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Business

The Earth-Friendly Wedding

As couples attempt to green-up aspects of their nuptials, more and more small businesses are supplying the eco-friendly goods and services

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Patrick Koppula and Bhavna Shamasunder wanted to hold a traditional Indian marriage ceremony while doing what they could to minimize its environmental footprint. In their home city of San Francisco, Koppula and Shamasunder, both 31, bought organic flowers, organic wine, food, and cake. And in addition to using eco-friendly paper, non-chlorine dye, and vegetable-based inks for their wedding invitations, the couple even opted for a unionized print shop. "It was our way of expressing our socially progressive ideals," says Koppula.

Koppula and Shamasunder are part of a growing trend among young people to instill their socially-conscious ideals into their wedding day celebration. And from organic flowers to recycled paper invitations, small businesses are popping up to provide eco-friendly and socially-responsible wedding supplies to support them.

The wedding industry brings in roughly \$72 billion per year, and an increasing share of that money is going to ecologically sensitive businesses. "I didn't hear any word about people being conscious [about the impact of their weddings] up to five years ago. Now, people are looking for ways not to be 'cookie-cutter' and for their wedding to reflect not just their style, but also their spirit," says Carley Roney, editor-in-chief of wedding magazine *The Knot*, which will devote an upcoming issue to the topic.

Change is Coming

There are now wedding planners whose sole business is to create green weddings. Corina Beczner got her master's in business administration (see BusinessWeek.com, 12/5/05, "[It's Getting Easier Being Green](#)") from the Presidio School of Management in San Francisco, which has a focus on sustainability; she started her eco-friendly wedding consultancy, Vibrant Events, in June, 2006.

Beczner says she spent six months analyzing the market across the country and saw a shift in product availability. "Over the last four years, you've really seen an increase in high-quality products coming from sustainable sources, products that can meet the needs of people who have higher expectations in terms of style and tradition," she says.

Choosing to go green provides a way for a couple to announce their unique qualities, as it does for businesses. "These are the ways that vendors differentiate themselves, particularly on the high end," says *The Knot's* Roney.

Shades of Green

Of course greater quality often comes with higher prices—which many consumers are willing to pay (see BusinessWeek.com, 10/24/06, "[Coach and the American Consumer](#)").

Beczner says there is about a 15% to 20% premium for the products and services she offers. Even if couples don't go all out as Koppula and Shamasunder did, they are more often opting for at least some eco-friendly aspect to their celebration. "If you want to have an eco-wedding, you can have a super-green wedding or a light-green wedding," says Beczner.

Starting a New Life

Many couples attempt to green just some aspects of their wedding, such as flower arrangements. Organicbouquet.com, the first online organic-flower vendor, started in 2001, has found fertile ground for its organic-flower sales. The U.S. market for flowers and plants was \$19.5 billion in 2004, according to the U.S. Commerce Dept., and sales of organics are still a small portion of that, but organic-flower sales grew 50% from 2003 to 2005 to \$16 million.

Socially and environmentally conscious couples and the businesses serving them are after the the same things: to differentiate themselves, while providing a unique experience to their clients or guests that reflects of their values. "We had this kind of wedding because it fits with our goals for how we want to live our life," says Shamasunder.