know how to use it. A photographer friend of mine met a guest at one of his weddings who was using a £25,000 Hassleblad H3D Camera, but openly admitted he had no idea how to change many of its settings. They can have all the gear and the gadgets, but without the knowledge and creativity they may as well be using a disposable camera.

4. Don't Expect Professional Results If You Ask a Friend or Relation to Take Your Pictures

This is linked to my previous point in some ways, but when it comes to family and friends, you can become a little sentimental. Your Uncle, Alex, is probably a really nice guy with a great camera, and you might not want to hurt his feelings, but his offer to photograph your big day as a wedding gift has to be turned down if you want great wedding pictures. Why? Experience!

Have you been to a wedding and thought, "the photographer makes it look so easy"? You can bet your Alex has, and he thinks like many amateur photographers do, that he can do just as good a job as a professional. But the photographer makes it look easy because he **is** a professional. He has photographed countless weddings and got his system down to a T.

In reality wedding photography is tough, hard work, stressful and very fast paced. Most, if not all inexperienced wedding photographers would have a hard time keeping up and getting the desired results. Do you want to give a photographer the opportunity to practice at your wedding? Or do you want a photographer who

has been through the practice stage of his career and knows how to deliver great results? There is nothing wrong with booking an amateur, just don't expect professional results from them!

Another difference between an amateur and a professional photographer is "back up". An amateur will only likely own one camera. But what if it develops a fault on your wedding day? A professional will carry at least two cameras to your wedding.

5. Allow Enough Time For Your Photographer To Do Their Job

Mistakes happen when you rush!

If you want some formal or group photographs taken, allow enough time for it in your schedule. How much time is needed will depend on a number of factors, so discuss this with your photographer once you have booked one.

Do you have any special photographic requirements? Your photographer will know you want pictures with your parents, best man, bridesmaids, groomsmen etc. What they won't know is that your favourite Aunt who you have not seen since you were 10, is flying in and you really want a few pictures with her. You need to inform your photographer of details like this, well in advance.

6. Don't Have Half a Dozen Photographers Competing With Each Other For Your Work

Now at first glance this looks like a good way to do business. And for some purchases this is a good idea. If you want to buy a new car then play all the local dealers off against each other. Whichever showroom you decide to buy from, you'll get an identical product, so only the price is important. And you can go to any dealer afterwards to get the car serviced or if you have a warranty issue.

But let me explain why this is not such a good idea when it comes to a service as personal as photography. A good photographer who has been in business a while, has a loyal client base who will continue to use them and recommend them to others. A reputable photographer does not need to entertain the antics of a price shopper.

So just by initiating a cattle auction/bidding war you could be alienating the people you really want on your shortlist. Of course price is important, but not more important than quality products, service and reputation.

7. Make sure you Read What You Sign

Now I should not be preaching to the converted here, but you would be amazed how many people just sign their life away, or just skim-read the terms and conditions before committing to a legally binding contract. If your photographer has made you a verbal promise, get it in writing!

8. Trust your instincts

If something seems too good to be true, it usually is!

9. Don't Ignore The Tell-Tale Signs of Being Unprofessional

A person's dress sense can say a great deal about the type of person they are. There are some photographers who think that being an artist means they need to dress in a way that reflects their creativity. Pierced facial features, multi-coloured hair, ripped jeans and a dirty t-shirt may be at home in an art student's wardrobe, but do you want that at your wedding? The way someone looks and acts whilst securing your wedding booking is a fair insight into how they comport themselves at your wedding.

10. Make Sure You See a Whole Wedding Album Sample

When a photographer shows you a sample album, they should be able to show you an album of pictures from just one wedding. Why is this important? Simply put, any amateur can go to a wedding, take 500 photographs and get a few good ones. So an album of 20 photographs with 2 or 3 from 8-10 different weddings is no real

insight into their ability to take great wedding photographs. Taking 500 shots and getting 50 excellent ones requires a bit more than luck.

Also, as you are looking at the photographs, ask the photographer about the wedding. For all you know this could be his mate's wedding album. Ask how the different photographic effects are created. A hesitant or nervous reaction is a sign that something is not quite right.

A Final Thought

Your photographer will be capturing your wedding day for you. They will have to interact with the Vicar/Priest, the reception venue staff, your wedding planner (if you have one), the car drivers, the DJ/Band, the toastmaster (if you have one) and all of your guests. You will be spending a good proportion of your day with your photographer. They will have one eye on you all day, watching for those special moments that make great pictures.

This means your photographer is more than just a service supplier. You will meet them before, during and after your wedding. So it's very important to book someone that you can get along with, someone who can work around and within your plans and most importantly someone who takes great photos!

Good luck for your wedding day, and for your future together!