

WISCONSIN BRIDE

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Say Cheese!

From vintage to modern, which photo booth is right for you?

By: Andrea Bahe

Milwaukee bride Kate Schalles has fond memories of the photo booth at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and the black-and-white photo strips documenting each visit. But when she and boyfriend Jim Battle visited the museum last April, the camera captured a moment she wasn't expecting: his proposal. So it seemed only natural that the couple would have a photo booth at their wedding reception. After all, what better way to round out the bride's collection?

A few years ago, photo booths were just another fun fad for nostalgic brides and grooms. But what started as a novelty has since become a common fixture at weddings across the country. Angela Dupont, owner of Madison-based Top Shelf Weddings & Events, says a third of her clients had photo booths at their weddings in 2009. Wedding photographers Ben Allen and his wife Simran, co-owners of Focus Photography, have seen a similar trend. "Last year the photo booth concept really took off," says Allen. "In 2010 and beyond, I believe that it will be a standard part of a wedding day in the same way a DJ, videographer, or photographer is."

The reason for the photo booth's enduring appeal is two-fold: It's a natural replacement for traditional favors and guestbooks, plus it's a fun experience for guests, from grandmas to toddlers. "It's great entertainment; it provides a cool party favor, but it also gives a lasting memory to the bride and groom from all their guests," says Casey Haselwander, owner of The Traveling Photo Booth in Madison.

Find a vendor

For couples who want a vintage look, there's a growing list of vendors who specialize in classic-style photo booths. Since many booths today are reproductions, couples don't have to sacrifice efficiency for authenticity. Automated touchscreens, digital cameras, and fast printers are becoming standard among these old booths made new. The Traveling Photo Booth is one company that offers these features and more.

Founded in Minneapolis five years ago, The Traveling Photo Booth now has franchises in seven states including Wisconsin. Despite its compact size, the company's retro-style booth can hold up to 10 people. Like its predecessors, the booth's headshot-style photos are taken in a curtained compartment and print directly outside the booth. Unlike a true vintage booth, guests can see themselves on a preview screen, choose from four tones

(color, black-and-white, sepia, and retro), and receive their prints in only 20 seconds. As a bonus, couples and guests can print photos from a password-protected online gallery for up to 60 days after the event.

Nicole Nearhoff and her husband Sean had The Traveling Photo Booth at their September 2009 wedding at Madison's Sundance Cinemas 608. Nicole calls it one of the highlights of their reception and says she loved getting casual photos of all their family and friends. "I really liked that every single person took at least one picture in the photo booth," Nearhoff says. "The photographer didn't have to feel like he needed to take pictures of every table, because people were more than willing to take their own pictures!"

Ask a photographer

Wedding photographers are good resources when it comes to creating a photo booth experience at a reception. Many, like Allen, have started offering a photo booth option alongside their regular services. He and his partner founded Focus Photography seven years ago and added a photo booth service last year in response to growing demand.

They spent nearly a year researching how to construct and operate the ideal booth. "It seemed that with the popularity of photo booths, many companies were rushing to put together makeshift booths that didn't reflect the elegance of the events they were serving," Allen says, describing their final product as "modern and elegant." Like vendor-run booths, Focus Photo Booths have on-site attendants who can step in if any issues arise. According to Milwaukee-based event planner David Caruso of Dynamic Events, this on-site help is a must. Even if the booth is run by a wedding photographer, couples should make sure they have additional staff so the photographers aren't distracted from their main objective: documenting the day.

The Allens' regular contact with couples also keeps them in tune with photo booth trends. "By far the most popular photos right now are any involving props," Allen says, adding that clients can request a free prop box with hats, feather boas, and other accessories. "Photo booths alone will draw out the fun, goofy side of anyone, but adding a few props to the equation seems to take the concept to an entirely new level."

Call an event planner

For couples seeking a tailored experience, event planners like Caruso are never short of ideas. Last fall, one of his clients requested a photo booth that fit the antique surroundings of the Delafield Hotel. Caruso and his staff custom-made a "photo wall" by covering a freestanding wall with damask wallpaper and decorating it with black-and-white photos of the couple's families. To make it an interactive experience, they added two framed cutouts where guests could pose. A camera was set up by the couple's photographer, Manning Photography, and controlled by a remote throughout the night. The result was a one-of-a-kind look. "It was a nice way to combine a modern, up-to-date wedding experience like a photo booth, with the antique style of the wedding," Caruso says.

Regardless of the route couples take, a photo booth will leave a lasting impression. "People are still talking about it," says bride Nadia Quinn, who rented The Traveling Photo Booth for her reception at the Marcus Center for Performing Art's Bradley

Pavilion in Milwaukee. “The only thing we would have done differently is keep it open longer.”

Photo Booth Tips

- Check with your reception site to make sure a photo booth is allowed. (It almost always is.)
- Work with your vendor ahead of time to determine the best location for the booth.
- Consider when your photo booth will be available to guests. During the cocktail hour or after dinner is ideal.
- Ask your vendor to provide an on-site attendant with extra supplies in case of glitches.
- For outdoor receptions, provide cover (such as a tent or roof) for the booth.
- Check to see if both you and your guests can get a copy of the photo strips.
- Don't forget to enjoy the booth yourself! Get your photos taken early in the event while you're still fresh and have extra time.