

# 5 Star Discos

Professional Wedding, Party & Corporate DJ

Guide to booking a party DJ

[www.5stardiscos.com](http://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 peoples who book me have never booked a DJ before and never will again and the task can be daunting, especially when it is crucial you get the entertainment just right.

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



# DJ Graham

## What to look for in a good party 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 parties are concerned. There is a very big difference between DJ'ing at a party and at a pub/club. Whilst there generally isn't as much planning goes into a party disco as a Wedding, there is still a good deal of planning required before hand. You will may be surprised to know that most of the work happens before the event itself.

It is now the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 party 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 good party Dj will have an intricate knowledge of lots of different genres of music. They should be able to play a wide mix to keep all your guests happy from the young kids to the Grannies and Grandpas.

## Legalities and Certificates

A professional party 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 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 certificate 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 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 break down 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 party 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**

Parties by and large are fairly formal affairs and your DJ should dress to fit in. A shirt and tie is a minimum requirement of any Professional 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.

### **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 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 party 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 whole 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 arrange 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 DJ bookings is the cost. Hiring a professional DJ can seem like a large expense when you can get a glut of guys on Gumtree offering to do your party for £100. 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 such an important event to save a few quid?

An experienced, professional Party DJ will cost around £200 minimum for an evening performance from 19:30 – Midnight. Now that seems like a lot, but when put

into context a big contributing factor to the success of your evening is how good the DJ does. A DJ really can make or break your night.

### **Time a DJ spends on a Party-**

Would you believe a Professional DJ will more than likely spend more time preparing for your party than what they do performing at it? The prep and planning for a party usually consists of sending emails, phone calls, meetings, a venue visit, possibly loading in the night before your event, 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. So when you book a professional 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 £100 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 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.

### 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 parties. In my experience, none have been of enough quality or power to perform for anything but a very small party.

**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 big party and this should build to a rousing crescendo and a fantastic send off. 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.

**Pub bands cashing in** – In recent years there has been a large number of pub bands jumping into the party 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 party. 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.

**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 name and party details. 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.

## **Common Mistakes When Booking a DJ**

These are some of the most common mistakes that people 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 someone 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 others 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 people 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 party you really want to ensure you have someone competent and capable of pulling of 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 of a successful party disco. Unfortunately one of the main reasons I get last minute bookings is people 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 party 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 bookers and venues.

**Leaving it too late-** If you see a DJ you have your heart set on, the issue is there 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 another person 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.

## **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 party DJ.

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 person, then I am happy I took the time to write it.

Best Regards

*DJ Graham*

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