

How To Make Money Videotaping Weddings

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How To Make Money Videotaping Weddings

There is a huge potential market for wedding videos. Just look in your local paper any summer week and see how many weddings there were. Since almost every household in the country has a VCR, you can bet that almost every wedding has a video. Keep in mind, though, that there is also big competition in this field. If you want to make it, you'll have to be sure of two things: that you have the skills necessary, and that you can offer more than the other video-ers in your area.

There's more to taping a wedding than just setting up a camera and turning it on. If you're married and had a video taken at your wedding, I'm sure you'll agree. You, the photographer, can expect to be dropped into an environment of potential conflict. Last minute spats between the bride and groom, conflicts between family members, still photographers, all can be a source of headaches for you.

The best way to prevent problems is to set up a meeting with the bride, groom, close family members, and, if possible, any other photographers that will be at the service/reception. This way, you can find out EXACTLY what the family wants, any special shots they will want, any unusual parts to the ceremony that they may want on tape, how many people will be involved, and other issues. Keep in mind, the family will be paying you, so they will probably want to TELL you what you can or can't do. If what they want is reasonable, don't fight it. That makes your job easier. But, if what they want is unreasonable, be honest with them, but, by all means, be tactful.

If you can meet with the other photographer(s), discuss where they need to be to get their best shots, so you and your camera won't be in the way. Also, this will help you with your planning so they won't be in your video, and you won't show up in the photos. This brings up the subject of planning.

Planning is all important when it comes to wedding videos. You will be producing something that the couple will want to view over and over, that their family and friends will be seeing. It's your best advertisement. So, you will want it to be the best it can be. If you know what the ceremony will be like ahead of time, and what special shots the couple and family will want, you've got the ball in your court. Be sure to attend the rehearsal, so you can set your equipment up and plan your camera angles. Since you've planned your work, all you have to do is work your plan.

Here's an idea of the equipment a well-stocked wedding videographer should have or have access to:

At least two VHS camcorders with high-quality low-light functions

At least one VHS VCR for editing and dubbing

At least one free-standing light for each camera

A tripod for each camera, preferably ones with a large range of heights

At least twelve hours of batteries for each camera

The best quality wireless microphone you can afford (one for each camera)

All necessary cables, with spares

Extra tapes, the best quality available.

Don't let this list scare you off. If you don't own all this, you don't have to rush out and empty your bank account. You can either rent what you need, or barter your services with someone who has the equipment. Then, pick up the stuff you need piece by piece. Also, keep your eyes open for good quality used equipment.

Other equipment you may want to consider would include a good video editor deck, for putting your finished product together; a film-to-tape camera attachment (can be used to create a montage of scenes from old home movies of the couple when they were kids - a great service to offer and a unique marketing point to offer!); and a graphics/title generator.

So, you may have wondered, why would you need more than one camera? If you have two cameras set up, you:

- can have different angles of the action, instead of the standard wedding video, which has a half- hour of a still camera; and
- you're covered if one of the cameras messes up or lighting is bad.

Make sure your videos are special, different from the run-of-the-mill wedding videos. Try to get a camera aimed toward the faces of the couple, so you can capture them during the vows, and at other points. This will also provide close-up footage to edit in at slow points. Try to have a camera at the end of the aisle, so you can catch the exit of the bride and

groom. This camera could also be used to show the bride from the back, entering the ceremony, an angle that you rarely see in a wedding video. If possible, get or draw up a floor plan of the location of the ceremony. It will help you plan your camera placement and shots.

Position your microphones where they'll do the most good. If possible, get either the bride or the groom to wear one, and get the minister or celebrant to wear one. This way, you'll have crisp, clear sound. Just remember to warn the bride and groom not to whisper anything they wouldn't want the microphone to pick up! (You can always edit out any unwanted sound.)

Other places you may want a camera would be (with the couple in the 12 o'clock position): 10:00 or 2:00. Use these camera to get views of the crowd, the parents of the couple (edit a shot of them in during the vows - catch the emotions of the ceremony), and the entrance of the attendants. If the ceremony is a specialized ethnic ceremony (becoming more popular, especially with Black Americans) or unusual, you should look for points of interest to capture on tape which will show the special meanings and emotions of the ceremony. If the couple and family can watch your tape and feel the same emotions they had during the actual ceremony, your tape is a winner!

Technical skills are important, but they can be learned. The most crucial skills are smooth panning and zooming. Before you ever do your first wedding, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!! The worst wedding video is the most common: one stationary camera, no zooms, never moving. People look around when they're at a wedding, and so should the camera, within reason. Practice slow, smooth pans that keep the subject in the frame of the camera. Practice smooth zooms that aren't jerky, and aren't too close or too far from the subject.

You've probably figured that you'll need a helper for the actual taping. Unless the only camera that will pan and zoom is the one you're operating, and the others are stationary, you'll need someone. Be sure your helper is well-trained, with skills up to par with yourself. Ideas: a friend who also has a videocamera (here's a way to save on equipment costs); a college or high-school kid with video experience (they're becoming more common, as more and more schools add video classes to their curriculum); or a freelancer (possibly a crew member from the public access channel at your cable station).

At the reception, it's important to get the "traditional" events: the garter/ bouquet toss, cutting the cake, toasts, etc. Use the same guidelines as before: keep in mind what's important to have in the frame, and try to tape it smoothly. A good idea may be to talk to the relatives of the couple and see if some of them would want to say a few words about the couple

on tape (try to do this early in the reception, before a lot of drinks have been served!).

If your videos are special and well-produced, you should be able to charge fees that are toward the top range in your area. Premium wedding videographers in large areas should be able to get \$750 to \$1000 for a wedding. Discretely call other videographers in your area to get an idea of what the range is. Also, customize your prices depending upon what services the family wants. If they don't need three cameras and extensive editing, charge them less.

Marketing ideas:

Scan your newspaper for engagement announcements. Then, use your computer's word processor to print out personalized letters detailing your services. Use your library's city directory to find the addresses you need. Send the letters and a brochure to the lucky couples.

Set up a referral network with florists formal wear shops, printers, and other wedding-related retailers in your area. You could offer them a set commission fee each time a referral leads to a taping job.

Find a wedding photographer in your area who doesn't currently offer video. Set up a deal where your photo and video services could be offered as a package.

Make sure you have a booth at local bridal shows. These are attended by people who will be marrying soon, qualified prospects for your services.

Have plenty of your brochures and marketing materials handy, so you don't run out. A good idea is to have one of your best videos playing on a monitor at the show (get permission from the couple on tape first - maybe offer them a discount in exchange for letting you use their tape for marketing purposes).

Advertise in your newspaper's wedding supplement. Most newspapers publish at least one a year.

If your taping was simple, with only one camera, you may be able to deliver the tape to the couple at the end of the wedding. If more extensive editing needs to be done, make sure you give the couple a realistic date when they can expect the tape. Don't give them a time that will leave you rushed. If you don't have your own editing equipment, check ahead with your local cable station. Many times, they have facilities for their public access station which can be rented. Many also offer short

courses in video editing which are worth checking into.

A few final words:

Try to be discrete when taping. No one likes tripping over a bunch of cords and being distracted during the ceremony by someone running from camera to camera and moving lighting around. You want people to remember the wedding, not you.

Don't take advantage of the free food/drinks at the reception, unless invited to by the couple. If invited to, eat small and late. You're working, remember. This will allow the optimum time for taping, and you won't be remembered as a freeloader.

If the couple is not satisfied with their tape, don't take it personally. Offer a deep discount and write it off to experience. Look at it this way, at least you got good practice and were paid for it!

Emphasize to your prospective customers in your brochures that your services and fees are customizable. A lot of people can only afford a few hundred dollars for a good video. Scale back on the complexity of the video, but still give them a high-quality product. They may be your best referral source.

Keep tabs on your competition. If one starts offering a special feature, try to offer the same. Always try to think of new, creative services you can offer, so you lead the pack.

Weddings can be a lot of work. They can also be a lot of fun. You are in the position of being able to give the couple and family a permanent record of one of the most special days of their lives. Help make it one to remember for them and you can be on your way to success!