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FEATURE

Story by The Aleit Group
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THE COST OF *Love*

The wedding industry as we know it is a relatively modern phenomenon. In earlier times, women were viewed as possessions and sold. Today, couples spend thousands of Rand to see their idea of a "perfect day" come to life.

The wedding industry changed most dramatically from the 1920s to the 1950s. Many of our traditions today were developed during this time, and were largely influenced by advertisements and promotions from major retailers, jewellers, caterers and other companies. In the 1960s and 1970s brides started to deviate from the original wedding plan; they challenged tradition and moved the wedding outside of the church. This led to the development of the "destination wedding", which is still very popular today.

In fact, there has been an increase in destination weddings ever since. This has aided the wedding industry boom which has taken place in South Africa over the past decade. Modern couples get married later in life. They are often well educated, well travelled, have more exotic taste and are financially independent. The sunny shores of Southern Africa appeal to thousands of brides from Europe annually, offering not only a warmer climate but much greater value for money. The facilities and services on offer are world class, and in many cases exceed the expectations of the couple and their attending guests.





In times of economic strife people are known to cut back on luxuries, yet the one area that seems to emerge relatively unscathed is that of the nuptial celebration. Rather than forgo their idea of *the* perfect wedding, couples are finding creative ways of making their money work harder and stretch further. For example, the bride and groom may cut their guest list, opt for a three course menu instead of a four course one,

settle for a DJ instead of a band and downscale the decor production (ever so slightly). But at the end of the day, the name of the game is to reduce quantity, rather than quality. Couples have also shifted their focus to products and services that bring a greater sense of meaning to the wedding.

On the other end of the scale, more affluent couples are still planning six figure weddings and show no signs of cutting back. "Essentially we're not hearing doom and gloom, but we are realistic and realise that the industry is not recession-proof," says Aleit Swanepoel of Aleit Wedding Coordination. "We're keeping a close eye on things, but it's quite clear that most people have been saving for their wedding or their children's weddings for years and still want the best. Couples are still getting married. People are still spending money. Wedding businesses with an excellent reputation and good, solid marketing practices are still thriving during the recession. Sure, they have noticed changes just like everyone else, but they also had structures in place that allowed them to respond and adapt.

"Furthermore, the recession has added important emphasis to the fact that wedding coordinators are responsible for clearly advising their clients on effective budget planning. Every aspect of the day should be explained and the options clearly discussed," explains Aleit. "Weddings are expensive. There is no sugar coating the fact. It is our job to ensure that our clients live their dreams and experience a day that is nothing short of unforgettable – with no regrets afterwards." **T**