



The DWHSA Guide to **BRIDAL AND WEDDING SHOWS**



TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Here's the 411.....	3
Finding the Best Fits.....	7
The Costs and Co-Ops.....	12
Planning Your Booth.....	14
Before the Show.....	21
During the Show.....	24
After the Show.....	30
Learning Lessons.....	36
Took Kit.....	37

Wedding Shows:

Here's the 411 ...

Wedding shows, fairs, and expos are trade shows organized for engaged couples (and their family members and friends) to preview the products and services offered by various wedding vendors - everything from wedding cake bakers and photographers to bands and invitation printers.

More than 6,000 wedding shows take place around the United States every year, with about 35 to 40 percent of the brides currently planning weddings attending at least one show, according to the latest statistics.

Wedding shows offer you many distinct advantages to promote your romance travel expertise and services:

- **They expose you to lots of new prospects under one roof in a short amount of time.** Most shows run for a few hours on weekend mornings or afternoons (though some expos may go a full day). It's hard to imagine an easier way for you to get in front of dozens or hundreds of engaged couples in a single morning or afternoon!
- **Show organizers typically collect registration information from the couples** to share with exhibitors before or after the show, so that you can easily and quickly follow up with both (a) the prospects who stop by your booth and (b) those who missed your booth entirely.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

- **Working your show booth gives you the immediate hands-on opportunity** to give the couples your business card, destination wedding/honeymoon brochures, and other materials - and to begin building a relationship (however quickly) with them.
- **Show organizers should invest a lot of time and money on their part to promote the show**, including the exhibitors, in their web sites, flyers, and advertising. They do the hard work of drawing the crowds for you. Most exhibitors at the typical wedding show are focused on promoting locally based wedding services (hall rentals, DJs, videographers, etc.), so you will have less competition given your focus on sending happy couples away from the local area.
- **When you exhibit in a wedding show, you'll meet local wedding vendors** - from cake bakers and dress shop owners to photographers and DJs - to build a strong referral network. These shows will help you grow your professional network and build more cooperative relationships with these fellow vendors.

However, **they also pose significant marketing challenges** for agents:

- **They're not cheap.** It's not unusual to pay \$300 to \$500 for a standard booth at even the smallest local shows - and, if you're based in a large metro area, prepare yourself to pay \$1,000 (or, much more!) for that same booth. They're not suited ideally for travel sales. Yes, you'll run into the occasional bride who's ecstatic to see you at the show because she's been searching for months for a local destination wedding expert. But, it's much more likely that you'll talk to lots of excited brides and couples while ending up with a short list of honestly qualified prospects. (Remember, though, that it may take only a single booking to pay for the show expenses.)
- **For the prospects themselves, wedding shows can quickly feel crowded and overwhelming!** Some shows draw a more sedate crowd, but it's not unusual to see hordes of brides, grooms, and their parties charging down the show aisles as soon as the doors open, searching for every freebie they can find and giving exhibitors like you little time to get to know them.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Here's the most important decision to consider before you sign up for any wedding show: **Figure out why you want to participate.**

Many competing exhibitors will be trying to persuade show attendees to make purchase decisions on the spot or soon afterwards - book this DJ here, reserve a cake there. However, your goal is persuading show visitors to consider planning a destination wedding and/or honeymoon with you - a big decision that you can't lock in on the spot at the show!

So, **your focus at the wedding show should be introducing yourself and your services**, making a strong first impression, and collecting enough data to follow up with the couples who stop by your booth. Your goal is to get those **HOT** leads from potential clients, not closing sales.

Also, for romance travel agents, participating in a wedding show is marketing – not hard sales. You can't just show up at the event, give out supplier brochures left and right, and go home waiting for the phone calls and emails to start pouring in! They can be an excellent first step in building relationships with prospects and spreading the word about your business - but, there's a lot of follow-up work involved to get to the bookings!

Wedding Shows:

Finding the Best Fits ...

You'll have no trouble finding a wide variety of wedding show opportunities in almost every state and province across North America - from huge civic auditoriums and hotel ballrooms to small community centers and church basements, with booth fees ranging from free to thousands of dollars apiece.

To find the wedding shows in your area, **check local bridal publications and web sites** (many offer an events calendar, for example), **ask other local wedding vendors** (e.g., dress shops, photographers and videographers), or **simply use phrases such as "[YOUR TOWN] wedding show" in search engines**. Plus, here's a link to the directory of wedding shows in the United States, Canada, and other countries compiled by the Association for Wedding Professionals International (AFWPI):

<http://afwpi.com/shows/index.html>

<http://bspibridalshows.com/calendar.php>

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Unfortunately, most agents cannot afford the time, the energy, and the funds required to do every show in their area! So, it pays to narrow down your options by contacting the show organizers and asking them to send you an exhibitors kit with complete details on participating in their events as a vendor. (Many shows also post exhibitor information on their web sites.)

Here's a short list of questions you should ask to identify the shows that are the best fits for your travel business:

- **How many years has the show been operated?** It may not make sense, for example, to exhibit in a show during its very first year, because the show organizers don't have a track record of attendees to share with you.
- **How many attendees did the show attract over the past few years** - and, has the attendance gone up or down? Ask whether the show numbers reflect registrants or actual attendees - and, do they reflect brides only, or the gross number of everyone who walked through the doors (including friends and relatives of the brides)?

Also, **request a breakdown of the attending brides by ZIP or postal code**, so that you can see the local cities and counties where the brides live. The Wedding Report, a U.S.-based wedding industry research firm, offers a handy tool called "Wedding Cost Search" (<http://www.costofwedding.com/>) where you can input U.S. ZIP codes to see how much brides spend on average for weddings in each locale, which may give you an idea of their value as potential clients. (Some shows also sort attendees by "role," which means you can run the ZIP codes for mothers of the brides, too.)

- **What exhibitors have participated in the show in recent years?** Has the number of vendors increased or dipped in the past year or two - and, if so, how does the show organizer explain this? Are the vendors primarily involved in selling wedding/ wedding/honeymoon products and services, or do you see non-wedding exhibitors on the list who may be filling unsold booth spaces?
- **What's the full range of booth prices - and, what do those prices include?** At some shows, the booth fee covers just the open booth space plus the "pipe and drape" marking off the space, while other shows charge fees that include carpet, tables, chairs, and even electricity and WiFi access.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

- **Are the booths zoned by category** (e.g., the photographers are grouped together, the travel agents are grouped together), **or will the vendors be spread randomly** throughout the show floor? Can you pick your booth spot?
- **How will the show be promoted and advertised locally?** Take a close look at the specific media the show organizers are using in their marketing - do the demographics of those media match the types of brides and couples you're targeting? Or, are the show organizers simply "shot gunning" where they attempt to reach an entire region looking for many couples to attend?

Learning details about pre-show promotions can also help you target your own marketing efforts before the show starts (e.g., you can send releases or suggest interviews to local newspapers, bridal publications, radio/TV stations that are promoting the show, and social media).

- **What promotional avenues exist during the show itself?** For example, you might be asked to donate a door prize or offer yourself as a speaker for seminars conducted during the event.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Michelle Bouzek (Vacations in Paradise) recommends **putting the show's name in search engines like Google** - you never know what you'll find in terms of praise or criticism for a given show.

"I go for quality over quantity. I look for smaller, more intimate shows where I will have a chance to talk with brides one on one. I also look for shows that don't feature lots of giveaways. Brides that go to shows without the giveaways are the brides who are serious about finding people to help them with their wedding/honeymoon."
(Becky Gillespie)

Wedding Shows:

The Costs and Co-Ops...

When you budget your participation in a wedding show, start with the basic booth costs. Again, you should ask the show organizer for the fine-print details of the booth fees - what they cover specifically. **Here's a quick list of items that may (or may not) be included in the booth fee:**

- The "pipe and drape" materials found in many trade shows that surround and mark the individual booths
- Basic booth furniture - typically, a 6' or 8' table with one or two folding chairs plus a wastebasket
- Carpeting inside the booth space
- Drapes or tablecloths for the table
- Electricity inside the booth
- WiFi access inside the show
- The number of people you can bring to work the booth (some shows charge extra if you bring helpers with you)

Then, you should budget for the costs of your booth layout (see the next section for more details), including decorations, TV monitors/computers to play DVDs, giveaways, collateral marketing materials, extra business cards, and other booth materials. Plus, you should add any extra fees for taking part in activities such as the fashion show, seminars, or giveaways conducted by show organizers.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Finally, you may incur expenses for the helpers who work the show with you.

Many agents seek cooperative ("co-op") marketing funds from their preferred suppliers to reduce their booth expenses. If you plan to seek co-op funds from a supplier, you should solicit these funds as early as possible - four to six months before the show isn't too early! Agree in advance with the co-op supplier how you will split the booth costs (e.g., is this split 50:50 or a different ratio, do the funds apply to basic booth fees only or add-on expenses, and how will the payment be handled by the supplier [will the supplier pay its share upfront, or must you "front" the funds and apply for reimbursement after the show]). Also, you should agree how the show leads will be handled for follow-up (the best arrangement is that you, as the agent, will retain all leads and take responsibility for following up, though some suppliers ask for the list of leads and do their own follow-up contacts as well).

Some suppliers do not offer co-op funds for bridal shows, but they will offer you additional marketing funds or even bonus commissions for incremental sales increases you book with them because of a show - so, it never hurts to talk with your top preferred suppliers before you book your next show!

Wedding Shows:

Planning Your Booth ...

Once you've selected and confirmed your wedding show schedule, it's time to focus on your booth!

Keep in mind **the primary goals for a successful wedding show booth:**

- **A focal point within the booth** that draws attention and gets the show attendees talking
- **A warm, friendly atmosphere** where brides will feel comfortable (especially top prospects with whom you'll have deeper conversations during the show)
- **A system for sorting "tire kickers" from your ideal prospects** and for gathering follow-up information from everyone
- **Is it welcoming to all couples** (including LGBTQ couples)?

Now, let's break down the booth components:

The booth location: Once you've been assigned a booth, ask the show organizers which vendors will be positioned next to, and across from, your booth. You want to identify any travel-related vendors who may be competitors, so that you'll know if you've been grouped together or if they've been assigned to other aisles.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Also, use a show floor plan to identify where your booth is located relative to the show entrances (where brides will come in), show activities such as the fashion show, and food stands and restrooms. (If you can snag a corner booth, one big advantage is that you'll capture brides coming from two directions.) Think about the traffic flow around your booth as you decide where to place your signage, your collateral, etc.

The basic furnishings: Most show organizers will provide the "pipe and drape" in the back of your booth, along with a folding table (usually 6' to 8' in length), one or two folding chairs, and a wastebasket. Some shows allow vendors to pick the drape colors, so ask in advance if you'd like something other than basic white or black. Move the table from the front of your booth to the rear - you don't want any barriers between you and the brides and grooms. If you have a corner booth, position the table on the inner side of the booth next to the nearest booth. Also, consider folding up the chairs and storing them beneath the table or behind the drape (if you're working the crowds during the show, there'll be no time to sit!).

"We DO NOT want chairs in our booth! We have done high-top rounds to stand around, and we invite the brides to join us. Also, we offer giveaways at each show, and they vary depending on the size of the show - from spa day gift baskets and luggage pieces to gift certificates."
(Jennifer Ferch)

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

The show organizers may also provide (for an extra charge, in some cases) a strip of carpet inside the booth plus access to electricity and WiFi. If you plan to use video/DVD/music players, TV screens, etc., in your booth, confirm the availability of electricity and WiFi in advance. (If you forget, you may find it impossible to get these hookups on the day of the show - and, if you do, it will cost you.)

You can bring extra furniture, tables, etc., if you want to make your booth feel welcoming and comfortable. However, be careful not to clutter the booth – brides and grooms will feel more comfortable in an open atmosphere.

Signage: Great signs will help brides find your booth and make you stand out from competing vendors who may be stacked all around you. Create signage that is large and distinctive, and tie the sign design into your overall branding image (e.g., the signs should include your brand colors, your logo, etc.). Hang a sign above your booth (if the show allows that) or buy a tall "pop-up banner" with a floor stand, so that brides walking the aisles will spot your booth easily. Many agents also use tabletop covers that have been imprinted with their agency name, logo, and web site address (sitting on top of the table in your booth). Also, remember to add smaller signage throughout your booth.

Collateral: Along with brochures and materials from your preferred suppliers, you should have your own marketing collateral in the booth - an oversize postcard, a flyer, or a similar marketing piece that is well written and that is easily identifiable with your booth. Brides may hold onto your collateral for months before they contact you, so this piece must remind them who you are!

Also, consider having different types of collateral in your booth to match various prospect levels - e.g., a postcard or flyer for general prospects, plus a more detailed brochure or marketing piece for your ideal romance travel prospects. Does your marketing piece reflect all couples and have gender neutral language?

Lead-gathering system: Many agents put their "freebie" giveaway items and their lead-generating system (e.g., a sign-in sheet, Quick Tap Survey, sign-up cards for a prize drawing) in the back of their booths, so the couples must step through the booth to get to them. You can put signs at the front reminding brides about any giveaways.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Also, think about fun, creative activities you can do in the booth - along with any prizes you're giving away - to entice brides to sign up with you. For example, create a tropical-themed display where brides can stand for funny pictures - you can take the photos and promise to post them on your Facebook business page or email them to the brides after the show.

"In my booth setup, I wear a lab coat and stethoscope and carry a prescription pad. I give couples a quick and fun honeymoon prescription on the pad, which has my contact information and refers them to my web site. Once they sign up in my booth, I give them a bright orange bag with my brochure and other travel agency benefits and travel brochures (all of which have a stamp or label with my contact information). This has worked very well for me in collecting leads at shows - brides always remember me as well!" *(Brenda Llamas Young)*

A space for conversations: Generally, you should plan never to sit during a wedding show. But, the exception is conversing with ideal prospects and current clients who approach your booth - you'll want a space within the booth to sit and talk with them. Some agents bring their own comfy chairs to create a casual seating area for this purpose. (Remember: Don't ever sit during a wedding show unless you're with a hot prospect or a client.)

The booth's focal point: Wedding show experts recommend having one focal item that draws passing couples into your booth - an eye-catching, conversation-starting display or item. Ideas range from a stack of wedding gift boxes to flip flops that imprint "Just Married" into the sand. Then, use images of this attention getter in your collateral materials and in your post-show follow-up mailings and emails (to remind brides about your booth).

Here's a short list of other booth layout and design tips from DWHSA members:

- **Find ways to let brides "try out" a destination wedding or honeymoon at your booth.** Use scents, flowers, gorgeous travel photos, music (if allowed), and other techniques to give attendees stopping by your booth an idea of what a destination wedding or honeymoon would feel like.
- **Make your booth look neat and professional amid the decor.** Brides notice the little things - the litter on the booth carpet, the empty Starbucks cup on the table next to your brochures ...

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

- **Bring plenty of business cards!** It's amazing how often agents run out of cards at a wedding show - imagine the impression you're leaving when a bride asks for your card but you're forced to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I just ran out!"
- **Make sure you staff your booth adequately.** It's best to have at least one extra person with you, so that you have backup if things get very busy or if you need to sit down for a quick consult with a hot lead.
- **Remember to use your logo and logo colors** in your booth as much as possible.

Wedding Shows:

Before the Show ...

Savvy wedding show exhibitors prepare in advance to take advantage of promotional opportunities and to nip problems in the bud before the show opens.

Many show organizers do pre-show publicity to promote attendance, and they may have tie-ins with local newspapers, wedding publications, and radio/TV stations. Find out in advance where your show's organizers are promoting the event, and follow up with those media to offer yourself for interviews, to send them press releases about your business, and to offer to write articles or share tip sheets for brides in an effort to "piggy back" on the show's publicity efforts.

Review the exhibitor list, and reach out before the show to other vendors (especially those you already know) to discuss ways you can cooperate to "cross promote" your booths. For example, a local dress shop could provide a mannequin and a beach-friendly wedding dress to stand in your booth, while you provide the dress shop owner with island-themed giveaways she can offer brides from her booth.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Let your current prospects and clients know you'll be exhibiting at the show. Invite them to attend the show (some shows give exhibitors a number of complimentary tickets for brides, so you can offer them to your key prospects). Give these invitees your booth number and location, so they'll know where to find you. Send an email or a postcard before the show to your client/prospect lists. (Some show organizers will give exhibitors a list before the event with contact information for the brides who have pre-registered - but, make sure to ask the organizers if the brides have given permission for exhibitors to contact them by email.)

Also, talk up your involvement with the show on Facebook, Pinterest, and your other social media networks (and, share or retweet messages from the show's organizers and from other vendors to create a little goodwill).

Go easy on the giveaways from your booth - you could wind up spending a lot of money if you're not careful! Think about helpful giveaways that brides will hold onto long after the show: pens/pencils with your agency info, note pads, calendars, date books, hand sanitizer bottles, or water bottles.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Consider donating prizes for the show's drawings and contests. Many shows will conduct random drawings for door prizes, early-bird registrations, and other promotions. They're a great way to get your name in front of everyone in the show's printed program, door prize posters, etc. (Perhaps you can even get a photo with the winners when the drawings are actually done.)

One week before the show date, begin collecting the items and materials you'll need for the booth - work from a list, so you don't forget anything! Remember the basics: pens, paper, stapler, tape, scissors, supplies for hanging things (e.g., fishing/picture wire), power cords and strips, bottled water, snacks, breath mints, and hand wipes/sanitizer. If you have an agency nametag, pack it too. (Several agents recommend a nametag that stands out, such as VideoNameTag.com.)

The most important pre-show preparation tip is lining up your follow-up steps - the emails, postcards, and other methods you'll use to reach out to brides after the show - well before the show date. Too many agents invest the time and funds to exhibit at a wedding show but then fail to do the required follow-up! So, if you write your email templates or print and set out your postcards before the show starts, that makes it easier for you to jump in once the show is over and start the follow-up steps!

Wedding Shows:

During the Show ...

On the morning of the show, dress comfortably (starting with shoes you can stand in the entire day!), but aim for a professional look.

Arrive as early as you can at the show venue, and set up your booth quickly. Doing so will allow you to take time to walk around the show and peek at what the other vendors are doing in their booths. You may get ideas and inspiration for your next show. Plus, you can introduce yourself and pass out your packet of information to the other exhibitors (be respectful of their time, as they're probably setting up their own booths) and trade business cards. (Follow up after the show with a personal email to those vendors who might be good marketing partners for you down the road.) Some shows also offer a networking event, before or after the show, that's geared specifically toward the vendors, so don't miss this chance to chat with the other exhibitors.

As the show doors prepare to open, remind your booth staff that it's time to show energy and enthusiasm from the moment the first bride walks down your aisle until the last bride walks out the doors! Now's the time to stand up (remember - no one sits during the show unless you're with a client!), put cell phones away, and hide any food or drink that's found its way into the booth.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Stand in front of your booth (just in the aisle, but without blocking traffic), put on your biggest smiles, and welcome the brides and grooms (and their family members and friends) heading toward you. Be respectful, be friendly, show interest in them, and find ways to engage them. Asking them "When is your wedding date?" is always a good icebreaker.

Some agents like to use a short "elevator pitch" for prospects who come to your booth - a 10- to 20-second description of what you do for brides. One helpful formula is a sentence about your agency, a sentence with a key selling point, and a sentence about you:

"Are you ready to plan the best part about getting married? The honeymoon! At Getaway Travel, we have helped hundreds of couples plan their romantic honeymoon!"

Other agents prefer to ask questions to qualify the brides. If you're focusing on honeymoons, for example, "Have you booked your honeymoon yet?" is a quick way to sort approaching prospects - if they answer "Yes," you can give them a business card or your basic collateral, while "No" answers deserve your full attention!

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Your goal is connecting and bonding with as many ideal prospects as possible - so, don't simply shove the same flyer or brochure into everyone's hands! Instead, take time to "sort" the visitors to your booth, and give them different collateral based on their interests. "Window shoppers" should be given your business card or basic collateral, and you still want to capture their email addresses if possible.

On the other hand, you want to spend more time obviously with brides who're seriously looking at a destination wedding or honeymoon. Bring your calendar, and if you sense the opportunity, set appointments with these prospects right on the spot to follow up after the show (or, sit down with them in your booth while your booth helpers handle new brides approaching).

Remember: You're not obligated to give the same collateral to every bride! If a few brides can't take the time to speak with you or share their email address, they're probably not that interested in working with you - so, by sorting your prospects, you'll end up with fewer names that are more highly qualified leads. Also, hand writing a note on one of the collateral pieces will help draw attention to it again when they are sorting through all of the information. A simple "It was great to talk with you today" can make the difference of whether she keeps or tosses your information.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

"These days, where there are fewer and fewer storefronts, I think that brides are looking for something substantial to take home. They also want to take information home to the grooms who are planning the honeymoon. So, I do pass out brochures, but not before I show them a picture of a property or two in the destination where they indicated they want to honeymoon, so they can get excited." (Michelle Bouzek)

"Put together a packet of collateral for wedding vendors at the show; 5 business cards, 5 of your postcards or business brochures, some pens with your name on it. Put them in a pretty envelope with your logo on it and ask to meet for coffee to learn about each other's business." (Lisa Sheldon)

Wedding shows can be very overwhelming to many brides, so you'll stand out in their minds if you make your approach very personable. For example, as you hand brides your business card or your collateral, pull out a pen and write a personal note on the materials. Christine Boulton, the wedding show expert at ThinkLikeABride.com, recommends writing down a different phone number or email address on materials you give your very best prospects - a "personal" phone number or email address that's different from your main agency phone number or email address - to make them feel valued and important.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Use a sign-in list or cards to collect information from the prospects who visit your booth - but, think carefully about how much information you collect from them. You're generating leads, not closing sales, so you may only need the most basic details from these brides: their names, their wedding/honeymoon dates, their email address, and their phone number. Later, you can cross check the basic information you've collected in the booth with the more detailed information that may appear on the registration lists given to you by the show organizers. Be prepared for brides who bring pre-printed mailing labels with them to make it easier for them to enter prize drawings during the show - let those brides slap the labels on your sign-in list or card without complaining.

It's not unusual for brides to create a generic "wedding email account" that's not their primary day-to-day email address. They do this to sort wedding show- and wedding-related communications from their other emails.

Wedding shows can get hectic - but, if you have the chance, make notes about the brides with whom you speak, so that you can remember facts about specific brides when you follow up after the show. For example, if you promised to send a bride details about a specific resort, note that request on the back of her sign-in card or keep a running list of requests, and then follow up as quickly as possible after the show.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Consider doing your own prize drawings or giveaways during or near the end of the show. Many brides will expect exhibitors to offer prizes, but they don't have to be expensive for you. Think about supplier gifts – fans, potpourri, tote bags and water bottles, photo holders, or other keepsakes (via one drawing at the end or even hourly raffles).

If there is a fashion show, traffic past your booth tends to slow down. This is a great opportunity to network with the other exhibitors. If you are the only person in your booth, it may be hard to leave because some brides and grooms still come through while the show is going on. Or if it's possible, you could get to the booths closest to you while still keeping an eye on your booth in case someone stops by. If your booth is covered, get out and network and pass out your packet of information to the other vendors. Take your appointment book and schedule a meeting to get to know each other better.

Wedding Shows:

After the Show ...

The truth about wedding shows is that the real selling efforts start after the show is over! During the show, most brides are browsing and gathering ideas and information. They're not ready in most cases to confirm DW/honeymoon bookings on the spot. However, many bridal show exhibitors do little or no follow-up with prospects afterwards - and, that's a huge mistake! Marketing experts say it takes seven or eight contacts with prospects before they really pay attention to our businesses and our services - so, if brides meet you once during the show but then never hear from you again, you've essentially wasted the time and money you invested in doing the show in the first place!

It pays to create a system and a schedule for wedding show follow-up - and, that project starts with building a list of show prospects. You'll have two main sources of prospect names: the registration/attendee lists given to you by the show organizers, and the lists you've collected in your own booth.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

The list of prospects who visited your booth and signed your list or cards giving you their email addresses and other contact details is the "warmer" list, because you met these brides and couples personally during the show and they willingly provided their contact information to you. So, you should gather this data into a spreadsheet or a file of some sort so that you can sort out the email addresses and phone numbers later.

Meanwhile, the registration/attendee lists provided by the show promoters is a "colder" list, because it includes not only the brides who stopped by your booth but also brides who didn't visit you (or even turn out for the show after they registered in advance). It still pays to reach out to these prospects, however, because you never know which ones might be receptive to working with you in the future - so, create a second list or spreadsheet with these prospects, and weed out the names that already appear on your first list (the "warmer" prospects whom you met in person in your booth). You can contact these "colder" prospects via phone or direct mail, but be careful before you email them - ask the show organizers if brides gave permission for vendors to contact them when they registered for the show and provided their email addresses in the process. If the show organizers didn't include that language in their registration forms for the brides, then under U.S. "CAN-SPAM" anti-spam laws, you don't have permission technically to email the brides (though, again, you can call them and send them mail).

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

Once you've created these lists, it's critical that you contact the brides immediately following the show - typically, with a friendly email that thanks them for attending the show and offers them a few tips or pieces of advice for planning their DW/honeymoon trips. Remind the prospects that you're ready to set up a consultation with them and you're available by phone or email if they have questions. Speedy follow-up right after the show is very important, so that you stay fresh in their minds.

After that first follow-up email, you should continue to stay in touch with these prospects on a regular basis - really, you should communicate with them forever, unless they ask you to stop contacting them! Brides can take months or even years to plan their DW/honeymoon trips, so you should stay in touch as often as you can. To ensure that your emails and follow-up contacts work, keep them fun, informative, and useful! A good rule of thumb for the content is three or four parts information and advice to one part sales pitch. That informative content can include planning and travel tips, updates on romantic destinations, ideas for saving money on these trips, testimonials from your happy clients, etc. Your goal is to persuade these prospects that you're a romance travel expert who can help them when they're ready to plan their trips. (Commercial email services such as MailChimp, iContact, AWeber, and Constant Contact offer "autoresponder" functions that allow you to write your follow-up emails ahead of time, upload the email content into the system, and then schedule each follow-up email's future delivery time and date.)

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

"I offer a free report or a free worksheet at my stand that the brides can sign up for, and then you can send the report or worksheet in your follow-up email." (Wendy Dall)

You can mix these emails (sent weekly, biweekly, or on the schedule you select) with other types of contacts, such as a personal phone call a few days after the show to thank the brides and to let them know you'll be sending them tips via email or a direct mail piece sent after the show that's personalized for the bride. (Some agents use services such as SendOutCards.com to automate these customized mailings.) With every follow-up step, remind the brides where you met: "This is Jane - we met at the ABC wedding Expo."

With direct mail, consider sending postcards with great images (e.g., a picture of the "focal point" at your show booth), and write handwritten notes on the cards. Also, direct mail should always be personalized with the brides' or couples' names (don't use phrases such as "Dear Bride To Be"). You might also try the "UPS" or "lumpy mailer" technique - send your top prospects a 9" x 12" envelope with something bulky inside, such as pieces of candy or a pen, so that the packet stands out in their mail.

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

If you plan to follow up via phone, it may make sense to collect multiple phone numbers when brides sign up in your booth (their work, home, and cell numbers). DWHSA member Lisa Jurkonis sends a text to the brides she meets immediately at the end of each wedding show before she leaves the venue! Also, it's OK to call during the work day to leave a voice mail message, but be careful calling before or after work hours (as those calls may be considered intrusive by some prospects).

Here are more follow-up tips from DWHSA agents:

"When they say to follow up, follow up, follow up, that means an average of seven to 12 times with each bride. Whether it is by phone, e-mail, or snail mail, this is what has been working for me. The bride must be 'touched' by you to remember you. Space out your contacts with her by offering her helpful tips that show your expertise, and keep contacting her until she tells you otherwise. If the bride is not getting married for six to nine months, you have plenty of time to reach her seven to 12 times."
(Kimberly Jacoby)

The DWHSA Guide to Bridal and Wedding Shows

"Educate your target clients. Sell YOURSELF and why they would want/need to work with you as an agent. Maybe send out an email educating brides why they don't want to leave a trip as important as their honeymoon to chance by booking it themselves. The most important thing you can do is position yourself as a valuable resource and educate them on your value." (Mike Whittaker)

Beyond these basic follow-up steps, you should consider two other options:

- Collect a very short list of your most promising prospects from a bridal show, and lavish lots of love and attention on them. Invest time personalizing their emails and direct mail follow-up pieces, send them chocolates, offer to buy them lunch - it sounds over the top, but this technique is a great way to stand out with your most qualified prospects!

Hold an invitation-only event after the show for the prospects who visited your booth. Set up a seminar in your storefront agency, or invite these brides for coffee at a local restaurant where you'll present DW/honeymoon planning tips. Organize a "Honeymoon Planning Event" after a wedding show, with invitations given to every couple you meet at the show if they haven't already booked their honeymoon.

Wedding Shows:

Learning Lessons ...

While you're doing the follow-up steps with your prospects, it's also time to look back over the show to decide what worked (and, what didn't). How did brides like your booth design and layout? What was their reaction to your giveaways? Were you successful in capturing lead information during the show, and did you run into obstacles you hadn't expected?

Also, you can compare this year's event to the same show if you did it the previous year. Look at the sales you closed from this year's leads versus last year's bunch, and think about whether it was harder or easier this year to capture prospects and book sales later. Also, consider the vendor contacts you made at the show - sometimes, agents report that they closed few sales from show leads, but they made vendor contacts at the show whose referrals over time led to substantial business!

When you take on new clients in the months and years following a show, always ask the new clients how they found you or heard of you, so that you can track leads that originated from your presence in a show.

Wedding Shows:

Tool Kit...

- Calendar/appointment book
- Business cards
- Brochures flyers/brochures
- Agency stamp, labels
- Cell phone, charger
- Push pins, safety pins
- Black electrical tape
- Rubber bands
- Pens/paper
- Safety pins
- Small hammer
- Masking tape
- Duct tape
- Extension cord(s)
- Stapler/staples
- Tissues
- Scissors
- 3-pronged plug
- Surge protector

Wedding Shows:

Tool Kit...

- Floral wire
- Paper clips
- Clear fishing line (to hang things)
- Sharpies
- Scotch tape
- Breath mints
- Bottled water
- Tylenol/Advil/aspirin
- Antibacterial wipes/gel
- Signs, banners
- Decorations, table cloths
- Laptop, iPad, cords
- Prize drawing box or bowl (if you're collecting at your booth)
- Double-sided tape (in case the hem in your slacks comes out)
- Band-Aids (for paper cuts and blisters)