



Wedding Planning & Events Management

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Congratulations!

You have taken the first very important step to becoming a Professional Event Manager and Wedding Planner!

Whether you are taking this course to start a new career or part-time business, or to enhance your current skill set, or even to gain some knowledge to plan your own, or your company's wedding or event, this course could be the best investment you have ever made.

In today's challenging economic conditions, people are working more hours for less or similar money, and have less time available for leisure activities, carrying out the household chores, or taking holidays. Many people, particularly busy professionals, value their recreational time very very highly. It is jealously guarded and has become almost sacrosanct.

Despite the fact that money seems to go less and less far, people still value their time ahead of their disposable income, and a glance at any employment study will reveal that, unlike five or 10 years ago, wages and salaries are slipping further down the list in terms of motivators. The overwhelming majority puts the availability of leisure time just behind job satisfaction when listing the factors that encourage them to change employers.

This is fantastic news for you! There has been unprecedented growth in the personal services and business facilitation sectors, and more and more people are prepared to pay to have routine chores taken care of, such as gardening, household cleaning and even shopping. The growth of online ordering and delivery services from all of the major supermarkets over the last five years is staggering! Drive through any urban development and you will see yet another 'hand car wash'. No-one wants to waste what spare time they may have on such mundane tasks, and they are prepared to pay for them.

Add to this drive towards unloading onerous tasks the fact that even large companies are now shedding 'non-essential' roles (people) to cut costs, and you can begin to see why Events Management has become such an essential part of the peripheral business landscape. For the same reasons, Wedding Planners are also in very high demand; many typical young professional couples wanting to 'tie the knot' simply do not have the time or the appetite for dealing with the intricacies of the big day, and they are generally reluctant to foist the whole thing on parents and friends. Besides, they have become used to 'sub-contracting' so many other facets of their lives that for many, hiring a Wedding Planner is a 'no-brainer'.

By the time you complete this course you will be able to confidently tackle the most complex projects, will be ready to plan and manage Corporate Events, and make a valuable contribution to the most important day in most couples' lives. The best part is that you will get paid for it - very well, if you apply the principles you are about to learn.

Good luck, and enjoy the journey! In the words of the great American Sales Trainer and Motivational Speaker Zig Ziglar, "You can have everything in life you want; if you will just help enough other people get what they want".

Welcome to the Wedding Planning and Events Management Course!

Unit 2:

Budgets and Finance



2.1 What to Charge for Your Services

Working out how much to charge is probably the most daunting exercise you will face initially. You probably have little idea of the 'black art' of costing,

particularly if you do not come from a financial or business background, but the basic principles are really not that difficult.

There are many different pricing or costing methods, depending on what sort of business you are engaged in. The event planning business is basically a service business, i.e. you are providing a service in return for a fee, rather than a retail model (where you are buying products for one price and selling them for a higher one). However, the business principles are the same - the purpose of any business is primarily to make a profit for its owners. Unless you do this successfully, you will not last very long, unless you have huge savings that you are prepared to give away!

The best way to determine how to set fees is to work out your hourly rates. There are many different ways to approach this, but it is a good idea to have two separate hourly rates; one for undertaking consultations and one for delivering the event. Not that you will necessarily charge clients by the hour for the event, but unless you have that hourly rate behind all of your negotiations, it is very likely you would not appreciate the value of your time. If you do not, the client certainly will not!

Consultation Meetings

The first hourly rate is to cover you for the initial meetings with clients to carry out the very necessary fact-finding exercises required. There are two schools of thought on this; some events managers or wedding planners conduct the first meeting free of charge and limit their time so that if it results in a non-engagement, all they have lost is an hour or so of their time, literally.

Once they have been engaged, they would agree prices as outlined later, but these would be for actually carrying out the event. Between the initial meeting and the event, a number of smaller face-to-face meetings may be required with various participants, and with some clients these can add up to a lot of time and energy being expended by you, which effectively makes

you unavailable to other clients. So for those periods, you are not able to earn elsewhere. Therefore, it is sensible to agree an hourly rate for these meetings in advance, as 'consultation fees'. Other professionals, such as solicitors, accountants, architects, and engineers, do this as a matter of course, so there is nothing unusual about it; charging by the hour is the 'done thing'. Determining what to charge for these consultations is as easy as checking round the competition and pitching your rate in a similar range; £40 - £75 is not unusual.

You may consider charging a flat fee, say £100, for the initial consultation, but make that refundable if the contract is signed. This gets a commitment from the client, and underlines the fact that they are dealing with a professional. They should appreciate that they are paying you for your expertise, knowledge and experience, and you should be making it clear to them that engaging you will save them a great deal financially and be of huge benefit psychologically.

Although charging for the initial consultation may mean that you initially get fewer enquiries, you will also waste less time and energy trying to convert those people who are just 'tyre kicking' and bouncing round the marketplace trying to get the cheapest deal. Generally they will not be interested in working productively with you; rather they will probably turn out to be the most demanding clients you deal with, who always want something for nothing, will be on the phone constantly, will be slow to pay you, and throw up all sorts of minor niggles after the event to reduce the bill.

Some of the consultations, particularly in the early stages while you are finding your feet, may result in no business. Unfortunately, nobody can 'close' every sale. However, at least if you are charging for that initial consultation, you will have some income to cover some of your expenses while you are searching for that first paying client, plus, it will focus you on properly preparing for the meetings. After a few consultations you will have a feel for

the types of questions that come up, an idea of what people are prepared to pay, and generally will be more able to adjust to the correct mind-set.

The Main Event

Calculating an hourly rate for the 'main event' can also be done in a number of ways, but the following is suggested as a model:

- **Decide what you want to earn** - If you are currently employed, you may decide that the minimum you can manage on is what you are currently earning. After all, you have bills to pay (mortgage or rent, car payments, living expenses, insurance premiums, children's school fees, saving for holidays etc.), and it may be that there are few of these you could realistically reduce without a major change of lifestyle. Alternatively, you may be unemployed, in which case you may have little disposable income (if any), and you see the event planning business as a way to both give yourself a job and secure a better lifestyle for yourself and your family. Wedding and Event Planning can certainly provide both of these.
- **Work out what your likely costs will be** - This is not as difficult as it sounds at first. They will include vehicle costs (fuel, servicing, tyres, insurance, road tax et cetera), communication costs (telephone, fax, paper, envelopes, postage), advertising and marketing (local press, national press, business cards, flyers, online advertising), and office space

It may be that you are going to work from home initially, to reduce expenses, but be aware that even in this situation there may be costs. For example, if you were previously going out to work every day, there will be additional heating and lighting costs for you to be at home every day. You may consider balancing this against your previous travelling costs to your place of employment, whether they be rail or bus fares, or motoring costs. There may also be a clause in your buildings or contents policy either prohibiting the use of your home for business purposes, or requiring notification, which will almost certainly attract an increase in premium, if the change of use can be incorporated.

Every situation will be different, but it is important to consider them all. You might want to take some advice from your accountant on the tax advantages (or otherwise) of using part of your home for your business. If you are in rented accommodation, this may need to be discussed with your landlord, as many rental agreements prohibit the use of the accommodation for business purposes. They are all things that need to be checked and considered.

Let us deal with the two aspects, deciding what you want to earn, and working out your costs, in a little more detail.

Firstly, we will sort out the income side and deciding what you want to earn.

Running with the earlier example, you are currently earning £2500 per month as an employee, and your lifestyle is such that you feel you cannot manage on less.

To determine how much you need to earn an hour, it is important to work out how many 'chargeable' hours you will be able or likely to work in any given week. This is sometimes called 'face time' because the reality is that unless you are actually face-to-face with your clients, you are not earning anything.

Unit 3: Wedding Planning



3.1 How to Deal with Enquiries

This section has been included in Unit 3 – Wedding Planning, but is equally applicable to any type of event management, and indeed to most businesses.

Enquiries, or sales leads, are the lifeblood of any business. They are usually the first contact a potential client has with your business, and are therefore potentially the most important event you will deal with each and every day. Sadly, for many businesses, the way these enquiries are dealt with is anything but professional. It may be that you have never dealt with clients on the level you are about to, i.e. as a business owner, so we will go through every aspect based on this assumption.

Even experienced business people fail to do this properly, so skip this section at your peril!

Whether the initial enquiry comes in by telephone, e-mail or in written correspondence, it should be treated with a sense of urgency, and responded to in the most professional manner possible.

E-mail

In the case of e-mail correspondence, it is relatively easy to ensure that every base is covered and every query answered, purely because you have time to execute and time to consider your answers fully before committing them to paper or 'print'. However, resist the urge to fire response off quickly, and do take the time to cover everything the enquirer has asked about. Do not use 'text speak' or bad English; make sure that the e-mail is grammatically perfect and has no spelling mistakes.

Also be sure to match the style of the writer as far as possible. If the writer begins the e-mail 'Hi John', your response should be similar; in other words do not open your response with 'Dear Mr Brown'. Conversely, if they start the e-

mail with 'Dear Mrs Jones', you should not respond with 'Hi Jane'. Much of this is common sense, but worth mentioning. Always begin the e-mail after the greeting with a line such as 'Thank you for your enquiry', do not just launch into answering questions or making a sales pitch.

The other thing to be careful with e-mails is that you do not accidentally press <send> before you have finished writing; it is easily done, and nothing is worse for professional credibility than sending out a partially completed e-mail before it has been checked for spelling and grammar.

Once you have answered all of their queries, be sure you include some sort of incentive or offer as a closing paragraph, such as:

'You may be interested to know that until the end of this month we are offering discounted consultations, 10% off event prices, and 250 free invitations for each event booked. I will be glad to discuss this with you and any other aspects of your planned occasion when you call back on (01969) 123456' then sign off appropriately with a line such as:

'I hope this brief e-mail has satisfactorily answered your queries, but please do not hesitate to contact me again if you require any further information.

Kind regards'

. . . . and insert your 'signature block'. There are further devices you could add at this point from a marketing perspective, such as a 'call to action' PS; these will be discussed fully in Unit 12.

There is always a temptation to include attachments, such as pricelists or marketing information, but be aware that some people's e-mail providers will automatically flag these as 'Spam' and not deliver them. The best thing is to include a link to your website in your signature block.

Most e-mail programs include spellchecking software which automatically checks the spelling in your e-mail before sending. However, most of it is written by American programmers, so the spellings are very likely to be Americanised. If you do not know what that means, the Americans spell some words differently, such as the last word in the previous sentence, which would be flagged up by a spellchecker as miss-spelt; it would suggest it should be 'Americanized' (with a 'zee' rather than an 's'). Other common words which are different include 'color' (no 'u'), so you need to be aware of them and make the necessary adjustments before sending.

Here is an amusing little 'poem' which illustrates the point very well:

Ode to the Spell Checker

Eye halve a spelling chequer

It came with my pea sea

It plainly marques four my revue

Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word

And weight four it two say

Weather eye am wrong oar write

It shows me strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid

It nose bee fore two long

And eye can put the error rite

Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it

I am shore your pleased two no

It's letter perfect awl the weigh

My chequer tolled me so.

Written Correspondence ('Snail Mail')

It seems there is less and less written correspondence these days, largely because of the convenience and instant response afforded by e-mail. But you will still need occasionally to write business letters, including correspondence with clients and potential clients who prefer not to use e-mail. It is therefore very important to get this aspect right. You can rest assured that any client who prefers to use snail mail will also have a good command of the English language and the appropriate protocol to use when writing business correspondence. If you are to retain credibility with these people, you need to be able to do the same.

Know when to use 'Yours sincerely' and 'Yours faithfully' at the close. Any good book on English grammar and correspondence will tell you this and more, but as a rough guide you should use 'sincerely' when addressing clients by name (Dear Mr Brown, Dear Sandra), and 'faithfully' when the letter is addressed to a title (such as Dear Colleague, Dear Events Organiser etc.) or 'Dear Sir or Madam'.

As in the previous section regarding e-mails, always match the style and tone to the situation or previously-received correspondence.

Invest in some quality writing paper that is suitable for both inkjet and laser printing. It is not very expensive, but immediately elevates your business above those who just throw out correspondence on photocopying paper. Look for something at around 100 g/m² (100 gsm), preferably watermarked, and an additional 'quality' enhancement is a textured face. Conqueror

Vellum is ideal, and is currently priced between £20 and £25 per ream (500 sheets). You can also buy matching envelopes for an even better effect.