

the classiest stationery of all

When a graphic designer creates a stationery suite, it shows. Rather than cobble the stationery up on a laptop or buy ready-made (just fill in the blanks) notepaper, commission a graphic designer. Here's how it works.

The work of graphic designers includes creating brands, strong visual communication that has at-a-glance recognition. Beautiful wedding stationery unites all the printed bits and pieces under the umbrella of the couple's 'brand'.

Finding a designer who will interpret the desired look of the brand may require some legwork. Keep an eye out for beautiful design work and follow the lead. A web search is convenient, samples of the designer's work will be up and sites may include the costs, which can vary greatly. Looking under graphic designers in the YELLOW PAGES will yield hundreds of names, people close-by are worth a call. Assess their suitability on the phone, ask them to email examples of their work. It all cuts time.

Every professional designer will have a portfolio of work which has been created for clients' specific requests. So, although the style may not be totally suitable it will give an idea of their creativity, use of typefaces, colours and paper. Ask the designer about budgets for the projects shown; anything is possible with an unlimited budget. An experienced designer will know ways to reduce production costs and deliver superior products to clients.

Make sure the designers have wedding stationery experience, they will be more understanding of all the detail required. It's not necessary to pick the first designer who pops up with an appealing portfolio, a co-operative personality is also essential. The person must be happy to discuss options, make changes and add items to the suite.

Commissioning a professional is going to be more expensive than DIY or asking a friend or relative to whip up a design. But a professional job is worth the price. Costs range from \$30 per hour upwards, consultation rates are \$100 per hour plus; the cost of printing the stationery is on top of the designwork.

To ensure things go smoothly, get everything in writing. This will eliminate mis-understandings on what is required of the designer and the costs. Include deadlines, contact addresses and any other important information that may affect the outcome of the delivery. Email is a great way to keep track of the decisions made; if the designer doesn't supply a copy of the commission in writing, send an email to confirm agreements, just to make sure.

Attend the meeting with a budget in mind. A good designer can work within any budget and advise how to achieve the best result for the money. Costs can blow out very easily so it's important everyone knows their limit.

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Discuss the options with the designer, it may be more economical to have fewer, better quality items than many bits that end up looking disappointing. Fewer colours can reduce printing costs, consider all the options suggested.

A bit of research is necessary before the first meeting with the designer; compile magazine clippings that show the desired look; take along colour swatches, fabric samples of bride's and bridesmaids' dresses and images of favourite flowers. The season in which the wedding is to be held may also influence the design and colour palette.

All these factors will help the designer understand the style and type of event that is being planned.

These inspiration pieces don't have to be wedding related; a satin ribbon, a favourite book, a quote, a pebble collected during a romantic moment on the beach will all help to stir creativity. A list of key words that best describe the couple is helpful. Anything that speaks to the couple can be the starting point for a unique and innovative stationery suite and will help the designer determine colours, papers and typefaces.

Dislikes are important for the designer to understand, too. If certain colours are a turn-off, they should be named at the start. Limit changes once work is underway, they add to costs.

For design and printing, lead times should be generous. More detailed designs or more extensive stationery suites will take time to prepare; different printing methods take longer than others. Timing is very important says SAMANTHA FRAY from CHAPEL PRESS in Melbourne. *"Allow lots of time, custom design and letterpress printing are labour intensive. We recommend clients visit four to six months prior to their wedding. If they can supply us with a vision of their stationery, it is perfect."*

Invitations should be sent out six weeks before the wedding, even earlier for overseas guests or if a destination wedding is being planned, so it is imperative the designer knows the key dates. This will allow the designer to prepare a schedule that accommodates design, client changes and printing, all within the time frame.

When determining the print run, remember that each guest won't need an invitation as many guests will be one half of a couple or a member of a family. Work out how many invitations are required, this will affect the printing cost.

The number of items in the suite may vary from as few as an invitation and matching envelope to a full suite of stationery complete with bonbonniere swing tags and thank you cards. Whatever the extent of the suite, organise a priority list so expendable items can be deleted if the budget looks like blowing out. Be prepared to listen to the designer's advice. The designer has valuable experience in the design and production of stationery.

The wording for all elements of the suite won't be required at the first meeting with the designer, but it's worth considering if it will be traditional or contemporary wording; this will be determined by the style of wedding. Formal wording would look incongruous on a modern design, likewise contemporary wording doesn't fit a formal design.

While it may cost more upfront to engage professional services, beautiful bespoke stationery, on time and on budget is worth every penny.