

When you start thinking about entertainment for your wedding, remember there is more to it than just hiring someone to play music.

First you need to get some referrals. Some great resources to start with are friends, family, parents, photographers, caterers and hotels. You can also use major search engines such as Yahoo, Google, or professional organizations such as the American Disc Jockey Association ([www.adja.org](http://www.adja.org)). There are also the Yellow Pages and Bridal Magazines. Always double check referrals from catering hall managers, as some of them receive a "referral" fee from the DJ companies they recommend. Next, make a chart of the names and numbers you collect so you can keep notes as you talk to each one that you call.

One of the most puzzling things you will notice is the great disparity of pricing from one DJ service to the next. However, we suggest that you leave the question about price for last. First you need to find out what makes the DJ worth their fee and the many differences in what they provide. Remember, your entertainment can make or break a reception. While it may be attractive to shop for a DJ by price, just as with every other wedding service vendor, price alone is not the definitive factor in this decision. All DJ services are not equal.

These questions are listed in approximate order of importance. Once you compare your answers, you will be able to make an informed decision.

1. Are you available for my date?
2. Do you provide a written contract?
3. How many playing hours are included? Do you take breaks?
4. Is set up time and travel included?
5. How early do you arrive to set up?
6. Do you charge by the hour or do you have a package?
7. Is there an extra charge for additional hours?
8. (If needed) can you provide music for the ceremony?
9. Can you explain how you conduct the afternoon/evening?
10. Do you provide a wedding reception planner? Is it available on-line?
11. What do you wear?
12. Do you do the announcements? Are you the emcee?
13. Are you open to requests? From us? From the guests?
14. How large is your music collection and is it varied?
15. How do we pick our music for the event?
16. How do you handle music that is suggestive or contains explicit language?
17. Is a wireless microphone for speeches included?
18. Can you provide dance floor effects lighting and is it included in the price?
19. How long have you been in business?
20. How many weddings have you done?
21. Are you the DJ who will be at the reception?
22. What type of equipment do you have? Is it professional equipment?
23. Do you use CDs or compressed audio files such as MP3?
24. Do you legally own all of your recordings?
25. Do you bring back up equipment?
26. What is your deposit?
27. What is the total price for the package?
28. Are there any additional charges?
29. How is payment arranged?

Remember, there is a lot of prep work that should be done prior to the wedding by the DJ. He/she should be able to explain what they will do for you in advance to ensure the success of the event. This includes providing a planner, sample format of how the afternoon/evening will go, a tentative timeline, making sure they have the music you want and more. Advance preparation is what a professional DJ does as part of their service.

A true professional will spend between 10-20 hours preparing for your reception. This includes going over your plans (consultations), music preparation, setting up and tearing down equipment, working with the photographer and venue staff, etc. In other words, what you are paying for is more than just a body playing music!

Music, however, is a very important element at your wedding reception. You have thought about the music you would like and probably imagined the afternoon or evening as you would like it to be. If the DJ does not have a sufficient music library, you may find your guests won't be on the dance floor as much as you would like. A budget DJ simply has not invested the amount of money necessary to provide you with a first class selection of music. At a minimum, 5,000 songs is a necessity today for a professional, and 10,000 or more songs is a very good music library. (Note: make sure that the number of songs quoted by the DJ is valid, that is, that it refers to songs that could actually be used at an event and not every song listed on every CD. Also, make sure that the DJ will bring his or her entire library to your event). Therefore, it is important for you to select a DJ who has invested in an extensive music library. However, along with having the song titles, your DJ should also have a variety of music genres AND the know how to blend them into a pleasing mix. Ask about the musical background of your DJ. Since you will be having guests with varied musical tastes, your DJ needs to be familiar with all genres of music, including jazz, classical, folk and local flavors. Find out if the DJ encourages requests from the guests, or if he/she uses a set play list. Decide in advance which you prefer.

A first-rate disc jockey not only uses professional equipment, but knows how to adjust it to the venue so that the music is presented in best audio quality. Ask your DJ how much experience he/she has in sound reinforcement.

Also ask if the DJ's record library is legal. Some multi-DJ companies purchase one disc or sound file and then make multiple copies for their operators. This is not only illegal, but also unethical. You would not want your DJ's music collection confiscated the day before your wedding! Also, many DJ's today use the compressed audio MP3 format. Some people prefer CD audio quality, and some do not notice a difference. If you have a preference, make sure your DJ offers that format.

As the guests begin to arrive and enjoy cocktails and as they enjoy their meal it is nice to have quiet and appropriate background music playing. At some point after the arrival of the Bridal Party, it is customary for a toast or two to be made to the new couple. For this, a wireless microphone is a necessity. A wireless microphone allows each speaker to be more relaxed and comfortable and make their speech at locations a standard microphone cannot reach. A professional DJ should never charge extra to bring or use a wireless microphone. It should be a standard part of his equipment setup.

After you book a DJ, you will need to reach them. Knowing they are available full-time without additional costs to you is comforting. Having a toll-free telephone number could save you quite a bit of money. Does the DJ company have fax service? Does your DJ carry a cell phone for calls needing a quick response? Additionally, a well-designed website may provide extra benefits such as an on-line planner and music selection lists.

Finally, listen to the DJ as they speak. Does he/she have a pleasing voice and personality? Remember, what you hear on the phone will be twice as good or bad when amplified through a sound system. Make sure the person you are talking to is the one that will do the wedding reception. If they assign one of their associates to you, ask to speak to the DJ who will be doing the reception. Never accept someone with whom you have never talked in person. He/she should also be willing to meet with you in person. Remember, having confidence in WHO you hire is of prime importance in all of your planning. As with all things in life, quality and professionalism is priceless.

The bitter taste of poor quality remains long after the attractiveness of low price is forgotten.