

# The PERFECT WEDDING COMPANY

GRAN CANARIA

"In my business," says the firendly, long-time Gran Canaria resident and weddings entrepreneur, Bernadette Garside "I am a part of someone's really important day, and that is truly fulfilling."

"You are becoming part of their memories, they are letting you in to such a special moment in their lives, it is nothing less than an honour. In fact more often than not, I end up becoming friends with my clients, and not just the lucky couple, but even if just for one short week, you have become integral to their memories, and all their friends and family come up and thank you and remember. I can't describe how special that is."

"I'm very lucky" she says "very few people get so up close and personal with their clients" and let's face it many super markets and other types of business would love to know their clients as well as she knows hers.

"My job is to work with lots of different businesses, and to work *well* with lots of different businesses. It is important to me, if I am not working well with a business, to find out how I can, because they all have a place in my portfolio if they are into weddings and they provide a quality service, it doesn't matter how much they charge, from the smallest salon to the biggest professional make-up artist, every one of them has a place in my business and it is important to me to work well with them"



Bernadette Garside is a vibrant and erudite businesswoman, who started her Perfect Wedding Company in 2012, and it has quickly grown into one of the highest quality companies in the canary islands, planning beautiful and exotic marriages from her base on the sub-tropical island of Gran Canaria.

Bilingual in Spanish and English, she understands that simple advertising is not enough to grow a business here, but that success comes from honest communication and building a brand in the minds of as many people as possible, through letting potential customers know who you are, and where you can be found.

Even marketing to people who might simply recommend your service to others is important, through consistent local newspaper adverts, leaflets, chatting to people, competitions and as in Bernadette's case, writing relevant articles about her industry that can be used as a reference point for anyone looking to marry in a top sunshine destination like the island she has made her home on for the last 21 years.

"A business needs to grow organically, people need to be realistic about what they can do and the skills they present" Having worked in commercial relationships and marketing for some of the largest and most successful organisations on the island, including holiday operator Airtours and top native medical provider, Clínica Roca, and later Hospiten; when it comes to communication, she really knows what she is talking about.

## Top wedding planner, Bernie Garside, talks about some of the challenges of building a successful small business on Gran Canaria.

"My business plan is constantly being updated, it is never finished" she says.

"I have recently been looking at the Norwegian side of the market here on the island. I work with a great Norwegian photographer called Mette Brandt, we work really well together and she recommends clients for me, and I give her work back and so it is this collaboration that we have going together that has led me to start working on how to expand my Norwegian client base. For that I think it is really good to have Norwegian advocates of your business, because it all works hand in hand. In fact most of my clients come from either recommendations or people who tell me "I was thinking of you and I asked somebody and they said 'yes, go for it'" So that's what's happening quite a lot now."

Though prospective clients may not ask "Do you know someone who is good at weddings?" They may say "we were thinking of using this girl..." And then with positive feedback the decision that has already been made is validated and becomes near enough a done deal before anyone even speaks to you.

"So I want to do more on the Norwegian side and on the Scandinavian side, and Mette helps me with that, she plans to even write something on my blog, so I've considered opening a blog in Norwegian, simply explaining that I'm an English wedding planner so that they recognise from the start that I speak English, as do many themselves, and might then think 'I don't mind working with this girl'. It is important to start by not deceiving them and letting them know what they are getting, right from the beginning"

It was Mette who suggested Bernadette join her to attend Gran Canaria Business Week at the beginning of this year.

She has been working with Gran Canaria's leading online-strategy guru, Todd Michael Heater, who was also one of the key speakers at this year's conference.

"Consequently Mette keeps talking about the importance of links between websites, and so we are now linking to each other. Intuitively I am cautious about service providers linking from my site, because then people can more easily find my suppliers, and so some might think why do they need me."

Of course this is a bit of a grey area for any service provider. Just having a suppliers list does not in any way replace Bernadette's contacts, working relationships, years of experience, language skills or the quality of her knowledge in delivering a polished service.

"Mette and I have a good working relationship, and I recognise that the value of a Norwegian-language website linking people to me, means that I am much more likely to get business, and I in turn can send her business on the basis of my recommendation."

"I am a firm believer that there are people who will hire a wedding planner and there are people who will go and do it on their own, regardless, and it doesn't matter if I quote them 50€, 500€ or 5000€ they just do not plan on going with you. They just plan on getting all your information, and when that happens I just say 'be my guest, there it is'. There are people who, once you have quoted, will say they have decided to do it themselves and I respect that, and just think 'well they're just not clients for me' and I give them the file. I trust that if they are going to go with me, then they will, and if not then I simply say 'here is some information for free, good luck, and have a great wedding.'" A very healthy outlook for any business person to hold.

"There have certainly been people who have said they can't afford me, and then in the end have turned round and said 'Look this girl's been brilliant' and decided that they can't afford not to have me. Weddings, in particular, is a business that people are really willing to pay for what they want, if they feel that there is a value in it"

"Then there are people who are sent to me from hotels, that may have already

booked some part of the wedding, like the venue, and its not that they haven't gone with me because they can't afford my services, but get in touch saying that they need a photographer or they need some flowers and that can be really good business."

"Customer profiling becomes very important to avoid under-delivering to those who might turn around after some weeks of consultation saying that they only want one small part of the service offered with a view to doing the rest themselves. For the sake of ensuring quality it becomes a game of saying 'Sorry, it is these services as a package or nothing' to avoid disappointment on the day and avoid an unhappy client. "

### "Customer profiling becomes very important"

The view Bernadette takes is "If I can't serve their needs, then I'd rather not do it because they will not be happy in the end. If I provide a service that doesn't suit their needs, they will not be satisfied, and that is no good for my image." And of course, image is all important in any business, but especially when you are being asked to plan out people's dreams, something for which Bernadette shows sincere and deep reverence.

One thing that our Ms Garside is adamant about is the need to be realistic about what your business is and what it can do.

"There is no point making up numbers or pretending that you are much bigger than you are, when the fact is you can benefit greatly from simply concentrating on offering a great service with the resources you actually have."

"There is a lot to be said for smaller businesses," she says with a knowledgeable twinkle "and there are those who can do unbelievably well just by keeping an eye on their numbers and only taking on staff when that is a realistic option. Small business owners can find themselves actually doing better than much larger organisations, just by keeping it real, working within their means and sticking to budgets, not going over the top with big fancy offices, but growing their business organically"

Just because you open your doors, it does not mean that suddenly you will have customers, they come over time, or as another GC Business Week speaker, entrepreneurship mentor Peter Carruthers, puts it "Businesses are built one relationship at a time"

There are few who would doubt that Bernadette Garside's success, perhaps more than most businesses, is all about her distinct emphasis on the importance of relationships.

**For advice about the most perfect weddings, or perhaps even business, on Gran Canaria contact Bernadette through her website [PerfectWeddingCompany.com](http://PerfectWeddingCompany.com) or call her on (00 34) 653 642 208**

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Renewal of Vows Ceremonies  
on the Sun-kissed Island  
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