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Writing Portfolio

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DIY wedding ideas to help you save money

Looking to save a bit of money on your wedding budget? Here are four DIY ideas for things you can actually make yourself.

It's no secret that weddings can get very pricey very quickly. Even with the best intentions to keep things small and simple, costs can rack up if you aren't careful. The good news is, there are quite a few ways that you can save money and still have the perfect day that you've always dreamed of. All you have to do is get a little crafty and put on your DIY hat. And don't forget to rope your friends into helping too!

You can also get a little help from an RCS Personal Loan to get you up the aisle in style. Loans start from as little as R2 000. The application process is quick, simple and paperless. The best part: you get the money in your account within 24 hours!

THE INVITES

One of the biggest trends for weddings right now is the paperless invite. Couples are turning to events as a way to save money, manage their guest list with ease and be eco-friendly. By using a service like paperlesspost.com or theknot.com, you can send out beautiful invitations with animations and bespoke designs – without the hassle and cost of printing and posting each one. These services also track RSVPs for you.

If you'd rather go for traditional invites, a big cost saver is to make them yourself. Print out the necessary information on normal paper. Then buy some lovely cardboard, as well as some ribbon or pretty tape, and put them together. You can make an afternoon of it with your fiancé or friends.

THE FLOWERS AND BOUQUETS

Flowers are often one of the biggest expenses for the day – and well worth it because they add real magic to the décor. However, you can save money here by doing some or all of it yourself. For centrepieces and ceremony flowers, try the vintage approach. Scour markets and second-hand shops for old jars, tins, vases, bottles, glasses, cups and anything else you could use to put flowers in. Then head off to a local flower market in the weeks before your wedding to see what they have. Chat with the vendors about their recommendations, haggle a bit to get the best price and place your order. You'll have to fetch the flowers the day before or of the wedding and arrange them in your DIY vases, but it'll be worth it.

While you're at the flower market, have a look around for flowers for your bouquets and buttonholes. You can get a really good deal on the price if you buy in bulk. Also, if you're worried about making your own, you can always buy some flowers a few weeks before and do some practice bouquets. There are plenty of tutorials on YouTube showing tips and tricks.

THE WEDDING FAVOURS

Now, when we say DIY, we don't mean that you have to make the entire wedding favour from scratch. What you can do is find a very small gift – chocolates, biscuits or trinkets – and add a handwritten note. This gives the gift a personal touch without costing you a fortune.

If you are very good with handmade things, then this is a sure-fire way to save money and free up budget for other things. Just make sure you plan your time properly. It's never fun to be frantically making wedding favours the day before you walk down the aisle.

THE SIGNAGE

From welcome signs to dinner menus, signage can be a big expense. Printing costs are usually very high, especially when you use glossy paper and print in colour. Another big cost is the design of all the printing.

There are several ways to save money here with a little DIY. First of all, you don't need a designer. There are numerous templates available on websites like Etsy that you can download – either for free or for a small price. Then, instead of individual menus, print one for each table or just one large menu next to the seating plan.

There are lots of places and reasons to put signs up at a wedding: the welcome sign, bar, bathrooms, gift table, order of the day – just to name a few. You can make your own by using old pieces of wood and painting on them, or use chalkboards and write the message on them.

HAVE THE PERFECT DAY NO MATTER YOUR BUDGET

With a few simple DIY hacks, you can have the wedding day you've always dreamed of. And if you need a little bit more help in the budget department, why not get an RCS Personal Loan? Loans start at R2 000, and the money is deposited straight into your account within 24 hours. Apply today!

Go social and slash marketing costs

Published in Entrepreneur Magazine, April 2013

Are you tired of pouring a massive portion of your capital into advertising costs but don't see an alternative? You can't really afford not to tell people what your company has to offer, especially if you're just starting out. That being said, it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Why not get your customers to do the work for you – for free?

Build an online community to spread your message

Creating a virtual community is actually a highly cost-effective way to market your business. In fact, you don't have to pay a cent to set up a Twitter account or LinkedIn profile for your company. It's also an excellent way to build a loyal customer base and attract new customers through word of mouth. But where do you start the process of building an online community? Firstly, you need to:

- **Find out where the conversation is happening** – Take the time to search the big social media sites for mention of your company and see if anyone is already talking about you. For example, if people on Twitter have acknowledged what you do, you've already got the foundations for your community right there. It would be unwise to try and force the conversation to start on another platform. Of course this doesn't mean that you can't expand your community to include other sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook, it'll just take more time to get going.
- **Treat your users like the individuals they are** – Once you've got your social profiles going, it's time to start talking to people. This is where most companies fall down as they simply broadcast their message to anyone and everyone. Instead, you should be talking to individuals, one at a time, and showing that there is a real person behind the company profile. This way, you'll gain people's trust as an authority in your industry, which encourages them to interact with you on a regular basis.
- **Get your community excited** – Virtual word of mouth is one of the most successful ways to bring new members to your community and keep them there. However, if you want people to talk about your business, you have to give them something that will get them talking. Essentially, you need to supply your users with thought-provoking content on a regular basis.

Remember, while building and maintaining a thriving online community is definitely an affordable marketing option, it does take time and effort. There is no quick fix that will get you 1 000 interested users overnight. However, if you're willing to put in the work, you'll be able to reap the rewards for years to come.



Let's show you around

Before me stood a goddess, her radiant beauty was more than I could take in. I was in a strange room, building, space? The edges were impossible to focus on then suddenly there was this siren just standing there. Her long hair cascaded down her back like melted golden candle wax and glistened in a light that seemed to come from within her and her white teeth flashed from that same light when she smiled. Cloudlike material was wrapped loosely around her body- nothing held it there and even though it looked like it was falling, it stayed as she glided towards me on bare feet. She stopped when she was nearly touching me, I inhaled sharply. I could taste her, it was deep, rich red wine. Suddenly the material surrounding her had colour, it was deep maroon. I could see the light that was within her burning beneath the surface of her eyes. She was haunting like a siren and her voice, "Welcome to your subconscious, Mr Anderson."

"My name is Holly and I'll be your tour guide on this most unusual journey." I took in her beauty with some difficulty but her voice. Her voice came from somewhere deep inside her and was playing a sweet melody on my eardrums. Somehow through all this I understood what she was saying as if it was inside me already. "Hopefully we will be able to find some answers as to why we are here. By we I mean you and I, Mr Anderson, and all the other members of the board that make up your psyche. Each one of us represents a different part of you and then there is the chairman. Well I think we'll start with your suppressed childhood hurts."

"This is little Bobby, also known The Fat Kid. He is a sad, pathetic, shaky thing that never stands up for himself. I don't think he can, hey Fat Boy! Look at him try to say something- kinda reminds you of a Chihuahua." A cruel edge hit her voice but I didn't want to feel anything against her, she was too beautiful. Looking down at this boy I felt something inside me try to cry out like he was. Was little Bobby that part inside me that always wants to back down? "Yes, Mr Anderson, little Bobby is that part of you." Her voice was soft and lilting again and her eyes filled with sympathy for me as she looked up at my face. It was as if the harshness was never there, so I'll pretend it wasn't because I feel a certain attraction to this beauty. But why did she hear my thoughts, how, I didn't speak? "No, Mr Anderson, you didn't but we are where your thoughts are created."

"Next up we have the awkward age when Bob, as we liked to be called because it sounded older, started to notice girls. Remember Rebecca Johnson, that little red headed snot? She was the famous first love and she dumped us an hour after asking her out and she had said yes with a smile." Now there was a little bit of hurt in her voice, why do these different memories create different emotions? Wouldn't being fat have hurt her too? "Oh it did, Mr Anderson, but as I said Bobby was a suppressed memory so I don't feel the hurt anymore. Anyway, we swore off girls for a while didn't we?" Yes, I remember that, she really hurt me and I stopped letting anyone affect me emotionally. I became emotionally cold. "On the outside very much so, but on the inside it always hurt." Holly was right.

"And to the right we have Robby, the teenager. He was smart, career driven, knew exactly where he was going and was very lonely on the inside. Michael was his best friend until he got sucked into the black hole of popularity when he won a stupid science competition with a really 'cool' idea. That fatal weekend, he never should have been at the party and the unpopular Michael wouldn't have been there. He died and we blamed ourselves yet the popular brats didn't care. They forgot he even existed a week later. High school ended alone for us but we moved on, on to university." I felt my guts twist tightly, pain wracked through me and I saw Holly wince. I felt guilty about hurting her because I think I may love her and guilty about not stopping Michael, "He wouldn't listen Mr Anderson and you hurt us all every time you blame us because it's not true." The flame behind her beautiful eyes flashed as her delicate features hardened. We all hurt and on my right Robby was crying.

"Moving along we come to Rob or Robby, the university student. On his way to being the best damn chartered accountant there ever was. And then there was Tammy. She came to us and we tried to run away at first but her persistence made us cave. We had friends, real friends, for the first time ever and it was the best years of our life." I felt a smile stretch across my face at the memory,

God Tammy was so wonderful. "It's too bad she chose her career over us, but..." I would rather she did that if it made her completely happy than stay and not fulfill her goals. "Maybe someday she'll come back, we're still young, there's still time. And it seems you're now getting the hang of communicating with me, you can communicate with the others as well." Robby looks so happy, his life was perfect. There's nothing to say him.

"Now there's someone that should be very clear in your memory. Meet Robert Anderson, chartered accountant. Successful in job but not doing so hot on the social side." I stared at Robert's face, it was mine, my face today. In that face I saw the person that loved Tammy and wanted to go after her, I had banished those thoughts from my mind five years ago. "No, Mr Anderson, not from your mind but from your conscious thought. The want to run after her still remains locked inside here." She waved her arms around, indicating the surrounding area. Then she turned to me and pointed to my head, "In your subconscious." Trying to come to grips with her leaving was the most painful thing in my life, more painful than Michael. I began to deal with that feeling of loss by becoming confident and more outgoing. "Now you're over confident, people are turned away from you by your ego." Another Robert was standing next to the first, but this Robert had a confident, easy-go-lucky attitude and ego oozed from every pore. Was this me to the outside world, did I look like I love myself this much to others? "Yes, Mr Anderson. We are disgusting to other people, we're chauvinistic and egotistical." Why? "Perhaps our next stop will shed some light on why we are so in love with ourself."

Holly took hold of my arm and pulled me towards a desk with a big office chair behind it. The chair was facing away from us and everything else, all the other Robert Andersons, disappeared. Holly pushed me forward while she hung back. The chair started turning, a young lady sat there in a tight, fashionable business suit, her blond hair was pulled back from her face in a bun, but there was no mistaking her, she was Holly. I inhaled sharply, I could no longer smell or taste the red wine but it was Holly. "Yes, Mr Anderson, I'm the chairman. I run your mind, I keep all your emotions in check, I'm the reason for every thought that runs through our mind." She had a sadistic smile blemishing her sweet features. I was almost in love with her because of the way she looked and if she was me then... "So tell me, Mr Anderson, do you know now why you're so in love with yourself?"

I felt my body jerk and I was surrounded by black. Then somebody yelled, "He's coming round!" I coughed and water came out, my eyes opened and saw people standing over me. I coughed more water out, I must've drowned. Some people claim to see death in a situation like this, I think I saw something scarier, much scarier.

Stanford wine farms

When people think about things to do in Stanford, visiting the many exceptional wine farms in the area is often very near, if not at the top of the list. Many of these wine estates are internationally renowned and offer an excellent selection of vintages to buy and to taste, as well as restaurants where you can enjoy a meal.

The wine estates in Stanford genuinely are a must-do for anyone who finds themselves in the area – whether you live there or are just staying for a short time. The rich history of growing grapes and turning them into delicious wines is just one of the many reasons to visit the estates. You can do tastings to discover what makes each one so special and why people come from all over the world to buy from them. You can also wander through the grounds and marvel at the splendour of the Overberg region.

The Cape Whale Coast truly is a special place with its rich diversity in flora, fauna and landscapes. The different types of soil in the valleys and on the mountain slopes provide excellent grounds for growing a wide variety of grapes. This great range allows the winemakers to produce everything from deep merlots to vibrant sauvignon blancs to tantalising blends. Whether you like sweet or dry, wooded or unwooded, red or white, or anything in between, you'll be able to taste it all.

The history and the grounds of each estate is full of stories worth hearing and retelling. Whenever you go for a tasting or a meal at one of the wine farms in or around Stanford, be sure to chat to the sommeliers, the waiters and if you're lucky, the wine makers. They'll be able to tell you all about how the farm started, what they grow there and maybe something about their special processes that make their wines stand out from the crowd. Many estates also offer farm-to-table dining experiences that are a foodie's dream come true. Be sure to look at the menus when touring the wine farms.

For the Stanford locals, it's really wonderful to have so many excellent wine farms right on your doorstep. You can get farm prices on exceptional wines and keep a good-looking wine cellar in your own home. Bottles of unusual or rare vintages also make excellent gifts, and having these farms close by means you always have a good supply of potential presents for family members, friends and even for work events.

Extract from SAFE – an original screenplay

1. EXT. ROAD. DAY.

SABINA is moving down a busy street, slowly because of all the PEOPLE. She glances behind her and sees AGENT COLLARD behind her. She pulls the hood of her jacket further over her head and continues to push forward. Collard signals to other MEN across the street to keep moving. Collard hasn't seen Sabina but knows she is on the street somewhere.

Sabina comes to a stop at a traffic light to cross the road. She glances behind her again as Collard spots her. He starts running in her direction pushing people over. Sabina runs across the street before the light changes. She runs down a flight of stairs into a shopping mall.

2. INT. SHOPPING MALL. DAY.

Sabina glances behind her again and then all around her. She pulls the hood off her head to blend in with the people there. She moves quickly down an escalator and along a corridor.

Collard and AGENT DU TOIT run down the stairs into the shopping mall and stop. The other men stop behind them.

AGENT COLLARD

Spread out.

The men move off in different directions.

Sabina comes to an opening and pauses, she glances around. She moves across it but turns sharply when one of the men steps out in front of her. To her left another man steps out causing her to turn in the other direction where she sees another of the men. She stops short, not bothering to turn to the only remaining opening behind her. Collard steps out behind her.

AGENT COLLARD

Fancy meeting you here.

Sabina sighs in resignation.

3. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM. DAY.

The room is small with a long table in the middle. Sabina sits in a chair on one side of the table, facing two chairs on the other side of the table. She is handcuffed to the arms of the chair.

She pulls at the right handcuff and then at the left. They don't give and she sighs, frustrated.

The door opens with a creak and Collard and Du Toit walk in. Sabina looks at them as if examining prey, she leans back and crosses her legs.

Du Toit seats himself furthest from the door. Agent Collard pulls out the empty chair but remains standing behind it.

AGENT COLLARD

(feigned politeness)

Sabina, meet Du Toit.

He gestures to the other agent as if they were at a dinner party.

AGENT DU TOIT

Pleasure to finally meet you.

He grins, carrying on the feigned politeness of Agent Collard.

AGENT COLLARD

He doesn't think that cuffing you to the chair is necessary.

SABINA

You should tell him what happens when your guards take a nap while I'm in custody.

Collard finally sits down.

AGENT COLLARD

Oh, I did. I've also told him all about this case. He's been very helpful in tracking you down.

SABINA

Needed the fresh legs to run after me?

Collard smiles overly sweetly.

AGENT COLLARD

Actually, it was his photography skills I find most useful.

Du Toit removes a pile of photographs from a folder he had been carrying. He starts putting them down on the table one by one with an obsequious smile.