

How & Why to Hire an Awesome Wedding Reception DJ!

Separating the Awesome DJs from the Good and the Bad.

– An Eye Opening Answer.

Draft 20

by DJ / MC Kerry “KC” Cameron

Kerry is an accomplished Mobile DJ/MC, as well as a Magician, Hypnotist, and Game Host. He has been on stage professionally since he was an 8-year-old dancer back in 1970. He is a full time entertainer and started DJing back when 45s were popular, and has grown through LPs, CDs, and now uses a computer (actually two!). After going through the stress of planning a reception and watching hundreds of brides do the same thing he has decided to help with this guide.

After researching what others had to say about hiring DJs, Kerry discovered that many people rehashed the same old thing– and it was often dated or just plain wrong! Much of the advice was self-serving, describing the writer (the DJ), and guiding the unwary to hire him. Like all Awesome DJs, Kerry works hard to provide the best service possible, not just to make a dollar. He leaves no stone unturned. After creating the draft and comparing it to what other DJs were saying online and in books, Kerry sent the draft out to Awesome DJs across the country to critique, from California to North Carolina. Each criticism was carefully considered and often added to the ebook.

You will find this book extensive, but not verbose. There is no fluff. Many DJs are not going to like this book because it tells it like it is and exposes misconceptions DJs like to promote. Written by a DJ, this is the ultimate guide to having the best wedding reception possible by getting the perfect Wedding Reception DJ! While many things in the ebook will help a person judge the quality other type's of DJs, this was written specifically for brides looking for the perfect wedding reception DJ.

A Word of Thanks

I would like to thank my wife, Sheree, for proofreading this e-book to ensure that its grammar is as good as its advice. I would also like to thank three Awesome DJs, Ross Merle, Keith Henderson and Jeff Oliver for helping me stay on top with the best! Special thanks to Todd Donald of FreeDJAmerica.com for his editorial advice.

Table of Contents

Pg 4 Table of Contents	35) Professional
Pg 5 Statistics	36) Time in Business
Pg 6-7 Wedding Stories	37) Back-Up DJ
Pgs 8-37 How to Get an Awesome DJ?	38) Multiple DJ
1) Cost	39) Meeting at an Office
2) Personality	40) Pressure
3) Attitude	41) Discounts
4) Pride & Love	42) Business Type
5) Accommodation	43) BBB
6) Confidence	44) Website
7) Voice	45) DJ Associations & Awards
8) Flexibility	46) Contracts
9) Coordination	47) Insurance
10) Organization	48) Communication
11) Dress at Reception	49) Advertisement
12) Experience	50) Yellow Page
13) Age	51) Brochures and Videos
14) Interaction	52) Photos
15) Music Selection	53) Audio Demo Tape
16) Lyrics	54) Bridal Shows
17) Important Songs	55) Recommendations
18) 40,000 Songs!	56) Wedding Coordinator
19) Vinyl, CD or Computer?	57) Equipment
20) Requests	58) Wireless Microphones
21) Slow Transition	59) Back-Up Equipment
22) Micro-Management	60) Emergency Kit
23) Volume	61) Dance Floor Lighting
24) Arrival	62) Props
25) Smoking, Drinking, and Profanity	63) Dangerous Equipment
26) Breaks	64) Additional Skills/Equipment
27) Wedding Music	65) Package Deals with Photographer, Videographer
28) Karaoke	66-69) What Type of Company is it?
29) Children	70) Tipping
30) Observing a Reception or Party	71) Questions
31) Problems	72) Instinct
32) Importance to him	Pg 40 Unsolicited Advice - Other Products
33) How Many Parties	Pg 41-48 Questions To Ask Your DJ
34) Reception Venue	

How to Hire an Awesome Wedding Reception DJ!

Martha Stewart says, “The entertainment you choose for your wedding, or party, is responsible for 80% of the events success and the memories you will have for the rest of your life.” What does everyone else say?

72% **of all brides say** given a second chance, say they would have spent more time choosing their reception entertainment. Unfortunately, there are no second chances.

100% **Almost 100% of guests say** the thing they remember most about a wedding reception is the entertainment, both good and bad entertainment.

100% **Almost 100% of the brides say** given a second chance, they would have spent more of their budget on the entertainment. Unfortunately, there are no second chances.

81% **During wedding planning, Brides say their highest priority** is their attire, followed by the reception site and caterer - reception entertainment is among the least of their priorities. **BUT ...**

78% **of the brides, a week after the reception, say** they should have made the entertainment their highest priority! Unfortunately, they were a week too late.

65% **of all couples that chose a band** to entertain at their wedding reception said if they had it to do over again, they would have chosen a DJ.

There are NO second chances for your reception.

The Bridal gown industry has done well pushing the value of the gown. How well do and your fiancé remember what others have worn? What about the flowers, food, and location? How well do you remember the entertainment, whether it was good, bad or lacking? What will your guests’ remember about your reception? How would your reception go if your gown was stained, or the flowers wilted, the ice carving did not arrive, the chicken was tough or the venue was not as good as promised? If all this happened AND you had an Awesome DJ, the guests would still enjoy themselves!

*These statistics were published in [St. Louis Bride & Groom Magazine](#) in 2003. Sources include: Simmons, 2001; USA Today, 2002; National Bridal Service, 2001; The Knot, 2002; Brides Magazine, 2001.

*throughout this ebook I refer to DJs in the masculine (he/him) for ease of reading only. I in no way am saying that there are not awesome DJs that are female – there are.

The most confusing decision after “I DO” is hiring your DJ. You can find a lot of advice on the net. Most of it is self-serving or old. Often it is just bad advice. After reading this, it will be difficult to go wrong. Please do not expect to find a DJ that fits every characteristic listed—just use this as a guide.

Do you remember when you first started to daydream about your wedding? Most brides start very young. It may have been when you were watching Cinderella, or when you were playing with Barbie and Ken. The significant thing about these memories is that they were always perfect. Now you have a much clearer picture of what you want. As a child, you could not possibly imagine how much work planning your wedding and reception would be – or how much it costs! Reality can be overwhelming!

The Wedding is over, you are having your last photos taken, and your guests are at the reception patiently awaiting your arrival. Who is keeping your guests entertained and taking the pressure off you and your family? Enter into the realm of the Professional Wedding DJ.

Your reception is a big “Thank You” for everyone who has been a part of your life. It is a balance of three things, a celebration of your marriage, a family reunion, and a reunion of friends. You are the host, so it is important to be a gracious host and to cater to your guests desires, not just your own. Eight-year-old Annie to eighty-year-old Granny-- and everyone in between-- expect to be kept entertained – at the same time! It is not an impossible job, but definitely a difficult one.

Six months after your wedding reception, what will people remember? What do you remember about other wedding receptions? Often the least expensive but most remembered element in a reception, or any party, is the entertainment. People will remember a bad or good time. So why do so many brides skimp in this area?

The entertainment is often the last chosen and hired, and most brides are under-budget. Because that finger food was soooo good and she decided to get a little more, now there is no money left for entertainment. On goes the quest for the Discount DJ. The month before the reception, the DJ did not feel that essential to her, but the week afterward, the DJ became supremely important. That Discount DJ did not have the experience handling a widely mixed crowd, seemed overly in love with the microphone (or terrified of it), and his organization, or lack thereof, was evident. His selection of music was at best adequate and his voice did not have the clear confident ring that the voice in her dreams had. To top it off, he was still setting up when her guests arrived. The reception of materialize, and her friends catch TV (but they all course). Her reception ended an hour and a half early, and there was no time for the bouquet toss because the guests departed shortly after they finished eating, and the DJ seemed clueless. The photographer looked worried as he struggled to find good shots. The DJ was supposed to put smiles on the guests' faces and set the photographer up to take those pictures you will be looking at for the rest of your life . . . but it just was not happening. The caterer was harried because the DJ did not seem to be on the same schedule, and had announced the toast before the toasting drinks had been poured. The ice sculpture went unnoticed and much of the food was not eaten. When the bride broke down her reception cost into a total per hour, that Discount DJ just cost her thousands of dollars and a lifetime of wonderful memories.

... no money left for entertainment ...

What Can You Do to Get an Awesome DJ?

Finding an Awesome DJ can be frustrating. There are no legal standards or special licensing for DJs, so the awesome are mixed with the good and the bad, and it is up to you to sort them out. Unfortunately, price, like in most goods and services, dictates quality, but there are a number of things to look for, too:

1 **Cost. It seems as if PRICE is usually the main determining factor, even though** there is NEVER going to be a second chance for your special day. The difference between a Discount DJ who is looking for some quick pocket money and accomplished professionals is dollars, not diamonds! Different areas have different prices, so a price guide is impractical. In New York, A DJ asking \$1500 is not unusual, while in some areas it is hard to find a DJ charging over \$600 for a wedding reception (2005 dollars). A DJ who initially appears to be less expensive will often up-sell to be more expensive. “If you want me to MC, it will be another \$50” is NOT what you want to hear. You want a DJ who loves his work and is not trying to nickel and dime you. Most equipment “extras” cost little extra for the DJ to use since he already owns them, but they may require more set-up and teardown time. Hidden costs can include: extra equipment, set-up, tear-down, travel, tips, and paying with a credit card. Stay away from the DJ Company that nickel and dimes you to death by charging you extra for every little thing!

If you see many different packages, expect the DJ to try to up-sell you into a more expensive package than the one that caught your eye. After he has you committed to him, he will try to up-sell you, and will probably be successful. The DJ who was better and a little more expensive upfront is still better, but now less expensive when you compare him to the nickel and dimeing DJ.

An awesome DJ gets booked easily; he is in demand. Expect to pay 50% up front and the rest BEFORE the reception. DJs learn that some brides are over-budget and do not have the money to pay the DJ. It also seems tacky for a DJ to ask for the check as you are getting into your limo.

a significant amount to
CANNOT hold a

**... only 52 Saturdays
in a year ...**

payment or he may not book that Saturday. There are only 52 in a year. He does not have time to try to run down the bride after the honeymoon. If the DJ DOES NOT take 50% up front and the rest before the reception, I would wonder how badly he needed the

DJing a wedding contributes
an Awesome DJs income. He
Saturday for long without

reception income, since many brides will put a DJ “on hold” if possible while they make up their minds. Remember: There are never enough Awesome DJs to go around

Do you take major credit cards? – Today, there is no reason for an Awesome DJ not to take plastic. Period. Credit cards charge vendors around 3% for their use (on top of the interest you pay), so do not be surprised if the DJ tacks that on to your bill. By using a credit card, should something happen, you can more easily get your money back by informing the card’s dispute services that the contract was not fulfilled. Note: Debt or Check cards do not offer this service!

IMPORTANT: There is no sales tax on entertainment in most areas. If the DJ charges taxes, DO NOT BOOK him –report him!

2 Personality. Do not expect a quiet person to suddenly become a dynamic party leader. It does not happen. Personality is very important if you and your guests plan to party hard. Formal Receptions are easy to do, but bringing a diverse group into party mode is not easy. It often takes a leader with a strong personality to bring people to ‘Party Mode’.

Be careful that the DJ does not BECOME the party. This may be appropriate in other venues, but not at your wedding reception. How much personality is too much is subjective, but remember it is all about you, not the DJ. Some DJs are cheesy; the better ones can be interactive but not cheesy. It should be apparent when you speak to him.

Many mobile DJ's started in clubs, where their primary job was mixing records, not acting as an MC or entertainer. Others started on radio, where they needed to talk ALL THE TIME. The best wedding DJ's are part showmen and part problem-solvers... part music experts and part diplomats. These "Party Hosts" have

... part showman, part problem-solver ... part music expert, and part diplomat.

an awesome personality and stage presence to help motivate your crowd to have fun without having to be on the microphone excessively. They MC your traditional dances and events, and help make the other vendors' jobs run smoothly.

Without someone in this "leadership" position, a beautiful reception will quickly deteriorate. You have multiple things to accomplish in a set amount of time. Remember, the photographer, caterer, and your new mother-in-law all have agendas in mind. The DJ should create a copy of your order of events and provide it for the other vendors.

3 **Attitude. Professionals emphasize the positive advantages of their company.** They have no need to belittle their competition or use scare tactics to get you to book them. DJs who feel confident competing based on service as opposed to price often use a more laid-back selling approach. They will not pressure you to book them on the spot. They will give you time to think it over before you make your decision. Companies that compete based on price are more likely to push you to sign a contract immediately.

4 **Pride & Love. It should seem obvious that the DJ loves his job,** not the check. He should take pride in every aspect of DJing. If he does not, beware. When talking to him, does it sound like he enjoys what he does, or is it "just another job?"

The DJ must watch for details both on and off the dance floor. He must plan effectively and personally with the event host or bride and groom. Most importantly, the DJ must care about details and he must ask himself, "What if this was my reception?" The DJ should honor requests and weave them into a musical mosaic. An experienced DJ must be able to read the guests and play a selection of music that will keep a good continuous flow of people on the dance floor. There will be different age groups and music tastes at your event. The DJ and his music library must be versatile enough to please all people attending your event.

5

Accommodation. How eager is the DJ to accommodate you? An Awesome DJ is very accommodating-- but only to a point. An Awesome DJ is in demand and does not need to be overly accommodating for most dates to get booked.

An Awesome DJ is a leader, so do not expect him to be a pushover. In the early stages of planning, he may make decisions about your reception that you may not like. Rest assured these decisions are based on experience and are done for your benefit. If you still disagree, he will follow your decision, but do not blame him if things do not go as planned! Your Awesome DJ is the professional and helps plan receptions for a living, so trust his judgment. You would not tell your mechanic how to fix your car, so why would you tell your Awesome DJ how to DJ? Give him the guidelines and let him go!

6

Confidence. If the DJ does not seem confident now, how is he going to appear and sound on the microphone at your reception? Awesome DJs are confident bordering on, but not becoming, arrogant.

7

Voice. How is his voice? This will be the first impression for most of your guests. Does he have the voice that you want to hear making announcements? Does the DJ speak in complete sentences without using "um" and "uh"? Public speaking is the #1 fear in America. If the DJ is not good at speaking in person, imagine how he will speak when he is in front of your guests.

8

Flexibility. Flexibility is important, especially at receptions. Things rarely go as planned, and a DJ will have to be alert and capable of changing gears smoothly. Flexibility IS NOT an excuse for lack of organization.

9

Coordination. Does he coordinate with the caterer, photographer, videographer, floor manager? If there is a problem (and problems happen with the best), the DJ can smooth things over so you and your guests never find out the problem existed. The caterer is running late, the photographer needs to reload his film, the videographer is in a less than optimal position to record the garter removal; these are all things the DJ fixes or smoothes over so no one ever notices –

except the grateful professional with whom he was coordinating. Speaking to each applicable vendor in advance goes a long way to smooth out any potential bumps.

10 **Organization. How well organized is he?** How helpful is his reception planner? Not all reception planners are equal, and a reception planner can give you a good idea of how organized he will be at your reception. He should have a planner in Adobe Acrobat® PDF format or an interactive online version – or preferably both! His organization or lack thereof will be evident in your reception. Remember: Organization allows flexibility. Disorganization is not flexibility; it is just disorganization. If he does NOT have a reception planner, run and do not look back! He is NOT the DJ for you, no matter how good everything else seems.

11 **Dress. If your event is a formal event,** your DJ should be dressed appropriately in a tuxedo or formalwear. If your reception is casual, he should dress accordingly. A DJ whose attire does not match the affair will take away from the overall look and feel of your reception. For most DJs, this should not be an issue. If it is, find another DJ.

12 **Experience. Experience is important, as long as it is good experience.** You do not want a DJ who has a lot of experience with bad parties! Most DJs get experience from a variety of venues and can use this experience to your advantage. Wedding reception experience is, by far, the most important.

If a DJ works in other venues, he may pick up some bad habits. Radio DJs usually talk too much, because that is their experience on the radio. Club and college DJs are often resistant to music that is outside of their specialty. They often take time beat mixing when they should be reading the crowd. On the radio, in the club, or at the school /college dance the DJ has a very select group of people who are interested in one type of music. You do not hear Sinatra on a pop station or Glen Miller at a club (anymore). These DJs do not have experience playing for a diverse audience; in fact, their experience makes it

more difficult for them to play to a mixed crowd. In what type of audience does your DJ really specialize?

13 **Age. If your DJ is too young,** he may not please your older guests; if he is too old, he may not please your younger guests. A young DJ may not have the time in the business to do the job you want. Make sure your DJ is fluent in both older and modern music in all major genres. Usually an older DJ has more experience-- just make sure he listens to modern music, too, and has the energy level you need.

14 **Interaction. Awesome DJs are ALWAYS able to be interactive,** without being annoying or cheesy. You want a DJ who is comfortable with the microphone and knows when, and when not to, talk. Different receptions require different styles, and your DJ should be able to comply with your desires BEFORE the reception, but be able to change DURING the reception if you so choose. Ask him how interactive he is, and if he has any interactive options. These options really separate the DJs.

Awesome DJs offer interactive options called skits and games. Yes, some DJs are cheesy, but if done right, these can be a lot of fun! If your DJ says “I do not do gags, skits or games because they are not appropriate.” then he is probably lying. He does not do them because he lacks one or a combination of the following: personality, experience, props. They ARE appropriate at many receptions, even if they are not appropriate at yours. Many brides who think these options are not appropriate BEFORE the reception, change their mind DURING the reception. Formal receptions are much easier to DJ / MC, and as long as the DJ will follow your directions, you should never have to worry about him doing something you do not want.

15 **Music Selection. DJs can claim they have an awesome selection** of music. This does not mean they do. The DJ's music should consist of two elements, a “base library” of older music coupled with a subscription service. EVERY good Wedding Reception DJ, unless he only plays one

style of music, subscribes to a music service. Most get a CD of hits in all major genres every month. Better yet are the ones who get a CD every week. It is just not economical to buy every CD that comes out, and subscription services allow a DJ to stay current. Currently (2005) there is no weekly DVDs for Video Jockeys, only a monthly ones.

16 **Lyrics. This can be very important if you want, or do not want, obscene lyrics.** Make sure to ask what version of music he uses. There are Album edits and Radio edits. Radio Edits are clean enough for the radio (but possibly not for grandma/church/temple). Album Edits are the full, uncut versions that *may* contain material that is not suitable for radio play. You also want to ask your DJ about songs he would not play, even if requested, because of the song's appropriateness. "Run-Around Sue" would generally not be appropriate, especially if the bride's name was Susan!

17 **Important Songs. I do not know how many times I have heard** of DJs who did not have the "Electric Slide" or some other crowd favorite. The DJ should have all types of music with him at the reception. The DJ should be able to play music from the big band, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's, and 90's, right up through today's hottest hits. Your DJ should be able to provide even ethnic music to suit your event. Make special note to insure your Awesome DJ has your ethnic and / or religious songs. If he does not have them, then he should purchase them.

18 **40,000 Songs! Many DJ Companies claim a huge amount of music.** Do you take the time to count it? Here is how they come up with their numbers. They have eight DJs, and each has about 5,000 songs = 40,000 songs! On top of that, since DJs buy many compilations, 1,000 or so of the original 5,000 are duplicates or other versions of a song. Here is another way they count their music. Their competition says they have 20,000 songs, so they pick 40,000 to look better! 40,000 songs translate into 2,667 CDs (at a generous 15 songs a CD) or about 75 feet of CDs in cases, one laid on top of the other (3 CDs per inch)! Can you imagine their weight alone, much less their size? At 3.1 ounces each, 2,667 CDs in jewel cases would weigh 515 POUNDS of music! If they have 40,000 songs, they must have an

IMMENSE amount of duplicates and duds. 40,000 songs **GENERALLY** will translate into a big “misrepresentation”. If a DJ lies about something so trivial, what else is he lying about? In reality, 10,000 song TITLES are more than enough, if they are mostly hits. Actually, since only 15 songs are played in an hour, a DJ playing a four hour gig only needs 60 songs – they just have to be the right 60 songs! Note: Since 40,000 songs is a MAJOR overkill with lots of songs that people have forgotten (with good reason), it is not economical for a single DJ to have so many . . . but I know of at least one that does.

19 **Vinyl, CD or Computer?** **If you want “scratch hip-hop/rap”, vinyl is best.** If the quality of sound is important, both the CD and computer DJ CAN be fine. The computer DJ can respond to requests faster, and can spend more time reading the crowd and being more interactive than the CD DJ flipping through CDs.

Vinyl and CDs scratch, Digital files corrupt, nothing is perfect. Here are a few things to think about:

Ask the Vinyl and CD DJ about skip protection. A DJ's records and CDs can skip once the party gets hopping, especially if he is on a stage. The DJ should be prepared for shaking with skip protection hardware and cushioning. Another sign of a good CD DJ is that he has CDs in sleeves. This cuts down on weight and space, protects the CD better in a large collection and saves a lot of time getting the CD in and out of the case.

The Computer DJ HAS TO HAVE immediate back up in case of a crash and should have a battery backup incase of a power failure. Windows machines are much more prone to crash than a MacIntosh now that MacIntosh is running UNIX. Computer DJs are cutting edge; all radio stations now use computers to play the music.

Many DJs will lead you to believe use of a computer signifies a DJ who downloads illegal music. ANY CD DJ can easily download a poor quality, illegal song too; he just burns it to a disc. If the DJ appears that he cares in other areas, he probably cares about the

quality of his music. However, in reality, the truth is that you can only know for sure that the vinyl DJ did not download his music.

20

Requests. They should always be taken . . . with a few grains of salt.

Some guests will request music that will kill the party. An Awesome DJ will know when to smile and nod and when to play a request. Of course, he should always follow your guidelines. A good question is: If we have banned a song from our reception and it is requested, how would you handle that?

21

Slow Transition. It is possible to satisfy the diverse audience

using a simple and effective technique called the "slow transition." After the dinner music, the DJ transitions into the dancing portion of the reception with a mix of older and more romantic songs. As the evening progresses and people get more enthusiastic, the DJ builds toward a more upbeat, contemporary mix. With a smooth transition, you will be surprised at how well "the old folks" adapt to the new stuff (I see 85-year-olds doing the Cha Cha Slide all the time – sometimes in walkers!). Artfully staged, nobody really notices the evolution in progress. Each guest will recall that the DJ played his or her type of music.

22

Micro-Management. You may be tempted to make a list

of every general dance song you want the DJ to play. If you are getting an Awesome DJ this is ALWAYS a mistake. The DJ has been to hundreds of wedding receptions and has a much better feel for what to play than 99.9% of brides. Special dances like the first dance and father/daughter dance YOU should pick. For the open dancing, provide general advice of decades and genres, along with a few special songs and songs you do not want to hear. Let the DJ discover the beat of the crowd. At a club, the excitement level is high when you arrive, the people want to dance, and they want a specific style of music. At a reception, it takes awhile to warm up the crowd. Half do not want to dance, but would rather watch and talk. They may not have seen each other in years. This does not mean they are not happy. Each party has a pulse. It should have highs and lows with the excitement level progressing. You cannot expect people to dance to a fast-paced song immediately; they need to be seduced onto the floor.

Here is a not-so-extreme example of a wedding reception:

Sherry is a 23-year-old bride-to-be with musical tastes that run toward alternative rock. She decided her wedding reception would be pre-planned, song-by-song, to reflect her tastes. The DJ worked with Sherry to change her mind, but Sherry was the customer, and she rejected each of the DJ's suggestions.

Here is the problem: Sherry was from NY and the reception was in NC - far from Sherry's home and friends. It was mostly attended by the groom's family - a conservative, country family, none of whom was vaguely familiar with alternative rock.

Guests continually complained to the DJ about "his" poor musical taste. Many guests left shortly after the meal. Even Sherry recognized that the Fugees' "Killing Me Softly (With His Song)" should have been called "Killing My Party with This Song".

A handful of family members remained when Sherry reluctantly allowed the DJ to take requests. Those few stayed late and had an awesome time.

Here is another example:

Lori did not want any line dancing – especially not the Electric Slide or Macarena. They were overused and trite. She had a vision of the reception and line dancing just did not fit.

Unfortunately, her guests did not share her views and, as is usually the case, they requested the Electric Slide. At the time, Lori was so wrapped up in things she might not have noticed the Electric Slide. What she did notice were unhappy guests. Many of her older female guests did not have partners (or willing partners!) with whom to dance. They felt awkward dancing alone or with another woman.

The dance crowd was sparse, and the DJ was not allowed to use a tool that nearly guarantees a full floor and gets people up and dancing. NO line dances, especially the most requested dance of all: the Electric Slide.

The DJ was nervous and working hard to get people up and dancing. Lori blamed him, but her ideas emptied the dance floor even more. The DJ begged Lori to allow him to play a line dance or two. Eventually she conceded, as long as they were requests. Since at least four people had requested the Electric Slide, it was played immediately. The dance floor packed, and stayed full the rest of the evening, even though the DJ did not play any more line dances.

The moral of both of these examples is this: You have done your homework, now let your Awesome DJ do his work. Trust your Awesome DJ to play the music your guests will enjoy. Who has chosen music at hundreds of receptions and perhaps thousands of parties? DO NOT handcuff the DJ with too many specific song requests or banned songs. Give him general ideas, tell him who the audience is, and let him do his job. The DJ who needs a specific song list should not be used. Sometimes people will get a bad impression of a DJ when it was the host that made the party flop.

23

Volume. Volume should never be an issue. The DJ should always keep the volume at the level you request. **IMPORTANT:** Older people often have hearing problems that make it difficult for them to distinguish conversation from background noise. Unfortunately, they often sit right next to the speakers and refuse to move away even though they complain the music is too loud. I have never understood this. In a mixed age group, it is ALWAYS best to seat older people as far from the DJ as possible.

The DJ should be as near the dance floor as possible, since that is where you want the music to be loudest.

Quality sound equipment can be played louder with less discomfort because it has less distortion. Distortion, not volume, is a big reason guests complain; they do not realize it is the distortion, and instead think it is the volume that is the problem. It is not unusual for an Awesome DJ to have invested \$20,000+ in equipment alone. A lesser DJ will “get by” with a \$3,000 equipment investment. Believe me, there IS a difference!

The DJ should have his speakers at or above head level. Human bodies quickly absorb higher-level sound frequencies. When the mid-ranges and tweeters are not above the guests' heads, they must be louder in order to cover a large room. Then there are high frequencies now blasting into some of your guests' ears! By raising the speakers above guests' heads, the sound travels over the people instead of being absorbed by their bodies--it travels farther without being as loud!

The bass is not absorbed as easily by bodies. Because of the size and weight of bass speakers (called sub-woofers), they are placed on the floor. Besides providing the low notes, sub-woofers generate a feeling of excitement. With good enough quality speakers, a 2-speaker system w/o a subwoofer may sound good, but it will never sound as awesome as it would with the sub-woofer.

By adding additional speakers and placing them throughout the room, the volume of individual speakers can be reduced while covering the room more evenly with sound. By using the appropriate number of speakers, the sound level can be comfortable and even in all parts of the room. **DO NOT EVER let a DJ tell you his two speakers are all that is needed for an awesome sound.**

An Awesome DJ will walk through the room as it fills up and empties out to monitor the sound. If sound ordinances are in effect, it is beneficial to have a Decibel Meter. This is the only real way to tell if you are staying “legal” – and a good defense if a neighbor complains.

24

Arrival. The time the DJ arrives is important. The earlier, the better.

Traffic problems can put him behind schedule. Malfunctioning equipment takes time to isolate and replace (assuming he carries replacements). Some locations are difficult and time-consuming when it comes to loading equipment. Some locations do not have the outlets available, or the DJ may need 500' of electrical cord, or long speaker cord. An Awesome DJ will visit a new site, or when this is not an option, speak with a new site's staff before your Wedding day. The DJ who plans to arrive an hour or less before any event can be hard pressed to be ready on time. It is best that the DJ arrive an hour and a half to two hours before your guests. It is better for a DJ to wait for your guests than for your guests to wait for him.

25

Smoking, Drinking, and Profanity. An Awesome DJ is NOT a Smoker,

does not habitually swear, and does not drink the day of the reception.

Many venues do not allow smoking in their main rooms, which will force a smoking DJ to leave for "smoke breaks". While this may be fine for you or your guests, your DJ needs to be on top of things all the time, and this is impossible if he has to take smoke breaks. Also, some guests may be offended by his smoking.

Many DJs drink while working, but no good DJs do. Your DJ must be sharp to read the crowd and anticipate changes and problems. It is common to hear of DJs being drunk at the end of a reception – and do you want a drunk entertaining your family and friends? If the DJ has to drive home, do you want to be legally responsible for his driving?

Profanity may be acceptable in some venues, but it is rarely acceptable at a reception – need I say more?

26

Breaks. DJs should not take any breaks. Your DJ can put on a longer

song to run to the bathroom, but that is it. Your Awesome DJ is a professional service provider, NOT a guest! Unless it is a very long party, the DJ should not eat a meal, but he can nibble. He can eat before or after the party. During the event, he should be entertaining or preparing for later. If he does eat, he can very easily spill something on himself (due to his tight working

quarters). He can become too wrapped up in food or conversation and miss something. Remember that the DJ is a highly paid SERVANT, not a guest. The DJ should NEVER drink alcohol before or during a party – so please do not offer any!

27 **Wedding Music.** **You may save a bundle** if your DJ can/will do the ceremony music. Just make sure he has the songs in the versions you want. Expect a small charge if he has to set-up a separate system for the wedding. If he is using the same equipment for both, expect AT LEAST a 30-minute time delay if he needs to set up the same equipment twice. This is also an indicator of his quality if he does not have back-up equipment.

28 **Karaoke.** **A Karaoke DJ (called a KJ) is NOT a DJ.** Nor is a DJ a KJ. Some DJs have various abilities to provide Karaoke, and some KJs can DJ, but they are two different skills and require different equipment. A KJ's music is without the main voice track and in a different format (CD+G) than the DJ, which means his music selection for KJing will not work for DJing. A KJ does not mix music, or even do radio fades. The KJ does not need to read the crowd so he can play what they want before they even know they want it. The KJ just does requests. Most KJs speaking voice is not an inspiration to hear and they may have a desire to sing to your guests. KJs do not usually work at weddings, so they probably will not have a clue about many jobs an Awesome DJ will do. I recommend staying away from a KJ for a wedding reception – even if he can DJ. Remember his experience as a KJ is not the same and can work against him. Better find a DJ that has KJ abilities than a KJ with DJ abilities. Remember Karaoke can be a lot of fun, but it can also kill a party. Use with caution!

29 **Children.** **Children can enhance a reception,** or they be very disruptive at a reception - especially young children. They will quickly get bored and let everyone know. If children are going to be attending your reception, you may want to hire an entertainer just for them. If you do not hire a separate entertainer, the DJ should entertain them. Ask him what will he do to entertain them. Here are some answers you should expect from an Awesome DJ.

A) He can play special music for them, especially when they are finished eating. The 3-6 year olds may enjoy dancing to the Wiggles or some other children's music.

B) The DJ may also offer toys, use of props, or even tie some balloon animals to keep children entertained.

C) The DJ could do some games for them while the dance floor is empty.

Adults will enjoy the childrens' dancing and games. Some adults will probably join the children. By doing this, it lets the children know they are special, parents appreciate it (as does the crowd in general), and the children are an asset instead of a liability. Please understand that most DJs will give you a blank stare, and then tell you they are DJs, not children's entertainers.

30 Observing a Reception or Party. **Would you want your DJ to invite people** to crash your party, possibly eat food or offend your guests?

These people are unknowns to you. At the same time, do you want your DJ to be concerned with the impression he makes on his future clients, or do you want him to be focused on your party? If you do not want strangers crashing your reception to evaluate a DJ, do not hire a DJ who would allow you to crash someone else's reception.

At an additional cost, you may consider hiring him for a less important event ahead of time, to evaluate his service first hand. Some DJs will accommodate this request with a discounted sample rate for the smaller party, with the understanding that if you are impressed you will immediately book the reception following the smaller party. Do not expect this discount sample to be on a Saturday!

31 Problems. **What problems has the DJ encountered at weddings** and how did he solve them? You want a wedding DJ who is resilient and who can respond quickly to unforeseen problems that can disrupt your reception.

Nearly EVERY reception has a problem or two. The question is: How does the DJ deal with it so no one realizes it was ever a problem? In this case, the more

issues mean the more experience. If your DJ can only come up with one or two problems he has fixed, it means he IS NOT fixing them, NOT that his weddings do not have problems.

32 **Importance. What does the DJ claim is important in hiring a DJ?** Look at his “How to Hire a DJ” web page. Understand this is what he wants you to think is important. Understand it is probably partially self-serving, in that he will not put something down that he cannot do, and he may put in attractive “fluff” for clients who do not know better.

33 **How Many Parties? How many events will your DJ work** on your wedding day? Do you want him arriving late because the other event went long? What about not being able to stay later than scheduled because of another engagement? Multiple events per day can help reduce the DJ’s price – but at what cost? The "load-and-leave" schedule will invariably result in a crazy quilt music program. You will pay more for the individual attention, but it is worth the price.

34 **Reception Venue. Ask your DJ if he has done receptions on site.** It helps that he knows the reception venue, directions to it, and familiarity with the staff. Your DJ may also be better prepared to deal with known issues with the wedding reception hall. This is not a big issue, but every little positive thing you find makes it less likely that you will have problems with your DJ. This does NOT mean you should reject the DJ if he has not been there before, but if he has been there before it is a small nod in his favor. If he has not been there before, expect him to speak with the manager of the venue and inspect it, or arrive VERY early to overcome any problems. There is one venue of which I am familiar where DJs have to go up several flights of stairs (DJs cannot use the elevator) and go through the kitchen. It takes a LONG time to set-up, and an Awesome DJ will arrive very early!

35

Professional. It is rare to find a DJ who does nothing else during the week. Most just are not that successful. Most of the ones who claim to be full-time DJs are stretching the truth. Most work for large DJ Companies; they manage and sell DJ services during the week. This is somewhat valuable experience, but not as much as they claim.

The part-time DJ's other career can be a clue to his personality. A position of leadership shows that he probably has the confidence needed to do a good job. A job in sales often means good people skills.

Since a semi-pro DJ has weekends free, he can have the same amount of experience at receptions as a full-time DJ and can still be a good choice. The downside is that a true professional may have more general DJ experience and will be available during working hours. The professional will also have more time to prepare for your reception. Here is a scary point: If the semi-pro's job transfers him, he needs to take a trip for his job, or his boss needs him to work on Saturday, where does his allegiance lie?

36

Time in Business. Most start-up businesses fail, and the DJ business is no exception. People often think a DJ makes a lot of money for his time and decide to try it themselves. They quickly discover it is a skilled craft, with a wide degree of knowledge needed. Then they discover the cost of business phones, equipment, music, advertising, web pages, insurance, and travel. They find the prep work for a wedding reception daunting, and they have to take time answering calls, learning music, ordering equipment, and dealing with stressed out brides when they usually would be relaxing. Then they find their weekends are no longer theirs, but their clients'. Their spouses complain and their family can be stressed. It all becomes too much, and their business files bankruptcy. That big down payment? Gone. Worse yet, now you need to find another DJ, and you have less time. Awesome DJs usually book far in advance, so you may have to settle for a less successful DJ. How long your potential DJ has personally run the business (as opposed to working for someone while he learned the ropes) is important.

37

Back-Up DJ. It is extremely rare for an Awesome DJ to need a back-up DJ. An Awesome DJ will do everything humanly possible to be at your reception. The chances that an Awesome DJ will miss a reception are smaller than if a bride or a groom will miss a reception. Still, it can happen. If the DJ has advance notice that he will not be able to make it to your reception (surgery or the overused excuse of a parent or grandparent dying) he should have connections to find you a comparable DJ. Ask any potential DJ to recommend another DJ. If his recommendations are good, then you stand a much better chance of getting a good sub should something unfortunate happen. One thing you need to understand: In most cases, it is economically unfeasible for an owner / operator to have a specific Backup DJ of quality. A large company may have one, but chances are it is only talk. Booking a DJ that will show up is much more important than booking a DJ that might not, but has a backup!

If the DJ should not show up at the reception, you will not know until you arrive. It will take thirty minutes to contact the company (if it is not an owner/operator DJ). It will take the DJ Company forty-five minutes to locate another DJ. It will take an hour for that DJ to get ready, and an hour for travel. It then will take him at least thirty minutes to set up in front of your guests. Nearly four hours later you will have music. A dependable DJ is much more important than having a last-minute emergency back-up DJ. Analyze your DJ choices carefully.

38

Multiple DJs. More than one DJ is rarely needed at any reception. If they advertise two for one, one of the DJs is in training, a tag-along, a body to help with the lifting - or both are sub-par. Lighting is usually preprogrammed, and if they need a person to run the lights, it is generally overkill for a reception. Having multiple DJs at a reception is a marketing ploy that probably has very little value to you. If you have money to blow, an Awesome DJ and a good MC can sometimes make things a little smoother – but the cost to value ratio is too high for the vast majority of receptions.

One exception to this is husband/wife, parent/child teams. This type of multiple DJ group works well with each other and often a good deal.

39

Meeting at an Office. Except for larger companies, and even then, a formal rented office is rarely needed. If the DJ has an office outside of his home that is not used for anything else, it is to impress you. Guess who pays the rent? You do-- with higher fees.

40

Pressure. An Awesome DJ will have no problem filling most Saturdays. Occasionally booked dates cancel or change, and sometime a Saturday just does not book – but most do. Do not expect an Awesome DJ to hold a date while you make up your mind – this IS NOT a pressure tactic. He needs to fill the date, and he is in demand. In most cases, you need an Awesome DJ more than he needs you.

When a DJ starts in a new area, he may not have the usual amount of business. If the DJ pressures you it means he is desperate for your business. Why is he desperate? He probably will not tell the truth here, but it is probably because he is not successful.

41

Discounts. Why should a successful DJ give you a discount on a Saturday? Discounts on non-Saturdays are expected, but there are only 52 Saturdays in a year, and several of those are not easily booked due to timing (too close to a major holiday). January, February and November tend to be slow. If a DJ offers a discount it means he does not think he can book the date if you do not book it. Depending on the time of year and how close it is to the reception, this may be understandable. If not, it means he is unsuccessful – and unsuccessful for a reason. Is it because he just is not any good?

On the other hand, if you offer the DJ the engagement party, and/or the rehearsal dinner you are making his life easier and he may offer a discount.

42

Business. Many DJs make a big deal about being incorporated.

Understand, a DJ can incorporate for a couple hundred dollars – it is not a big expense. Also, understand his incorporation DOES NOT benefit you-- in fact, it may be a negative. A company incorporates for two main reasons. The first is to be a legal partnership, and the second is to protect the individual's assets. An incorporated company is treated like an individual by the law. If sued, the DJ's personal assets are protected, and only the company's assets can be taken. Most incorporated companies own NOTHING; they LEASE it from the owner (the DJ), so the company can be sued and the DJ loses NOTHING AT ALL. If they follow the law, they HAVE to state in all advertising that they are incorporated (such as LLC behind their name). This is a WARNING to the consumer, not something about which to brag. Incorporating is a perfectly good business practice that I would recommend to a DJ; it just is not an advantage to you.

43

BBB. It is a good idea to check out the DJ's BBB record.

Realize the more parties a DJ does, the more complaints he may have. This certainly does not mean you go with the DJ with the most complaints, nor does it mean you go with the DJ with the fewest. The BBB gives you a little glimpse of the DJ. Remember: People rarely give positive comments to the BBB. The verification seal on a site means they are in good standing with the BBB. This does NOT mean if they do not have the seal that they are in bad standing with the BBB. It means they have not PAID the BBB for the seal.

44

Website. Today, nearly EVERY Awesome DJ has a website.

Most often, the website is “homemade” – and that is fine. You are hiring a DJ, not a website designer. The website gives you insight on what the DJ feels is important. The website is “the best foot forward”. A tacky website probably means a tacky DJ. A website that emphasizes equipment probably means lack of personality or experience. A website that emphasizes the DJ, with lots of pictures of him, or photos of him with celebrities, probably means a big ego. This may indicate that

he is hard to work with if you have a disagreement. An Awesome DJ website should exude confidence and show guests enjoying themselves. If you want a DJ who can make things go wild, his website should reflect that. His website should have music lists, an 800 number, and other functions that can help you. The DJ should consider himself “one of the best.” Confidence bordering on arrogance is GOOD. If he considers himself “the BEST” then he needs to be able to demonstrate why he is the best. If he does not consider himself “one of the best,” then he is not, and should be avoided.

**The website is his
“best foot forward”.**

45 **DJ Associations & Awards.** **DJ trade shows can be helpful,** but are certainly not necessary for a high quality performance. Like all trade shows, they are tax write-offs in resort areas like Las Vegas, and there are many non-professional reasons to attend. Do not let your DJ snooker you into believing going on a tax write-off vacation makes him a better DJ than the next. When it comes to DJ Associations, they can be helpful, but they really are not that big of a deal for you, the client. For the DJ, he can probably get a better deal on music, insurance, advertising and other things by joining, and that is the reason why most join. He may also get to use their message boards, but there are plenty of other resources available that are free. The main reason for most of the “Professional Organizations” is marketing. He can advertise that he belongs to such and such organization, and lead you to believe there is a heavy screening process. I do not know of any heavy screening processes outside of providing the cash to join and “swearing” to uphold a code of ethics that is rarely, if ever, checked. One or two organizations check to ensure that a DJ has done a few weddings – the key word is “few”. When it comes to awards, they are totally marketing tools. I have an acquaintance whom was named “Karaoke DJ of the Year” by a DJ organization. I investigated, and found out only fourteen DJs were at that “convention” where he was awarded “Karaoke DJ of the Year,” and they awarded 16 awards – one for each DJ, and some got two awards!

Another DJ I know has won a “Best Mobile DJ” award two years in a row from a local paper. He also happens to be a Club DJ and a Radio DJ, and encourages people to vote for him all the time. The award is more a reflection of his politicking than his ability. I

know-- I have talked to brides and grooms that used him at their reception. He swears, refuses to play some requests, and has been insulting to guests. Would you want him reminding your guests at your reception to vote for him at the paper's website?

Still, being a member of professional organizations can demonstrate a commitment to the profession. If a trade organization or a directory receives serious complaints about a DJ, they will usually yank his listing, but understand this is unusual. It also may mean he may network with other professionals and learn new skills. If your DJ is a member of several organizations, he may be well-connected and constantly learning new and exciting ways to entertain your guests, as well as running a more professional operation. It is an indicator, but a DJ who is in many trade organizations does not have to be any good, and a DJ who is in none can be excellent. The first DJ can have too much time on his hands and the second can be too busy.

46

Contracts. The importance of getting a written contract from your DJ cannot be overemphasized. In a vast majority of cases where there have been last minute problems, there was NO written contract, or the DJ was a "friend" of the family. You may have a very capable friend who has offered to provide you with DJ services at a discounted rate. The most important social event of your life is NOT the time to mix business with friendship. What if the performance is not up to your expectations? Your reception is disappointing and a friendship will be compromised. If you have no contract do you really want to take the chance of the DJ not showing up for your event, or canceling at the last minute? A written contract is imperative. You want the contract to clearly state who your DJ will be, what hours are covered, and what is included in the price. Often lighting and other options are available at an additional fee.

Look out for fine print on the contract. All that fine print may be for their protection only. Ensure EVERYTHING agreed upon is in the contract. This is your ONLY recourse if it does not go as planned. This is a list of things the contract should cover:

- The name of the DJ Performing
- The name of the DJ Company
- Contact Information
- Equipment Package
- A Cost Breakdown and a Total Cost
- Contract Date
- Date of Event
- Set-up Time
- Start Time
- End Time
- Total hours Performing
- Refund Policy
- Insurance
- Back-up DJ policy
- No Show/ DJ Cancellation Policy
- Attire
- No Advertisements During Reception!

47 **Insurance. No one expects an accident,** but accidents do happen. Many venues now insist on insurance. A fully insured DJ will have comprehensive to cover his equipment, AS WELL AS liability to cover himself, the guests, and the Bride and Groom. DJ equipment can suck up a lot of power and get very hot. What happens if the equipment catches on fire? If drunken Uncle Harry spills his drink on the DJ's mixer, what happens? What happens if someone slips on the floor and breaks an ankle because bubbles were overused?

48 **Communication. A fax number and cellular phone number,** preferably local or toll free, add security to your reception. You want to be able to reach the DJ for last minute changes.

How quickly does the DJ return your calls/emails? Do you have to leave many messages before he answers you? How easy is it to communicate directly with the DJ who will actually be performing at your event? Does the company permit this? Can you communicate with the DJ Company at times other than weekdays 9 to 5?

49

Advertisement. Flashy advertisement does not equate to quality work.

Actually, it may mean you are dealing with a DJ Broker or a Multiple DJ Company. Still, look at the advertisement to get a feel for the DJ's personality. If it does not fit with your vision, look elsewhere.

Remember: The owner/operator DJ does not have the advertising budget of the large company, and often the video or ad is more a reflection of who the company hired to create the ad than the DJ himself . . .UNLESS it is poorly done. Poor advertisement often does equate to poor work.

IMPORTANT: Many DJ Companies feel it is necessary to advertise at your wedding reception. Your DJ may announce his name multiple times over the microphone, and even solicit clients. Many will have large signs (I have seen six foot signs) displayed at their tables. If you do not want your DJ to advertise, make SURE he understands.

50

Yellow Pages. Today, yellow page advertising does not bring in many mid-to-high end wedding receptions for most DJs. Most brides search the internet for their DJs. The brides who use the yellow pages are predominantly either not computer savvy, or unable to afford internet access. This means the brides have less to spend. Do to their expense and their lower end market, HEAVY yellow page marketing by a DJ today means that he specializes in weddings on a budget, and is usually a Multiple DJ company owner or a DJ Broker.

51

Brochures and Videos. These tell more about the videographer

and graphic designer than the DJ Company. In multiple office DJs, the DJ you see in the ad will probably not be the DJ you get. I know one company's demo video is another DJ entirely. I know this because I know the DJ on

the tape, and know he never worked for them. They paid a videographer to provide tape of an awesome reception that he had already done. It did not matter that the DJ was not theirs. The customers would forget the DJ's face (only briefly recognizable by a friend) well before they hire the company. There are also companies that specialize in DJ videos and brochures. They make one or two "killer" brochures and videos and they just put the

DJ Company's name and contact information on the materials. Usually they only sell to one person or company in a region, so customers never realize the promo materials are created from a template. The DJ Company gets a flashy video and/or brochure for a low price, but it does not even remotely resemble the quality of their work.

52

Photos. Do his advertisements, promotional material, and website have many photos of himself? You do not want a DJ who needs to be in the spotlight. A good wedding reception DJ facilitates an awesome party – he himself is not the awesome party.

53

Audio Demo Tape. Do not bother to ask for a demo tape of the DJ playing music. This is because the music a DJ plays varies dramatically from one party to another. You do not want a DJ who uses pre-packaged sets because crowds are different, and what works for one party may not work for the next.

54

Bridal Shows. Very few Awesome DJs go to Bridal Shows. Since the DJ is often the last hired, his promo material is often lost or forgotten – and Bridal shows are expensive! The DJs who attend bridal shows are usually Multiple DJ Companies and Brokers who can do many weddings on the same day at the same time, so bridal shows are cost effective. Awesome DJs get booked easily and USUALLY do not need to attend. Also, to make a bridal show really work, a DJ MUST use the list of attendees to cold call or mail AND have flashy promo material. This is not the way most Awesome DJs operate. A few do use bridal shows as their main way of advertising, so do not discount them – it is just a hard and expensive way to make a living for a Single Owner / Operator.

55

Recommendations. A dirty little secret is that Multiple DJ Companies pay the venues and other vendors to recommend them. Other vendors will rarely recommend a DJ who is bad because to do so is a poor reflection on them, but you probably will not get the best for your money. In addition, venues often want to recommend a company with multiple DJs to

ensure one will be available. This makes them look better. Multiple DJ Companies often have a person whose sole job is to schmooze with hotels and vendors. When this happens, the Single Owner/Operators who can make it on their own are often overlooked.

Recommendations from others are often tainted. The DJ who was awesome at the club or the anniversary party may not be that awesome at your reception. One person's taste, often the more verbose person, may not be in line with that of most of your guests. People like to think they got an awesome deal on a DJ, and if you take their advice, it makes them feel needed and respected. The fact that their DJ was at best "OK" takes second seat to their insecurity or their wanted memories. Recommendations can be helpful, but you need to consider the recommendation, who gave it and what state were they in when they observed the DJ. By what state they are in, I mean were they drinking? People that are drunk are not good judges, and have faulty memories. In addition, what type of experience do they have hiring DJs? If they have only experienced two DJs, and the first was very bad, the second does not have to be very good to get an awesome recommendation. Ask many questions to the individual who is giving the recommendation so you can have a good idea what the recommendation is worth. Most often recommendations should only play a small part in your choice, unless that individual has many recommendations from similar receptions. The awesome backyard "pig-picking" DJ is not always the awesome "plated meal reception" DJ.

A trick you can use to help determine the DJ's quality is to look at other vendors the DJ recommends. Birds of a feather. . . The vendors a DJ recommends can be a reflection of the DJ's own quality.

56

Wedding Coordinator. Most wedding coordinators are "Wedding Coordinators," not "Reception Coordinators," and usually have less knowledge about receptions. This fact does not stop some from volunteering to coordinate your reception, though! Many do not want to justify to the bride the higher fees of an Awesome DJ, so they find a Discount DJ for your special day. Some may feel threatened by an Awesome DJ; they feel they have to be in charge. An Awesome DJ will do a better job coordinating the reception than most

Wedding Coordinators. If you have an Awesome DJ, he should be in charge of the reception, and the coordinator should assist. You need to let both the wedding coordinator and the DJ know who is ultimately in charge of the reception or there could be problems. It is important that everyone be on the same page, so it is crucial that the vendors talk and iron out responsibilities. Interview the coordinator and get her experience with DJs. **IMPORTANT:** Her experiences with DJs will be a result of the quality of the DJs she recommends. See how valuable a DJ is to her. Many will just think of a DJ as a human jukebox.

IMPORTANT INFO! There are two types of Wedding Coordinators, those whom you pay directly, and those whom you pay indirectly. The “FREE Wedding Coordinator” is not free. She is paid by charging each vendor a fee to be hired. Thus, she will only work with DJs who will give her “kick-backs”. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as you understand the dynamics, and realize she may have a hidden agenda.

57 Equipment. **An Awesome DJ can use poor equipment** to bring smiles to your guests and happy tears to your eyes. A poor DJ can use excellent equipment to create a flop. Still, good equipment often, but not always, means success. Quality equipment also means the DJ cares enough to provide the very best for his clients. It is difficult for a non-music professional to know what professional equipment is and what it is not. Most brands that you can buy for home use do not make professional quality equipment.

Beware of the DJ who emphasizes his equipment, rather than experience. The newest, fanciest gadgets are fine, but will not necessarily make the most appropriate and proficient reception DJ. An agreeable personality, experience, attitude, a good reception planner, and willingness to work with each client play the biggest role.

58 Wireless Microphones. **Wireless microphones never have the quality** of sound that corded microphones have. They often are “walked on” by other transmissions - the last thing you need is someone else’s conversation being picked up by the microphone and transmitted

through the speakers at some key moment. If a corded microphone will work, I ALWAYS recommend it. The concert halls, where you see singers on cordless microphones, are shielded from external transmissions and their microphones are ridiculously expensive. Still, a wireless microphone can be handy; just make sure your DJ backs it up with a corded microphone. Expect a DJ to pay over a \$1,000 for an excellent wireless microphone that has little chance of problems, so DO NOT DROP IT!

59

Back-Up Equipment. If someone from the night before spills his drink

on the DJ equipment, does the DJ have back-up equipment for your reception? The best of equipment can fail during the reception, so back-up equipment on site is crucial. How can you tell if he is telling the truth about having back-up equipment? Ask him if he can perform your wedding ceremony that is being held in a different location than the reception (whether you want him to do this or not.) His answer should reflect whether he has back-up equipment or if he will have to use the same equipment for both events.

An Awesome DJ will have not only back-up equipment, but also back-up cords/wiring.

If a cord goes bad and cannot be replaced it does not matter about back-up equipment. Light bulbs and fuses are needed should a dance floor light go out.

60

Emergency Kit. An Awesome DJ always has an emergency kit

not only to cover himself, but you and your guests. The kit should include: Aspirin, allergy medicine, throat lozenges, Band aids, tissues, tweezers, needle and thread, extra buttons, emergency pin-on buttons, safety pins, bobby pins, extra cuff links and bow ties, collar extender, spare stockings, scissors, duct tape, disposable tooth brush and breath mints. Do not forget a small fire extinguisher. DJ equipment can get hot!

61 **Dance Floor Lighting. Lights affect the mood of the party.** Lighting can generate romantic feelings and lighting can generate excitement. If overdone, lights can bring a club feel to the reception. If underused, your reception can feel like a Sunday afternoon ice cream social.

62 **Props. They may not be for you, but if they are, you will love them!** It is 11 p.m. the Saturday evening of your reception and you want the party to get a little crazy. A prop box can be a big help. Hats, wigs, blow-up guitars, and tambourines are all things normally found in a prop box.

Often this means an extra expense to you (props are broken, lost, and stolen all the time), but they are often well worthwhile. You know the personality of your guests, and the mood you want to project. NEVER underestimate the value of props to an awesome time!

63 **Dangerous Equipment. Just a quick note on equipment** you may want to avoid. Bubbles can make a hard floor VERY slick – use them with care. If the DJ uses regular bubble mix, the bubbles will stain your dress and others' clothing. If bubbles are used, they MUST be a non-staining mix. Strobe lights have caused people to go into epileptic fits – even people who did not know they had epilepsy. Fog and haze can cause breathing problems. Often better venues will ban the use of bubbles, fog, and haze because of the residue and inherent dangers.

64 **Additional Skills / Equipment. Expect a Wedding Reception DJ** to have dance floor lights and be able to MC. Awesome DJs cultivate other benefits. He may be able to sing or play the piano. He may be able to entertain your guests with close-up magic while they await your arrival.

He may have karaoke or use video like MTV DJ (VJ). Perhaps he has an awesome interactive website. Whatever it is, you do not need to use it, but the fact that the DJ offers it shows that he cares about his clients.

65

Package Deals. Hiring your DJ, photographer and videographer

all from one company has the advantage of price and ease of use. The main disadvantage is lack of quality. Large companies hire those who cannot get enough work for themselves. The best in each field generally do not work for others; they are self-employed. This is not to say that if someone is self-employed, he is good, but if he is an employee his quality should come into question.

Package deals are sometimes done with part-time videographers (often spouses) who do not edit. This is because the DJ is savvy enough to edit the video during the week when business is slow, allowing him full-time work. With two streams of income, he can charge less – just look at the quality before you buy. Some do great work. Sometimes individual vendors will pool advertising dollars and create a co-op. This is the best of all worlds. Each vendor is careful not to be associated with a vendor of lesser quality, so you can assume the quality to be the same across the board.

66

Brokers. Brokers are the true bottom feeders of the DJ industry.

They often have no DJs who work for them. They book parties, and then look for a DJ that will work the party for them. Since they often advertise low rates, they often have to wait until the last minute to fill the job with some DJ who did not end up booking that day. Way too often they do not locate a DJ, and will give you an excuse and refund your money. One I know has called me three times to cover an emergency where his grandmother died. Maybe he (or his grandmothers) was just unlucky - but I doubt it. By then it is probably too late to get adequate entertainment, especially since you were budgeting low anyway. In addition to this, they have all the problems of Multiple DJ Companies. In fact, many DJ Companies are a combination of Multiple DJ employees and brokers. Brokers have the largest “no-show” rate in the DJ industry.

On the positive side, if anyone can find a DJ at the last minute, a Broker can. Since they deal with the DJs who have little work and they are used to hiring at the last minute anyway, this is their bag. Of course, chances are the quality of the DJ will be low.

67

Multiple DJ Companies. They often have a “closer” to get you to sign on the dotted line. This is fine, but make sure you feel as good about the DJ who will be working for you as you do about the “closer.” Make sure that the contract states that the DJ you chose will be the DJ who shows. Many DJ companies make last minute scheduling changes and the DJ may not know for whom he is playing or the style of music until the day of the event. Find out how much the DJ is paid. Many companies may charge you \$800, but pay the DJ who does the work only \$300. If that DJ is less than scrupulous, and is offered a job from another company, or finds a better paying job himself (not too hard!), you may not get the DJ of your choice – or worse yet, he may just not show. DJs are always complaining about the DJ Companies that hire them. Do you want to see firsthand what happens when a DJ quits???

DJs that work for DJ Companies do so for a reason. They cannot, or chose not to, make it on their own. They may not like the pre-reception work or the advertising, or they may be too busy at another job. Maybe they are new to the business and do not have their own equipment. They may also just not be that good. If you hire with a larger company, talk to the DJ and find out why he is not on his own.

On the positive side, DJs in the better Multiple DJ Companies receive some formal training, and follow guidelines when doing a reception so their service is uniform throughout the company. There are many DJs to choose from, and if one backs out, they may have a replacement. The quality of the DJ from the Multiple DJ Company is usually good. They usually do not hire poor quality DJs, but cannot hire the Awesome DJs.

68

Single Owner / Operator. They are often harder to contact than a larger company because they do not have staff to answer the phone and are sometimes only reachable after work. Their advertising is not at the same level as Multiple DJ Companies or Brokers because they do, at most, 50 wedding receptions a year (52 Saturdays a year) and their advertising dollar promotes one DJ instead of a group of DJs.

On the positive side, most of the Awesome DJs are Single Owner/Operators.

69

Directories. **These are not DJ companies,** but usually online, searchable lists of DJs. Each directory is unique, and most have both paid and free listings. It only takes an internet connection at the local library to get a free listing, and so free listings should be suspect. Paid listings mean the DJ Company is probably not at the bottom of the heap, but in reality, it means they have the cash, intelligence and need to advertise. Most directories will boot a DJ whom gets many complaints from clients, but the clients need to contact the directory. This is about as much as one can expect from a directory. Online Directories such as WeDJ.com and FreeDJAmerica.com are great places to start your search for an Awesome DJ.

70

Tipping. **The answer to tipping is strictly up to you.** Generally, people that get minimum wage get tipped, so you should feel NO obligation to tip no matter how good the performance. Watch out for companies that encourage tipping or make tipping part of the contract – it is a hidden cost that masks the true rate. If you really want to thank the DJ, write a good letter of recommendation for him!

71

Questions. **Do not be afraid to ask many questions.** Most people hire a DJ only once or twice in their lifetimes, so questions are to be expected. Any DJ who is not more than happy to help you get what you want, and answer all of your questions, should send up a warning sign.

72

Instinct. **Take your time and listen to your gut instinct.** Do not just rush out and hire because you dislike hiring, or because there is a lot of “flash.” Often our subconscious minds pick up clues of which we are not consciously aware. If you feel uneasy, but everything else looks good, take your time to discover why you feel uneasy. If the DJ is pressuring you, find another.

Unsolicited Advice

A Few things EVERY bride should consider:

Software for the organized Bride (and those that want to be organized!). Is planning your wedding overwhelming? Of course it is! This is the best software to help you keep track of things, made specifically for weddings.

<http://www.awesome-dj.com/redirect/index.php/WeddingSoftware>

Beautiful, Functional Wedding Website. Wouldn't it be nice to have a beautiful Wedding Webpage? One to where you could direct your guests, and they could leave comments? Where you could share pictures and memories both before and after the wedding? One that was easy to use, yet reflected your special day beautifully? I recommend this site:

<http://www.awesome-dj.com/redirect/index.php/WedWeb>

Nobody wants three toaster ovens. Insure that your guests know what you need for your new life together. Wouldn't it be nice to have an online gift registry that was not store specific: one where you list items from online stores to department stores ANYWHERE? I will have one soon! Email me!

A Complete Reception Planner! Understand traditions and your options at a wedding reception. Organize things the way YOU want them! Coming Soon. Email me!

How to hire a Reception Venue, Caterer, Photographer/Videographer, Florist, and Cake Decorator are all coming soon, all high quality, straightforward advice to make your special day STRESS FREE! Coming Soon. Email me!

Questions for the DJ!

Here is a list to ask yourself and the DJ you are interviewing. Many are “trick” questions to get a feel for the DJ. Make sure the person you are interviewing is the DJ that will be performing at your reception! The DJ WILL be surprised at such knowledgeable questions, and will probably ask where you got them. Remember, some things may seem common sense, but review his answers with the appropriate section to make an accurate assessment.

DJ Name:

Company Name:

Website:

Phone Numbers:

1) Cost – What is the TOTAL cost after the nickel and dimeing and up-sell to a higher package? Does he take major credit cards?

2) Personality – What is the **DJs** personality like, not the salesperson!

3) Attitude – What is the **DJs** attitude like, not the salesperson!

4) Pride & Love – How much Pride and Love to his craft does the DJ show? - Not the salesperson!

5) Accommodation – How accommodating is the DJ?

6) Confidence – Does the DJ exude confidence?

7) Voice – How does he sound? Does he say “UM” a lot? Is this the voice you want doing the introductions?

- 8) Flexibility – How flexible does he seem?
- 9) Coordination – Does he coordinate with other vendors?

- 10) Organization – How good is his reception planner? How much time do you think he will devote to preparation of your reception?

- 11) Dress at Reception – How will he be dressed?

- 12) Experience – What is his experience in wedding receptions? What is his experience DJ?

- 13) Age - Is his age going to be a problem?

- 14) Interaction – How interactive is he? What does he offer? Games? Skits?

- 15) Music Selection – What company/website does he get his subscriptions. What genres do they cover, and how many CDs do they send per month? How broad and deep is his selection?

- 16) Lyrics – Does he use clean lyrics?

- 17) Important Songs – Ask him if he has the songs you MUST hear. Do not forget ethnic / religious / college music! If he does not have some, will he purchase them?

- 18) 40,000 Songs! – How many songs does he claim to have?

- 19) Vinyl, CD or Computer? –

- 20) Requests – How does he handle requests? If we have banned a song from our reception and it is requested, how would you handle that?
- 21) Slow Transition – Does he know what this means – perhaps calling it something else? How would you play both big band and club dance music at the same event?
- 22) Micro-Management – What is his reaction when you say you want to pick every song he plays – in order!
- 23) Volume – How does he monitor volume? How does he place speakers?
- 24) Arrival – When does he arrive?
- 25) Does he smoke, drink or use profanity?
- 26) Breaks – Does he take breaks?
- 27) Wedding Music – Does he provide wedding music?
- 28) Karaoke – If he provides it, does he consider himself a KJ that DJs or a DJ that KJs?
- 29) Children – How can he entertain them?
- 30) Observing a Reception or Party – Will he let you?

31) Problems- Have him list some problems he has solved in previous wedding receptions.

32) Importance – What does he see as important in a DJ?

33) How Many Parties - How many parties will he be doing on the day of your reception?
– Ask him if changing the time will matter. If it does, he may be doing more gigs than yours.

34) Reception Venue – Has he performed there before?

35) Professional – What is his day job?

36) Time in Business – How long has he owned the company?

37) Back-Up DJ – Who is his back-up DJ?

38) Multiple DJ – Does he recommend bringing more people than himself to the reception?

39) Meeting at an Office – Does he have an office?

40) Pressure – Is he pressuring you?

41) Discounts – Does he offer discounts?

42) Business Type – Is he incorporated or a sole proprietor?

43) BBB – Call BBB and see if anyone has complained about him.

44) Website – Evaluate his website.

45) DJ Association & Award – Is he involved in any trade associations and does he brag of any awards?

46) Contracts-

The name of the DJ Performing –

The name of the DJ Company –

Contact Information –

Equipment Package –

A Cost Breakdown and a Total Cost –

Contract Date –

Date of Event –

Se-Up Time –

Start Time –

End Time –

Total Hours Performing. –

Refund Policy –

Insurance –

Back-up DJ policy –

No Show/ DJ Cancellation Policy –

47) Insurance

Is his Equipment insured?

Is he himself insured?

48) Communication – How easy is it to reach him? What are his hours? What are his contact numbers?

49) Advertisement – Evaluate his ads if applicable.

50) Yellow Page – Does he have a yellow page ad? If so, how big?

- 51) Brochures and Videos – Evaluate his brochures and videos if applicable.
- 52) Photos – Does he have many photos of himself?
- 53) Audio Demo Tape – Does he offer one?
- 54) Bridal Shows – Does he participate in any? Which ones?
- 55) Recommendations – What do people say about him?
- 56) Wedding Coordinator – Will he work with or for a Wedding Coordinator.
- 57) Equipment – Does it sound like it is professional equipment? Do you recognize any household names?
- 58) Wireless Microphones – Does he use one? Does he back it up with a corded microphone?
- 59) Back-Up Equipment – Ask him if he can perform your wedding ceremony that is being held in a different location than the reception (whether you want him to do this or not.) His answer should reflect if he has back-up equipment or if he will have to use the same equipment for both events.
- 60) Emergency Kit. Does he bring an emergency kit, and if so, what is in it?
- 61) Dance Floor Lighting – What will he bring?

62) Props – What will he bring?

63) Dangerous Equipment – What will he bring?

64) Additional Skills/Equipment – Does he have anything else not mentioned?

65) Package Deals with Photographer, Videographer –

What type of Company is it?

66) Broker –

67) Multiple DJ Company –

68) Single Owner / Operator –

69) Directory – Generally will not give an interview.

70) Tipping - What is his tipping policy? Is it in the contract?

71) Questions – Your questions here!

72) Instinct – What is your gut level feeling about this DJ?

Written by DJ Kerry “KC” Cameron of <http://www.AwesomeDJ.com> and

<http://www.Cinderella-Weddings.com>

KC has entertained at hundreds of weddings and thousands of parties as a DJ, Magician and Game Host. He is also formally trained as a Wedding Coordinator.