

Hiring A DJ: Points To Consider by Ken Heath

Throughout history, celebrations have accompanied victory in Sports and War, Coronations of Kings, Birthdays, Reunions, and, of course, Weddings. Music has played a key role in all of these festivities. The two best choices for a music source today are bands and disc jockeys. The purpose of this article is to help you choose the best DJ for your wedding reception. Mobile Disc Jockeys are some of the most versatile music professionals who regularly provide Master of Ceremonies services and sound support for your entire event. They are your "one-stop shopping" resource for reception and ceremony entertainment, pro sound support, and itinerary consultation and planning.

You host your first party as husband and wife at your own Wedding Reception. Every detail should reflect the joy and happiness you share to your family and friends. Great music adds flavor and bouquet beyond the best food and the most beautiful flowers. Guests will remember the quality of entertainment you provided at your event above most other things. Professional DJ entertainment provides the atmosphere for your party. Music, skillfully selected and played, will add the important "feel good" element that helps everyone interact and develop friendships. Music is relaxing, exciting, romantic, and inspirational. Dancing keeps everyone at your wedding reception or other events longer and contributes greatly to your guest's enjoyment.

Consider this when shopping for your DJ service:

You should consider your choice of entertainer as an insurance policy against all of the other money you spend resulting in bad memories or a less than enjoyable occasion. You do get what you pay for. Is the price too good to be true, then it probably is! The DJ is often the last service chosen, after much of the budget is expended on a venue, food and clothing. This often leads brides and party planners to shop for the cheapest price possible because of a lack of resources. ***Good entertainment is NOT cheap, and cheap entertainment is NOT good!!*** And yet many people will pay far more for a cake, flowers, or food than they will for the most crucial ingredient at a party – the music.

You need to consider the entertainment as a commodity that you purchase to "feed" each of your guests... If your buffet is costing you \$15.00 per person (with 250 people), you'll pay \$3750.00 plus tax (\$187.50 in Idaho), and rest assured, the Caterer will add their own 15% gratuity (at least) so add another \$562.50 for a total of \$4500.00! At the last Wedding you attended, do you remember what was served? Most people don't, and you're spending nearly five grand on that! My fees break down to only a few dollars per person and I would never have the effrontery to add in my own tip!

If you break down everything "per person" you'll quickly realize that the entertainment is by far the most economical part of the day, which is kinda strange considering that it can easily 'make or break' the party.

When was the last time you saw a \$1200 Wedding Cake provide several hours of interactive entertainment directly related to putting smiles on all your guest's faces? Further, when was the last time you heard a guest tell you "Boy, that \$15.00 stuffed chicken breast was great, I can't wait until I go to another party to have that again"? No, that doesn't happen, instead, they talk about the music that was played, and whether they had a good time or not. Ask a few people you trust about the last Wedding they attended and what they remember most, I'll bet they remember the entertainment (good or bad), the location (good or bad) but most cannot tell you what they ate. They will *always* talk about the music and entertainment!

If you thought about renting or borrowing all these components, or "doing it yourself", you would most likely end up spending a lot of money and be quite disappointed with the results. When you plan a party of any sort, your objective is to ensure that your guests have a good time, period. Your choice of entertainment, particularly if you are considering a DJ, is often crucial to that end. Who you choose for your wedding reception or special event will have a greater degree of effect than any other factor, such as food or location. Choosing a DJ can be a difficult choice, particularly from the aspect of what to look for and what to avoid. The DJ you choose is a direct reflection on you. Here are some important points to remember when you interview a DJ company.

Prompt return of your phone calls or Emails:

You should expect to get a call back or an Email back within 24 hours. Many DJ's are out working and may not be able to return your call within an hour or two.

Willingness to meet with you and present his/her service:

Will the DJ try to meet with you soon, or is he/she just trying to book the date sight unseen? Is their material neat and professional looking, and is their presentation organized and informative? Some DJs invite clients to see them at other receptions. However, most DJs refuse to do this. The problem with "visiting" is the fact that the reception you see may be geared to an entirely different group from your guests. The best way to judge a prospective DJ is an in-person meeting; this will help you to determine if you will be comfortable with a DJ. A face-to-face meeting allows you to judge his/her appearance, posture, speaking ability, and knowledge of receptions and music. A professional DJ should be friendly, personable, and easy to talk with. He should actively listen to your concerns and address them in a positive manner. He also should be able to explain the basic order of events, and what his strategy is for making your reception unique and special.

Some DJ's use videotapes for their presentation. Videos show the DJ in action. They usually show the DJ, his setup, and how the guests react to his performance. Videos are convenient, but because they are edited for use, they may not always provide an accurate indicator of a DJ's typical performance.

Do you LIKE the person that shows up?

There is NOTHING worse in the world than having to worry about things you shouldn't have to, you are hiring a professional and your worries should end right there. Choosing the person who "feels" right is the most important factor in picking the right entertainer for your party or reception. The DJ you choose should be very open about what he/she can do for you and should volunteer information and "show" you that knowledge base. Is the person knowledgeable about your type of event? There are all kinds of DJ's. Club DJ's, Wedding DJ's, Rave DJ's, Radio DJ's...the list is endless!! Can the DJ you interview handle your type of event? Ask the DJ how many events of your type that he/she has done. Get references AND CALL THEM!

What sort of documents does the DJ use to procure your business?

In a good interview, the DJ should show you several documents. First and foremost is a planner. This planner should impress you enough to the point where you begin to understand that the DJ you are hiring is a professional, and is capable of handling your event. A sample copy of the CONTRACT to be used should be available as well as a schedule of pricing information. A good DJ should have at least a handful of current references. You should be able to call these previous clients and ask them what they liked/disliked about their DJ. Be sure to call several to get a more "balanced" criteria of his/her better receptions.

Does the DJ have a music list that shows you what sort of music he or she has available?

Many DJ's do not use music play lists, others do. In some fashion, you the client, need to be assured that the DJ you hire not only has a sizeable collection, but has a wide variety of music, especially for wedding receptions, where many different styles of music and guests will be in the same room together.

Will the DJ offer to meet with you BEFORE & AFTER signing the contract to plan your event?

A professional DJ is ALWAYS willing to discuss your event at any time before the event starts, and should display the flexibility to accommodate changes and help you solve problems. Planner meetings with your DJ are of paramount importance to a successful event.

Is the person that you signed to contract with the person that will perform at your event?

This is THE most common complaint about the DJ industry today. The person you meet turns out NOT to be the person that actually does your show. Often, you are not aware of this. Ask the DJ you interview if he/she will be the actual person performing, or is the event to be performed by someone else. You need to know this UP FRONT before you sign a contract.

Are You the Dj's only responsibility that day?

Is your DJ a single operator or a "multi-op" with more than one system and more than one entertainer? This can be an important consideration. You need to be certain that you are going to be the priority on your special day, whichever service you choose.

A Professional Demeanor

Simply put, a professional DJ should dress appropriately for your event (formal wear for a wedding, etc.); be set up and ready before your guests arrive; use a setup procedure that is unobtrusive, safe and orderly; and treat you, your guests and other vendors with respect. He/she should be polite and able to handle adversity in a calm manner.

Great Communications

Your DJ should be able to speak in a clear, concise, easy to understand manner. He/she must be able to introduce you and your guests and make announcements that are easy to understand in a noisy room. He/she should be able to grab the attention of your guests, and enunciate and project his/her message with a positive attitude.

Quality Equipment and Music

Your DJ should use professional-grade equipment. This refers to heavy-duty speakers, amplifiers, mixers, etc., just like a band or a broadcast studio would use. Most home stereo equipment will not reliably perform to the quality standards necessary to ensure the success of your event.

The Desire to Please the Client

There are two basic approaches to DJ'ing. The first is to develop a show that seems to work for a majority of parties and stick to that formula. This is often referred to as "cookie cutter" DJ'ing.

The other approach is to use a well organized "flexible planning" format with song lists. In this approach, the Client decides what special events they do or do not want. They also choose a limited number of songs (usually 10-20) that they feel would be appreciated by their guests. This DJ will always play other requests, using discretion as to what is appropriate to the spirit of the event. The key to this approach is to balance the preferences of the Client with those of their guests.

There are both good and bad DJs that use each approach. A good "cookie cutter" DJ takes care of all the details. If you don't like filling out forms, you might enjoy a "canned" show better. If you wish to have substantial input into your event, the "flexible planning" DJ should be your choice.

An Agreement In Writing

Professional DJs should always provide written agreements for their services. It provides legal protection for both parties and gives your DJ the information he/she needs to entertain your guests properly. The contract/agreement should include the following:

- ♪ The name of the DJ (Vendor) and the name of the person responsible for payment (Client).

- ♪ The venue name, address, contact person, date and time of the reception, including starting and ending time

- ♪ The details of services provided by the Vendor

- ♪ The details of services provided by the Client

- ♪ The total price to be paid for the DJ's services

- ♪ When payment of the balance is due

- ♪ Overtime authorization details

- ♪ Cancellation requirements of both the Client and Vendor

- ♪ Signature of DJ and client (dated)

- ♪ Usually a retainer and a signed agreement are required to "block out" your date. The agreement should note your retainer payment (amount and check #) and the balance due. Read your agreement carefully before signing.

However you choose your DJ, the final goal is to please you and your guests, remember...

Quality isn't expensive, it's priceless!