

THE “I DO” INVESTMENT

Wedding Guests Agree: Put Money Where the Mouths Are

(April 23, 2012) – Just over 61 million Americans have plans to attend one or more weddings this year, but it’s going to cost them. The [*American Express Spending and Saving Tracker*](#) found they expect to spend \$339 per wedding to attend. While celebrities don’t seem to spare any expense on their nuptials – many engaged couples and wedding guests are trying to keep to a budget. With most everyone watching their wallets, where should the betrothed spend the biggest bucks? Sixty-two percent of consumers agree it’s the meal.

Let them Eat Cake! They can always work it off on the dance floor.

Following the meal, consumers say the venue (52%), entertainment (52%) and wedding cake (50%) are almost equally important when deciding which parts of the wedding should get a boost in budget. At the bottom of the list – Save the Dates (33%), transportation for the wedding party (31%) or wedding guests (22%) and guest favors (28%).

Not surprisingly, men and women aren’t exactly walking down the same aisle. Women believe more of the budget should be allocated to the wedding dress (53% of women vs. 44% of men) as well as the ceremony venue (54% vs. 43%), flowers (49% vs. 41%) and the bar (41% vs. 35%). But while men and women differ on investing big in the cosmetic wedding details, they both agree that food should be at the top of the “must spend on” list.

Do I Stay or Do I Go Go Now

While brides and grooms-to-be calculate the ROI of chicken over fish, guests are also weighing the economics of accepting a wedding invitation. From gifts to travel arrangements, clothing, pre-wedding celebrations to childcare preparations, wedding guests expect they will spend, on average, \$339 in 2012 ([down from \\$490 in 2011](#).) For those in the wedding party, the average expense bumps up to \$377, falling from last year’s \$539.

The average amount guests expect to spend per wedding this year has dropped in many categories, including hotel stays, transportation, dining out and arrangements for child/pet care. For Affluents, hotel accommodations, transportation and dining out decreased, while average spend on wedding accessories such as jewelry and pre-wedding parties increased.

“Saying ‘I do,’ isn’t just an investment for those getting married, guests have to consider their costs as well,” said Claire Bennett, EVP Loyalty & Membership Benefits, American Express, “from the suit to the suite to the sitter, the expenses for attending a wedding add up and we’re seeing consumers cutting back a bit this year to manage the cost.”

A Gift that Brings Wedding Bliss

Once the RSVPs are confirmed, there’s still the age-old conundrum of the wedding gift. Money? A gift from the registry? Something more personal or unique? While more than half of couples (53%) prefer gifts of cash than gifts from their registry (preferred by only 18%), thirty-four percent of consumers surveyed typically give gifts purchased from the couples’ registry.

In determining how much to spend, guests rely most heavily on their relationship to the couple (41%) when setting the value of the present they'll give; followed by their own budget (33%). Wedding guests plan to spend an average of \$166, or \$30 less than last year, on close family getting married, and an average of \$105 for close friends. Co-workers' gifts has stayed the same year over year, at \$56 on average.

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The [American Express Spending & Saving Tracker](#) research was completed online among a random sample of 1500 adults, including the general U.S. population, as well as the sub-group—Affluents. Interviewing was conducted by Echo Research between **March 2 through 5**, 2012. Overall, the results have a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence.

Affluents are defined as having a minimum annual household income of \$100,000.

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