

Hope you enjoy this excerpt from
Be a Wedding: The Definitive Guide to Starting a Wedding DJ Business

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Book Your First Event (and Many More)

You've set up your website and advertisements and gathered all your equipment, and you're working on your DJing skills, so now it's go time! Like I said, though, you can start booking jobs earlier, whenever you feel ready.

Before we get into specifics, here's the typical workflow for a DJ job from start to finish:

- The potential client contacts you about DJing their event.
- You discuss your services through email and/or meet up or do a phone call.
- They hire you. They fill out the contract and pay the retainer.
- Two weeks or so before the wedding they return the reception planner to you.
- You review the reception planner and gather the music and make any other preparations.
- A week or so before the wedding you meet up or do a phone call with the couple to go over the details and make sure everything is squared away.

- The day of the wedding you provide your awesome services. You also get any remaining payment from the client if they haven't paid it already.
- Sometime after the wedding the client (hopefully) leaves a review about your services on the Knot, WeddingWire, or other websites. If they don't do this on their own, you reach out to them a couple weeks after the wedding inquiring if they would.

How to Get Clients

Let's start with just some of the many different ways to get clients:

- **Friends, family members, and co-workers** – Let everyone know you're now DJing weddings. People typically feel more comfortable hiring someone they know, even if they barely know them. I once worked at a company, and it got around that I DJ events, and a co-worker I had never met (it was a large company, and she worked in a different department) ended up hiring me to DJ her husband's 70th birthday party. That simple connection of working at the same company, even though we had never met, was enough to make her consider hiring me.
- **Your advertisements on the Knot, WeddingWire, and other spots** – Paying for a higher listing can get costly, but it's how you increase your chance of getting inquiries. I've tried to buy lower packages to save money, but the number of inquiries I get always goes down significantly. You simply have to have the higher listing to get more inquiries on websites like the Knot and WeddingWire. Again, you should be tracking where your inquiries come from, so you'll learn what you should continue to put your money toward and what you should stop.
- **Bridal fairs** – Bridal fairs can be expensive (\$1,000+), but it can give you a lot of face-to-face time with potential clients. I'd recommend building up your business more (as in, getting several jobs under your belt) before doing these bridal fairs, but it's something to keep in mind. Many bridal fairs offer

discounts to exhibitors who sign up early or are first-time participants. More on bridal fairs later.

- **Referrals from other DJs** – Reach out to the DJs you shadowed and ask if they will refer any jobs to you that they're unable to do. This is 100% how I booked 14 jobs my first year—the DJ who trained me sent them my way.
- **Contact schools and businesses** – These aren't wedding gigs, but schools have dances and businesses have holiday parties or other events that need a DJ. I'll discuss these other gigs later, but you can contact local schools and businesses and share that you're a DJ and available for events. This has led to some work for me, so it could for you too.
- **Volunteer to DJ at things** – You can always offer to DJ for friends or family members' weddings for free as a gift to them (and also to get more experience). You could also volunteer to DJ other events to get experience. Maybe a friend is having a party and you could play some tunes. Or maybe there's a 5K coming up or a charity event that would be happy to have some awesome music from a free vendor. Maybe your current employer is having a holiday or "employee appreciation" party that you could play some music at. People are often more willing to give you a thumbs up when they hear you'll do it for free. Obviously, your goal is to make good money, but starting out, volunteering can be a good way to get experience, take some photos of people dancing to your DJing, and if for some reason it doesn't go great, there's less pressure.

When Someone Contacts You About DJing...

Raise a glass—it's on: someone has contacted you about potentially DJing their event. Keep in mind they're most likely contacting several DJs at the same time. Most inquires will come through email. Try to respond quickly. This alone has, I think, gotten me a few jobs, as I've heard clients complain that some DJs took too long to respond (over a day, etc.) and that they were thankful I got back to them so quickly. It builds confidence that the DJ is on top of things. Think about how you'd be: say you

contact five companies about painting your house. It's a big project, will cost a lot, and you're overwhelmed. The first company that replies has a BIG advantage over the others.

So What Do You Say?

I recommend creating a script that you essentially copy and paste into the initial reply. Change it as necessary, particularly to include their name, adjust the price if the event is farther away or for some other reason, and respond to any specific questions they ask. Make sure you sound personable and friendly. Essentially, try to sound like your email isn't totally copied and pasted. Try to build a little rapport and get to know them before you bring up cost but also don't waste their time with a lot of run-around or any tricks like, "Call me now to get your quote." Answer their likely main questions, such as, are you available, how much do you charge, and what is included with your services but avoid making the email 4,000 words long.

Here's a script you can use:

Hi **[NAME]**,

Thanks for your interest in my DJ services. I am available on **[DATE]**. I'm curious, what ideas do you have for your reception? Have you seen things at other receptions that you loved? Didn't love? Obviously, my goal is to make your reception amazing, so the more I can learn the better.

As for fees, I typically charge **[PRICE]** for a reception and cocktail hour, plus **[PRICE]** if you'd also like me for the ceremony. And that's it. That fee covers everything (music, microphones, lights for the dance floor, travel costs, as much time as you want, emceeing, unlimited consultations, and more). My goal is to keep it easy and stress-free, so we can focus on throwing an amazing party for you and your guests.

So how does that all sound? I'm happy to tell you more, or if you have some concerns/questions about my fees or services, feel free to let me know.

See photos and videos at **[Hyperlink for Instagram]**.

See reviews at **[Hyperlink to The Knot, WeddingWire, etc.]**

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR WEBSITE ADDRESS OR OTHER CONTACT INFORMATION]

Hopefully they'll eagerly reply, wanting to book your services right then and there, but that's rare. Some people you might never hear from again. Some will reply and have further questions. Keep responding quickly and professionally. Sound like a human being, as if this person could one day become your friend (not just your client), but be professional. Ever call a company's customer service, and you can tell the employee is just stiffly reading a script? "Hi, Mr. Smith, we at Central Bank value your service and your loyalty. We know you have many places to bank. We are happy you chose us." But ever have the customer service person you've never talked to before in your life who tries to be so chummy it just sounds weird? "Oh hey, Kyle, staying out of trouble? Haha. Got any fun plans for the weekend? Let me look up your account, just a sec, bro . . ."

Find the happy middle ground.

Sample Reply from a Potential Client

“Thanks for your reply. I guess we’re just looking for a DJ who is fun. The DJ at my brother’s wedding played the same song multiple times and didn’t get anyone dancing and didn’t do a good job interacting with the crowd. I guess you could say we’re looking for the opposite, lol.”

Now it’s your turn to reply.

Bad Reply

“Thanks, Leslie. Well, I’m an amazing DJ and will get everyone dancing all the time. That’s the way I do things and always have. That other DJ must’ve really sucked, haha. I hope you book me, thanks!!”

MUCH BETTER Reply

“Thanks for the info, Leslie. Yeah, we definitely want a better result than your brother’s wedding! I make sure to get to know my clients’ taste and pick the music one at a time at the reception to create a good flow, incorporating your ideas and your guests’ requests. This helps keep the dance floor crowded, rather than using a playlist entirely thought up ahead of time that doesn’t allow for spontaneity or adjust for people’s likes and dislikes. I’m curious, what are some songs you’d like to hear? Or any you definitely don’t want to hear? Anyway, I’m happy to tell you more, but I’m curious what other questions you have? Thanks again!”

Some clients will be easy to book. Every now and then you will get someone who you exchange one or two emails with, and then they’re ready to book you—sweet! That was easy. Make sure you send them (and explain) the reception planner and contract. It’s a good idea to type up a basic explanation of those for the clients who do book you solely through email, and save that so you can use it later, just like the initial reply template I included above.

Meetings

Some potential clients will want to do a phone call or meet up in person before booking you.

Phone meetings can be a bit more challenging. You obviously can't see each other and sometimes people put you on speaker phone or are shopping or doing another activity during the call. Yeah, it's weird. I've frequently been in the middle of a phone call with a potential client, and they've had to go let their dog out or deal with their kids who are asking for something ("Mom! Mom! *Mom!*"). Of course, these things can happen at in-person meetings too . . .

I've done Skype calls with potential clients too, but you still deal with some potential technological drawbacks, such as slow computer speeds and other home distractions.

On the plus side, for phone/Skype meetings you don't have to travel anywhere, and these can work better with people's schedules. As well, if the couple lives far away, a phone call might be the only sensible option.

Email the potential client a copy of the reception planner and contract ahead of time, so they can look those over as you explain them during the call.

In general, in-person meetings work much better. It's easier to communicate and get a good sense of each other. Be sure to bring a copy of the reception planner and contract that you let them keep.

When deciding on a place to meet, try to find a place most convenient for them. Coffee shops, Paneras, and similar places can work well. Don't meet in someone's home—that's just awkward. Some clients might suggest a bar. That's totally fine (cheers!), but I wouldn't recommend you suggest that, because some people might think that's unprofessional. Obviously, keep your drinking under control. And certainly, if you're sober or uncomfortable meeting at a bar, it's okay to say so and suggest meeting elsewhere. Also, be mindful what type of bar it is—you want to avoid some place loud or during a sports game or anything like that.

Whether phone or in-person, your first goal is to build rapport and make it seem less “salesy.” Obviously, you’re ultimately trying to sell your services, but if they think you’re cool and fun to talk to, then that’ll make the actual sale even easier.

Some things you can ask/talk about to build rapport:

- Ask how wedding planning is going – Most people will sigh or laugh from frustration, because planning a wedding is really, really hard. Sympathize with them and have a good laugh. Pick up on their complaints and build those into your pitch when you talk about your DJ services. If they say the photographer is slow to respond to emails—*boom*, talk about how you try to respond quickly (and hopefully they have noticed this by now).
- If they’re from another city, and you have something fun/positive you can say about that city, do it! Many of your clients will live in other cities but be doing the wedding in your city because they, or their fiancée, grew up there or for some other reason. If you can build rapport over their city, do so. For example, I’ve had clients who live in, say, Austin, Texas, and then I’ll share that I was just there for my friend’s bachelor party. Usually they’ll perk up and ask what we did and then I’ll share what restaurants, bars, and activities we did, and we’ll potentially bond over Austin spots and experiences. (Note: My friend’s bachelor party was very tasteful. No strip clubs or those kinds of exploits. If it wasn’t tasteful, then I wouldn’t have brought it up!)
- Anything else that you’ve picked up from their emails that could make for good small talk. For example, some client’s email signatures will say they’re a school principal or some other interesting profession—ask about that (“You’re a principal? How is it this time of the school year?”).

You want to build rapport but don’t waste their time. If it’s natural and a good conversation, you can do this small talk for a bit, but if they’re giving you short answers and the conversation isn’t flowing, it’s time to move on. In either case, eventually pivot to asking about what they want in a DJ, and any music ideas or initial questions they have. Some clients will have a lot of thoughts and questions,

while some will barely have anything or say something generic like, “We want a DJ that’s fun” (really!?).

I’ve found that the reception planner is a great step-by-step guide to discuss your services in a meeting. You can go over each page and explain how things work: how the grand entrance works and how you learn everyone’s name ahead of time, how for the first dances you can fade the songs out early if they want, how the timeline is arranged in a typical order if people do everything, how to write down their music ideas on page four, and how to list the songs for the ceremony on page five, or however you have it arranged.

As always, try to make it more of a conversation than you just blabbing on, so keep checking in with them if they have any questions, and ask some of your own:

- “Any idea what song you want to do for your first dance?”
- “Think you’ll do the dollar dance?”
- “Any songs you particularly don’t want to hear?”

Then explain your contract (you want to save any talk about money for as late in the conversation as possible) and the down payment. Make it clear you’re not pressuring them to sign anything. Some clients will sign it and write a check right there, while others will want to talk it over privately and contact you in a few days.

Once everyone is satisfied, shake hands, thank them, and call it a night.

Other Tips for a Successful Meeting

- Be on time (duh).
- Silence your phone and put it away.
- If in-person, dress nicely. You don’t need to wear a suit or formal dress, but don’t show up in biker shorts and a ripped t-shirt.
- Say their names back to them. An old Dale Carnegie strategy: people love hearing their names. Say it. “Thanks for meeting with me, Justin.”

You're going to meet all kinds of people at these in-person meetings. It's honestly fascinating. I've met some people where it felt like we were immediately best friends for life, while others just stared at me blankly, or the groom just messed around on his phone the whole time and didn't pay attention and seemed pissed to be there. I've met with couples who couldn't stop giving each other occasional smooches while I sat across the table from them waiting for a good time to keep talking, as well as couples where I wondered, uh, do these two even like each other? Sometimes they'll bring along a friend or family member. Sometimes they'll tell you very personal stuff or go on rants about something. And some people are just plain awkward or weird. Certainly, if you leave the meeting feeling uncomfortable, you can by all means turn down the job. If someone seems shady or like they can't pay, or they seem like more of a headache than it's worth, you do not have to do the job!

Thankfully, almost everyone I meet is awesome. I've legit loved the variety of people I get to work with. And if they are a little odd, hey, you're DJing for them for one night and then you'll most likely never talk to them again. You don't have to be best friends with people you DJ for, but you should still come off as—yep—awesome.

“Can you hold the date for us?”

Occasionally you'll get couples who don't yet want to sign the contract and pay the retainer but ask if you'll hold the date for them, so they can have a little more time before making their final decision (and so you don't get booked by someone else). Thank them, but politely say that you consider the date open until you receive a retainer and signed contract.

Similarly, you might get a couple that tells you, “We're going to book you!” Rejoice, but consider that date open until you get the contract and retainer. Sadly, you will get couples who tell you they're going to book you, and then they don't! It's happened to me plenty of times. You don't want to turn down business from other clients, until you're in fact booked for that day, and that means getting a signed contract and down payment.

After You Book the Event: Now What?

Congrats on booking a DJ job! You're on the path to an awesome side income or new career.

After you sign your portion of the contract, scan it, and email it to the client (or however you want to arrange signing contracts, whether entirely electronic or something else). Mark the job in your calendar, so you know to tell future potential clients that you're booked that day, and keep track of the income in a spreadsheet or other accounting method (I'll share financial suggestions and an expense-tracking spreadsheet later), as it's important you keep meticulous records of EVERY expense and income.

And now . . . well, there's often months of absolutely no contact with the couple or anything you need to do specific to the event. Cool! Sometimes, however, couples will reach out to you months before the wedding to see about discussing ideas, changes in plans, and perhaps touring the venue with them, so you can get a better sense of their event. If so, cool! Continue to be responsive and awesome.

The reception planner I provided asks for it back by two weeks before the wedding. I often send a reminder email to couples about three weeks before the wedding (so, one week before the reception planner due date), so they know to turn it in soon. That said, two weeks is a suggestion. You can hardly get mad at the couple if they're late, and often they are. Just go with it.

Once you receive the reception planner, it's time to get to work. Look over the schedule and start to formulate any questions you may have. Go through the music choices and make sure you have all those songs. If you don't, get them! I'll cover getting music in the next chapter.

Around two or three weeks before (so about the time you should be getting the reception planner), it's a good idea to ask the couple (or at least one of them) about doing a 15- to 20-minute phone call to go over the details and make sure you have everything correct. Usually I like to do this the week of the wedding, so they are most likely to have as many details as possible figured out. However, it's good to be

available two weeks before the wedding to talk too (or earlier), just in case the week of the wedding is too busy and stressful for them (it will be!).

Some couples will propose this type of meeting themselves. I've been invited to grab a beer or meal, etc. Sometimes they'll want to do this two months before the wedding. Sure! Whenever works for them, though the farther away, the more likely they'll change their minds about certain details and need to do another quick chat with you.

During this chat, I usually go through the reception planner chronologically, starting at the first event for which the DJ is involved (usually the background music before the ceremony, or the cocktail hour if they didn't hire you for the ceremony). You don't need to cover everything in the reception planner, like discussing each individual song they asked for, unless you do have a question or clarification ("Did you want the version of ____ with the duet from ____ or the original version?" etc.).

Page one: go through the grand entrance. Practice saying each of the names. Make any phonetic notes.

Page two: go through the specific dances and remind the couple that if they don't want to dance the entire song for the couple's first dance and the dances with the parents that they could just look at you and nod, and you'll fade it out. You should've mentioned this when you initially met, but it's likely been months now.

Page three: go through the timeline, which is what you'll talk about the most. Make sure you have the timeline down as well as any quirks, such as a particular person saying a prayer before dinner (needing to use your wireless microphone), the time for last call, dinner instructions, such as if it's a buffet and you need to excuse tables, etc.

Page four: you can often skip this page unless you have questions or comments about the songs.

Page five: if you're also DJing the ceremony, discuss the plan for that. What's your cue to start the first processional song (as in, will an event coordinator give you a thumbs up, or you'll see the groom and officiant walk down the aisle, and then you start the song, or what?). Unfortunately, many couples don't yet know the exact instructions, because they'll learn them at the rehearsal the night before, but most

have enough of an idea that you can figure it out together. It's also a good idea to tell the couple to tell the officiant to find you sometime before the ceremony (say an hour before), so you can give the officiant the lavalier microphone and show them how to use it.

And then that's it! It's often a very quick phone call, sometimes under 10 minutes. But obviously talk about as much stuff as you want, and some couples will have their own questions.

Be sure to also remind them of any remaining payment they owe you.

During these chats, the couple will often be stressed and might unload some of their worries, often not about you but the wedding in general: difficulties with other vendors, family squabbles, problems with the bride's dress, etc. This is a great opportunity to be a calming presence. After all, you are the DJ. You are providing the fun and entertainment. You are providing the magic for the part of the evening, where they can cut loose and party. Demonstrate your confidence that everything's going to be great, that any of these loose ends will get tied up, and they'll be able to rip it up on the dance floor, etc.

What If the Couple Asks You to Attend the Rehearsal?

Occasionally couples who booked you to provide the music and sound for the ceremony will ask if you could attend the rehearsal that is taking place the night before the wedding, so you can play the music while they practice, and make sure you're all on the same page. This is totally your call. I've done it a couple times, but I usually tell the couple that I don't find it necessary for my sake. We'll talk out the plan during the phone call a few days before, so I don't feel I need it. Often, the couple will then say, "Oh, sounds good" and drop it. Some will still be uncomfortable and feel they need it for their sake, which I can sympathize with (even if I still don't think it's necessary). You could suggest that someone in the wedding party just play the songs on their phone for everyone to practice walking into. After all, that's mostly what you'd be doing if you attended: just playing the songs (but through your equipment, not your phone), while everyone walks down the aisle, and then doing it several times,

so they can practice. In general, the wedding party doesn't need to hear the actual songs to know how to walk down an aisle. You, the DJ, just need to make sure you know the instructions, when to transition to the next song (if there is one) and so on. This can be done during the phone call that week.

Other reasons to not attend the rehearsal:

- Perhaps the wedding is far away, so it's annoying to have to make the drive two nights in a row.
- There goes your Friday night (or whatever night it is)! Or at least part of it.
- Rehearsals can be unnecessarily long and drawn out. Often the wedding party is hanging out drinking beers, just kind of having fun, until some frazzled event coordinator tries to get everyone rounded up. It's a lot of just sitting around.

And perhaps the biggest reason: you don't want to commit to a rehearsal taking place the night before the wedding, because there's a chance you could book another wedding that night (the night of the rehearsal)! For example, say you have a Saturday wedding, and they ask if you can also attend the Friday rehearsal. I'd recommend politely saying no, as you don't need it for your sake, and you might be booking another job that (Friday) night. That said, if it's now a week or two before the wedding and you haven't booked a Friday night job, well, you're probably not going to.

You could also consider charging a fee for attending the rehearsal, say \$100 or \$200. But be clear about this up front before they've booked you, so they don't feel like you're surprising them with a random fee. Don't be the DJ that surprises people with bogus additional fees. You're not a cell phone service provider.

In the end, it's your call. The couple will be very happy if you do attend the rehearsal, but often they won't mind if you don't. And most of the time they won't even bother asking you to do so.



Gather Your Music

People expect the DJ to have basically any song they could possibly ask for. Thankfully that's a lot easier these days than it was "back in the day" when DJs had to haul tons of records or CDs.

You have several options for where to get your music. The big thing I can't stress enough: get your music legally. Buy your own copy, whether that's an mp3, CD, or vinyl.

The legality of using streaming services like YouTube or Spotify for events where you're paid to be there is confusing. Is it okay? Is it against the law? Try to find the answer, and you'll hear a variety of responses. Additionally, it's risky to rely on streaming services or anything that requires Internet access anyway. I've DJed at venues, where the WiFi didn't work, and my cell phone data wasn't helping either (so I could play the song from my phone plugged into the mixer as a last resort). Plus, the audio quality of streaming services can be bad, or an ad could start playing. In

general, the best option is to have your own copy of a song that doesn't need Internet/cell phone service to work.

You can buy mp3s through Amazon, iTunes/Apple Music, and others, which can be great, because they often have clean versions for songs that are normally explicit (and a lot of couples prefer the clean version). Don't download illegal versions online—they're often low quality, might be incomplete (such as the track gets cut off early), and they're ILLEGAL. Just don't.

Another option is to subscribe to a DJ pool, a paid service that gives you access to lots of current songs that you can download. Again, make sure you pick a legal one. One popular option is Promo Only. I subscribe to their Top 40 pool, which as of this writing is \$12 a month. It's updated several times a week with brand new tracks, including clean versions, edited versions, and remixes. It's a very cost-effective (and again, legal!) way to get lots of new music.

DJ pools typically don't have older music, so your best bet, financially speaking, is to buy mp3s or CDs that you rip to your computer to make mp3s. Buying used CDs will save you money, but there's always the risk the CD is scratched, so be sure to check. Scour the Internet, thrift stores, garage sales, record stores, etc., and you might find a lot of good stuff for cheap.

Keep your eyes open for one of the greatest resources for DJs: compilation albums! You can get tons of hit songs on one album. These can help you build up your wedding DJ music collection fast and often fairly cheaply. The Now That's What I Call Music! albums are amazing, because they're full of hit songs, and these albums come out constantly, as well as various spin-offs like Now That's What I Call Party Hits!, Now That's What I Call Motown, and tons of others. As of this writing there are over 100 of the Now That's What I Call compilations. Consider getting tons of those. Same with any other compilations you can find. Best R&B songs. Best love hits from the 70s. Best trance remixes. Best *anything*. Plus, many of these compilations are all clean, giving you an easy way to get the clean versions of songs. And don't forget greatest hits collections of any artist you can think of: the Beatles, Whitney Houston, George Strait, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, etc.

When you get the reception planner back, make sure you get any songs the couple asks for that you don't already have.

Get in the habit of checking the music charts as well as simply paying attention to what the current hits are. These are often the songs you should be playing and people will be requesting. I think a lot of people assume wedding DJs play the same old songs everyone has heard a million times: "YMCA," "Ice Ice Baby," "The Macarena," and so on, so I think people are pleasantly surprised when they hear a current hit.

Organize Your Music

You're going to compile thousands of songs (maybe hundreds of thousands). You want to create some shortcuts, so you can easily access songs quickly and get ideas. One way is creating playlists in your mp3 software by genre, decade, situation, etc. You likely won't play the playlist, as in starting it from the beginning and letting it run, but it's a simple cheat sheet to get ideas for songs that might work for a situation. Some playlists I have include:

- 50s (and before)
- 60s
- 70s
- 80s
- 90s
- 00s
- Jazz/Swing
- Country
- Soul/Motown/R&B
- Funk/Disco
- Hip-Hop/Rap
- Sing-Alongs (for songs that tend to get everyone putting their arms around their friends and singing along. This would be songs like "Piano Man" by Billy Joel and "Friends in Low Places" by Garth Brooks.)

- Slow Dances
- Reception Gold (this is my name for the absolute most popular songs played at weddings, like “I Wanna Dance with Somebody” by Whitney Houston and “Yeah!” by Usher. This is the go-to playlist for ideas if the dance floor has cleared out, and I need a sure-fire hit.)
- Group Dances (for any songs where there’s a choreographed dance everyone does, like “The Cupid Shuffle,” “The Electric Slide,” etc. These songs are often REALLY popular, so, similar to the reception gold songs, I often save these for “uh-oh, the dance floor cleared out,” and this can quickly solve things.)
- Reggae
- Indie
- Latin
- Long Songs (occasionally you need a long song to play, while you’re doing something else, such as using the restroom or running to grab something from your car. Put together a mix of some long songs just in case. Some examples include “Crush” by Dave Matthews Band [8:09] and “Tiny Dancer” by Elton John [6:18].)
- Bouquet Toss (songs that are popular for the bouquet toss, like “Single Ladies” by Beyoncé and “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” by Cyndi Lauper. It’s nice to have this list if the couple leaves it up to you what song to play for the bouquet toss, which does happen.)
- Garter Toss (similar to bouquet toss. These songs include “Girls, Girls, Girls” by Mötley Crüe and “Another One Bites the Dust” by Queen.)
- Dollar Dance
- Anniversary Dance
- Cocktail Hour/Dinner (songs that work nicely for background music like Sara Bareilles, Van Morrison, Adele, and more)
- Classical/Ceremony (for ceremonies, people often want classical music, such as orchestral songs/arrangements. This is a great spot to compile a bunch of those. Songs like “Canon in D,” “Here Comes the Bride,” and others.)

- Cake Cutting (almost any song can work for the cake cutting, but there are a bunch of sugar-related ones that can work if you are asked to make the choice. Songs like “Sugar, Sugar” by the Archies and “How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)” by Marvin Gaye or James Taylor.)

These playlists will help organize your huge collection of music into categories. Of course, you’re not putting every single song in one of these categories. Only songs you’d actually possibly play. And from time to time, you can delete songs from the playlists (but not your overall collection) to make them less cluttered.

Create Mixes

In general, when you’re DJing you want to pick each song one at a time to create the best possible mix based on how the crowd is reacting, the requests you’re getting, and what the evening calls for. However, pre-ceremony and during the cocktail hour and dinner, a pre-made mix can often work totally fine, and you can just let it run. Make sure it fits for the event, but soon enough you’ll have a few go-to playlists that can save you a lot of time and work. I also have a mix called “Equipment Move” that started as just that: a collection of songs that can run in the reception room, while I pack up my second setup after the ceremony or am off talking with the event coordinator for a second or whatever the case may be. This can also be helpful during dinner when I’m running around excusing tables for the buffet, or in the line for the buffet myself (though, try to minimize how much time you’re away from the DJ table).



Finances

Now that you're a business owner, you need to keep track of every cent you spend and earn. Get in the habit of the following things:

- Keep receipts for any purchases you make, such as equipment, photocopying costs for the reception planners and contracts, advertising, and more. Keep track of these in a spreadsheet, financial software, or some other method.
- Write down EVERY mile you drive for DJ events. This includes driving to/from the weddings/events, as well as meetings with potential clients. Everything. If you drive a total of one mile round trip, write it down. I do this all the time! It sounds anal, but the government lets you deduct mileage, and this can save you LOTS of money when it comes time to do taxes. Get in the habit of writing down your odometer on January 1st, so when doing taxes the following year, you can write down your mileage total for the year (beyond just the DJ business driving, which you'll report separately).

- Yes, pay income taxes. Pay federal, state, and any local taxes. Keep it above board. You're a professional business now. More on taxes in a bit.
- Write down any tips you receive—yes, tips are a very real thing. Often the couple will tip you \$100 or more at the end of a wedding, and it's a really nice treat!
- If you travel to DJ—essentially any event that requires you to stay somewhere else for the night (a hotel, Airbnb, etc.), you should not only write down that expense, but you can also add meals you had while traveling and deduct *half* of that expense when figuring out your gross adjusted income for the DJ business at tax time. Don't look at this as an excuse to buy tons of lavish meals, and it's seriously only for events that you had to legit travel for and spend the night elsewhere. If you drove two hours to a wedding but then drove home right after, then you don't get to deduct meal expenses. Keep in mind that you're not getting reimbursed for these meal expenses but it's reducing the amount of income you're taxed on.

My Spreadsheet

There are definitely more high-tech solutions than a good ol' fashioned spreadsheet, but I've found keeping spreadsheet records to work just fine, and it incurs almost zero costs for me, while other services might charge you. If you prefer a different way, by all means do that, but here's my way.

My spreadsheet and other documents can be found at:

<https://beaweddingdj.com/documents/>

Note: I won't lie—this is complicated and confusing. I've tried to explain it as best as possible, but this does require some tinkering in Excel and a decent amount of formulas and other complicated things, so if it's too confusing, consider making your own spreadsheet or using a different method of keeping financial records.

Page One

On the first sheet I write down any and every expense, any income that comes in (Revenue), and all mileage that is DJ-related. This sheet alone can give me basically all the information I need when doing income taxes, plus seeing how well I'm doing financially. I generally do just one year per spreadsheet, otherwise the file will get incredibly long and unwieldy. So, I'll have a file called DJ Expenses 2018, DJ Expenses 2019, etc.

Note: While the methods described here have worked for me when doing taxes, please consult an expert. Your state/city might have different laws. As well, tax laws are constantly changing.

Note: If on, say, November 1, 2019, you book a wedding for April 1, 2020, you put any money you earned/spent for that wedding in 2019 on your 2019 spreadsheet. It doesn't matter if the actual event isn't until 2020.

Here's an explanation by columns:

- **Description** – yep, you guessed it: it's a short description of the expense/income (Wedding, Meeting, Music, etc.)
- **City** – for things that are easily attributable to a certain city, I mark it. If the wedding is in Indianapolis, obviously I'd write "Indianapolis" here. If it's a meeting for an event or I bought a new speaker, I do not list a city.
- **State** – similar explanation to "City."
- **Date** – date of the occurrence. If I received a check for an April 1, 2020 wedding on November 1, 2019, I mark the date here as November 1, 2019.
- **Event ID** – Each time I book an event, I give it a number chronologically. So the first event you book can be 1; the second, 2; third, 3, etc.
- **Revenue** – any income, such as a retainer, remainder payment, and tips.

- **Equipment** – any expenses that could be considered equipment. This can include speakers and microphones but also gaffer tape, glow sticks, and other things.
- **Promotional** – anything that goes toward promoting the business. Google Ads, website costs, monthly payments to the Knot and WeddingWire, etc.
- **Music** – any music you buy and its expenses
- **Misc.** – anything that doesn't fall under one of these other categories. Examples include tolls, parking fees, liability insurance, meals (but remember: write down half the total cost of the meal), etc. For these I try to attribute a city and state to each one (for the sake of tax purposes—more on this in a bit). If it's not easily attributable to a city and state, you could just use your home city and state. For example, you go to a copy shop to make copies of your reception planner—you might use that file in multiple cities and states, but I just count it as my home city and state.
- **Miles** – the number of miles I drove to and from for an event or meeting or other DJ-related incident. If I drove from Kansas to Missouri for this event or meeting, I just list the state as Missouri.
- **Mileage** – this column takes the number of miles and multiplies it by the government's current tax deduction for business driving. For 2019 that amount is 58 cents per mile. This is what you'll need to update each year as the amount the government allows changes. Now, your "actual" mileage expenses won't necessarily be what the government allows you to say, but that's the allowed deduction, so you might as well use it.
- **Income** – this starts to put it all together. If a number was entered in the Revenue column, it'll appear as a positive number here. If it was entered in one of the expense/mileage columns, it'll show up as a negative number here (Microsoft Excel connotes this by putting parentheses around a number).
- **Notes** – a place to leave any notes, such as the date of the DJ event for which you received payment, what equipment you bought, etc. Make it easy, so

months or years down the line you can look at March 4, 2017 and have an idea what the \$43 charge under the Equipment column is actually for.

Scrolling down a little farther, you'll see each column get added up. You can see your year's Revenue in that column, while your adjusted gross income (revenue – expenses) will be at the bottom of the Income column.

Below the grand totals, you'll see a highlighted box. This pulls all the numbers together and breaks things down by state. If you only DJ in one state, then this is totally unnecessary information (and it'll just repeat your grand totals from a few lines up). Thus, you can skip this next part. Otherwise, continue:

If you DJ in multiple states, this will help you big time when it comes to doing your state taxes. Every event you DJ will have a state associated with it that you should enter in the State column. That will then pull that number into this table. The Revenue Percent will then break down each state by how much of your revenue (the percentage) was earned in that state. For example, say you earned \$10,000 in the year. Let's say you did 3 events in Kansas. You earned 600 at one, 750 at another, and 900 at the last one, so your total revenue was \$2,250. This column will then do the math for you and divide \$2,250 by \$10,000, and thus say 22.5%.

So why do you need to know that 22.5% of your revenue came from one state? This is how you can then essentially figure out your expenses for that state, which will help you on your state taxes. If you have an expense that is directly attributable to one state, such as a toll or parking expense (say you had to pay \$15 to park your car in a parking garage outside the wedding), you can by all means list a state in the State column for that expense. But other things don't have a directly attributable state to assign it to, such as equipment, music, website expenses, promotional costs, etc. So, essentially you can take the equipment costs and multiply them by the percent revenue for that state and figure out the amount that you can attribute to that state (in theory). Say you spent \$700 on equipment that year. In the Kansas row, because your revenue percent for Kansas was 22.5%, the Equipment cell in the

Kansas row will take \$700 and multiple that by 22.5%, making it \$157.50. This isn't precise, but it's a reasonable way to figure out your expenses by state.

Again: please get professional help especially when you're new to keeping tax records for your business.

Page Two

The second sheet of the spreadsheet is a simple entry for each event you've ever done, so you can number each event (1, 2, 3, etc.) and list other basic information. This is also a way to keep track of how much down payment the couple paid you, and how much is remaining. You can track how they found you (Google search, the Knot, other vendor referral, etc.), so you can more easily see what's working and what's not.

While I only do one year on the first sheet of the spreadsheet, I keep track of every event of all time here, so I have it all in one place.

Pay Estimated Taxes

For most jobs, where you work for a company, the employer takes out taxes from your paycheck automatically. This makes tax time not too difficult. You've most likely already paid the income taxes you owe for that year, and you might even get a refund from the government!

This is not the case when you start your own business. You're getting tons of DJ payments, the money is rolling in, and you're loving it . . . and then tax time comes, and suddenly it's a wake-up call: you have to pay taxes on this money to the federal government, any states you DJ in, and possibly to a city if the city has a local tax. And if you owe a particularly high amount, the government might charge you a penalty for not having paid any taxes on that money so far.

This is why you should pay "estimated taxes." These are payments you make every quarter to cover your "estimated" taxes for the year. Thus, if I think I may owe \$4,000 on taxes to the federal government for that year, I could pay \$1,000 each quarter and then there's no penalty and huge bill at tax time. If I end up overpaying, the

government refunds me that amount. If I underpay, okay, then I just make up the difference at tax time. You can also pay different amounts each quarter, paying higher or lower depending on how much you think your taxes are going to be. I could also do a similar arrangement for state and local taxes (though likely different amounts, because those tax rates might be lower than the federal rate).

This can be confusing at first—how much should you pay? It might take a couple years of seeing how your business does and how taxes turn out before you get a good sense. There are various calculators you can use and forms you can fill out to figure out your estimated taxes, which are usually based on how well you did the previous year.

The first couple years I didn't pay estimated taxes and then I ended up owing \$2,000 or more at tax time, which hurt. The year that really hurt was the year I discovered I owed \$7,000 in taxes! Wow, that hurt and was a big *oof!* Lesson learned. The following year (and the years since) I paid estimated taxes, which spread out my tax payments, avoided penalties for not having paid any taxes yet, and eased the big burden of a sudden huge bill. Just remember, if you owe a lot of taxes, it means you're making a lot of revenue. This is a good thing!

Hope you enjoyed this excerpt from
Be a Wedding: The Definitive Guide to Starting a Wedding DJ Business

When you're ready to purchase the complete guide, or learn more information,
check out:

<https://beaweddingdj.com/be-a-wedding-dj-book/>