World wide weddings

Deliver the details of your day easily with a custom Web site

by Gabriana Marks

Weddings are all about personalization. Wedding Web sites tailored to the bride and groom may have started out as just a fad, but they are now fast becoming standard communication for many couples. Sharing the details of the big day through your own Web site is a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to get the word out to family and friends.

The list of what can be included on a couple's Web site is virtually endless. Wedding Window (www.weddingwindow.com) is a site-building service offering 39 pages and plenty of custom pages.

"Many couples use the site to share their story, how they met and include information for guests so they can easily make travel arrangements," explains Amy Ruocco, president and CEO of Wedding Window Inc. "The most common page to include is accommodations ideas because couples can link directly to hotels. This makes it really easy for guests to plan their travel."

Newlyweds Julia and Kevin Hartz of San Francisco used their personalized site on Wedding Window to tell their story and give guests the particulars of their special day.

"It was really easy to set up and gave us a tool to help our guests stay up-to-date about the wedding," recalls Julia. "So often, wedding invites arrive and the recipient loses the invitation (and details of the day) along the way. So, a Web site that our guests could visit was a must for us."

"Couples also use the RSVP feature," says Ruocco. "It's a time saver and a money saver. Guests can enter their RSVP online and the couple can export their list to Excel."

You can also incorporate fun games and quizzes about the bride and groom as well as photo albums. Ruocco says this provides a nice interactive tool for guests.

"We offer the custom look without the custom price," says Ruocco.

Wedding Window charges $59 for six months and $79 for a year.

Another hugely popular, but less expensive site is Engagepage.com.

"We offer a pretty full suite of services," explains John Ferm, publisher of Engagepage.com. "Our mission is simple, yet elegant with easy functionality. Engagepage keeps it short and sweet. You don't have to be a technical wizard.

"The time savings and basic user set are what attract people.," he continues. "Your life speeds up tenfold once you get engaged and so our site is easy and fast — hassle-free."

Ferm adds that a wedding Web site is often looked at as an indulgence, but if you think about the time and money that it can save, it's really worth it.

Engagepage.com costs $29 for six months; $49 for a year and $79 for 18 months.

Whether you are having a small, intimate wedding with 20 guests or a huge, 500-person blowout, a wedding Web site can make a lot of sense. Besides providing guests with the engaged couple's story, their gift registry and travel details, many couples use a wedding Web site to give suggestions for local activities for guests.

"This can be a resource for guests traveling the globe or even from the next county over. It's a resource for the couple and the guests," says Ferm. "We're trying to engage the people coming to the wedding. The user should be engaged in the site. No pun intended."

There are plenty of sites to choose from and they generally charge $40 to $80 to maintain your site for a year. Many of them also offer a CD copy of your Web site for an additional fee. Additionally, most of the sites give you a one-week free trial so you can test them out and then choose which one you want to use.

If you are looking to save some more money, The Knot (www.theknot.com) and WeddingChannel.com help you build your own site for free, but there are more limitations on what you can include.

Newlyweds Mark Prince and Rachel Firestone Prince of San Francisco used WeddingChannel.com to build their wedding Web site.

"It was free and easy to use," Rachel says. "I wanted simplicity. Mark and I were both working full time and I just didn't want to worry about anything. The step-by-step user interface made is really easy for me to plug anything in and it was fun."

As well as the free sites and moderately-priced sites, some couples choose to go the uber-customized version and hire a Web designer to make a site for them from scratch. This is a great option for couples that have a little bit more to spend and want something truly unique. Prices vary greatly depending on the designer you choose and what you want on your site, but plan on spending a few thousand dollars.

So now you're probably wondering when to put your site up. Some couples put up their site right after they get engaged so they can share their excitement, but most couples put up their wedding Web site between six and eight months before the big day.

Once you've got the wedding date and location picked out, that's generally a good time to post your site. You can announce your new personalized site to family and friends when you mail out your save-the-date cards.

Other great sites to check out include: OurWeddingWebsite.com, WedPageDesigns.com, WedQuarters.com, eWedding.com and WedShare.com. The Knot also offers premium services through its WedOrama.com and WeddingTracker.com sites. To help you choose, check out the comparison chart and reviews at www.weddingwebsites.com. But no matter which site you pick, family and friends will love to read more about you and your big day and have a place to get clear and concise updates on all of your wedding details.

Wedding Window

WeddingChannel.com

Engagepage.com