

5 Star Discos

Professional Wedding, Party & Corporate DJ

Guide to Booking a Wedding DJ

www.5stardiscos.com

About Me –

Hi, My name is Graham Moore, sometimes otherwise known as DJ Graham and I run 5 Star Discos. I have spent the past 10 years working as a professional DJ and musician performing at hundreds of Weddings, Birthdays, Proms, Engagement Parties, Party Nights, Corporate Functions across Scotland. Infact you name it I've done it. In that time I have performed at a wide range of venue across the length and breadth of Scotland such as Turnberry, Stirling Castle, Cameron House, Murrayfield Stadium, Glasgow Science Centre, The Balmoral, Dynamic Earth, St Andrews Old Course plus many more.

My experience as a musician/performer has given me a great insight into not just reading a crowd but entertaining them. In that time span I have went from running a small operation into being one of the most respected and sought after DJ's in the business.

I decided to put this guide together as probably 90% of couples who book me have never booked a DJ before and never will again and the task can be daunting, especially for such an important occasion as your wedding.

This guide doesn't apply just to me, it gives you the information to make an informed choice when booking any DJ for your big day.



DJ Graham

What to look for in a specialist wedding DJ

One of the biggest misconceptions is about DJ's is that we are all created equal. This is not the case and especially not where Weddings are concerned. There is a very big difference between DJ'ing at a Wedding and at a pub/club. There is even a big difference between DJ'ing at a birthday party and a Wedding. Most parties don't take much in the way of planning from our point of view, but a Wedding has so many other fine details to be taken care. You will be surprised to find that the majority of work for a Wedding disco happens before the event itself.

It is now the 21st century and discos have moved with the times. A contemporary DJ will have high quality, modern sound and light equipment usually in the form of LED lighting fixtures. They should also have a variety of systems to suit your need. You don't need a massive sound system if your Wedding reception is only for 20 guests, and like-wise your DJ should have the option of offering you a choice of lighting setups dependant on your tastes, from subtle mood lighting to the full on Ibiza rave experience.

A specialist Wedding DJ will also have intricate knowledge of the entire Wedding day, from the ceremony, through drinks reception, to the breakfast, to the evening entertainment. Most DJ's now offer half day and full day packages and it is vital they know how a typical wedding runs. A good Wedding DJ will also perform Master of Ceremonies duties throughout your day if required.

Legalities and Certificates

A professional Wedding DJ will run a totally legal business. There is a whole host of certificates and processes that must be followed to ensure a DJ business complies with the law.

The main certificates a DJ will require is PAT testing, PLI, ELI, vehicle insurance and a ProDub licence.

PAT Testing is carried out on a yearly basis on all electrical equipment that plugs into the mains. This ensures the equipment is entirely safe for use. A lot of venues now require a DJ to provide proof of PAT certificates before they will let them in the building.

Public Liability Insurance (PLI) is insurance a DJ carries that will cover them in the event of an accident to the public which was their fault, or if they accidentally cause damage to the venue or other property.

Employee Liability Insurance (ELI) is insurance a DJ/company will carry that covers any employee in the event of accident or damage to a venue or property.

Vehicle Insurance is pretty self explanatory, however a pro DJ will have business insurance covering them in the event of an accident. Also a pro will have vehicle breakdown cover and possibly the use of a back up vehicle.

Pro Dub is a licence issued from the Performers Rights Society (PRS) to ensure DJ's who copy music from CD to digital format are doing so legally. If the DJ uses CD's, vinyl or digital downloads without transferring then they do not require a ProDub licence.

A professional DJ will also be able to complete Health and Safety forms and Method Statements for events. A lot of venues require these as standard now.

Tax

Professional Wedding DJ's will not just be Tax Registered, but will also issue contracts and receipts with all bookings, leaving a paper trail. One of the biggest outgoings for any DJ is PAYE and NI contributions, these generally amount to over 20% of the cost of hiring a DJ. Booking a DJ who deals cash in hand or doesn't pay tax will usually result in a cheaper quote. But they will ultimately let you down if they are prosecuted by the HMRC. There have been some high profile cases recently of DJ's getting their equipment confiscated, or simply pocketing money and not turning up. No contract, no receipt, no proof!

Legal Music and Software

Having legal music AND software ensures you will receive the best quality sound and reliable system to play it on.

Dress To Impress

Weddings by and large are formal affairs and your DJ should dress to fit in. A shirt and tie is a minimum requirement of any Wedding DJ. I offer clients a choice of a dinner suit with bow tie, Black shirt, waist coat and tie or a full Kilt outfit.

Prepared for the unexpected

No one likes to hear there is the possibility their DJ won't be able to make their event. However it would be naive to think that sometimes incidents outwith our control can't happen. Luckily I have never had to cancel a gig, but in the extremely unlikely event that I can't make it I have back up DJ's of a similar quality available for cover. Professional DJ's will also carry a range of back up equipment so if anything breaks on the night the party isn't over.

Wide knowledge of songs and genres

All DJ's will have their preference of music style, but they should have a wide knowledge of genres and carry enough music to please everyone from the kiddies right through to Granny and Grandpa.

Easy to Contact

This goes without saying, if you need to contact your venue you expect to do it without any hassle and the same applies for your Wedding DJ. A variety of contact details should readily be available on your DJ's email, website, contract and receipt.

Did I mention Contract and Receipt?

Yes! Quite a few times because it is imperative you get a contract with every booking. You wouldn't book a venue, hand over money and not expect a contract. Your DJ is no different. A contract lets both parties know all the details and means you have backup in writing if there is a disagreement about the booking. A good idea is to save a copy of your contract to your phone so you will definitely have it with you at the Wedding should you need to refer to it. A receipt proves that you have paid a deposit or balance and is a good indication that the DJ is tax registered.

How do you spot the right DJ?

In an ideal world you would see a DJ on a night out, love them, book them and that's another part of the Wedding process put to rest. This very rarely happens and you will likely find yourself searching the internet for a DJ.

A good way to find a DJ is by recommendation or testimonials. A DJ will have testimonials from recent events which you should be able to contact the client directly to verify. If after your event you are happy with your DJ's performance, we always appreciate some feedback and a testimonial which can help secure us other work. After each gig I contact clients to ensure they are 100% happy with how the event went.

A DJ's website is a good indication of their level of professionalism. A website is a modern DJ's number 1 tool of promotion, if the website looks like it has been thrown together in a matter of minutes, is the DJ really serious about portraying a professional image?

But lastly my top recommendation to spot if your DJ is right for you is simply pick up the phone and call them or meet them. If they can answer all your questions, put you at ease and give you the service you require then you are onto a winner.

Your DJ should be happy to have a pre booking meeting to discuss your needs. Most people want a large input in their entertainment and your DJ should be able to work with you to ensure you get the entertainment just the way you want it. They should have a party planner that details any special

requirements/announcements including songs to definitely be played and songs not to be played under an circumstances. They will work with you to help create a playlist if you wish, but also remember the DJ's are experts at what they do so have an open ear to their suggestions. They will know how to make a night flow and what tracks bomb the dancefloor.

Your DJ should turn up on the day knowing exactly what is going to happen and when.

Deciding Factors

Easily the biggest deciding factor in most Wedding DJ bookings is the cost. Hiring a professional Wedding DJ can seem like a large expense when you can get a glut of guys on Gumtree offering to do your Wedding for £150. However don't be fooled by this false economy. If you look back at the equipment, basic certificates and insurances a DJ needs to run a professional business, these all add up to a substantial amount and the DJ must charge accordingly. A DJ offering to do it cheap as chips will in most cases actually walk away with more money than a pro simply because they don't pay tax or have the relevant documents, you may think you are getting a deal but are you willing to take the risk on the biggest day of your life. If you had the choice between paying for a quality cake or paying someone to knock one up in their kitchen with the cheapest ingredients it would be a no brainer.

An experienced, specialist Wedding DJ will cost around £350 minimum for an evening performance from 19:30 – Midnight. Now that seems like a lot, but when put

put into context let's see how it adds up. Let's base this calculation on a standard booking from 19:30 – Midnight which is 4 and a half hours or just under 50% of entire wedding day. Also bear in mind the evening reception is the only part of the day ALL guests get to enjoy, whether they were at the ceremony or not. An average wedding costs approximately £20,000. £350 is 1.75% of that budget! Say you had an intimate wedding costing £3500, that is still just 10% for your DJ who is a massive part of the day. Infact my research, and others show that food, entertainment and the venue are the 3 most talked about points afterwards. Also remember you are paying for experience and expertise. You may pay hundreds of pounds for a Wedding cake which contains £20 worth of ingredients, but you aren't paying for the ingredients, you are paying for skill and expertise in putting the cake together. Your DJ is the same.

Time a DJ spends on a Wedding-

Would you believe a specialist Wedding DJ will likely spend more time preparing for your wedding than what they do performing at it? The prep and planning for a Wedding usually consists of sending emails, phone calls, 1 or 2 meetings with you, a venue visit, possibly loading in the

night before your Wedding, issuing contracts and receipts, helping create a playlist with you, checking and maintaining equipment, sending your venue certificates, sourcing music, ensuring certificates are in order, completing health and safety forms, filling in your party planner, travel to the venue...the list goes on. When you book a specialist Wedding DJ, you aren't just receiving a professional service on the day, you are getting a thorough and professional service from the moment the contract and deposit is received. A £150 DJ from gumtree simply won't put these hours of work in.

Changing Factors of Cost

One of any DJ's top queries is 'Why don't you publish your prices online?'. Some DJ's do, but in my opinion no 2 events, especially Weddings, are the same so there is no 'one price fits all' system. There are a few factors that can alter the cost of your DJ, the main ones being travel distance, timings, difficulty of venue load in (may need to employ a roadie for a difficult venue), size of PA required (this is linked to the size of room or number of guests), lighting setup, if the DJ has to stay over and extras. These are just a few but it highlights how 1 set price would not work in general.

DJ vs. iPod – The Gloves are OFF-

One of the biggest trends, and hotly debated topics is should you just have an ipod instead of a DJ. Being a DJ I am going to be biased so I have just came up with some Pro's and Con's of both and I'll let you decide.

iPod – Pros

Cheap - Most folk have an iPod and it means you just have to hire a PA to tun it through.

Can play whatever you want – You have complete control over the playlist, but remember a pro DJ will work with you to create a suitable playlist. Also bear in mind, you may love all the cool indie tracks, but will your other guests?

(I'm sorry but that genuinely is the only pro's, all be it a very weak ones, I have for using an iPod)

iPod – Cons

You have to hire a PA – Most folk don't know what a suitable PA is and can end up spending over the odd's.

What if something goes wrong – Again most people won't know how to work the equipment so if your music cuts out, what do you do? Party is over. Or else you could hire a tech

for the evening, but this would probably work out about the same as hiring DJ.

No Backup – Again if something does break, you are unlikely to have any backup to ensure the night keeps going.

You can currently find companies offering an ipod hire system for weddings. In my experience, none have been of enough quality or power to perform for anything other than a very small wedding.

No Lights – An added cost is you will have to hire in additional lights if your venue doesn't have them.

No flow to the event – A DJ isn't just pushing buttons, their years of experience let's them know what songs to play to get the dancefloor filled and when to give people a rest, what songs to mix together and how to properly do it. An iPod can't make any special announcements, call the buffet or last orders, but my main gripe with iPods is come the end of your evening it's the close of the biggest and happiest day of your life this should build to a rousing crescendo and a fantastic send off for the now happily married couple. My experience of iPod gigs has been the music keeps playing until the lights go up and the venue cuts power.

Band vs DJ

If you are reading this I will assume you are fairly set on booking a DJ but thought I would include this anyway. Once again I'll deal with pro's and con's.

Band Pros –

Live Music – Many people believe you cannot beat the atmosphere of live music.

Focal point of the evening – A great band will get all your guests talking. (Bear in mind so will a great DJ)

Band Cons –

Live Music – Live music is great, but a bad band playing instruments can ruin an evening.

Cost – It goes without saying a band will cost more than a DJ. A 3 or 4 piece band can easily cost +£1250.

Timings – Bands generally perform shorter than a DJ. The standard for a band is 20:00 – Midnight with a 30-40 min break. Some bands will only perform 2 x 45min sets!

Noise – A band can only be as quiet as their drummer (which is pretty loud), and some bands just like volume. You don't want your guests sitting in an adjacent bar with a headache.

Lights – Bands tend to have little, or nothing in the way of a lighting show.

Space – Most DJ's can fit into the smallest of spaces whereas a band takes up a lot more room simply because there is more people and equipment. Some venues simply can't accommodate a band.

Sound Limiters – A lot of DJ's choose not to play venues with sound limiters (I am happy to play these) but for some bands it is simply impossible for them to play with a sound limiter system as there is no way for them to keep their volume down.

Pub bands cashing in – In recent years there has been a large number of pub bands jumping into the Wedding market for a quick buck whilst not having the quality equipment or experience to meet your expectations. If you do book a band ask for their experience and testimonials.

I do love live music and have worked with many great bands and musicians over the years so if you do decide to book a band please feel free to get in touch and I may be able to point you somewhere in the right direction.

Extras

You will find most contemporary DJ's will offer a whole host of Extras that can be booked to enhance your Wedding. Some of which include

Ceilidh Calling – You shouldn't be charged extra for this but many DJ's these days can call a host of popular Ceilidh dances incase your guests don't know the steps. I use a wireless mic system that allows me to come into the crowd to demonstrate and have a good bit of banter with the crowd.

Master of Ceremonies (MC) – Again a professional Wedding DJ should be able to direct your entire day if you require them to

Mics for Speeches – Some DJ's, myself included, offer packages where you can have mics for during the speeches.

Background music – Again a lot of DJ's offer background music for parts of your day such as during the ceremony, drinks reception and dinner. I will cover this in detail in the half day and full packages

Mood/Uplighting – Always popular, many DJ's offer this service which washes your walls with light to match your colour scheme. I use modern wireless LED battens that give great light, have no wires for tripping and run cold so there is no danger of a kid touching one and burning themselves. At night these can be changed to dance in time to the music, giving your whole room a nightclub atmosphere.

Gobo/Spotlight – A custom projection from a spotlight that would have your initials and the date of your wedding. I offer a custom fabrication and an economy version of this service.

Dancefloors – I have an arrangement with the largest supplier of dancefloors to give my clients the best quality dancefloors at a great cost. Variations include LED, Chess board, colour panels.

Video & Pics - Some DJ's will take pictures and videos of your evening. I offer this as a free service and guests can view and share the material online.

Live Instrumental Music – I can perform live acoustic guitar instrumental music for your guests.

Packages – A few DJ's now offer a host of packages.

The standard is an Evening Wedding Disco which usually consists of a DJ performing from 19:30 – Midnight.

I also offer

Half Day Package – This includes background music during dinner to set the atmosphere and avoid awkward silences and Mics for Speeches.

Full Day Package – This includes background music in the ceremony room for guests arriving, music for during the ceremony (entrance, exit and signing of the register)

I can cut these songs to specific lengths if required.

Background music during drinks reception, Mics available for the photographer to gather groups together and of course music and mics during dinner. I am in attendance with all these packages to ensure everything runs smoothly.

With any of the packages I offer free live guitar instrumental music if required.

The main benefit of these packages is that your entire music entertainment for the day is sorted and it means during turn over the schedule is more likely to be met

because most of the equipment will already be in the venue.

Common Mistakes When Booking a DJ

These are some of the most common mistakes that couples come to me with when they have been let down. Please ensure you don't follow the same mistakes.

No contract or receipt – How can you prove you have a booking or have paid without a receipt. I once had a couple who called me last minute because their DJ had simply forgot he had a booking because he had no paper work. Unfortunately in the past other couples have been scammed because they have no proof of what they have paid.

Getting harassed or hard sold – Now DJ's are a business like any other, but like any other they should be appreciative of you considering to employ their services. Some couples feel pressured into booking a DJ because of their hard sell tactics or under cutting. Ensure you are happy with your DJ and if at any point you feel under pressure, don't be shy or embarrassed to walk away. Remember this is a big decision and you want to ensure you make the right choice for you.

Getting a friend/relative to do it – Now this doesn't always spell disaster, but for your Wedding day you really want to ensure you have someone competent and capable of pulling off the event you deserve. Someone you know may be great at running Karaoke down their local pub but that doesn't necessarily mean they can pull off a successful Wedding disco. Unfortunately one of the main reasons I get last minute bookings is couples being let down by a friend of a friend who offered to do a cheap or free disco but then canceled because they got offered a higher paying gig or just fancied a night out.

Booking a DJ without the proper certificates –

Certificates won't be (and probably shouldn't be) the first thing on your mind when booking your Wedding DJ, but I cannot stress the importance of ensure your DJ has all these in place. It is not uncommon for a DJ without PAT or PLI to turn up to a venue and be turned away because the venue won't let them in the building to work. This may seem harsh from your venue but they have an obligation to ensure any suppliers coming into their venue are safe to do so. Unfortunately at this point it is usually too late to find a replacement. I am a member of DJ Mark which checks I have the necessary, upto date certificates and I am happy to show them to prospective clients and venues.

Leaving it too late- If you see a dress your heart is set on and you order it, the chances are maybe more than one person will have the same dress on the same dress as you. If you see a DJ you have your heart set on, the issue is we can only be one place at one time and once we are booked we can't be do any other events. For this reason a DJ should be one of the first things you consider after booking your venue. Many DJ's work on a first come, first served basis for fairness. If you contact a DJ and hang about for weeks or months, another couple could come in and book them for that date. I am in no means saying rush in and book the first DJ you find. But carry out your research and if you are happy then do the contract and pay the deposit to avoid disappointment. As a general rule quality Wedding DJ's can be booked as far as 18 months to 2 years in advance.

Conclusion

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this guide. I believe I have covered just about everything you may need to know when it comes to booking your Wedding DJ.

My wife gave me the idea of creating this guide. I got married in July 2013 and I took for granted that I knew exactly what to look for in entertainment and what questions to ask. My wife commented that although she knew just about everything to do with dresses, cars, make up, decorations...she would have been clueless about what to look for when it came to entertainment.

Booking your DJ can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be. If this guide has helped take abit of stress from just one couple, then I am happy I took the time to write it.

Best Regards

DJ Graham

www.5stardiscos.com info@5stardiscos.com

© 5 Star Discos. All rights reserved. Not to be copied