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My approach to this Tutorial

You may be an experienced professional photographer who wants to diversify into wedding photography. Or perhaps you're a keen amateur who wants to be a 'ProAm' wedding photographer - or maybe you've bought this tutorial because a friend has asked you to photograph their wedding and you're not sure where to start....

Your reason doesn't matter - whatever your background and whatever your motivation, it is vitally important that you approach wedding photography with high professional standards and you need to be determined to produce first-class results.

This tutorial doesn't include a lot of 'technical' information as such, because I assume that you wouldn't be taking on wedding photography unless you're a competent photographer - however, if you have any questions please feel free to ask.

Because of the number of pictures included in this tutorial and the need to keep file sizes within reasonable download limits, the resolution has had to be reduced more than usual, and this has resulted in reduced image quality.

Different cultures, countries and customs

Not all weddings are the same - and that's an understatement!

But although there are different customs and practices and differences in procedures in different countries and between different religions and different socio-economic groups, this tutorial is equally relevant to all.

Bear in mind though, when pricing the job, that in some cultures the wedding festivities can go on for a very long time, sometimes running into more than one day. Obviously this will affect the price.

Getting the business

There is no (or very little!) repeat business in wedding photography, so you will need to market yourself. Eventually you can expect to get a steady flow of work from recommendations, but this can take a very long time to bring in results.

Advertising and marketing

Most **local newspapers** have a suitable section for your type of advert. A fairly large display advert which tells people about your wonderful quality and your unbeatable level of personal service will be expensive. This type of advertising could pay off if you're charging very high prices, but I have my doubts.

At the other end of the scale, something like *Wedding photography 01234 100100* will cost far less, but this type of advertising tends to only attract the type of clients who want to spend the absolute minimum, they will ring every photographer they can find and will buy the cheapest deal - it always seems strange to me that there are people who will happily spend huge sums on their wedding but they try to cut corners when they buy the photography, which is the only permanent and tangible reminder of their day.

And then there are the **specialist bridal magazines**. Unlike the local newspapers, they have the advantage that just about everyone who reads them is planning their wedding and so is in the market for your service. This can be a cost-effective form of advertising, but don't forget to allow for the cost of your advertising in your pricing.

Yellow Pages is very well-established and many people still use it, but in my view it is less effective than it used to be and may not be worth the cost of a large, expensive advert. The Yellow Pages issue is now clouded by the introduction of YP-style advertising in BT phonebooks, and you may feel that you need to advertise in neither or both. If you're going to advertise in these directories, try a small one for the first year. Then there are other directories that may claim to be better or cheaper than Yellow Pages.

Forget them!

The Internet works well for wedding services, perhaps due to the fact that most of the people who get married are fairly young and so are more likely to use the Internet than older people. Basically there are two ways of promoting your services on the net, use both of them!

1. **Your website** can be expected to bring in enquiries, over time. But before it can do so it will need to rank high with major search engines, and this will take both time and effort on your part. There are a large number of Companies who will 'guarantee' high search engine positioning in return for a fat fee but my advice is to save your money and buy a proprietary search engine positioning program such as WebPosition Gold instead, or even better get search engine optimisation on your site and let Google do the rest.
2. And then there are the **Wedding Services Sites** where you (usually) have to pay to get your own website listed.

These sites can work very well, but there's a growing number of them and some are much better than others - stick to those that are well-established, have many of your competitors already advertising with them and that also carry adverts for other wedding services, such as hire cars, bridal wear etc. You can easily find out which of these sites get the most visitors simply by using a free service such as Alexis, which tracks website traffic. Some wedding directories are free, at least while they're getting established.

But your marketing effort shouldn't be limited to advertising and you will probably find that related services can produce very good results - catering venues, car hire, Churches, bridal wear.... obviously you can't expect recommendations to be free, but at least you will only be paying for recommendations that turn into business, so your costs can be quantified and there will be no wasted money.

And then there are the '**professional associations**' for photographers, who in return for a fat annual fee will list you in their directory and perhaps provide you with discounted Yellow Pages advertising under their own banner, which may impress potential clients.

Some also provide training for an extra fee, discounted insurance, credit card facilities and various types of advice. I suspect that many people join these organisations to gain credibility and some letters after their name. Perhaps they are right, personally the only letters I have after my name are B.A. and I don't think they would help to get me work even if I used them. Was it Groucho Marx who said "I do not want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member"?

However, many people *are* impressed by letters after someone's name or membership of an association, so you may find membership worthwhile.

How much should you charge?

That's for you to decide, but my view is that photographers should charge enough to ensure a healthy profit and turn out a standard of work that delights, rather than merely satisfies, their clients. There are always plenty of people grubbing around at the bottom end of wedding photography, providing their clients with low standards of both quality and service - don't be one of them, do the job properly and help to improve the reputation of wedding photographers!

We offer our own clients just one service – the photography - which is supplied at a fixed price.

Then, when they get back from their honeymoon the proofs are waiting for them. The proofs are low resolution files, written on CD, which costs almost nothing to produce. If they don't have a computer I'll be happy to print proofs for them, but it's rare for clients to ask for this.

More and more people now want digital, or 'Storybook' albums, which are ideal for reportage-style photography. They can have any number of prints on a page, the prints can be of any size or shape and they can even have panoramic prints covering a double page spread. And they can have as many pages as they like.

We sit down together and design their album on my computer, using the software supplied, I punch the number of pages and the cover chosen into the programme to get the price and collect the cheque. The chosen images are then enhanced as necessary and written to disk and I let the album company (www.queensberryalbums.com) do the entire job, including colour corrections.

Or, if they prefer a traditional album, the process is similar – "Here are some sample albums, it's £X for the album itself and £Y for each pair of prints".

Simple and effective. And the beauty of it is that I have made my money from the photography and even if they don't buy an album I'll be happy with my profit.

Prices need to be based on making the required level of profit from just the package. Some weddings produce a very large number of print orders, which bring in very substantial extra profits, others produce none.

Times have changed, guests now take their own photos and won't feel a need to buy yours - and you'll often get a guest who fancies his luck as a photographer (as long as you do all the hard work and set up the shots) and who will then steal both your shots and your customers. I have ways of dealing with these people but the advice remains to make sure that **you do not rely on print sales in order to make a profit!**

This doesn't mean that print sales don't matter or that you should ignore them, and some photographers make a lot of extra money by selling prints at the reception. The usual method here is to download digital images to a laptop, resize, carry out minor retouching as necessary and produce a few prints on a dye sublimation printer. (Dye sub printers are far more reliable and produce much better quality than inkjet printers - and the prints are permanent).

Should you get them to sign a contract?

The short answer is that I don't know. A contract is a legally binding agreement on both parties and, in theory, it makes sense to get everything in writing and signed. The problem with this is that if you fail to deliver part of the agreed coverage they may hold you responsible (even if the omission is entirely their fault). Another possible reason for not having a written contract could be that a few (thankfully) people are never satisfied and always expect more - they may read what they want to see into a contract and insist that you provide more than you agreed. If that happens bad feeling will result and the case could even end up in Court, which is an enormous waste of both time and money.

A third reason, speaking personally, is that I always seem to end up on very good terms with my wedding couples and I feel that a contract might, in some cases, put the relationship on a less friendly basis.

If you don't use a written contract (and I don't) you should avoid misunderstandings by confirming the booking and all the important details - i.e. date of wedding, name and address of wedding venue, time of ceremony, location of reception, approx. No. of guests, number & size of prints in the finished album, details of the level of coverage.

These details may not all be available at the time of the booking, so a second letter can be sent if necessary shortly before the wedding.

One compromise solution is to combine a contract with a questionnaire, and a possible example is included at the end of this tutorial. If you feel that this is helpful, modify it to suit your own level of service and circumstances. This questionnaire can provide you with very useful information - get them to complete and sign it not more than a week or so before the wedding, so that it is as up to date as possible.

Beautiful Bride?

Some photographers avoid close-up shots of Brides who don't match their own perception of beauty but I feel that this is wrong. Even if she doesn't have classical good looks, the Bride is beautiful to her new husband and she is looking at her very best on her wedding day. Because of this I treat everyone in exactly the same way and make sure that I have some good close-ups.

Keeping to time schedules

In an ideal world, the photographer will be fully consulted about the schedule and will be able to make sure that there is plenty of time to get the photography done before the guests sit down to eat – but this rarely happens!

Whether it's a Church, Registry Office or Hotel wedding, my first job on arrival at the reception venue is to find the person in charge and ask when the guests will be eating. I then make sure that I do nothing that will cause the meal to start late – partly because the reception venue is important to me and I need to be on good terms with them, partly because the food needs to be served when it's ready and not spoiled by being kept hot, and partly because, as photographer, I'm just a supplier and have no right to change things to suit my own convenience.

Unfortunately, some photographers have little consideration for other people and they can take so long over their photography that the meal is seriously delayed. There is one photographer in my own area who seems to over-run the time schedules by anything up to 2 hours!

But what if there simply isn't enough time between the ceremony and the meal? Simply use the time you've got for the formal and the group shots, and tell the Bride & Groom that you'll take the pictures of them on their own later, immediately after their meal. There is a side benefit to this, because after a drink or two and a good meal, you're likely to get much more relaxed shots.

Down came the rain....

As luck will have it, rain isn't often a problem because there are often some dry spells, but sometimes outdoor photography is impossible, either because it's raining steadily or because the ground is waterlogged and muddy from previous rain.

There are various 'Plan B' strategies to cope with this.

You may be able to shoot indoors using just natural light, although this will normally involve the use of a high ISO (reducing image quality) and a tripod, neither of which are ideal.

Or you could use a flashgun, used on a bracket to avoid the 'Deer in the headlights' look. Well, this is certainly better than a flash mounted directly to the camera, but not much better...

Or you could use a couple of studio flash heads, and this is my own preferred solution. The lighting arrangement has to suit the venue rather than my own views on good studio lighting, but if possible I normally use a light fitted with a large shoot-through umbrella as the key light, and a second head bounced off the ceiling to provide fill. But sometimes the ceilings are too high (or too low) for this to work, so there is a need to be flexible.

The problems are likely to be related to the background – fire safety notices, mirrors, other reflective surfaces etc can all cause problems. Space may be limited but people need to be placed far enough away from the background for shadows not to cause problems, but close enough for flash power fall-off not to cause the background to go dark. Work **with** the reception venue and don't hesitate to ask for help in finding a suitable location, or to get furniture moved.



The biggest single problem with forced indoor shots is that all your shots will end up against much the same background. You may not have much of a choice of backgrounds, but you can change your own position to add some variety to the background – this works especially well if you're using a wideangle lens, which you will probably need to do.

Informal Bride & Groom shots can be done elsewhere – in hotels at least, corridors, stairs, landings and bedrooms often produce first-class backgrounds

Cameras and lenses

(Please see our separate tutorial on cameras and filters)

The ideal camera for any type of wedding photography is a single lens reflex with wide-angle, standard and mild telephoto lenses. The shutter speeds and aperture must be capable of being set manually.

Zoom lenses are a convenience but by no means essential and personally I prefer to use prime lenses whenever possible because of the extra quality they produce, their larger maximum aperture and because zoom lenses are more prone to flare, especially when backlighting is used.

My favourite (in the sense of most-used) lens is a 50mm f1.4 - the quality is superb, and because of its wide aperture it auto-focuses immediately under just about any lighting conditions and it is ideal for informal and reportage shots and for shots inside the church.

A good lens hood *is* essential and the need for a good lens hood reinforces my dislike for zoom lenses, because the lenshoods for zooms are only fully effective at the widest setting; when the lens is used at longer settings the hood is normally virtually useless.



Zoom-type lenshoods (left) are only really effective at the wide end. Collapsible rubber lenshoods (right) are for more effective but can cause vignetting at the wide end - simply collapse them if necessary

Digital or film?

Photographers often have very strong views on this, I have no axe to grind because I use both, although I use digital more often.

Digital has obvious advantages for wedding photography - no film costs, no time taken up changing your film and no negatives to scan for later computer enhancement - but there can be a very real problem with the very high contrast between white dresses and black tuxedos. Negative film can cope with this brilliantly, slide film and digital can struggle with this range of contrast.

The need to avoid high contrast with digital makes the use of fill flash absolutely vital in bright sunlight.

Point and shoot digital cameras are simply not suitable for wedding photography. Their sensors are too small, which means that the pixels are too small and too close together. They can't cope with the wide range of contrast involved in wedding photography. Enlargements are limited because they have to be enlarged too much, because of the short focal length of the lenses you won't be able to get blurred backgrounds and there is usually quite a long shutter lag.

If you're using digital it needs to be a DSLR.

Which make you use is a matter of personal choice, but regardless of the make, the model can be quite important.

Regardless of make and model, with all things (mainly lens quality) being equal, any DSLR with an APS-size sensor of say 6 megapixels will turn out much the same quality of image as any other camera of similar spec. The differences are mainly in the handling, and this can be important.

At the cheaper end, many cameras have combined function controls, which often means that instead of just turning a dial you need to press and hold a button while turning the dial. This slows things up. The more expensive bodies are physically larger and have more room for individual controls; the controls also tend to be larger and easier to use.

Cheaper cameras may not be compatible with the full range of lenses, and may not work with all of the dedicated flashguns produced by the same manufacturer.

Autofocus is often slow too, and can be very uncertain in poor lighting conditions.

Some bodies will only work with microdrive cards, which are much slower than CF cards and as they have delicate moving parts they are far more prone to failure — definitely not recommended for wedding photography!

Some of the better cameras can run either consecutively or concurrently on more than one type of card — for example a CF and a SD. The camera can be set to write to one of them first, switching over to the other when it's full (consecutive) or to write to both at the same time, providing extra security for your images (concurrent).

Cheaper cameras may have a smaller image buffer, which means that you may find yourself unable to take any pictures until the camera has had time to write the ones you've just taken to the card.

And, finally, cheaper digital cameras are not really designed for the hurly burly of wedding photography, they can't be used in rainy conditions and they're bound to wear out more quickly.

This doesn't mean that you have to buy a top end camera, but it's important to understand why so many people *do* choose to spend a lot of money on their cameras.

Of course, the cheaper cameras can produce perfectly good results and they should last a long time if used only as backup cameras.

One final point about digital; I don't lie to people but unless they ask I never tell them that some of the shots will be taken on digital. The reason for this is that just about everyone has seen appalling quality from digital cameras at the lower end of the market and they may not appreciate that professional digital is different.

Let's work through the type of shots you might take.

There's no such thing as a typical wedding and there's no such thing as a right way of doing things, but I hope that these example shots will give you some ideas.

Some of the example shots were taken with the lens wide open. Sometimes this is due to necessity – shots taken indoors are taken without flash whenever possible and that means that wide apertures are needed.

For some shots, more depth of field is needed so smaller apertures are used. On a 35mm film camera (or a full-frame digital camera) it's usually OK to stop the lens down

Arriving at the ceremony.

I don't want to patronise you, but if you were shooting getting ready shots indoors by natural light you were probably running at about 800 ISO – don't forget to change to 100/160 for the outdoor shots. Arriving shots can be either posed or unposed or a mixture of the two.



8 You've already had a look inside of course, and if you're going to take shots from the back then your tripod will be out of the way but ready.

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