

# CREATIVE WEDDING IDEAS to the MAX

*By Michael Nelson*



**P**roducing wedding videos is my love and my passion. I wish that was all that I did. But in Utah, the industry is very seasonal, so we have to offer other services. I have a degree in accounting, and I could probably earn more in that industry, but I chose this field because of my passion for it and the ability to be creative.

In the early 1980s I had a partner who had what I call the “Big Bucks Bug.” We parted after only a year because he didn’t like weddings and didn’t think there was any money to be made in providing memories on video.

He went after the big bucks corporate productions. It’s interesting now, 20 years later he is no longer in the video production industry, he’s a salesman for lawn products—manure actually. Nothing wrong with that, it makes your lawn greener.

I’m still producing wedding videos. I’m loving it more every day, and our company keeps increasing in size. I now have 13 employees.

What’s the secret behind the success of our business and our continued growth? I believe it’s because we’ve looked for and found ways to take our existing clients and enable them to want to spend a lot more with us.

Video is exciting—it’s fun, and emotional, is it not? It shouldn’t be unusual then that clients would be willing to spend more if their videographer properly presented them with more opportunities for doing so. Rather than looking to book more brides at the same amount, our aim is to increase revenue by getting existing weddings to be a bigger revenue generator. That’s our marketing strategy in a nutshell—and it’s working.

Ignorance is our biggest enemy in this industry. Most brides are not aware of the huge number of products that a professional wedding videographer can offer, or the quality that can be provided. In fact, we’re undervalued because of ignorance.

When you think about it, the typical bride who contacts you probably has prior

knowledge of only three, maybe four products that you can provide for her wedding: a photo montage, pre-ceremony coverage, ceremony and reception coverage.

By comparison, my own business offers brides at least 40 different products, and this list keeps growing.

There are three marketing hurdles that we have to overcome every time we book a bride, in terms of getting them to consider additional products.

First, you have to get a client to think of the product. In other words, think of a wedding. Secondly, you have to get them to think of hiring a professional for that product instead of Uncle Bob.

And thirdly, you have to get them to differentiate between professionals and select you. This works on a macro level and a micro level, and the same underlying principle applies to all businesses.

Our goal is to better meet our brides needs by maximizing our investment, including our equipment, our training, and our expertise



(which is even more important than our equipment) beyond the weekend and the slower time here in our region.

We've increased our initial sale by about 50% by offering multiple products. More importantly, by strategically knowing when to offer those products we've been able to add another 40% to what they purchase.

Initially, I play all the products for the client and thus help educate them. Don't be discouraged if you screen something they've never seen before, like the Bridal Elegance, for example, and they don't buy it. Market studies show most consumers need to have contact with a potential product at least three times before they decide to purchase it. When you're educating, you have to be willing to plant seeds and give them time to grow.

#### 4-Category Product Breakdown

I position all of our products into four distinct categories: Pre-Wedding Day Products; Wedding Day Products; Product Presentation; Post-Wedding Day Products.

You already know many of the products, whether you're offering them or not. For example, Pre-Wedding Day Products include: Bridal Shower, Photo Montage, Courtship Photo Montage, Heritage Photo Montage, Love Story, Date Video, Bridal Elegance, Groom's Moment, Flower Girl Elegance, Music Video, Groom's Day Out, Bride's Day Out, Rehearsal, Rehearsal Dinner, and The Lace Opener.

In category two we offer: Groom's Morning, Bride's Morning, Ceremony with one, two, or three cameras, Same-Day Edit, Cocktail Hour, Reception Dinner, and Wedding Party Imaging Session (that's the photo shoot; but I don't like the term "photo session" because it can unintentionally convey to the bride that this is the photographer's product or that he/she is in charge—or by using the term "photo session" that the photographer is first, or more important).

Today, even photographers are using the term "digital imaging" in place of the word "photography" and that's wonderful for us

because as videographers we are digital imagers as well. So I use the term Wedding Party Imaging Session and do everything in my power to avoid the term photography.

Other products in this category include Reception Interviews, Daddy/Daughter Dance, and the Mother's Tribute.

Our "Presentation" category shows the many different ways we can display our products for our client. Included is our large screen projection, which I refer to as our Theater Showing (good for large groups); our Picture Frame Showing (A 20" flat LCD screen with a beautiful frame around it. Good for medium-size groups and repeat playing); Table Top Presentation (a set-up for a smaller group where we have little picture frame showings as table top displays), and also our Video Print Displays.

Featured among our Post-Wedding Day products, produced after the wedding, are Love



Reflections (a documentary, like a Love Story, but about the wedding day itself); First Dance, Daddy/Daughter Dance; Mother/Son dance, special speeches or musical numbers, Honeymoon Photo Montage; Recap; Closing Credits; Edited Original Footage; Simple DVD; Hollywood-style DVD; Personalized Cases; Archival Submaster; Anniversary Updates, and video prints.

Producing these products can create or add to your edit backlog. We don't have next-day delivery for the sum total of all products selected.

What we do now instead, is help the client adjust to the wait time and see this interval period as a positive, not a negative thing.

We do that by having a series of client meetings. A pre-meeting with our client allows us to discuss her wedding and confirm we are meeting her video needs. We also ask for a post-meeting about two weeks after their honeymoon (you have to let them go on their honeymoon) and at that point we review what they purchased and pre-planned for their wedding versus what actually happened. Since,

usually these two don't match, we give brides choices to help better meet her needs.

Yes, it leads to additional sales, but the bride is very responsive because she knows you are offering products she needs—and wants. Remember, the 2003 WEVA Nationwide Survey of Brides proved that brides do value video—but that they value it most highly after the wedding. So instead of trying to keep "fighting the tide" before the event, we changed our marketing strategy to "go with the flow" afterwards—to sell when the feeling of value was at its highest point, and we're doing a lot better as a result.)

Generally, what brides select at a pre-plan session is rarely the full extent of what the final video will become. Often in our Pre/Post or Approval meetings they are willing and able to buy our additional video products.

#### Coping With Turnaround Time

While I have a standard delivery time, the bride always ends up adding to this delivery time. From our pre-plan meeting, where we discuss shooting, she already knows I'm not going to begin the edit phase until we have the post-wedding meeting.

The post-wedding meeting is often delayed or postponed by the bride herself. That, of course, helps my editing time.

Similarly, after the post-meeting there will be additional production time needed because we're often adding the additional segments she's purchased, or she's in the process of taking time to decide on the products. That helps with my delivery time.

We have one final approval meeting where the couple comes in and approves the video before it goes to DVD. And here again, the couple has another chance to buy some additional products—and they usually do.

During this whole process, from day one, we're educating the client to recognize and expect these phases of our production schedule. As a result of our client's awareness and continual involvement through the entire process we have reduced complaints about the turnaround time.

Also, by selling in stages instead of trying to sell everything up front before the wedding, we're able to sell more products to the client and the client gets a more complete video of the most special event in their life. And, they themselves are kept involved in the process instead of left hanging, waiting for their final DVD.

Interestingly, these steps do not increase my overall delivery time (productions have

not been delayed), however, they do result in bigger sales and happier clients.

#### Selling Options—‘The Lace Opener’

The key to selling add-ons is to ask key questions. When I find I’m speaking with a bride who has put a lot of time and attention into her attire head-to-toe, including her dress, tiara, veil, shoes, necklace, etc., this bride is going to love what we call our “Lace Opener.”

At first, I had a hard time with the idea of asking the bride some very personal questions. I’m a guy. And when a guy starts asking for intimate details about your dress, like the pattern, the texture, the train, and he doesn’t own a dress shop...we’ll, you get some pretty funny looks.

But it became apparent that I had to have an understanding of more than just lenses, signal-to-noise ratios and lux levels, in order to get better video results at my wedding shoots. Seeking to understand things from this other perspective has, I feel, made me a much better videographer—and so I say to all guys...“You can do this!”

I actually went to a bride’s dress shop to take some time to learn some details about dress designs and terminologies. And, after 20 years, I’m now asking about details as if I actually know what I’m talking about. “What’s the bodice like? What kind of lace do you have? Do you have sequins? How long is your train?”

I’ll ask her to tell me about it. She’ll start to get involved and get excited. But if she doesn’t, that’s my signal to skip the Lace Opener. If she is excited, you can honestly tell her, “I really think you ought to see this. You’re really excited about your dress and what you’re wearing. I think you’ll like this. Take a look..”

When you pre-qualify, and then present the product in that personal manner, by the time she’s done watching it, she wants to have it.

For the Lace Opener, the bride brings her materials to our studio. We spend about 15 minutes shooting—recording detail shots and close-ups of clothing, footwear, jewelry, etc. Set-up and take-down is about 15 minutes for each. Edit time is about 45 minutes. So in total, it’s done with about 1.5 hours of time and talent. And it’s a nice little add-on, shot during the week, not on the rush of the wedding day itself.

Our Heritage Photo Montage product is intended for the bride who feels a tight bond with her ancestors—her grandparents in particular.

This product is a nice way to honor the

grandparents if they have passed away, and it’s a wonderful way to involve the grandparents if they’re alive, since this segment is a tribute to her heritage and a nice way to show she’s proud of her family history. It’s a photo montage that focuses on photos of the grandparents.

It’s awesome when you have a wedding photo of the grandparents, but it’s hard to always get that. But so many other photos can be used to create a very emotionally moving sequence. It’s a really wonderful addition.

#### Gaining Total Control

Our Bridal Elegance product is one that I’ve demonstrated at WEVA EXPO and at WEVA Institute workshops. It’s a Pre-Wedding segment, shot with the bride in her wedding gown on a weekday before the wedding. It’s all about her and how beautiful she looks as a bride. Of all of our products, this is my favorite. I absolutely love it and I’m passionate about it.

It’s the time where I am completely in control and have the ability to produce the most beautiful product that I can create.

I control the look, the location, the motion, the day, the time of day, wind, props, everything, including lighting. We usually use two light sources sometimes three or four.

In shooting this segment, the most difficult kind of camerawork and detail can be done and checked, and re-done until we get it right. We have the time to use all of our skills to get the most flattering shots.

The grooms absolutely love this segment. This is where the idea came from. We listened to our client when he said, “I want a beautiful video of my wife.”

Mom and Dad love it, too. When we project it at the wedding dinner, I’ve had Dads who just go to pieces, and 30 minutes later they are still dabbing their eyes. I love to stir people’s emotions!

The Bridal Elegance has become a “price leader” for us. I didn’t intend it to be, but that’s what it’s become. This segment alone gets clients in the door, even if they aren’t interested in that particular product for their own wedding. They’re impressed and hopeful that the products they are excited about will be just as good as our Bridal Elegance.

#### Creating New Products

After showing the Bridal Elegance a number of times, we encountered a mother of a groom who was feeling a bit left out. So we created something unique for her son, and in doing so, created another product for us to sell.

This one doesn’t focus on his tux and cufflinks, instead we focus on his hobbies and talents. I think the hardest part was coming up with a name for this segment. We settled on The Gentleman’s Moment, or The Groom’s Moment. One of our grooms, for instance is the number one team horse roper in the state. He’s in the top 20 in the nation, so for him, we created the ultimate cowboy video. But the idea is you can use any hobby for a springboard—waterskiing, weightlifting, tennis, or whatever the groom is interested in.

A product that is becoming a real eye-catcher at our studio is a new concept we call The Flower Girl Elegance. We simply take everything we do in the Bridal Elegance and apply it to the flower girl.

Once again, it’s done before the wedding, on a day (or days) when we can be in complete control. It’s a great concept and another good price leader because it separates and distinguishes your work and your talent from others. Everyone loves kids and in this segment you can capture some really beautiful, and loving shots.

By creating multiple products, by taking time to discover what the bride and groom are interested in, listening to others in the wedding party, and inserting opportunities to sell the products after the wedding when video is most highly valued, we’ve been able to better meet our brides’ needs and increase our revenue tremendously.

It’s an exciting time for videographers who take time to better understand the market we are all serving—including research about the value of video, and use that knowledge to create the most desirable products. The continuing evolution of digital video technology, combined with creative thinking, and an eye on market trends continues to stretch the ability for us all to increase our income per job, and increase our growth as well. ©

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