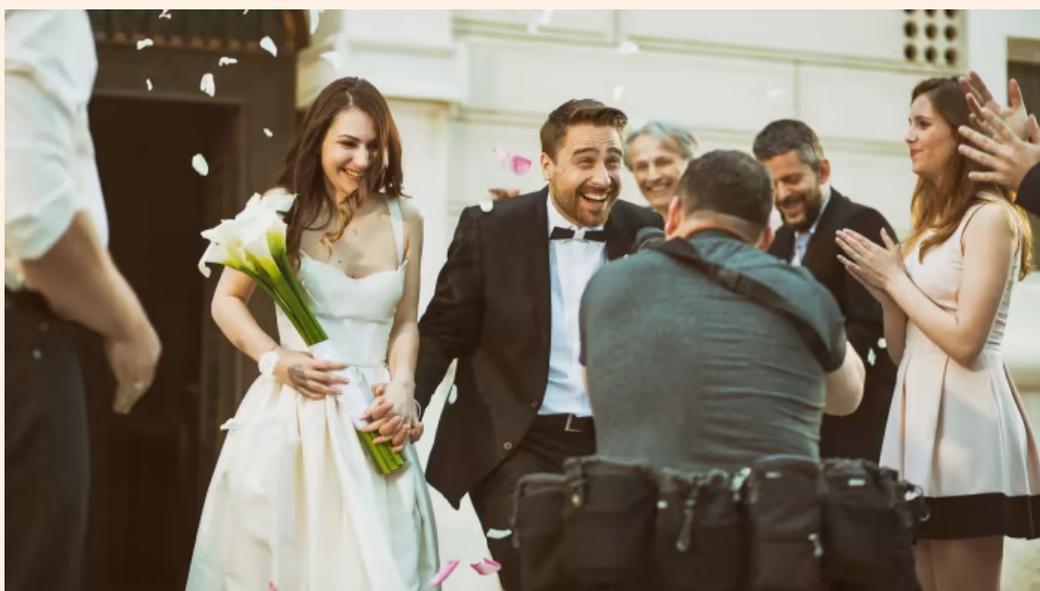


## Reader response: Shed a tear for the weddings industry

Weddings contribute £14.7bn to the UK economy and support about 400,000 jobs

**KRISTIN SHARP**



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**Kristin Sharp** OCTOBER 9 2020

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How much should you spend on a wedding? I'm a wedding photographer and while I'm used to reading articles about how to cut corners on wedding budgets, I ignore them most of the time. But I wanted to respond to Claer Barrett's [recent column](#), which welcomed the Covid-induced curbs on [wedding spending](#). This came as a bit of a sting.

I started my business 10 years ago this week, and I've photographed a fair few weddings since. These range from huge ceremonies, where it has felt as if the couple have been on a speed-dating night to get around all of their guests, to small intimate occasions which have been beautiful and romantic. The smallest was when I was both photographer and one of the witnesses. The couple asked me to provide another witness, so I took my mum along with me.

Yes, the cost of weddings has increased. So has the cost of living. And ultimately, there's something for every budget. I've been to weddings with £500 wedding cakes, DIY wedding cakes, cheese-stacked wedding cakes and M&S wedding cakes.

A lot of the best UK wedding blogs and magazines are brilliant at promoting stylish weddings that aren't about how much you spend, but having a great time, being creative and making the day feel a little less like a carbon copy of every other wedding.



Kristin Sharp: "The #WhatAboutWeddings campaign group estimates that spending on weddings contributes £14.7bn to the UK economy and supports about 400,000 jobs"

For couples with lower budgets, there are suppliers out there to provide the service they can afford or want. And ultimately, it is about prioritising what is important to people.

Not everyone who gets married is a millennial. Some of my couples are older; others have funded their own wedding. Plenty of them have a parent or two in the background with "ideas" who will bankroll the wedding – and often, these are people who had small ceremonies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Sometimes, couples don't want quite as much fuss as their parents would like to create. Older couples usually call the shots and don't invite dad's 20 golf pals or let mum dictate 40-odd family group shots, which end up feeling like a really awkward secondary school photo.

But the idea that you say the word "wedding" and the cost doubles is a total cliché. The cost is mostly determined by market demand. It's a fairly saturated market, so your pricing needs to be competitive. It's also determined by what is being requested.

When I turn up at a wedding, I'm usually carrying a lot of kit, I've done a lot more prep beforehand and there's a lot of work involved afterwards. In addition, perfection is a big expectation. My biggest-selling package involves 50 hours of work, of which maybe 10 are attending the wedding itself.

Then there are the overheads of running a business — most of which still have to be paid for even though nearly 80 per cent of weddings planned for 2020 have been cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Salary? It's such a dirty word when you're self-employed and doubly so when you're in the wedding industry. There's often a sense that photographers should live off exposure. I've often been told "it's good for your portfolio" or "but you love doing it anyway". The latest one is when people claim to be "influencers" and request freebies.

This is an industry made up of microbusinesses just like mine, many of which are run by women. The [#WhatAboutWeddings](#) campaign group estimates that spending on weddings contributes £14.7bn to the UK economy and supports about 400,000 jobs, ranging from catering and events planning to florists, dressmakers and photographers.

Some 85 per cent of these businesses rely on weddings for the majority of their revenue and many are in a precarious position now, feeling uncomfortable and unhappy about their job insecurity.

This is made harder by the demands for refunds of deposits, especially when those demands come six months after lockdown. Many working in the weddings industry have had no income since March. Some may have qualified for furlough or the self-employed income support scheme, but many have fallen between the cracks — particularly if they are limited company directors.

It is having a knock-on effect on other businesses too. This month, album manufacturer GF Smith [shut its photographic division](#) due to the lack of demand for wedding albums. In August, DC Thomson [closed](#) Scottish Wedding magazine. My local camera repair shop has lost a substantial amount of business because people can't afford to get their equipment serviced. If homegrown companies like these don't survive, valuable skills, services and jobs will be lost.

The wedding industry is like any other service industry, on which the UK economy depends. Of course it's window dressing for marriage but it's a financial choice that people are entitled to make — and one that supports thousands of small businesses in Britain.

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