

# RHT's Maggie Daniels Writes First Textbook on

## *Wedding Planning*



Thumbing through the course offerings in CEHD's School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism (RHT), wedding planning is not a subject one would expect to find. But thanks to Maggie Daniels, assistant professor of tourism and events management, RHT is gaining national publicity for this popular elective, TOUR 190.

Convincing CEHD's Curriculum Committee that a wedding planning course met academic criteria was a tough sell, but Daniels' challenging content made the grade and she received approval after a two-year process. Then, as she prepared to teach the first class in 2005, she faced another dilemma: finding a suitable textbook.

"Published works on wedding planning didn't meet my needs," Daniels says. "I used three different textbooks, which was frustrating for everyone because of the expense and the fact that none of them covered what I really wanted."

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive textbook on wedding planning, Daniels decided to team up with Carrie Loveless, MBA '95 and former RHT adjunct professor, who owns Carried Away Events. The duo wrote *Wedding Planning and Management: Consultancy for Diverse Clients*, which was published by Butterworth-Heinemann (a division of Elsevier)

last year. Beyond the nuts and bolts of planning weddings, the book features extensive information about the foundations of weddings and business essentials, as well as case studies involving crisis management scenarios, explanations of different cultural traditions, and vendor profiles. The text is complemented by more than 100 color photos taken by Rodney Bailey, an award-winning wedding photographer in the Washington, D.C., area. Bailey also serves as a guest speaker in TOUR 190 each semester.

"It was a great relief when we were finally finished with the book and could use it," Daniels notes. Sales of the book have been brisk, and Daniels has been busy promoting it at bridal shows in the Washington metropolitan region. The book recently won a design award at the 51<sup>st</sup> New England Book Show. In addition, the class and book are receiving a flurry of media attention. ABC News Nightline featured TOUR 190 in a recent segment, *The Washington Post* ran a full-length article that was reprinted all over the United States, and Daniels has completed numerous national and international interviews.

Following are excerpts from *Wedding Planning and Management: Consultancy for Diverse Clients*.

—Amy Biderman



## Role and Scope of Wedding Consultancy

Countries across the globe commemorate the institution of marriage with a ceremony, commonly referred to as a wedding. Few events are as tradition-laden and culturally bound as weddings, with heritage, history, symbolism and superstition playing important roles in the options that are debated and the selections that are ultimately made by the couple and those in supporting roles. Over the past 100 years, some of these decisions have become easier to make while others are increasingly complicated. Influences such as globalization, technology, the media, economic development, law, changing sex-role dynamics and altered definitions of family facilitate the decision-making process while simultaneously posing unique challenges to the couple.

Enter the wedding consultant. This cutting-edge field of study represents a growth occupation. A spin-off of the larger discipline of event management, the business of wedding planning is not an industry unto itself, but encompasses a broad array of support industries such as hotels, retail and catering services. United States government and market estimates support associated conclusions about the increasing demand for wedding planners:

*Estimate:* The average wedding in 2006 will cost approximately \$26,000 versus \$15,000 in 1990, representing a 73% growth. With close to 2.2 million weddings anticipated, the total market value of weddings is projected to be over 57 billion dollars (Fairchild Bridal Group, 2005; McMurray, 2005).

*Conclusion:* Weddings entail significant financial output on typically first-time purchase decisions. A wedding consultant brings experience to the process.

*Estimate:* 45% of couples report spending more on their wedding than they had planned (Fairchild Bridal Group, 2005).

*Conclusion:* Weddings involve emotionally laden decisions and external pressures. A wedding consultant brings logic to the process.

*Estimate:* Women have better educational preparation and career opportunities than ever (Ashford, 2005) and are thus marrying later. The proportion of women ages 30-34 who have never married more than tripled from 6% to 22% between 1970 and 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995; 2005). Similarly, the proportion of men ages 30-34 who have never



married increased from 9% to 30% in that same time period (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995; 2005).

*Conclusion:* Couples are marrying later, have less time and more disposable income, and thus can afford to hire a wedding consultant to handle their wedding details.

*Estimate:* 15% of first marriages will end in separation or divorce within 5 years, while over 25% will end within 10 years. Of those who divorce, over half will remarry, typically within 3.5 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

*Conclusion:* Second marriages are a common occurrence. Wedding consultants can assist in making arrangements that support blended families.

*Estimate:* Interracial marriage has increased five-fold since 1970, with younger and better educated couples more likely to inter-marry than older, less educated individuals (Lee and Edmonston, 2005).

*Conclusion:* Wedding consultants can help successfully blend different ethnic traditions and rituals into the ceremony and reception (González, 2005).

The above estimates and associated conclusions clarify why an estimated 19% of couples hired a wedding consultant in 2006, with an increase projected for the future (McMurray, 2005).

While these estimates are based on United States statistics, these same trends are being evidenced across the globe, as are the associated opportunities and dilemmas that these movements pose. For example, the average cost of a wedding in the United Kingdom is estimated between £16,000 and £17,000 (approximately \$25,000–\$27,000 U.S. equivalent), with prices continuing to rise (Gold, 2005; Papworth, 2005). Further, women's educational attainment and participation in the global workforce continues to rise; specifically, of all wage earners, women accounted for 38% in the early 2000s, up from 35% in 1990 (Ashford, 2005). When just considering more developed countries, women make up 47% of the workforce (Ashford and Clifton, 2005). Thus, women across the globe are advancing their educations and putting those skills to use. For instance, women in Japan are increasingly choosing careers over marriage, either putting off marrying or foregoing it altogether (Buckley, 2004). Education in India has been found to be an important precursor to mar-

riage, where students who plan to attend college “expect significant improvement in income, career opportunities, social prestige and marriage prospects regardless of post-school choice” (Dhesi, 2001, p. 14).

Global trends indicate that wedding consultants are bound to be increasingly in demand. Accordingly, the specific roles of the wedding consultant bear examination.

### Determining the Vision

A wedding *vision* is an imaginative conception of the event that encompasses all five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. As a consultant, the goal of discussing vision with your clients is to determine their ideal day, and then move to the pragmatics of making that vision a reality. The purpose of this chapter is to present the tools that will aid you and your clients in establishing a focused vision that will be accompanied by theme, destination and site selection.

### Writing Your Business Plan

Developing your plan is an important first step in showing the world you are serious about starting a business. After all, if you can't find the time or energy to put together a game plan for your business, how are you ever going to find the time or the energy to run a business? If you want to be taken seriously by lending institutions, vendors, colleagues and competitors, you need a business plan to achieve your goals and objectives.

Before you begin writing your business plan, the SBA (2006) suggests you consider four core questions:

- What service or product does your business provide and what needs does it fill?
- Who are the potential customers for your product or service and why will they purchase it from you?
- How will you reach your potential customers?
- Where will you get the financial resources to start your business?

In short, your business plan will help you describe your business, select a target market, manage day-to-day operations and handle finances.

### Developing a Marketing Strategy

Marketing is an umbrella term and pertains to the activities of a company that are associated with selling a product or service and developing a competitive advantage. Marketing has traditionally been packaged with the four 'Ps': product, price, place and promotion. *Product* is the tangible and intangible goods and services that you offer. As a consultant, you act as the liaison between the couple and many of the



tangible purchases they make; you also add the intangible elements related to design and organization. *Price* is the exchange value of the product—in other words, your fee structure. *Place* involves the radius or area that you serve, that is, the distance you are willing to travel as a planner and the primary communities that you serve. *Promotion* involves the advertising, sponsorship, publicity, sales promotion and personal sales that you use to grow your business.

It is commonly thought that marketing is all about advertising and making sales. In addition, marketing is about the little things a company does to reach its target audience like driving to a client's house to make a delivery in person instead of dropping it in the mail, having an annual party to thank clients or sending cards to vendors. If a business matches its products and services to the people who need them, then marketing has been successful. The purpose of this chapter is to point out the three key factors that will allow you to develop a marketing strategy for a wedding consultancy business: determining your target audience, marketing tool development and the secrets of selling to brides.

## Determining Your Target Audience

After you have established your business as a formal entity, it is time to get the word out that your doors are open for business. The best way to do that is through marketing. But, before you spend the first dollar on marketing or advertising, you must determine your *target audience*, which is the defined group of people you wish to serve. One of the hardest things about establishing a business is finding your style and defining it. Many consultants struggle because they want to be everything to everybody and are afraid to turn away business, but this generalist approach means that they can't focus their energy on a specific, target market. To get focused, consider the following questions:

- Who are your customers going to be?
- Is this a growing market in your area?
- How are you going to reach your customers?
- What pricing strategy will you implement?
- What will be your specialty area of expertise?
- What will differentiate you from your competitors?

When selecting a target market, you have to make sure there is a substantial customer base to justify the choice. For example, if you decide that you want to focus your wedding business on same-sex weddings, you should know the facts: Are same-sex marriages or civil unions legal in your state? How many same-sex marriages or civil unions have there been in your state since it became legal? Are there enough couples to support a wedding consultant who focuses on

same-sex weddings? The same series of questions pertains to any niche group, such as the over-40 market, the cross-cultural market and the second marriage market. Once you have drilled down and answered the questions about your potential clients, you are ready to develop a marketing plan to reach them. ❖

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