

Registry: What's It All About?

by Kathryn Lemmon

Bridal registry--what's it all about? Traditionally, there have been two reasons to set up a gift registry in the days leading up to your wedding. First, it allows you to select items you need in your new, married life. Secondly, gift registry is designed to make shopping easier for your wedding guests. These days the term "bridal" is a bit misleading. It's not just the bride who should be involved with this aspect of wedding planning. "Couples" registry might be more appropriate.

One of the biggest mistakes couples make when registering is heading into the store unprepared. Before you begin the process, talk with your fiancé about your choices, preferences and individual needs. Do you plan to hold formal dinners often or is your lifestyle more casual? Is your kitchen already full of appliances or lacking the essentials? Does your taste run more to contemporary, country, or Swedish modern? Once you have decided on general preferences, then you're ready to start selecting specific items for your registry.

Include a wide range of merchandise. Registries are no longer just about linens and formal china. Couples today are getting married later and many already have the basic home and kitchen items. So instead, you might consider recreational items such as camping gear or workshop items such as power tools. Also choose items within a range of prices to fit any budget, that way all your guests can use the registry, not just rich Uncle Al.

Be realistic about your needs. If you can't imagine ever using a gigantic silver serving tray, don't register for it, as storage space is always a consideration. If your current food processor works fine, don't register for another one, just because it's on a kitchen checklist you saw in a magazine.

Go with list in hand and stick to it. Wandering aimlessly around the store until you see things you like, will be a long and frustrating proposition. Most bridal magazines have a list of popular items which you can revise to meet your own needs. Or ask the store(s) if they offer such a worksheet.

When should you register? As a general rule, it should be completed no less than five months ahead of your wedding day and even earlier if possible. It's a good idea to check back with the store(s) occasionally and again a month before the wedding to make sure your selections are still available and in stock.

When it comes to registry, getting the word out is probably your toughest challenge. Experts say it's a serious breach of etiquette to list your registry on your wedding invitations. For the most part, you must rely on word of mouth. As soon as you've registered, let close friends and family know. Two other options are placing a discreet link on your wedding website or putting a small notice in your wedding shower invitations.

When asked directly where you're registered, don't hesitate to give a straightforward answer. Some people feel a sense of guilt when a guest comments, "I won't be able to make your wedding, but where are you registered?" If someone does ask directly, it's likely they really do want to know the answer and give you a gift. You might answer in this fashion, "We're registered at Bloomingdale's and Home Depot, but please don't feel you have to get us something."

A very new trend in gift giving is the honeymoon registry. Items on a honeymoon registry include activities or extras the couple would like to do while on their honeymoon. Additionally, gifts are broken down into financially manageable portions. Guests can give airfare, room nights, candlelit dinners, excursions such as horseback riding on the beach, or ski lift tickets. A great snorkeling trip for example, can create honeymoon memories couples remember forever, a unique gift that keeps on giving.

Not all travel agencies handle honeymoon registry. Some might advertise the service, but offer little more than an opportunity for your friends and family to mail checks toward the trip. If you're considering this type of registry, find a service, which provides more. Look for a company that specializes in honeymoon registry.

All gift givers want to feel they've purchased something meaningful. Receiving a list describing in detail what they've purchased, improves their gift giving experience. This may come in the form of a certificate. A travel agency with an 800 number is also helpful for out-of-town wedding guests.

Another new trend is on-line gift registry, which can be more convenient and quicker for computer-savvy folks.