

# hard truths and straight talk for tough times

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## What's Included

Smart Business Tips  
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Valuable Insights  
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And More!

If you've never been through tough economic times in the wedding industry, it's natural to get frightened and even shel-shocked. Fortunately, the wedding industry is more resilient than most. I like to say that it's recession-resistant, as opposed to recession-proof. The wedding market changes during a recession, but then again, it's really changing all the time. The brides of today are not the same as the brides of 5 or 10 years ago. The brides of tomorrow will be very different from those of today.

I believe that change is good as it keeps us sharp, forcing us to remain relevant. The Knot has been keeping up with the changes and we hope that you have as well. I realize that it's easier said than done when all you keep hearing is doom and gloom in the media, so I wanted to give you some guidance as to what you can and should be doing to ensure the long term success of your business. I will warn you that some of these may sting a little, so if you don't really want to hear it, stop reading now.

For those of you who are still reading, I applaud your courage and curiosity and I hope that these 11 Hard Truths and Straight Talk will help nudge (or shove) you towards greater prosperity now and in the future.

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### 1. STOP WHINING!

That's right, I said stop whining. You can't change what's going on around you, so stop feeding the negativity. Your friends don't want to hear it, your spouse doesn't want hear it and no one wants to be around someone who's a downer—especially your brides. People pick up on your energy, whether it be positive or negative. Surround yourself with positive people who believe that they will not only weather the storm—they'll prosper in it.

If you need an attitude adjustment pick up a copy of *Who Moved My Cheese*, *The Secret*, *Fish* or any of the hundreds of other books on this subject. The message is the same: you get what you

give. If you hold negative thoughts you will get negative results. If you hold positive thoughts you get positive results.

## **2. When did common sense go out of style?**

A lot of the issues in this economy were caused by individuals and businesses throwing out some basic rules. We all grew up hearing that we should “Live below our means”, yet we use credit cards to finance our lifestyles.

We were told to “Save for a rainy day”, yet so many live paycheck to paycheck. This downturn has reminded us that wealth is just a number on a piece of paper. You thought your house was worth a lot more than it is now, but since you didn’t sell, you never really saw that increased value. It was a fantasy, a number on a piece of paper.

The wedding industry has survived wars and many natural disasters. It survives, but it changes too. Styles change. Fads come and go. Need I remind you all of the powder blue tuxedos?

## **3. The definition of futility is doing the same thing, the same way, and expecting a different result.**

Some say it’s the definition of insanity. If you’re lamenting that the business isn’t the same as it was a couple of years ago, then you’re getting in the way of your own success. Don’t get left behind. What changes are you making to adapt to the current and future bridal market?

## **4. There are new competitors for you in every economy.**

If you’re a photographer or videographer who thinks the price of digital equipment is creating a crop of new competitors, think again. If you’ve been in the wedding business for a number of years, you’ve always had new competitors. You just didn’t notice them as much when business was flocking your way. Technology doesn’t change the things that make you a professional in your field—your talent and experience.

We have new competitors cropping up all the time. Sure, they can create a cool looking site, but if they don’t get any brides to come to it, what good does it do you? When you buy advertising you’re not paying for the number of pixels or the square inches on a page. You’re paying for access to that audience. The coolest website with no brides is a waste of your hard earned money.

## **5. When she decides not to book you, it’s easy for her to blame your prices, but there’s usually more to it.**

If she really wanted you to do her wedding, she’d be trying to find a way to make it happen. If she wasn’t trying to work with you to find a price point that she can afford, it’s because she just wasn’t sold on you.

She wants to trust you to do the job and deliver the result she is looking for. She assumes that if you’re a professional caterer, you know how to cook. But if she doesn’t like your personality, or if your office is messy, or if she has any doubts about your abilities, she’ll go somewhere else. She might, even pay more money for the peace of mind. You’ve all experienced it. You don’t get the job and then you find out that she’s booked someone more expensive. There are many reasons why, but most likely it was because she formed a better bond with another vendor.

## **6. Being an expert at your craft doesn’t make you an expert salesperson.**

Fifteen years of experience in floral design won’t prepare you for closing deals. You may have been spinning the hits back when they were on vinyl, but that doesn’t mean you know how to sell. Many of you even hate selling, but it’s one of those necessary evils. No sales means no food to cook, no photos to take and no music to make. You have two choices: learn how to sell or hire someone to do it for you.

One benefit to the economic downturn is, there are many talented salespeople looking for work. Who knows? One of them may even be a former client. Who better to sell your work than a happy bride?

## 7. Learn the difference between an investment and an expense.

Expenses are things like utilities, your car payment, or insurance, but investments that bring you business. If you already have a good quality digital camera, then a new camera, no matter how sexy, is probably an unnecessary expense. On the other hand, if your camera breaks, a new one would be considered an investment.

Professional salespeople and an advertising budget would also be considered an investment. A website could work in your favor too, though some of them do end up being bad investments. I've seen it dozens of times: pricey websites that get the traffic, but not the contacts. The goal is not to get a lot of web clicks; you want to encourage brides to contact you! Unfortunately, many websites are designed by the vendor, for the vendor, not for the brides.

## 8. If you don't like someone else's website, learn from their mistakes.

Keep a pad and pen by your computer and every time you get frustrated by something on another website, write it down, then check your own site. Ever get frustrated while trying to find a phone number? Make sure yours is at the top of every page, with a call to action.

Have you ever printed a page off a website, only to have it chop off a sentence? Make sure your pages print out neatly on letter-size paper.

Do you like to read paragraph after paragraph of text? No? Then what makes you think the brides will read all of the text on your site? Have you ever visited a website a second time and you had to sit through the same Flash video opening? It's frustrating, yet many of your sites do that.

What about when music comes on and you can't find the mute button? We know that the busiest times for our wedding media sites are Monday through Friday, 9am to 9pm Eastern time. She's at WORK and if music comes on automatically at your site, you've just busted her. Let her ASK to hear music or see video.

If you're trying to optimize your website for the search engines, then lose the Flash graphics or find someone that understands how to optimize a Flash website. Most Flash websites can't be read by the search engines or on many portable devices.

You can also have too little text. I've seen sites with plenty of photos, but little information. Search engines can't "see" what's in the photos, so not having enough text can hurt your SEO efforts.

## 9. Unless you're doing e-commerce, your website can't make the sale.

While your goal is to ultimately make the sale, the best your websites can do is get someone to contact you by phone or email. You still have to close the sale. Getting more people to look at your website is pointless if they don't end up booking you. Have a clear call to action by every photo gallery, video and menu on every page. Never ask them to call without putting your phone number in the sentence, no matter how many times it's already on the page.

## 10. Your Search Engine placement may have little to do with the business you book.

I often hear people bragging about how they come up on the first page of results for this phrase or that phrase, but they can never tell me how much business that brings them. In other words, if you're the only one who uses that phrase, then what good does it do you? If people click through to your site using that phrase, but they don't end up booking you, what good did that do you? Sure, it looks good on your analytics reports, but not your balance sheet.

Hitwise reported that the average number of words per query is on the rise, with "queries of eight or more words growing a whopping 22% since December 2008". So the one and two word searches you're doing may not be representative of what real brides are searching for.

## 11. You're not going to save your way out of hard times.

Yes, you should take a hard look at your expenses and cut where you can, however, your focus should

be on getting more dollars, not saving pennies. You'll make more money by booking more weddings than you could ever save by excessive cost cutting.

Show your customers that you're the best value for them, not the cheapest price. You can be the answer to these economic times by creating a "recession buster package". It's not your cheapest package; rather, it offers the best value combination of services. So come up with ways to keep a reasonable profit, while showing that you're the best value for that bride.

Another way to be the best value: be sure that you're level of service is at the top of your competitor's at every touch point. When she calls, be the best on the phone. When she emails, be the one that can have a real conversation and show her that you understand what she needs. When she visits your website, make sure that it's consistent with your business. When she comes in, she should feel that it's an extension of what she's already seen and heard from you. Your offices should be clean and neat to make your customers comfortable. It should reflect THEIR style, not just yours.

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### Final Thought

People don't notice when you meet their expectations. They always notice when you fall short of their expectations. If you're going to be noticed, isn't it better to be noticed for exceeding their expectations? Make it so that you become the standard by which they judge every other wedding vendor. They're going to shop around. Make it so that when she speaks to other vendors she'll come back to you, not just because of the quality of your work, but also the quality of the experience. Make it hard not to do business with you.

Put your focus where it counts—getting more business. If you're already advertising with us, you're already in front of the largest wedding audience with The Knot Wedding Network, so you just need to capitalize on that attention by converting it to sales.

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