

Deciding About Wedding Videography . . . and How to Choose the Right Company

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Two of the most typical complaints we receive from brides regarding video will probably surprise you. We receive these complaints well after the wedding and reception are over and not always directly from the bride, but sometimes from the brides' friends or family. These two complaints are not heard after the brides have received their DVD's from us or from any of our professional compatriots. The sad thing is, there is absolutely nothing we can do with the first one of the complaints and only the possibility of help with the other.

The flowers are dead and gone and probably in the trash somewhere. The food has been eaten and we won't even talk about where that is now. The decorations for the wedding and reception will never look the same. The gown is at the cleaners or hanging in a closet somewhere. You wake up the day after the wedding and can't remember the details of the ceremony or the reception. The most important and exciting reason to choose professional wedding videography is so you'll be able to relive that wonderful, once in a lifetime experience...a day that you planned for, worked hard for, and agonized over for months. And I mean relive it with all of the sights, sounds and movement that was so special to you each moment of the day.

Imagine going to your personal media library and pulling out a DVD of your grandparents, or even your great-great grandparents' wedding! The cover reads: "Our Wedding - Horace & Emma, February 12, 1922". You place the DVD into your player and there they are with all of the sights and sounds of their day. The beautiful beaded "flapper" gown on your great-great grandmother looks stunning as she graciously walks down the aisle carrying an arm of irises and eyes wide open in anticipation. Your great-great grandfather is in a zoot suit! You've seen pictures of your ancestors from their wedding day, but now you're actually able to hear them speak their vows and watch them dance at the reception (what are those dances all about!). Why is this so important? Of course you didn't know them in their youth, but more importantly, they are now gone. Great-great grandma Emma died twelve years ago and your great-great grandfather eight years before that. Wouldn't it be nice to have that video to watch? That's not usually possible unless they came from a wealthy family, or had connections in the motion picture industry. Even your parents may not have had professional video shot of their wedding (professional wedding videography started around 1980). But wouldn't it be nice to see that!

Our business is not really videotaping weddings. Our business is capturing and preserving history for this and future generations. We are historians.

Think about this for a moment. The only way that you can be a part of documented history is if a book is written about you, or a movie made about you. Wouldn't it be much better if you are the leading characters in the movie: a movie seen and heard by the future generations of your family?

Two Complaints From Brides About Video

- 1) I made the mistake of not having my wedding festivities videotaped.
- 2) I made the mistake of trying to save money by having a relative or friend videotape my wedding day instead of making the video a priority, and hiring a professional videographer.

Video: What You Should Know

What I'm about to tell you won't surprise you since I own a professional wedding videography company: hire a professional wedding videographer. I will explain not only why, but also how to choose a video production company that will suit you best.

First of all, let's look at the budget. You should budget as much for videography as you have for photography. Videography is never a replacement for photography, nor is photography a replacement for videography. Each one exists for different reasons. You're hearing more and more about digital this and that. This is especially true of photography and videography, but let me explain the difference.

Professional digital photographic cameras can now capture an image of the same quality as the old film style cameras. The quality of prints you'll receive is exceptional. But you can't get the same quality still photos from digital videotape. Although you can pull some medium quality photos off the video, there is absolutely no replacement for professional photos.

Professional digital video provides video that is much higher quality than the old VHS, S-VHS, 8 MM, HI-8 and other formats that are now obsolete. But photography can't show movement or sound. In other words, don't shortchange yourself in either area. Your DVD and photo album are going to be around for a long time and you should value each one equally. Try to imagine the thrill and excitement you'll feel 20 years from now when you look back to your special day and watch you and your husband exchanging vows and celebrating with loved ones that may no longer be with you. *That* will be priceless.

The average cost of a wedding and reception is over \$20,000. This could be a great shock to you if you haven't budgeted enough. But don't panic. Move services up or down in your budget as necessary and don't worry about pressures from tradition or other people.

Why You Should Choose a Professional Wedding Videographer

- 1) It's not fair to place pressure on a friend to capture this once-in-a-lifetime event. How will you feel if the camera is accidentally turned off during the ceremony?
- 2) A professional wedding videographer will have the right equipment to

capture and edit the footage so you receive a high quality product that you are proud to share.

- 3) Expertise. A wedding videographer will understand the importance of capturing not only the highlights of the day, but the romance as well.

How to Choose a Professional Wedding Videographer

- 1) Ethics. This is a tough one to talk about and there are several issues here:

- a. Will the videographer show up on time, or even at all? How will you know? Check references and testimonials. A call to the Better Business Bureau (BBB) could reveal unresolved complaints.
- b. Will the video production company cancel a week before the wedding because they got a higher paying job? Believe it or not this happens. Your wedding is the most important event in your life up until now. To the unethical video production company, it's just a job.
- c. Are you interested in using copyrighted music on your edited DVD? If so, give your videographer ample time to obtain the rights to the music. There is a wealth of copyright-free music available and much of it is similar to what you hear on the radio.
- d. Do you feel pressure while you're in their studio to buy now, or to buy additional packages or add-ons? Perhaps they don't have your best interest at heart. One way to avoid pressure tactics is to meet with the representative at your home or your parents' home, and have some family members involved in watching the demo during the meeting. This creates an easy environment for you to say "no" in, and also shows the company's best work on a home-quality DVD player. The in-home demo will give you a much more accurate picture (no pun intended) of what your DVD will look like. Finally, a real wedding videographer should encourage you to check other professionals' work before deciding.

- 2) Technique. This encompasses so much and is, next to ethics, the most important criteria in hiring a professional wedding videographer. There are a lot of *videographers* out there; and there are a lot of *professional videographers* out there. But there are very few *professional wedding videographers* out there. When you interview professional videographers, ask if weddings are their primary business. The length of time they've been in business and the number of weddings they've produced should not be used as the primary criteria when choosing the company.

Your wedding videographer should be a member of the Jacksonville Videographers Association - the JVA. If so, they will be well versed in the latest trends and techniques in the wedding videography industry. We're very excited about the many new ideas and options we now provide our brides based on these training seminars.

- a. Your wedding videographer should be familiar with the location of your wedding, either having shot there before, arriving early or attending the

rehearsal. He needs to understand the rules: where cameras are allowed, whether video lights are allowed, and how much moving around is tolerated. Just as importantly, you need to decide what you want. Do you want lights? One, two or three cameras? And how much moving around do you want by the videographer? A professional should be able to explain the differences to you and let you decide. In other words, you are hiring the videographer and he should be willing to shoot and edit in the style that is most pleasing to you. You don't need a "prima donna" videographer shooting your wedding.

- b. Personality and professionalism. The company you hire should have a complete understanding of how to dress for your wedding and how to treat the clergy/officiant, the bridal party, the photographer, caterer and all others connected with your special day. How will your videographer be dressed at the wedding? In tee shirt and jeans? (Yes, that has happened also!) If you like their work, personality, and ethics, and the price is fair, then you've found the right company to hire.
- c. Although having two or three cameras at your wedding is an option, and allows for cutaways during the ceremony, it is a more expensive option. A professional will be able to show you how to save money and get a fantastic looking DVD. The money saved might be better invested on a baby-to-engagement or honeymoon montage, extra DVD's, a pre-wedding romantic stroll scene, or a recap of your wedding played at your reception.
- d. Another part of technique is style. Close-ups are a must for a great-looking DVD. The videographer should capture close-ups of your vows, exchanging rings, the kiss, the first dance and a myriad of other special moments.

Do you want a documentary style DVD which captures the events in the order that they occurred, or do you want a more romantic style where some elements are staged, such as a walk on the beach or in the park?

Do you want your bridal party interviewed before the wedding? Very few professional videographers do this without asking first. There are excellent ways to get interviews without being intrusive.

Do you want the videographer to shoot you getting into the limo after the wedding, or get right to the reception? Once there, what style will he use? Candid out-of-the-way shots? In your face shots? MTV-type shots of the dancing? These are choices that you should make before the wedding.

Are there any special needs or requests? Is there someone you want more footage of, or someone you prefer not to see? Let your videographer know ahead of time.

The editing style will often determine the length of your finished DVD. Most friends will be uncomfortable sitting through one more than an hour long. Make sure you know how many DVD's are included, and how much extras will cost.

3) Equipment. I'll try to keep this simple.

- a. Cameras. Professional videographers have upgraded to digital for the accurate colors and sharp pictures. Also, don't be fooled by those who tell you that a bigger camera is better than a smaller camera. Both perform about the same inside. However, you definitely want a low-light, 3-chip camera for the ceremony. A smaller camera works better at the reception, because your guests may become intimidated by a larger, shoulder-mounted camera.
- b. Lights. Most churches and synagogues prohibit the use of video lights during the ceremony. For the very best video, the more light the better. If the venue doesn't allow the use of additional lighting, request that the lights be turned up. If the videographer is allowed to have a light on the camera, make sure the light is variable (can be adjusted) and that he's discreet, not interfering with shots the photographer is taking.
- c. Microphones. Audio *is* half of your wedding day celebration. Professional videographers use wireless microphones or digital audio recorders. Although both provide much clearer sound than the on-camera mic, wireless mics can pick up audio noise interference. The new digital audio recorders operate independently from the camera and do not pick up outside interference. If you want the best, choose a videographer who uses digital audio recorders.
- d. Tripod vs. handheld. If the camera is only permitted at the back of the church, it should be mounted on a professional tripod. If your videographer is allowed to shoot up front near the bridal couple, the camera should be shoulder mounted. This position will provide the best shots of you and your groom as you speak your vows. |
- e. Editing system. Make sure your videographer uses non-linear editing equipment. Computer editing retains the original quality of the raw footage.

Finally

After you have chosen the perfect video production company for your wedding, the three most important words I can give you are:

communicate, communicate, communicate.

Be explicit to the point of writing down what you want in a finished product so that there are no misunderstandings. Also, find out when you can expect to receive the finished product. A few weeks should be plenty of time.

To those of us who care, this is more than just a business or profession. To us, wedding videography is a heartfelt desire to capture these precious moments in time for you to experience over and over again. Events will happen in your new lives together that will test your "for better or worse" vows. Won't it be wonderful for the two of you, and your future generations, to journey back in time and relive the love and romance you experienced on that magical day?