

Wedding planners: A small but growing business

With a trend toward more elaborate weddings these days, busy couples balancing careers and other duties are finding it increasingly hard to plan a wedding themselves. Enter the professional wedding planners, who have slowly been gaining popularity in Beirut.

While they were unheard of only a few years ago, the percentage of couples using planners seems to have grown quickly. According to one planner, her business has an average of 100 clients per year. Another wedding and event planner, Caractere, notes that 5 years ago, there were only two to three companies in the business. Today, the figure has mushroomed to between 30 and 35.

Wedding budgets

In a recent survey conducted by *Information International*, the average budget for a Lebanese wedding was found to be \$7,600.

The survey also showed that those who used wedding planners had a higher budget compared with couples who organized their own wedding. The cost of weddings arranged by a planner increased by \$1,800 to an average of \$9,400, while those who planned their own wedding tended to have a smaller budget of \$7,500.

Who bears the cost?

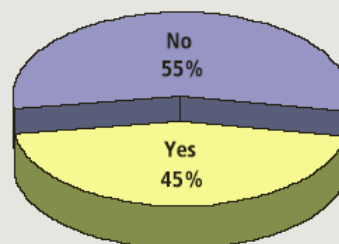
For the most part, the groom and the groom's family tend to pay for weddings, as indicated by 59.6% of those surveyed. However, a new trend was detected, with 16.9% of respondents having both families chip in for the wedding. Another 14.4% were brides and grooms who paid for the weddings themselves. A minor percentage, 1.9%, took out a loan to finance their wedding expenses. The remaining 7.2% were distributed among various responses.

Main expenses

A breakdown of expenses showed that the reception (cost of location, lighting and catering) took up the lion's share of a wedding budget, or 28.4%. The remaining expenses were distributed as follows:

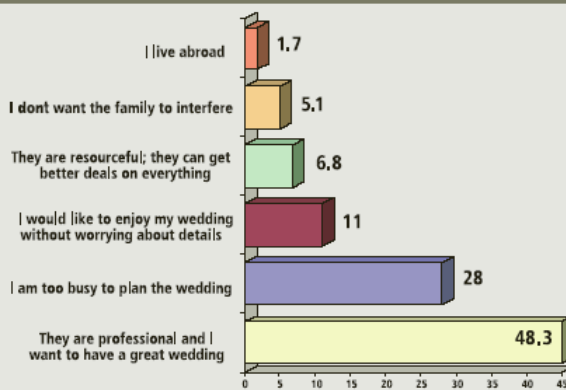
- Honeymoon: 17.9%
- Gown and accessories: 14.8%
- Favors or gifts to attendees: 6.1%
- Music and entertainment: 5.4%
- Photographer and video: 5%
- Grooms' suit: 4.7%
- Hair and makeup: 4.4%
- Flowers and balloons: 3.7%
- Religious representative: 3.6%
- Invitations: 2.9%
- Zaffeh: 2.7%
- Rental car: 0.4%

Did you ever consider hiring a wedding planner? (%)



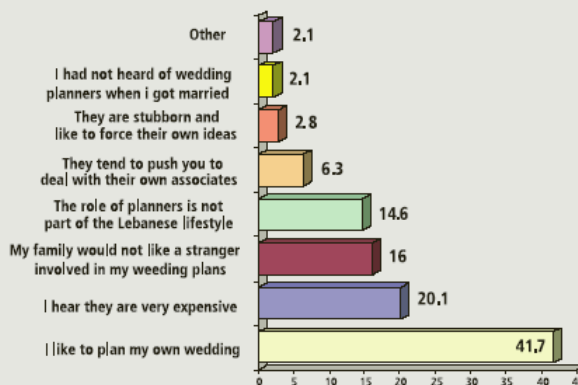
G1 Base: 262

Why did you consider hiring a wedding planner? (%)



G2 Base: 118 (Multiple responses)

Why didn't you consider one? (%)



G3 Base: 144 (Multiple responses)

Budgeting

Overspending on weddings was found to be common, according to the survey. On average, those getting married exceed their budget by around \$860. This is compared with 34.5% of couples who stuck to their initial budget.

However, many couples anticipated exceeding their budget and indicated a maximum acceptable amount that averaged \$1,154. The largest proportion, or 46.7% of respondents, indicated a range between \$500–1,000, while 14.7% said anything above their budget was not acceptable.

Interest in planners

The majority of respondents who had heard of wedding planners (55%) had not considered hiring one, mainly because they liked to plan their own wedding (41.7%). Another 20.1% heard they were very expensive, while 16% said their family did not want a stranger involved in the wedding plans. Almost 15% felt the idea of a planner was still not accepted by society, while a minor percentage believed they would compel clients to work with certain associates or force their own ideas.

Out of the 45% of respondents who had considered hiring a planner, half contacted wedding planners and 40.6% finally hired one (in other words, 78.7% of those who contacted wedding planners recruited one). However, if looking at the larger sample of those who heard about wedding planners, 18% hired one.

Their main attraction was that, as professionals, the planners would give their client a great wedding (48.3%). Other respondents (28%) were just too busy to plan a wedding and needed help, while some (11%) wanted to enjoy the wedding without having to worry about all the details. 6.8% of respondents felt they would be resourceful and get better deals, 5.1% considered hiring a planner because they did not want their family to interfere and 1.7% said they needed one since they lived overseas.

As one planner put it, their job is to “help couples save time and money by leading them through choices and directing them to experienced, quality vendors who won’t let them down.”

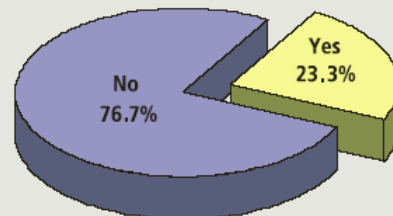
Sought-after services

The main service clients request from their wedding planners is music and entertainment. The survey showed that the majority, or 56.5%, of those who used wedding planners asked them to oversee this aspect of the wedding.

Pictures and wedding videos were the next most requested service (44.7%), followed by flowers and balloons (43.5%) and lighting (35.5%). Wedding planners were also asked to take care of invitations, according to 30.2%, find a caterer (27.5%) and a location for the reception (22.9%). Other services included favors (16.4%), a *zaffe* for the bride (11.8%) and guidance when looking for a wedding dress (6.9%). ■

Check out the next issue of *iMonthly* for more on this survey

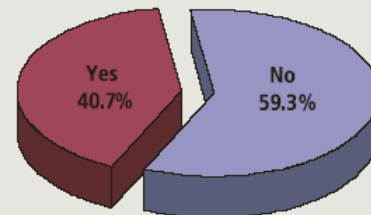
Did you contact any wedding planners? (%)



G4

Base: 262

Did you recruit any of the wedding planners? (%)



G5

Base: 118

Sample and methodology

The survey, conducted between 13 and 20 April 2004, was based on a quota sample of 400 respondents derived from the number of residents across different areas of Greater Beirut. In each area, respondents were randomly selected in line with the following restrictions:

50%: 200 questionnaires for engaged couples

30%: 120 questionnaires for couples married less than five years (who have not used wedding planners)

20%: 80 questionnaires for couples married less than five years (who have used wedding planners)

A sample of 361 was achieved through this technique, while the remaining questionnaires (for those who have used wedding planners) were covered through the snowball technique. Respondents were interviewed in person and the survey's margin of error was $\pm 2.4\%$.