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Wedded to planning

Wedding planners now offer varying amounts of service - even as little as the day of the wedding - in an effort to reach couples whose plans are less than lavish.

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Lisa Mahlman and Ian Lawrow-Svedvik are marrying in October and are busy consulting their wedding planner. Sounds posh, right? Actually, the couple's budget is right in line with the average cost for a Minneapolis wedding: about \$30,000.

But rather than hiring a professional to plan every piece of their nuptials, which would cost about \$5,000, Mahlman and Lawrow-Svedvik purchased a partial "day-of" package. Total damage: \$1,500.

"It was so refreshing to hear that we could have help, especially because we are both so busy, without it costing an arm and a leg," Mahlman said. "I feel so much more relaxed knowing everything will be taken care of and no one will be freaking out the day of ... well, no more than one would have to."

Day-of packages and other partial services are becoming the norm as wedding consultants try to draw in couples of all budget points. And it's working. This year, 21 percent of those marrying will use a wedding planner, with nearly half of them requesting the day-of service, according to Shane McMurray, author of the Wedding Report, a market research website.

Kathleen Murray, deputy editor of TheKnot.com, an online catch-all resource for wedding planning, has noticed the surge and credits it to the financial and time constraints of couples or the fact that a lot of brides enjoy planning their own wedding, but still want some help. "Day-of coordinators, for example, are standard these days. They replace mom as the contact person to handle crises and last-minute seating switches, and ensure everyone knows where they have to be at what time," she said.

Not sure if the service is right for you? Geri Wolf, event coordinator at the Style Laboratory in Minneapolis, suggests considering the following situations:

- You're time-strapped. Some coordinators can be hired by the hour, for example, to scout event locations, one of the most time-consuming tasks of planning a wedding.
- You have a limited budget. Coordinators often get better deals from vendors, so they can stretch your budget. They can even help keep your budget in check. Be sure to let them know up front how much you can spend.
- You want the big day to be relaxing - for you AND your family.

Coordinators can be hired for the wedding day only, to make sure things happen in a timely fashion, taking some of the burden off the couple, their family and friends.

- You enjoy planning.

Lots of couples enjoy the planning process, but need help in certain areas, such as choosing the right photographer.

- You're planning an out-of-town wedding.

Eighty-one percent of couples use the Internet to plan their wedding, but a wedding planner's expertise can help narrow the choices, especially if you're marrying in an unfamiliar city, or need help making arrangements for traveling guests.

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Aimee Blanchette - 612-673-1712

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SOME LOCAL OPTIONS

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At Your Service Weddings

Phone: 612-616-2314 Cost: \$300

What you get: 10 hours of service, including a one-hour initial meeting, two hours the day before the wedding for the rehearsal and last-minute errands and seven hours on the wedding day. Also offers consulting by the hour for \$35 with no minimum required.

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Heartstrings Wedding and Event Planning

Phone: 952-974-0073 Cost: \$950

What you get: Up to two hours of planning before the wedding, creating a detailed itinerary for you and your wedding party. Eight hours on the wedding day, including managing the vendors.

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The Style Laboratory

Phone: 612-825-4705 Cost: \$1,500

What you get: Help with design and planning, such as finding vendors, and contract negotiations and reviews that can be done from their office. A wedding-day itinerary is included. The day of the wedding, the coordinator acts as the point person for six hours. Clients can add more time for \$125 an hour.

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Nook & Cranny Concierge

Phone: 612-823-2018 Cost: \$1,000

What you get: Up to three hours of planning before the wedding and 10 hours on the wedding day. Includes vendor confirmation and management and distribution of final vendor payments. Also offers a la carte services for \$50 an hour.

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You can find more planners at TheKnot.com.

Caption:

PHOTO

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