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Five Ways to Cut Wedding Costs

Posted By [Alisa Gumbs](#) On August 5, 2009 @ 11:13 am In [Magazine](#) | [1 Comment](#)



[1]

Whitten and LeGrand were able to get great wedding deals. (Source: Jerry Jack)

When Aubrey Whitten and Major LeGrand got engaged in May 2008, they knew they wanted a traditional Saturday evening, sit-down dinner reception. But when Whitten, 27, a marketing manager for a publishing company, and LeGrand, 26, a business administrator for a nonprofit, started pricing their options, they got sticker shock.

"When we started doing research, we were like, 'Oh this is not at all what we had in mind.' We were just so naïve," says Whitten. "We could find what we wanted, but not in our budget for the number of people we wanted." The couple had initially budgeted \$10,000 for a reception for 200 people, but they couldn't find a venue they liked for less than \$150 a plate, which would have cost them \$30,000. Even after scaling back their guest list to 120 people, they were still significantly over budget.

After investigating four venues in New York City, where the couple lives and the average wedding costs more than \$46,000, according to New York magazine's Winter 2008 Wedding Guide, they decided to move the wedding upstate to Poughkeepsie, New York—saving about \$6,000.

"At first we laughed at the idea. But you want the best value for your money. We saw that there were beautiful venues, with great food, and the kind of traditional wedding you envision when you're a little girl," says Whitten. "And we didn't sacrifice our guest list of 120 to 140 people, or our budget." With help from both sets of parents, the couple plans to spend about \$23,000 on their September nuptials and is blogging about it at <http://bridegroomandbroom.blogspot.com> [2].

In this economy, couples are doing whatever they can to keep costs down, from moving the location to changing the date. A March survey by The Wedding Report Inc., a research company that tracks trends for the wedding industry, found that two-thirds of respondents are considering cutting their budget due to the uncertain economy. All that downsizing is having an effect on the \$60 billion wedding industry. The average cost of a wedding dropped 12% to \$19,219 in the first quarter of this year, following a 24% drop last year. The trends are toward smaller weddings, single sites for ceremonies and receptions, and do-it-yourself projects.

"The economy is making weddings a buyer's market. Couples have much more leverage to

negotiate with vendors today than they did a year or two years ago," say Alan and Denise Fields, authors of *Bridal Bargains: Secrets to Throwing a Fantastic Wedding on a Realistic Budget* (Windsor Peak Press; \$14.95). "We are seeing this in the declining average price for a wedding."

Last year, couples spent an average of \$1,940 on full-service wedding planners, according to The Wedding Report. But when money is tight, this is one of the first things to get axed. However, Deborah Moody, director of the Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants, says that could be a mistake. "Consultants save you money because they save you time. Couples save an average of 15% to 20% by using a certified wedding consultant, depending on the services they request," she says. "And consultants usually have a relationship with other wedding professionals, who are sometimes willing to pass on special benefits and cost savings."

If money is a concern, Moody suggests hiring a professional for an hourly consultation, during which you can ask questions and get help getting started. You can also choose an à la carte package, which lets you select only the services you desire; or a wedding day management package, which provides a "day of" coordinator, who will direct and manage the events on the big day.

Most couples on a budget want to know what they can do to bring everyone together to celebrate, says Plainfield, New Jersey-based, certified master professional wedding consultant Dion Magee (www.dionmagee.com ^[3]). Here are five ways to cut costs:

Cut the guest list. With more people, you'll pay more for almost everything: invitations, centerpieces, rentals, favors, and most significantly, food and drinks. "Reducing the guest count up front is the most effective way of reducing costs, because wedding costs are directly related to the number of guests," says Magee.

Scale back. Cut back on the lavish extras such as florals, linen, and lighting, or make the occasion less formal. Magee suggests food stations, filling hors d'oeuvres, or a light cocktail reception instead of a full dinner. For example, having a signature drink instead of a full open bar can slash 45% off your liquor expenses, according to Alan and Denise Fields. Negotiate. Magee says you should negotiate with all wedding suppliers. "Say to merchants: 'Here's our budget. What are some ways we can creatively meet it?'" According to The Wedding Report, couples are negotiating not just price, but payment plans.

Let your vendors help. "Identify and partner with people who are good at what they do and who can save you money in the long run," Magee says. "It may cost more up front to hire a professional, but they're going to give you a certain quality." They can also help you find savings in their respective areas.

Give yourself time. Magee finds that couples planning their wedding in six months or less to the date typically don't have a large budget and are really trying to crunch dollars. "But if they set that date maybe nine or 12 months later, then they find that they can afford more or are able to save more." You can also save by having your wedding reception on a weekday.

Whatever your budget, your wedding day is one that Magee says can have an emotional or financial impact for months or years to come, so you want to reduce the trauma as much as possible. "You can't buy a million-dollar mansion if you can only afford a one-bedroom condo," Whitten says. "At the end of the day you have to come back to your budget."

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