

10 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Wedding DJ

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Have you ever hired a wedding DJ? If you're like most brides, you probably haven't. With little or no experience in this area, how do you know what questions to ask to find an entertainer who will be an asset to your reception—and avoid those prone to equipment malfunctions and embarrassing situations?

When we receive calls or emails inquiring about our wedding services, more often than not the first thing brides ask is how much we charge. In most cases this isn't because they are looking for the cheapest DJ they can find—they just don't know what else to ask.

Fortunately for you, by reading this article you're well on your way to becoming an informed wedding DJ shopper. Below are ten questions you can ask to efficiently assess the expertise of your potential DJ candidates and determine if they have your best interests at heart. You'll notice most of the questions are open ended. This puts you in control—because you're asking how they do things before telling them what you want. If you ask "Do you do _____?" you give them the opportunity to say "Yes, absolutely!" even if they're lying through their teeth.

What type of events do you specialize in?

In most cases it is very valuable to work with someone who is familiar with wedding-specific traditions and procedures. This enables them to provide you advice and assistance in planning the details of your reception. Being a musician, music lover, or even DJing in a bar or club does not mean someone will be a good wedding DJ. A good wedding DJ won't just play music for the dancing portion of the evening—they'll also serve as your Master of Ceremonies and communicate with you and your other vendors behind the scenes to ensure your entire reception goes smoothly.

How do you decide what music to play?

Most weddings will have guests with a variety of ages and backgrounds—therefore it typically works best to play a variety of music. The specifics of that variety should be dependent on the demographics of your guests and what they are dancing to—not the DJ's personal favorites. The playlist should also be influenced by song requests from you and your guests.

How do you decide how loud to play the music?

Typically too loud is a bigger problem than too soft. In most cases you will have family or friends at your wedding who haven't seen each other in a while who want to be able to converse as well as dance. If the music is too loud to chat comfortably in the back of the room, more guests will leave earlier. A good DJ will be able to create a good atmosphere on the dance floor without blasting out the entire room.

Many DJs differentiate their wedding packages based on the equipment they bring. If you are looking for a loud dance club type atmosphere, your room is oddly shaped, or you are expecting an extremely large number of guests you may benefit from additional speakers. For the majority of weddings, however, a large sound system is completely unnecessary.

When will you set up?

Any good DJ will want to arrive sufficiently early to completely set up, test, and adjust their equipment before your guests arrive. Setting up after the reception has started is not only an ugly distraction to your guests, it makes it impossible for the DJ to fully test his equipment's operability and adjust to the acoustics of the room. This normally leads to poor sound quality and uneven volume. It also greatly increases the likelihood of blown circuit breakers and all varieties of microphone problems, including being too loud or too soft, wireless microphone interference or drop-outs, and feedback (loud screeching or booming).

Will you provide a wireless microphone we can use for toasts? What steps do you take to prevent feedback or drop-outs and ensure all my guests can hear announcements clearly?

Most wedding DJs will offer to provide a wireless microphone for you to use for your blessing, toasts, and to say thank-you to your guests. If the microphone cuts out in the middle of a toast or screeches loudly through the speakers, it completely ruins what could have been a great moment at your reception. Quality wireless microphones cost several hundred dollars, and many DJs skimp—to disastrous result. At minimum your DJ should arrive and set up early enough to do a live mic check at full volume everywhere you'll be using the microphone in your banquet room.

Even with the best planning and preparation, your DJ won't be able to control the actions of other people using the microphone. Usually those toasting the bride and groom aren't experienced public speakers, and as such are not intimately familiar with proper microphone technique. As such, some DJs will use a feedback eliminator device that automatically stops any screeching or rumbling that might arise from circumstances beyond the DJ's control. This further reduces the likelihood of disruption.

What do you do to communicate with me, my guests, and other vendors to ensure things go smoothly?

Your wedding day will be very busy, and probably somewhat stressful. During your reception you'll have guests coming to talk to you nearly constantly. Communicating personally with your photographer, caterer, DJ, and other vendors during the reception is difficult—and takes away time you should be using to enjoy your reception.

One of the most valuable services a good DJ will provide to your reception is communication—making announcements to keep guests informed of when things are happening, as well as communicating with you, your bridal party, and other vendors to coordinate events behind the scenes. A good DJ will serve as the Master of Ceremonies for your reception and will keep things flowing smoothly to ensure your guests don't get bored waiting for the dance to start, verify your dad is ready when it's time for the father-daughter dance, and make sure your photographer is ready and in position before the cake cutting or first dance starts.

Some DJs just show up and play music. Some DJs will make announcements from behind their DJ booth when you come ask them to. A good wedding DJ can and will do much more to aid the success of your event. To have a fun, stress-free wedding, you should make sure your DJ is a team player—someone who will help you plan your reception and will help your other vendors and bridal party carry it out in a manner that serves everyone's interests.

Who will be the DJ at my reception?

Some companies will let you choose your DJ and some will assign one to you. There isn't one right or wrong answer for every situation, however you should ask to ensure there aren't any surprises. In any case, make sure the person DJing your event will meet training and experience qualifications you are comfortable with. Things tend to go smoother if you're able to work directly with the DJ who will be at your reception at least in the final planning stages, and you should have the opportunity to meet with them in person if you wish.

What attire will the DJ wear?

Different DJs and DJ companies have different opinions on what they feel is appropriate to wear to a wedding. If your DJ will also be serving as the Master of Ceremonies and your spokesperson for the event, you are completely reasonable to want them to be well dressed.

May I contact some of your past wedding clients?

Some sources suggest asking to observe your DJ candidates at another reception. However, visiting someone's wedding as an uninvited guest is somewhat intrusive and only gives you a glimpse of what the DJ can do. Seeing what the DJ does isn't that meaningful unless you know what that client wanted.

Speaking with past clients can be much more informative with far less hassle, as you can get a complete assessment of the entire event and how satisfied they were with the total experience of using that vendor—from booking to planning to the last song at the end of the night. If your candidate is an experienced wedding DJ, they should have plenty of happy clients willing to provide a reference.

Do You Have Liability Insurance?

This is perhaps one of the best leading indicators of a competent DJ, as it shows they are serious about their business and have taken steps to protect their clients as well as themselves. Hiring a DJ with liability insurance ensures no bills are going to come back to you for something the DJ does. So even if Aunt Bertha trips over a speaker cord and sprains her ankle or a piece of the DJ's equipment scratches the fine hardwood floor of your venue, you can rest easy. Most commercial liability policies are at least \$1 million, and the DJ should be able to provide you a copy of their policy summary showing the coverage limits. (Some reception venues require outside vendors to be insured and provide proof—make sure you ask your venue contact about this so there are no surprises.)

Conclusion

If you ask these questions and listen carefully to the answers, you should have no trouble finding a great DJ whose style and personality fits the vision you have for your wedding reception. If you'd like more details about how we at Steve's Mobile Music answer these questions, give us a call at 877-DJ-STEVE anytime.

About The Author

Steve Saltzman is the owner of Steve's Mobile Music, a mobile DJ company specializing in weddings and school events based in Ames, Iowa. Steve has personally performed at over 100 wedding receptions throughout Iowa and surrounding states since founding the company in 2000.