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THIRD PLACE — WEDWU

## WedWu's name-your-price service courts wedding market

WedWu has been accepting bids for wedding services for about a year and is expanding nationwide.



Darren Atinsky's business is called WedWu, a  Priceline service for brides and grooms, and he won third place in the Business Plan Challenge. He is photographed among vintage luxury limos used for bridal events at Signature Grande in Davie. CARL JUSTE / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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Like the "I do's," the wedding services market is steeped in tradition. WedWu is out to turn all that upside down.

Traditionally, a bride would choose a vendor based on a referral from a friend or wedding planner and pay what was asked. A more price-conscious bride might spend months meeting with potential vendors, evaluating their work, talking with references, negotiating services and finally gathering bids in order to make final choices. Either way, most brides accepted that going rates for these services for their big day would come at a premium.

But it doesn't have to, says Darren Atinsky, 45, who founded Davie-based [WedWu](#), a Priceline-like service for brides and grooms. In just a year, he's already had 101 customers use his name-your-offer service, and is expanding beyond South Florida. WedWu took third place in the Business Plan Challenge's Community Track.

What Atinsky has found is that customers appreciate that he is working with a pre-qualified database of potential vendors so they don't have to do the research, saving them time, and giving them peace of mind because the vendors have been vetted by the company. They also appreciated the price cut, particularly in this economy. He says WedWu's services are generally 40 to 50 percent cheaper than the going rate on the market.

"It seems like when people finally come to our site they are amazed and wish they had seen it earlier because it really addresses this need that they

have to get great service at great prices," said Atinsky.

So how does the system work? Once on [wedwu.com](#), the customer submits an offer for a package of services for photography, video or DJ services. There are several packages from which to choose for each service. Once an offer is submitted, WedWu will either accept it or send it back suggesting the bidder

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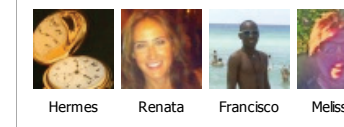
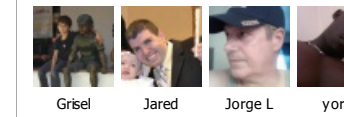
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resubmit a more reasonable offer. This could go back and forth a couple of times until an offer is accepted. At the point the customer decides to go through with the deal, a deposit is required.

WedWu matches the customer with a professional from its vetted database of vendors who have been checked out, bonded and are experienced in weddings. WedWu offers a 100 percent money-back guarantee. With such a large database, Atinsky says, WedWu can replace a vendor on the rare occasions when a vendor cancels, as happened once with only four hours to spare.

WedWu takes care of all the arrangements with the vendor, including scheduling and payment, and makes sure the customer receives the contracted services. The customer is provided with contact information on the vendor so that she can talk to him or her before the day of the event, if she would like.

Many customers who come to the site are grooms, and they bid on all three services at once, said Atinsky, who has worked in the wedding industry for years as a publisher of bridal publications. Many of his customers are planning second marriages, and increasingly he is getting requests for non-wedding events as well.

Wedwu.com has been in beta but has been accepting and filling bids for about a year to fully test the concept and service. Now the team, which also includes Humberto Lee as lead developer, is working on fully automating the site. So far this year the team has doubled the pool of vendors.

Judges were particularly impressed with his beta testing and progress to date. With more than 100 customers booked (72 at the time of plan), WedWu's conversion rate is 65 percent, showing that there is demand for a name-your-own-price service, even in the ultra-traditional wedding market. But some believed he was underestimating operating costs, particularly marketing costs, to go nationwide with the venture.

Atinsky said that so far the team has done very little marketing, and he said he has been surprised by how many referrals have come through social media channels.

"People are starting to book us from other states, Virginia, Oklahoma — we just got our first one from Seattle — so people have been finding us more easily," said Atinsky, who has also been focusing on search engine optimization.

Atinsky has been bootstrapping the company so far. "We are making revenue. It is financing itself on the working capital end, but we need investment to expand."

He is talking to investors, he says, and hopes to use those funds to hire an additional developer, scale up marketing efforts and build out the database. In the future, WedWu will likely add other wedding services, such as ceremony officiates and limos.

That would please Melissa Brown of Cooper City, because she will be recommending WedWu to friends and looks forward to using it for other events. She bid and contracted for videography services for her wedding in March.

"Most women don't have wedding planners. We are doing everything ourselves and it gets crazy. WedWu was amazing," she said. "They were professional and really work with your budget."


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