

**VOLUME 12**

**SERVING THE MODERN MARKET,  
NOT JUST YESTERDAY'S BRIDES**

Understanding contemporary couples and how the legalization of same-sex marriage is shaping the modern wedding market

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# INTRODUCTION

The WedInsights Series is designed to provide wedding professionals with relevant consumer and business insights. Each month, we'll focus on a particular topic – drawing on data from consumer behaviors and opinions, and provide actionable insights for your business.

In this report, we focus on **how contemporary couples are shaping the modern wedding market** by offering insights into questions such as:

- How has the wedding planning process for same-sex couples changed in the last few years?
- What are same-sex couples looking for when searching for their wedding vendors?
- What biases are there in the industry and why couples might be fearful of rejection?
- How can pros be inclusive to attract all couples getting married?

In order to provide the most relevant and up-to-date data, WeddingWire conducts a variety of research throughout the year with more than 50,000 wedding professionals, engaged and newlywed couples across the country. Together with behavioral data analyzed by our own data scientists, WeddingWire uses internal data to calculate overall estimates which we present throughout this report, unless otherwise noted.

## NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MARKET INSIGHTS:

*“The structure of the modern wedding market continues to evolve, as couples personalize old traditions and plan days that truly reflect them as a couple. With recent landmark Supreme Court rulings that now legalize same-sex marriage across the United States, we wanted to know how all couples (and specifically the LGBTQ) have begun to change how they plan their weddings.*

*We are pleased to share with you highlights from the **2016 Survey of Contemporary Couples & Current Wedding Trends**, our latest research study conducted in partnership between WeddingWire, GayWeddings, the Gay Wedding Institute, and Community Marketing & Insights. Same-sex marriage legalization and increased emotional and financial support from parents and loved ones means that LGBTQ are now more likely to get married in the state they currently live, plan more formal ceremonies/receptions (rather than city hall events) and spend more on a wedding. Not surprising, inclusivity is a major selection criteria when looking for a vendor, so more than ever, businesses need to showcase that they serve all types of couples.”*



**Andy Whittaker**  
**Director of Market Insights**  
**WeddingWire**

# HOW LGBTQ PROPOSALS ARE CHANGING

## SAME-SEX PROPOSALS ARE BEGINNING TO MIRROR THOSE OF OPPOSITE-SEX PROPOSALS

- According to our most recent survey that captures all wedding types (i.e. elopements, ceremony/reception, etc.), the average age of same-sex couples marrying today is 43, which is 13 years older than opposite-sex couples (age 30). This difference demonstrates the pent-up demand for same-sex marriage that has existed for many years, and we expect the average to decrease in the coming years.
- Today, 68% of same-sex couples are choosing more “traditional proposals” where one person proposes to another, as opposed to making a plan together (to discuss a legal elopement or traveling to another state).
- Seventy-four percent of female couples and 42% of male couples are exchanging at least one engagement ring.
- On average, same-sex couples spend approximately \$1,300 on their engagement rings, with lesbian and gay women averaging upward of \$2,000.



### Survey Methodology

This 2016 study included both same-sex and opposite-sex couples who married since 2013 or are currently engaged. All types of weddings were represented including city hall, legal elopements and ceremonies/receptions with invited guests.

### Recent Marriage Equality Milestones



-2013-

*Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA):*  
Supreme Court rules federal same-sex marriage ban unconstitutional

-2015-

*Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS):*  
Supreme Court makes same-sex marriage legal in all 50 U.S. States

## SAME-SEX COUPLES HAVE VARYING LENGTHS OF ENGAGEMENT, BUT LESBIAN AND GAY WOMEN TEND TO PLAN LONGER

- Like opposite-sex couples, the engagement length of same-sex couples varies based on the type of union. **Those who are planning a formal ceremony and reception are engaged on average 12-13 months**, whereas those who are applying for a license but aren't planning any type of ceremony are engaged approximately 5 months.
- Furthermore, we see that lesbian and gay women tend to be engaged approximately 12 months, compared to males who average 8 months. This longer engagement may be as a result of females being slightly more likely to have a ceremony and reception with invited guests.



### LGBTQ ENGAGEMENT LENGTH

TYPE OF UNION	AVERAGE LENGTH
CEREMONY/RECEPTION	12 MONTHS
SIMPLE CEREMONY (LIKE CITY HALL)	10 MONTHS
LEGAL ELOPEMENT	8 MONTHS
APPLY FOR LICENSE/NO CEREMONY	5 MONTHS

# WHY SAME-SEX COUPLES SEARCH FOR INCLUSIVE VENDORS

## COUPLES ALSO LOOK FOR VENDORS WITH SAME-SEX WEDDING EXPERIENCE

- Currently engaged same-sex couples face similar wedding planning challenges in the planning process as opposite-sex couples – such as budgeting, determining who to invite and finding vendors.

- **Vendor inclusivity and experience serving same-sex couples are two very important components to selecting wedding vendors among the LGBTQ community.**

- Ninety-eight percent of LGBTQ couples feel positively about a company featuring same-sex imagery on their websites and marketing collateral, and 53% of opposite-sex couples feel the same.



HOW LGBTQ ENGAGED COUPLES CHOOSE THEIR VENDORS

INCLUSIVITY	87%
SERVE SAME-SEX COUPLES	86%
AVAILABILITY	85%
PRICE	82%
CUSTOMER SERVICE	82%
OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF WEDDING VENDOR	82%

- Additionally, 55% of currently engaged same-sex couples report using at least some kind of LGBTQ-specific planning resource to help find their vendors, an increase from 36% over the last three years.

## FEAR OF REJECTION IS HIGH AMONG THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY MILLENNIALS

- While searching for their vendor team, **47% of same-sex couples have expressed fear of rejection based on sexual orientation.** In fact, findings show that lesbian and gay women express a higher fear of rejection than gay male couples (46% v. 26% respectively).

- Same-sex couples continue to report discrimination in the industry, from denial of services to heteronormative assumptions. Twelve percent of engaged same-sex couples say they've experienced discrimination, while 13% are uncertain (i.e. unreturned phone calls or emails can create suspicion despite the true reasons).

- Although acceptance continues to increase, the concerns have not lessened for Millennials who express the most fear of rejection based on sexual orientation. Millennials have come to expect transparency and honesty, and seek out recommendations from friends to find the authentic brands to do business.



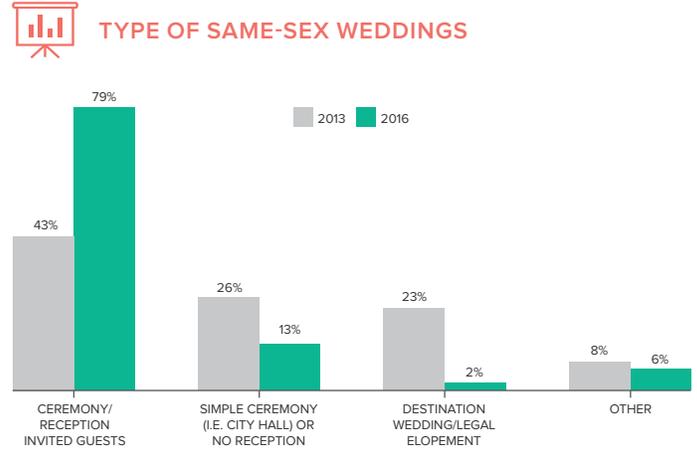
*"Our jeweler assumed we were sisters getting matching engagement rings and our dance instructor assumed we needed male partners to learn how to dance."*

**- Lesbian/gay female couple, Massachusetts**

# HOW SAME-SEX WEDDINGS LOOK POST MARRIAGE EQUALITY

## SAME-SEX COUPLES ARE PLANNING MORE ELABORATE WEDDINGS IN THEIR HOME-STATE

- In the last year, we're seeing a substantial increase in same-sex couples (79%) celebrating their union with a formal ceremony and reception. This is a large increase from 43% of same-sex weddings prior to 2013.
- The average same-sex couple has roughly 100 wedding guests and 6 people in their wedding party. (Unlike opposite-sex couples, the majority of same-sex wedding parties incorporate mixed genders on both sides.)



- There has also been a shift in where same-sex couples are getting married. Today, 77% of LGBTQ couples are now choosing to get married in their home state, as opposed to 43% in 2013, as they no longer need to travel to another state where same-sex marriage is recognized.
- When it comes to wedding day traditions, same-sex couples are generally less traditional than opposite-sex couples, however lesbian and gay brides incorporate more traditional elements and rituals into the ceremony than gay grooms. (Think: posed pictures, first dance, bachelorette party, etc.)

## SPENDING HAS GROWN SIGNIFICANTLY DUE TO INCREASED SUPPORT OF FAMILIES

- The average spend on a same-sex wedding has increased 88% from 2013, in large part, because same-sex couples are now much less likely to have “city hall” weddings.
- When looking at all types of weddings, ranging from city hall events to larger receptions, the average same-sex couple has spent \$11,000 compared to \$15,000 for opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couples spend \$117 per guest, compared to \$100 per guest for opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couples tend to spend less overall on their weddings compared to opposite-sex couples because they invite fewer guests.
- Same-sex and opposite-sex couples who plan ceremonies and receptions on sites like WeddingWire and GayWeddings are more likely to be planning larger events and report spending up to \$29,000.
- Though a strong majority of LGBTQ couples continue to pay for all or most of the wedding costs on their own (74%), the number receiving some financial assistance from parents is increasing. This may be attributed to the fact that families are becoming increasingly supportive of same-sex couples, although financial support still lags in comparison to opposite-sex couples.

## WHAT THIS ALL MEANS FOR WEDDING PROFESSIONALS

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2015 was a momentous year and a huge win for same-sex marriage equality. As inclusivity continues to increase, 85% of wedding professionals surveyed said they are ready, willing and able to serve same-sex couples. However, being willing-to-serve and prepared-to-serve are two different things. Follow our tips below to make sure your business is hitting the mark when it comes to serving all couples.

# 1

### Go beyond the first glance

Many in the industry (e.g., wedding pros, wedding expos, registry) assume a marrying couple is one male and one female, thus distributing forms/contracts with “bride” and “groom” language, and often using the term “bridal” when referencing their clientele. This bridal bias and heteronormative assumption is important to recognize as you may be alienating current and potential clients. Make the change to show your inclusivity by using the word “couples” instead of “brides”, and updating your collateral and/or contracts to be suitable for all types of couples.

# 2

### Gay wedding competent

In today’s market it’s not enough to be ‘gay-friendly’, you must be ‘gay wedding competent’. LGBTQ couples now have a greater choice when it comes to their vendor team and it’s no longer just about who responds back. Make it a seamless experience and show your competence by:

- Understanding what LGBTQ couples need (ex. how to enter down the aisle, how to orchestrate child-parent dances, etc.)
- Understanding how LGBTQ experiences and legal options shape their choices
- Using the terms that couples use to identify themselves

Not sure where to get started? Get educated on the latest LGTBQ stats and trends by [reading pro-advice](#) from Kathryn Hamm of GayWeddings.

# 3

### Spend money efficiently

Exposure is key to collecting more business and while spending more on advertising may help, it’s important to take a step back and assess if you’re spending your money efficiently. Look at what you’re spending on wedding sites, SEO, Facebook, Google Ad words and ask yourself if your messaging targets all couples or just opposite-sex couples. If same-sex couples are seeing the same ads for your business as opposite-sex couples, think about the imagery and language you are using. Take the time to drill down on your target audience, keywords, images and language so that you’re making the most of your advertising and talking to all couples in the way they’d want to be spoken to.



Learn how to reach same-sex couples planning their wedding by [opting into GayWeddings.com](#), the largest LGBTQ-friendly database of wedding professionals.