



## The Birmingham News

### iDo

**Hear a band, find a dress, tour a resort, nix some legwork with a few clicks.**

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Craig and Charelette Smith wanted to get married in Las Vegas, but didn't want any of their friends and family to miss their big day.

Then they found out they could have their wedding cake - and eat it, too. The folks who couldn't travel to the May 6, '06, nuptials were able to watch the Birmingham couple walk down the aisle at the MGM Grand, live, via Web cam.

"It was a way to include everybody," Craig Smith says.

It's a whole new World Wide wedding Web. And that means guests don't always have to be there to be there, because the Internet is changing the way couples plan and showcase their pre-, post- and day-of wedding events. You can even get married online on sites such as [www.irom.org](http://www.irom.org) (although it's not legally binding).

#### **Wedding simplicity**

Before Internet wedding sites, couples depended on magazines, books and word-of-mouth. Now you can pull up planning timelines and check-lists online, view and order photography proofs, and register for gifts. Then update everything, all with the click of a mouse.

Step into a "virtual dressing room," on sites such as [www.Brides.com](http://www.Brides.com), and try on different wedding dress styles for your particular body type (Pear? Apple, anyone?). While there, find a wedding up-do that suits your face.

Couples are screening vendors via the Internet, too. Say you heard Ms. Professional Photographer's work was spectacular. Log onto her Web site and you can find out if her prices are too spectacular for your budget.

"You don't have to call every vendor," says Meghan McAdams of Hoover, who plans to marry Ian Craig, also of Hoover, on June 9.

Want to check out bands for your reception?

"Back in the day, ... you would have to get in your car and go listen to the band," says Kristin Ciccolella, a spokeswoman for [www.wedalert.com](http://www.wedalert.com).

Nowadays, you can log onto plenty of wedding sites, find bands in your area, then see, and hear - sometimes through streaming video - whether they're the band for you.

"The same thing with a videographer," Ciccolella says. "You can actually watch clips of weddings they've

done."

That helps, too, when the bride and groom live in different cities, or even countries, and have to plan long-distance.

"They can check it out `together,'" Ciccolella says.

Log onto almost any wedding site and you can buy everything from gadgets, such as wedding bubbles and bells, to gowns, including the ones Chrishana Hunt Granger of Huntsville ordered, at a significant savings, she says, for her bridesmaids. But she never considered buying her wedding dress online - which was probably a good thing, wedding experts say.

"We recommend researching your gown online," says Christa Vagnozzi, senior editor at [www.theknot.com](http://www.theknot.com), then "go into the store, and get a good refund and alteration policy."

Couples can also set up their own blog or Web site to post photos and event details. Chrishana and her husband, Sam Granger, knew they'd have a lot of out-of-town guests at their November 4, 2006, wedding in Mobile. The groom grew up in Homewood, the bride grew up in Philadelphia and Mobile, and they went to school at Alabama A&M. So they built a site to post details for parties, hotel accommodations, links to airports, directions to the church and reception site, and more.

"It was like a one-stop shop," Chrishana Granger says.

The "Contact Us" button helped minimize phone calls, too.

"You don't have to field `thousands' of phone calls," says Marilyn Oliviera, editor of [www.weddingchannel.com](http://www.weddingchannel.com).

The Grangers, like the Smiths, sent out real-deal invitations. But they requested RSVPs online, which netted a better-than-average response, they say.

"It was very, very accurate," Chrishana Granger says.

For McAdams, the Web provided a wealth of wedding-related information and products.

"You get inspiration," she says. "Things you never knew you needed, you now can't live without."

Logging onto the wedding site [www.theknot.com](http://www.theknot.com) yielded an unexpected bonus as well: New friends, who she discovered when she entered their community message board to seek advice.

"I chat every day with other brides," McAdams says.

From the already-been-there brides, she finds out which vendors did - or didn't - deliver. From the soon-to-be brides, she gets and gives another kind of support.

"It's nice to know somebody else is going through the same thing," she says.

The Birmingham-area group has grown so close that their significant others have gotten involved.

"We've met some really cool couples," McAdams says.

Chat rooms can help with destination weddings as well, Vagnozzi says.

"If they're having a destination wedding in Hawaii, they'll talk to brides who have done that," she says.

The wedding site business began to boom at the turn of the century, wedding gurus say, but its scope was limited compared to today.

"Our mission was to provide the local bride and groom with the local wedding professional," Ciccolella, of [www.wedalert.com](http://www.wedalert.com), says.

### **ePlanning has limits**

The numbers of site users have swelled, too.

Oliviera cites more than 1 million accounts and 70 million page views a month on [www.weddingchannel.com](http://www.weddingchannel.com).

At [www.wedalert.com](http://www.wedalert.com), "we're getting about 50 million users a month," Ciccolella says. "When it first started, we were getting about 25,000 a month."

Nevertheless, don't be tempted to do absolutely every wedding-related thing online, wedding experts say. You should still thank folks for gifts, and invite them to formal parties and your wedding the old-fashioned way - via snail mail.

"A wedding is a very important event," Oliviera says. "You just can't get that across in an e-mail."

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