

SELECTING A CELEBRANT



BY LYNETTE MAGUIRE CMC



So . . . you need a Celebrant ?

Whether you're looking for a Celebrant for a wedding, a commitment ceremony, a funeral, a ship naming or any other rite of passage, you've come to the right place.

Now that you've decided that you need a Celebrant, how should you go about selecting the person most likely to give you the perfect ceremony?

The first thing to do is to think about the sort of person/couple you are, and then work out the sort of ceremony you would like. It is generally best to work through the celebrant selection process together, if one person makes all the decisions, the other partner may be disappointed or even worse, bored, throughout the ceremony.

So let's get started!

*Lynette Maguire
Sunshine Coast
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GETTING STARTED

Spend some time talking about your likes and dislikes

Are you a formal or informal couple? Will you break down in peals of laughter if the Celebrant mentions the 'marriage is a circle' stuff? Would you like religion to play a part in your ceremony? Do you want it over and done with quickly or would you prefer the ceremony allowed you maximum time in the spotlight?

Think about the kind of ceremony you want and make a few notes for future reference.

Which of these formats makes you more comfortable?

- Traditional, 17 bridesmaids, chapel, trumpets and cupids with bows; or
- Laid back, bikini, sarong, white sand, no shoes, surfboard as a signing table; or
- Somewhere in between?

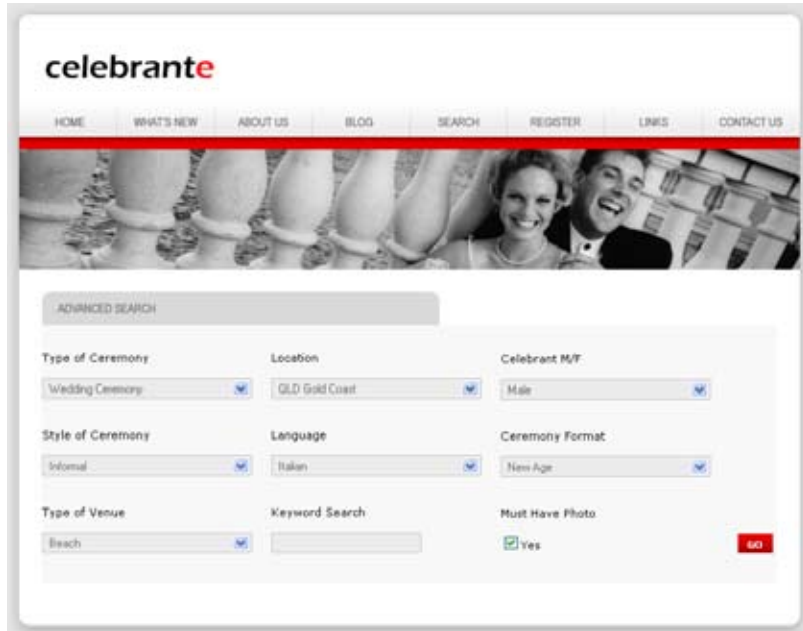
Once you've decided on the overall style of the ceremony, it will be much easier to choose a Celebrant to meet your needs.



SEARCHING FOR YOUR CELEBRANT

It can be daunting. There are so many options out there and the process can be very time-consuming. Thankfully, using a checklist and a website like celebrante.com.au, you can speed the process up considerably.

Let's save some time immediately. If celebrants haven't bothered to make your life easier with an intro, or a photo, you probably shouldn't bother with them either!



The image shows a screenshot of the celebrante.com.au website. At the top, the logo 'celebrante' is displayed in a pink and black font. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for HOME, WHAT'S NEW, ABOUT US, BLOG, SEARCH, REGISTER, LINKS, and CONTACT US. A red horizontal bar is positioned below the navigation menu. Below the red bar is a large image of a smiling couple. Underneath the image is an 'ADVANCED SEARCH' section with several filters:

Type of Ceremony	Location	Celebrant M/F
Wedding Ceremony	QLD Gold Coast	Male
Style of Ceremony	Language	Ceremony Format
Informal	Italian	New Age
Type of Venue	Keyword Search	Must Have Photo
Beach		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes

A red 'GO' button is located at the bottom right of the search form.

Some celebrants have flowery introductions and speak of the love and wonder of it all. Others are more solemn and simply tell you what they can do without too much fuss.

Then there are those laid-back celebrants who fall somewhere in-between. If you want a pagan wedding on the beach at midnight – it's unlikely that celebrants who focus on offering traditional ceremonies would suit you. They would probably be uncomfortable with the whole concept and consequently would be unlikely to do a good job for you.

And then there's the gender issue – is it possible that would you be more comfortable with a male or female celebrant?

That's a personal choice but its one of the first things you can use to filter out what you want versus what you don't want. Talk to your partner and see if they have a preference either way. I have heard of couples who chose a male celebrant because they felt guilty about not getting married in a church and had some vague idea their parents might confuse the Celebrant with a priest (more proof that some people think their parents are idiots). Others prefer female celebrants because they consider them more nurturing and caring.

There is only one essential criterion in choosing your celebrant and it's pretty simple - **you** must 'click' with your Celebrant as a person. If you don't get on with them – don't hire them!

It may take a while but keep looking. The right Celebrant is out there (make sure that you're not setting unrealistic standards though).

FINDING THE 'WOW' FACTOR

Let's look in a bit more detail at the best way to find the right Celebrant for you.

How do you know if they're any good? An introductory phone call is probably the best place to start:

"Hello, my name is ... I'm planning my wedding and am looking for a suitable Celebrant. Would you mind telling me something about yourself and your style of service?"

Remember that Celebrants talk for a living, so you may need to filter out some 'b.s.' to get to the stuff that matters. But the first call should allow you to get an initial sense of your compatibility with the candidates.

Some questions you can ask include:

- What's your style (formal, informal, spiritual, religious)?
- What's your fee and what do you include for that? Is travel included?
- Is it okay if I write my own vows? And can you help me with them?
- Do you have some literature, (e.g. brochure, factsheet etc) you can send me?
- Do you have any referrals (past couples) that I could speak to?

(It should be noted that Privacy Laws preclude the Celebrant from giving out client information unless those clients have given their prior approval. However, with your approval, the Celebrant can give your information to the referral couple and they can contact you).



Whatever questions you decide to ask, write them down so that you will stay on track through the interview and maintain consistency.

Grade each Celebrant out of 5 for Friendliness / Professionalism / Helpfulness / Cost etc. Mark them on the criteria that are important to you.

Explain what you want as clearly as possible

A lot of people say they are spiritual and ask for a ceremony which will reflect that spirituality – what is important here is their understanding of the word “spiritual”. I always ask the couple to clarify what they mean – some say religious, others are more the “angels and hand-fasting” ceremonies, whilst others have been more Pagan and I’ve conducted Wicca ceremonies – all under the tag ‘spiritual’. So try to have a clear idea of what you want and make sure that the celebrant has a clear understanding of your vision.

WHAT'S A REASONABLE PRICE?

As far as costs are concerned, there is no recommended retail price. A lot depends on where you're planning on getting married, you can expect Sydney celebrants to cost more than Hervey Bay celebrants.

Then there are Celebrants who do 'add ons'. I've heard of a Celebrant in Sydney who does magic tricks, in my opinion, he should charge more than other celebrants – he's offering an additional service. We have a singing Celebrant on the Gold Coast and I think his costs should justifiably be higher than the standard.

Know your budget, and as with any service, get some quotes. I have some couples who book me after speaking with them for two minutes. Others get ten quotes and compare. There's no right or wrong way, it's whatever you are comfortable with.

Some couples say I'm too expensive, others say I'm very reasonable. When comparing prices, it may help to ask why a celebrant is more expensive than the average (for instance). I never have a problem justifying my price to couples and if you encounter a Celebrant who does struggle to do so, that should probably sound some alarm bells. However, you should be aware that new Celebrants will often charge an unusually low fee to try to get some weddings 'under their belt'. There's no crime in being a new kid on the block, but do your homework. Ask questions. Why are they hundreds below the average price? What do they include? How many weddings have they conducted? When were they registered?

Remember, once you book and pay for a Celebrant, if they cannot make your ceremony for any reason, it is their responsibility to find you

another Celebrant for your day. If that Celebrant has undercharged, they often have a really difficult time finding a replacement. I've seen this happen from time to time.

Freebies, guides and how-to's

Many Celebrants have a pamphlet or factsheet that outlines the services that they provide. For instance, I have produced a 'Wedding Kit' which I send out to my couples – and sometimes I send them details of ceremonies which I've conducted in the past, many couples find this is really helpful as it offers a good base to work from.

Most Celebrants are happy to send out their blurbs, but I have heard of a few that won't even send out a Notice of Intended Marriage unless the couple has booked with them first! That's amazing as it's a free form which can be easily downloaded from the Attorney General's website.

Read the blurbs carefully. You should get a feel for the Celebrant from its style and content.

Checking their work

Prior to making a booking it's often possible to see the Celebrant in action, either live or on DVD - ask your Celebrant. However if you want to see them in person they will need to approach the bride and groom and ask whether that couple have any objections to 'outsiders' viewing their ceremony. Most won't mind, particularly if it's a big wedding, but for many weddings there is only the bride, the groom, two witnesses and the Celebrant – so it might be a bit off-putting if a stranger were lurking in the vicinity!

HOW TO BOOK YOUR CELEBRANT

Once you've found a suitable Celebrant you should book them as soon as you can. I've booked weddings with a week's notice (although that's not usual) – and I've also booked weddings several years in advance.

Most Celebrants won't formally 'book' a wedding until they have received a booking fee, basically a deposit! A booking fee shows the Celebrant that you're serious about going ahead and it guarantees that the Celebrant is yours for the time and date you've asked for. The booking fee is non-refundable if the wedding is cancelled – however, it is transferable if you change dates. If something happens and the Celebrant cancels – you should always get your deposit back! Check with your Celebrant if you're uneasy about any of this.

The balance of the fee must be paid before the wedding ceremony. So, unless your Celebrant has told you otherwise, post a cheque the week before or pay by cash or bank cheque before the ceremony. Make sure you get a receipt from your Celebrant.

Not many couples pay on the day because it tends to undermine the ambience! The last thing you want to be doing is administrative work!

Remember that this is a guide only – your Celebrant may want payment in chickens! If they don't operate as I've outlined – work it out with them up front.



How different Celebrants operate

I believe most people think that Celebrants are staid, traditional, formal and gushy. But, not all Celebrants are the same.

Some Celebrants won't do personalised ceremonies or allow you to write your own vows – others love that stuff.

Some Celebrants insist on having religious overtones in a ceremony. This is not a legal requirement. Remember it's your wedding – so play by your rules!

For my part, I'm a Celebrant who likes to relax, have a laugh, be open to new ideas and be truly committed to giving each couple their dream wedding (to the best of my ability).

I write ceremonies specifically for each couple to ensure that their service is uniquely theirs – if they want to cartwheel up the aisle – go for it! If the groom wants to yodel and play the bagpipes – cool! I love individuality! I encourage couples to hunt down favourite poetry; verses etc, or even write their own stuff and send it on to me.

I'm not on my own out there, there's a significant number of Celebrants that are equally relaxed. This could unnerve those couples, who would prefer the traditional, formal type of ceremony. And that's fine, as there are lots of celebrants who are very good at doing those sorts of ceremonies.

DO CELEBRANTS HAVE RULES?

Yep – and a tonne of them. We are governed by a Code of Ethics which you'll find on the Attorney General's website. For example, we must undergo ongoing professional development each year

What if you pick a dud?

During your dealings with your Celebrant, they should outline to you what recourse you may have regarding complaints. If they don't mention anything about this, it might not be because they're keeping it a secret – it might be that they have not had to think about it very much!

In the unlikely event that you need to make a complaint about a Celebrant, contact the Marriage Celebrants Section of the Attorney General's Department.

The complaint must be in writing and made to:

The Registrar of Marriage Celebrants
Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Other stuff no-one thinks about

There's nothing in the legislation about how a Celebrant should speak, but usually they're reasonably skilled public speakers .

Personally, I wouldn't hire anyone to conduct a wedding who doesn't speak well! (apologies to any slurring, stuttering Celebrants out there).

One telephone call will answer that question for you.



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CREDITS

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Lynette's profile can be seen at <http://www.celebrante.com.au/celebrants/Lynette-Maguire-Marriage-Celebrant-Brisbane--celebrante-australia-207>

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