

~~Trends in Wedding Invitation~~ The Impact of the Internet on Wedding Invitation Orderings

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## Abstract

Wedding Invitations: The Future of Online Retailers v. Local Stationers

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The purpose of study was to analyze and determine the current trends of wedding invitation ordering based on the priorities of marrying couples and the advancement of technology. Traditionally, wedding invitations were ordered in-person from local, artisan stationers. With the advancement of technology and the Internet Revolution in the last 20 years, modern methods have been introduced, including ordering from online retailers and sending electronic invitations, through e-mail.

This study began by interviewing three professionals in different segments of the wedding industry – a wedding planner, stationer, and online marketing manager. Each provided their expert opinion based on their experience in the industry and client feedback. The experts' answers were assimilated and analyzed through content analysis. A ranking method was developed to quantitatively measure the responses.

The results of the interviews showed that the current trend is ordering wedding invitations from online companies. There are many benefits to this method, including: a variety of designs available, customizable features, affordability, ease of use, convenience, and customer service.

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## *Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose of Study*

A wedding can be described as one of the most important and memorable days in a person's life. Most women begin thinking about the details of their special day as young girls - from the type of dress she will wear to the theme colors that every element will be based on. The coordination, time and effort that is put into planning the perfect occasion is vast. The same attention should be put into the wedding invitations as they set the tone for the momentous day and are the guests' first glimpse into the wedding style. Today, there are many methods available to order wedding invitations: traditional artisan stationers, online retailers, or emailed options. The Internet Revolution has introduced these more modern methods and changed the way couples think about ordering invitations. This study seeks to answer the question, "How has the Internet impacted the process of ordering wedding invitations from the traditional artisan stationers?"

Traditionally, one of the first steps of planning a wedding included visiting a print store or stationery store to discuss the printed pieces necessary for a wedding: invitations, save the date cards, RSVP cards and ceremony programs. This meeting would include talking to a designer or consultant about the couple's chosen colors, personalized imagery, wording, and handpicked papers and envelopes. Meeting with a stationer allows the couple to see samples and feel the paper in their hands. A proof would be produced, either a physical invitation (hard proof) or, an electronic document (soft proof) to obtain approval and confirm the order. The stationer would either send the files to be printed at another facility, or a custom invitation business would have the equipment necessary to print there. After production, the wedding collateral would be available for delivery or pick-up from the stationer.

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From designing to print production, it is evident that this can be a lengthy process. According to etiquette, invitations should be sent out six to eight weeks in advance. Printing time must be considered as well, and can take up to three weeks. If done ahead of time, there are advantages to personally meeting with a stationer to custom pick a wedding invitation. They have the advantage of hand-selecting the fonts, substrates, graphics and embellishments for their special day, as well as getting a feel for the substrates – their weight, thickness, surface. In this process, a completely unique invitation has been specially customized just for them.

While this was the main way to order wedding invitations in the past, today, local stationers are in competition with online retailers. Invitation websites are those that have pre-designed wedding invitations to choose from. Customizations include typing in the desired text, customizing the typeface, size and colors. Oftentimes, the website will preview what the invitation will look like with customizations. After purchasing the invitations in bulk, the file is sent to the print-facility and the invitations are printed digitally. Once completed, the printed pieces are mailed to the soon to be married couple. One of the advantages of online retailers are is the ease of accessibility to the invitations. They can be ordered from the comfort of one's home. Possible disadvantages include disappointment in paper choice (too thin, too smooth/rough) and color reproduction issues. Another choice is to send electronic emailed invitations, or E-vites. They can be customized with imagery and text pertaining to the couple and are emailed to guests. Some argue that E-vites are distasteful and too informal, but there are advantages as well. E-vites are very inexpensive or free, convenient, easy to set up and send, and allow the ability to monitor the guest list online.

Based on the trends, more people are purchasing their invitations online than in years past. This may be because online ordering is a convenient way to have a stylish invitation without expending too much effort. Online ordering is also appealing because customers can customize the text and instantly view an on-screen version of the invitation. This reasoning, in

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addition to the downturned economy, has most likely put some stationery stores out of business or made them change their business model to focus on other, more profitable areas. The purpose of this study is to determine the trend of wedding invitation ordering, considering the advancement of technology and the priorities of ~~soon~~soon-to-to-be married couples.

## *Chapter 2: Literature Review*

Marshall McLuhan, “universally regarded as the father of communications and media studies and prophet of the information age” once said, “The medium is the message.” (McLuhan) This holds true today, just as it did over 40 years ago when McLuhan said it. Wedding invitations set the mood and ambiance for an occasion; therefore, the fine details of the invitation should be carefully considered. “The etiquette and civility expressed through a hand-written note continues to be an important part of our culture and interpersonal relations.” (May)

Experts in the stationery and invitation industry have strong beliefs about the way invitations should be ordered and presented. Before the Internet, the main option was to visit a local stationer. With the advancement of technology, other options are now available, including ordering from an online retailer and even sending electronic invitations, E-vites, by email.

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Whether ordered through a stationery store or online, there are several choices of printing methods, inks and embellishments that can affect the quality of an invitation.

Wedding invitations are unique because the combination of the paper stocks (substrates), inks, embellishments and printing methods are wide. Traditional invitation stock comes in neutral colors like white, cream or ivory. More contemporary designs may be any color one wishes. More expensive options include cotton and linen blends, heavy paper and those in large dimensions. (Melendez) Once a stock is chosen, the next step is to choose a coordinating color ink. While customers might not have a choice of the type of ink: water-based, low volatile organic compound, soy-based, or solvent-based, the color options are vast. Some presses even allow couples to bring in a sample of a paint chip, fabric, or color swatch and can customize the ink color so it matches perfectly. ("Inks") The printing methods available for wedding invitations are vast, each with a specific purpose.

Depending on the size of the press and experience, invitations may be printed by the following methods: engraving, thermography, offset lithography, letterpress or by hand calligraphy. Engraving is the most traditional printing method and can be the most expensive option because it requires costly materials and takes the most time. "A custom metal plate is used to press the text into the paper from behind, resulting in a raised top surface and indented back." (Melendez) Thermography is the most popular printing method. "A resinous powder is applied to the ink and it is heated resulting in raised lettering very similar to engraving at a much lower cost." (Melendez) Offset lithography printing is the most cost effective method because there is no texture to the lettering. It is most often used for informal invitations and very textured paper that cannot support raised lettering. (Melendez) Letterpress is an antique process that has come back into style during the last few years. It is a relief printing process where raised letters are inked and create a debossed image on thick, soft paper. The process is similar to that of a rubber stamp. A letterpressed wedding invitation evokes luxury and class, but is known

for being one of the most expensive printing processes. Calligraphy is a great way to add a personal touch to an invitation. Calligraphy is best when there is a small guest list and the artist has excellent penmanship. Professional calligraphers may also be hired, or well-designed calligraphy fonts are available online. Whatever method is chosen, experts have some tips to make the ordering process easier. NOTE: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LETTERPRESS PROCESS? NO MENTION?

According to *E-Plan Your Wedding: How to Save Money with Today's Best Online Resources*, whether you decide to order your stationery at a local stationer or online, it is best to visit stationery stores or upscale wedding boutiques to see samples and ask questions. (Melendez) If ordering online, it is best to order paper samples so there are no surprises when the final printed piece is received. If ordering from a stationery store, visit wedding websites for fresh ideas. Another belief is to order the invitation from a local stationer, from start to finish, because of the personal attention from the stationer. The Stationers Guild website ~~is a website to find~~ provides a tool to assist one in finding a local vendor ~~in one's area~~. (May)

Therese Saint Clair is a member of the Stationers Guild, which is an organization comprised of the finest stationers that are admitted only by invitation. Members represent high quality paper manufacturers to small stationers setting the trends with their "...cutting-edge designs and beautiful craftsmanship..." (May) The Stationers Guild has a website, [www.stationersguild.org](http://www.stationersguild.org), that provides information about fine papers, invitations, and the stores where they can be found. All guild members advocate that purchasing custom invitations is best done in person because of the nature of the product. "Paper is tactile and screen resolutions simply don't capture the texture and color of fine papers and the creative designs of these artisans." (May) Another benefit to working with member dealers of the guild is that they offer fine papers and products that are not available from online retailers. The guild's main goal is to

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provide information on local, qualified, member stores and advocate purchasing invitations in-store. A solution some online retailers provide is sending paper samples.

Therese Saint Clair strongly opposes sending paper and invitation samples to prospective clients. Sheila P. May, a representative of The Stationers Guild, notes, "It would be presumptuous of me to select sample design for someone I have never met without having the benefit of a conversation and, most likely, a meeting to discuss their requirements, budget and style preferences." (May) Personalization is of utmost importance when designing a wedding invitation. Online methods seem to be so impersonal. May also notes, "If there is one piece of advice I can give prospective bridal couples, it is this: If you decide to purchase a wedding invitation from a catalogue or online be prepared to be disappointed. The outcome is unlikely to meet your expectations." (May) May goes on to note that samples from 60 of their companies would quickly overwhelm the couple. However, meeting with a stationer can narrow down the choices quickly. According to May, "There is a distinct advantage to working with an experienced stationer who has many samples of custom invitations, printing ink colors and paper swatches to help insure that you printed invitation meets your expectations. This is simply not possible in the online world where low image resolutions distort ink colors and, most certainly, don't begin to pick up the subtle textures of paper and their different weights." (May)

While the Stationers Guild has strong beliefs about ordering invitations in person with an expert, popular online retailer, Wedding Paper Divas (WPD) advocates for Internet purchases.

They note that ordering online is ~~only~~ more cost effective because invitations and stationery printed at a local stationer can cost thousands of dollars and comparable online pieces cost a fraction of that. The Wedding Paper Divas provide quality invitations without breaking a bride's budget.

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Wedding Paper Divas give five reasons to order wedding stationery online:

“unsurpassed customer service, expert advice, exclusive designs, convenience, and quality and competitive prices.” (“Five Great Reasons”) Wedding Paper Divas claims to have better customer service than some stationers who may have employees that do not know the nuances between various substrates, font styles and details that make an invitation special. Their website has a team of experts designing and printing the stationery. On the website, Wedding Paper Divas notes that they often hear of bride’s complaining that ordinary store clerks give them poor service, cannot answer their questions and merely ship off the job to be printed at an off-site facility, without any contact with the customer. However, an expert of the design team at Wedding Paper Divas (WPD) inspects invitations and stationery for quality. If there are any issues, customer service will call the customer to resolve the issue before printing the final product. WPD offer hundreds of stylish, trendy, and classic invitations. Laura Ching, vice president of marketing and merchandising and co-founder of Wedding Paper Divas notes, “We’re only as good as our designs. That’s why we used commissioned artists who keep a pulse on today’s wedding trends and develop high end, clean, modern designs for our customers.” (“Five Great Reasons”)

Convenience is probably the biggest advantage to ordering stationery online. It can be ordered efficiently and simply from the comfort of your home. The customer is able to view all aspects of the invitation: the front, back and inside as well as choose their papers, inks and envelopes. While browsing invitations online can be a lengthy process, WPD advocates that shopping store to store would take much longer. Another advantage to ordering online is that the bride can share the link to family members to show them the design and gain their input. Lastly, WPD boasts high quality stationery and invitations compared to other online retailers that print on low-quality stock. A common downfall of online ordering, is the inability to feel the paper before purchasing. Wedding Paper Divas allows customers to request samples by mail. Along

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with providing high-quality pieces, Wedding Paper Divas prices competitively. According to Ching, “We offer \$2-\$3 wedding invitations online that, if purchased in a store would be \$5-\$6.” The reason online retailers like Wedding Paper Divas is able to keep costs low is because there are no costs associated with maintaining a storefront and ordering is automated. (“Five Great Reasons”)

Technology has allowed traditional wedding invitations to move into the online retailing world; but, even further than that, E-vites are becoming more popular as a means to invite family and friends to the special occasion. E-vites, or E-cards, are an electronic card simulated on one’s computer screen by graphics software. This type of invitation is sent through email and can be viewed on mobile phones as well. (Hart) Another e-card website is Pingg, where users create invitations with their own photos or through their database of two to three million images for free. The process can take anywhere from ten to thirty minutes, depending on the complexity. The website also manages RSVPs. Guests view the invitation and then click “yes,” “no,” or “maybe.” Pingg will then notify the couple through email. (Barker)

According to *USA Today*, Evite.com, a website that designs, sends and manages electronic invitations, notes that in 2008 “...users sent 60% more wedding invitations over the past 12 months vs. the year before, about 1.2 million vs. 750,000.” At that time, the website had plans to triple that number within the following months, as well as adding new options such as same-sex invitations and those that mimic the style celebrity weddings. While it is obvious that the trend of E-vites is increasing, experts are split on where the market is headed. According to Anja Winikka, of *The Knot*, a wedding website and magazine, e-vites are “a great way to bring in the next generation of brides” and if done tastefully, can be efficient and inviting. (Barker) On the opposite side of the issue, Charlotte Hays, a wedding etiquette author, “only half-jokes that the digital invite is the end of civilization.” She goes on to note that our society is losing our civility and way of behaving and respecting each other. Hays agrees that emailed invitations are

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convenient, but wedding invitations being so special and significant, have no context in the place of convenience. Editor in Chief of *Modern Bride* magazine, Antonia van der Meer notes, “snail mail still reflects the importance of the day and sets the tone of the party in a way e-mail doesn’t. With the amount of effort and money put into people’s weddings, you wouldn’t want the actual first thing people see about your wedding to get lost (in a spam folder) or have a different tone than the rest of the day.” (Barker) E-vites tend to be more common for smaller, casual weddings.

Some family members and friends still want a traditional invitation and couples often end up sending paper invitations to appease them. Guests love to save a keepsake from the occasion, and the invitation is a great memento to remember the tone of the event. Taking technology a step further, Leah B. Hart, expert on the art of wedding invitations, proposes that couples are even using text messaging as a method of invitation and in the foreseeable future, E-cards will replace paper invitations. Hart further notes that traditional engraved invitations are most likely to survive the onslaught, but “traditional wedding invitation media seems to be under a huge threat.” (Hart) Wedding invitation selection is a matter of preference and the degree of formality of the occasion.

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Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of study was to determine the trends of wedding invitation ordering based on the priorities of marrying couples and the advancement of technology. This topic was researched through elite and specialized interviews and content analysis. Three industry professionals were interviewed to determine their opinion on the future of wedding invitation ordering design. Each person drew on his or her unique experience in the industry and used their knowledge to forecast the future of the market.

The research was modeled after the process developed by communication theorist, Lewis A. Dexter. In elite and specialized interviews, the process is elevated to match the status of the professionals being interviewed. The following guidelines were applied during the interviews:

1. Open the interview with a general question
2. Avoid leading questions
3. Avoid “why” questions
4. Avoid “either/or” and “yes/no” questions
5. Accept the interviewees definition of the situation, and encourage the interviewee to structure the account of the situation

6. Make the interviewee sense that the information provided will make a major contribution to the knowledge derived from the study (Levenson, 26)

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After interviewing all industry professionals, content analysis was used to determine the trend of wedding invitation ordering. Content analysis is the process of quantifying and analyzing responses. With the responses from industry professionals, unbiased inferences and predictions for the future of ordering printed wedding invitations were made. Each individual's

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unique perspective and responses helped shape the prediction, along with current consumers' priorities. (Levenson)

The first interview conducted was with Sharon Burns of Napa Valley Custom Events. Burns has been in the industry for over 20 years and has planned over 100 weddings. The following are questions that were asked during this first interview:

*Tell me about your career in this industry.*

*What role does a wedding invitation have in the overall occasion?*

*In the scope of the entire wedding, how much attention is put into the invitation?*

*When planning a wedding, how are the majority of the invitations ordered and purchased?*

*In most cases, what is the first step in choosing wedding invitations?*

*Would you recommend that your bride purchase online or in-store? Why?*

*How important is it to feel an invitation in your hand before purchasing?*

*What are your beliefs on E-vites for a wedding invitation? Have any of your brides invited their guests this way?*

*Where do you see the future of wedding invitations? Which sector of ordering do you see as being the most prevalent?*

*How have wedding invitations changed throughout your career?*

*Has the Internet changed the way your clients order wedding invitations?*

*Have your clients altered their preference for ordering invitations because of the downturned economy?*

Burns was a valuable resource in that her knowledge comes from the bride's perspective. She has years of experience in working with brides and their priorities when it comes to invitations. Additionally, she has used all methods of invitation ordering and, naturally,

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has experienced difficulties with certain methods. Being in the industry for over 20 years, she has planned weddings when the Internet was in its infancy and has seen the ordering of wedding invitations change. (Napa Valley Custom Events)

The second interview for this study was with Lorie Clift of An Exceptional Design in Napa, California. She specializes in creating a unique experience for a bride to customize her invitations. She gives each client quality time and creates high-quality, custom invitations according to the bride's needs and on any budget. (Clift) These are the questions that were asked of Clift:

*What type of invitations do you offer?*

*What are the advantages and disadvantages to template invitations and custom invitations?*

*How important is it for the client to see and feel invitations in-person before purchasing them?*

*What are the steps to designing and printing a custom invitation?*

*What changes have you seen in the invitation business since you started?*

*Where do you believe the market is going? Why?*

*How has your business changed with online ordering options?*

*What do you see as the future of invitation design in terms of ordering invitations and printing them?*

*Has the Internet negatively impacted the method your customers order wedding invitations?*

*Have you lost business due to the downturned economy?*

Clift provided the perspective of a local, artisan stationer to this study. She provided her input on the effect of the Internet on her business and the shifts she has seen in the industry based on technology and customer needs. (Clift)

Lastly, Matt Hamilton, Senior Marketing Manager at MagnetStreet in Minnesota was interviewed. MagnetStreet specializes in personalized “save the date” cards, invitation suites, thank you cards, menu cards and other wedding stationery items. They have been “designing and printing trend-forward wedding stationery since 2005. All of the designs found in [their] extensive gallery can be personalized from a diverse palette of over 60 contemporary colors or by creating custom shades.” (MagnetStreet Weddings) Their website includes a Design Studio where clients are able to experiment with fonts, colors, photos and wording to create a unique wedding invitation. Hamilton was asked the following questions:

*How has your business changed in the last 20 years?*

*Are your sales increasing, decreasing or remaining the same over time?*

*Have you seen your business losing clients to local stationers so they can meet face-to-face with a designer and feel substrate options?*

*Where do you see your business in ten years? Do you think customers will still be ordering paper invitations online?*

*How important are wedding invitations in the scope of the entire event?*

*How important is it for the client to see and feel the invitations in-person before purchasing them?*

*What sector of wedding invitation ordering do you see as being the most prevalent in the future?*

*If your answer to the previous question is different from your current business, would you consider incorporating that sector into your current business model?*

*Has the Internet negatively impacted the method your customers order wedding invitations?*

*Have you lost business in the downturned economy?*

This interview was essential to the research, because it gave the perspective of a popular online invitation retailer. The changes Magnet-Street has undergone in the past few

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years, as well as their plans for the future is an indicator of where the market is heading.

(Magnet-Street Weddings)

After all of the interviews were conducted, the information was assimilated through content analysis. Through this process, the trend of wedding invitation ~~reproduction~~ ordering for the future was determined. The responses to the questions below have been quantified and combined to make an educated prediction. A ranking method was developed for the questions that are key in determining the future of the wedding invitation industry. The questions are listed below, along with the value for each rank, and what the responses ~~have proven~~ will determine, in parentheses:

*How important are wedding invitations in the scope of the entire event? (Is studying wedding invitations worthwhile?)*

5=Extremely important. You absolutely cannot have a wedding without them. They set the entire tone of the day and give the guests a glimpse of what to expect.

4=Pretty important.

3=They can be sent or not. The actual day is what really counts.

2=They aren't too important

1=Not important at all.

*How important is it for the client to see and feel invitations before purchasing them? (Are ordering invitations in-person a significant factor?)*

5=So important! The colors do not render perfectly on screen. The weight, caliper and texture of the paper determine the feel of the invitation.

4=Pretty important.

3=It does not really matter either way.

2=It is not the most crucial thing.

1=It is not necessary at all. The design is the most important element.

*What sector of invitation ordering do you see as being the most prevalent in the future? (This question will determine the trend.)*

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5=Local artisan stationers. Couples want to bring back the craft of wedding invitations.

4=Online ordering. It is fast and convenient. Customers can customize the text to pre-designed templates.

3=E-vites. They are very inexpensive, if not free, manage the guest list online and are stylish.

*If your answer to the previous question is different from your current business, would you consider incorporating that sector into your current business model? (How fast is this trend approaching and how serious are companies in implementing it? How strongly do the companies believe in the new trend?)*

5=Yes! We are currently in the process of adding this new sector to our business.

4=It seems like a promising area. We are really considering it.

3=Maybe. I'd have to research the logistics and see if it is really for us.

2=Probably not. It is not a direction that we want to go in.

1=No. We are happy with the services we currently provide.

*Has the Internet negatively impacted the method your customers use to order wedding invitations? (Sectors that have lost business because of the Internet, and are rated as a 4 or 5, have not been considered as the future of wedding invitation ordering because the prevalence of the Internet is only increasing. Questions like these have been altered for Sharon Burns and will reference the method her clients use most often.)*

5=Yes. We are definitely losing customers to companies that offer their services online.

4=We have lost a small amount of customers, but nothing too significant.

3=Our business has stayed the same with the prevalence of the Internet.

2=The Internet has helped our business grow.

1=No. Our business has exponentially grown because of the Internet.

*Have you lost business in this downturned economy? (If every sector of the industry reports losing business at a level of 4 or 5, then I have concluded that consumers are spending less overall and it is not an indication that the process is declining in popularity.)*

5=No. We are doing just as well as before the recession, if not better.

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4=Not really. We are still a profitable company.

3=There has been no real change.

2=We have lost a little – nothing to really hurt our business though.

1=Yes. We've lost a significant amount.

Quantitative responses from the questions were recorded to determine the state of the particular business and the perceived future. The research method used has been clearly defined so any person could reproduce the study and interpret it the same way. After quantifying responses, the data was systematically analyzed and included all answers from the professionals. No information was left out that could align with the hypothesis of the study. Also, all jargon from the wedding and print industry used during the interviews was taken literally and analyzed as said, avoiding personal biases. (Levenson) Using the methods outlined above, the following research question has been answered accurately: How has the Internet impacted the process of ordering wedding invitations from the traditional artisan stationers? As discussed in Chapter 3, several industry professionals were interviewed about the trends in the wedding invitation market and how invitations will be ordered in the future. The interviews were conducted in-person, over the phone and through email for this research. The following section will outline the questions asked, the interviewee's responses and ~~its~~ the corresponding rating scale.

## Chapter 4: Results

To determine the relevance of this study, the industry professionals were asked, “How important are wedding invitations in the scope of the entire event?”

### RANKING:

**5**=Extremely important. You absolutely cannot have a wedding without them. They set the entire tone of the day and give the guests a glimpse of what to expect.

**4**=Pretty important.

**3**=They can be sent or not. The actual day is what really counts.

**2**=They aren't too important

**1**=Not important at all.



They unanimously agreed that a wedding invitation is extremely important in the scope of the entire event. Each interviewee's response was ranked as a 5. Lorie Clift noted that a wedding invitation serves four important purposes: first, “it informs the guests of the who, what where, when and why; second, invitations set the tone of the type of an affair the wedding will be, which can be determined by the paper. Invitations that are printed letterpress usually indicate that the wedding will be a formal affair. Letterpress is an expensive process involving

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custom dies and intensive labor. Third, an invitation also displays tradition and sets the tone and theme of the wedding, be it beach, wine, Victorian, or garden. Lastly, the invitations, as well as the save-the-date cards, are the utmost communication with the guests. They let the guest know who is truly invited by the way they are addressed.” (Clift)

Next, the industry professionals were asked, “How important is it for clients to see, feel and touch invitations before purchasing them?”

**RANKING:**

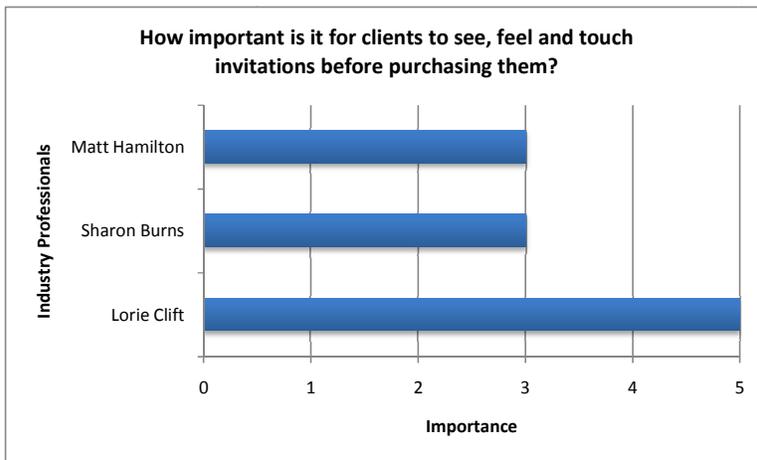
**5**=So important! The colors do not render perfectly on screen. The weight, caliper and texture of the paper determine the feel of the invitation.

**4**=Pretty important.

**3**=It does not really matter either way.

**2**=It is not the most crucial thing.

**1**=It is not necessary at all. The design is the most important element.



Clift’s answer ranked as a 5. There are many elements of an invitation that cannot be rendered accurately on the computer screen. For example, Lorie mentioned that many of her

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brides wish to work with vellum “that comes in different weight, patterns, and transparency – from sheer to fully opaque.” These variations are virtually undetectable on a website. Also, many brides wish to coordinate the color of their table linens, or other elements, to the invitation. In-person, this task is possible, but color-matching online can be quite difficult. For these reasons, Lorie Clift believes that clients must order their invitations in-person because they are tactile and crucial to the big day.

For Sharon Burns, it all comes down to the bride’s budget. Her response ranked as a 3. While she values the importance of feeling the substrate on an invitation, the bride’s event and budget do not always allow for it. For example, if the couple is only inviting 25 people and holding the ceremony in the backyard, there is no need to spend an exorbitant amount of money on invitations – ordering online is a much more viable option because it is affordable.

Matt Hamilton, Senior Marketing Manager at Magnet-Street, an online stationer, in Minneapolis recognizes the importance that clients place on feeling the invitation before purchasing them. Therefore, he includes invitation samples into his business model, sending them to clients upon request. His clients greatly appreciate seeing the invitations just as their guests will. For this reason, he is incorporating sending hard proofs to all clients before the order is finalized. Hamilton notes that about half of his clients request samples or a hard proof, while the other half are content placing their order based on product images from the website.

To determine the trend for ordering wedding invitations, the industry professionals were asked, “What sector of invitation ordering do you see as being most prevalent in the future and why?”

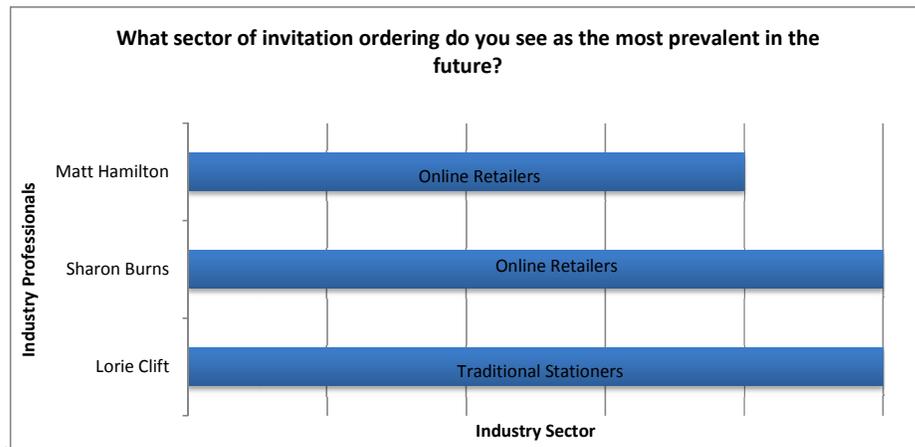
**RANKING:**

**5=**Local artisan stationers. Couples want to bring back the craft of wedding invitations.

**4=**Online ordering. It is fast and convenient. Customers can customize the text to pre-designed templates.

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3=E-vites. They are very inexpensive, if not free, manage the guest list online and are stylish.



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Clift is a proponent for local stationers (rating number 5) because a wedding is a major celebration and the invitations should be treated tastefully. In her experience, brides have been frustrated with online ordering because they cannot get the colors exactly right and are unable to touch and feel the product. The experience that Clift gives her brides is one-on-one personal attention, spending more time with the bride and her family than an online retailer, while pricing her services lower than competitors. With a different perspective is Sharon Burns who has worked with over 100 brides and has noticed a shift toward online ordering, saying that about 70% of her clients order online and she predicts that number will continue to grow (rating number 4). Burns suggests that her brides meet with a local stationer to sit down and discuss design objectives because a wedding is such a personal event. However, Burns is in the business of pleasing her clients and most of the time, budget is the deciding factor in invitation ordering. Online ordering is most prevalent with her brides because of the cost difference. Although the bride may want the extravagance of a letterpress invitation, what she is able to afford is from an online retailer. Hamilton's prediction of the future market of invitations and the

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way they are ordered are in accordance with Burns. He sees brides becoming more involved in the designing process, which the customization options online provide. They do not wish to take over the entire process by scratch, but enjoy adding their own unique flair – whether this be changing the fonts, or choosing a particular image that resonates with the couple. While the experts have slightly differing opinions on some interview questions, there are overall themes and predictions about the future of wedding invitations and the manner in which they are ordered. These themes will be thoroughly analyzed and examined in the following chapter.

### *Chapter 5: Conclusion*

This study asked the question, “How has the Internet impacted the designing and printing of wedding invitations by artisan stationers?” Based on elite and specialized interviews with industry professionals, this study found that ordering wedding invitations from online retailers has become the trend. ~~Soon~~Soon-to-to-be married couples choose the Internet, over

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artisan stationers, to order custom printed invitations because of its convenience, ease of use and affordability. The experts agreed that custom designed invitations from artisan stationers are beautiful and the level of craft is heightened, more so than with other options. However, consumers' priorities today align with the ease of online ordering. Ordering from online retailers has become an easy and comfortable process that rivals the customer experience of an in-store stationer.

One of the main reasons that ordering wedding invitations from an online retailer has become a trend is because of the features and customizations available. First, there are hundreds of invitation templates to choose from. The options are stylish and on point with wedding trends. The online company, Wedding Paper Divas, has commissioned artists design invitations for their website. Furthermore, the text, typeface and colors can be hand-picked by the couple, making them feel in control of the process. With so many customizable options, a couple feels as though they have really had a hand in the design of their invitation. Prior grievances of online ordering have diminished with companies like Wedding Paper Divas. In the infancy of online ordering, complaints from customers included: lack of personal interaction, hard to get questions answered, generic designs, disappointment in the final piece because of no proofing or insight into what the paper actually felt like. However, online retailers have improved their processes immensely. Companies now send paper samples, hard and digital proofs during the stages of design and ordering to ensure their customers' happiness. Additionally, Wedding Paper Divas have expert designers on staff to review the invitations before they are printed. They also boast customer service at every hour of the day. The online companies realize that couples are more apt to use the Internet to order invitations and have made the process easy and comfortable for them – making this ordering method a trend.

According to the United States Census Bureau, a 2009 American Community Survey found the majority of marrying couples are on average, 26.5 years old. (Stritof) This generation

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has grown up using the Internet as a content and solutions provider. They turn to the Internet to research everything. It is natural that this generation would search for invitations and order them from an online retailer as well. Online options are best suited for a modern couple. Older generations are prone to turn to traditional stationers for their invitations, but the majority of marrying couples are in their mid-20s; therefore, it is natural that the current trend is online ordering websites.

Another reason online invitations are increasingly popular is because they are generally more affordable than those from a local stationer. Sharon Burns recognizes the cost savings and oftentimes will recommend online invitation resources to brides on a budget. In the end, the extravagance and details of a wedding come down to the budget. While custom designed letterpress invitations are beautiful, the couple may only be able to afford a customized online template, printed digitally. Wedding Paper Divas provides beautiful wedding invitations at prices of, approximately, 50% cheaper-less than in-store options. (“Five Great Reasons”) Online retailers are able to provide more affordable options because there are no costs associated with maintaining a storefront. Especially in these times of an economic recession, the budget is a limiting, and deciding factor.

Marrying couples, and Americans in general, are likely to be very busy, especially when planning an event as large as a wedding. In Matt Hamilton’s interview, he noted the increasing trend of Do It Yourself (DIY) brides. An ambitious DIY bride, and brides in general, have many details to consider when planning the special day. Ordering invitations online is convenient, quick, and easy to use. A bride can choose a template and customize it in a couple of hours, at most. The invitations are shipped promptly after that. The process is efficient. Ordering from a stationer would take time out of the bride’s day to meet with the designer and discuss every detail. Some brides may place high importance on this, but the modern bride is oftentimes so busy that ordering online is an easy way to check the invitations off her list.

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Lastly, ordering wedding invitations from online retailers is the trend, according to the majority of the experts interviewed. Sharon Burns, a wedding planner, and Matt Hamilton, Senior Marketing Manager at MagnetStreet both agree that online companies will be the most prevalent sector for invitation ordering in the future, for the reasons mentioned above and because of the feedback received from their clients. The ranking Burns and Hamilton placed on the importance of seeing and touching an invitation before ordering also supports this. Both ranked this as a 3, on a scale of 1 to 5. They believed that feeling an invitation before purchasing is desired, but it isn't the absolute most important element when ordering invitations.

Ordering from online retailers has become the most desired method of ordering wedding invitations because of the relationship of today's wedding invitation consumer with the Internet. Additionally, this is the method of choice because of its customizable features, ease of use, affordability, and convenience. The experts also agree. Based on the professional opinion of the experts interviewed, ordering wedding invitations from online retailers is the trend. Their client experiences and preference for ordering invitation online is evidence of this current trend.

Because online ordering of wedding invitations has proven to be the trend, it is natural that business for traditional artisan stationers has, and will continue to decrease. According to the experts interviewed, clients prefer working with online retailers, as opposed to traditional stationers, for the reasons explained in this research. In order to remain successful in the wedding invitation industry, local stationers should look into creating an online presence and selling their services through their website.

~~NOTE: CAN YOU REFER BACK TO THE ORIGINAL QUESTION — How has the Internet impacted the process of ordering wedding invitations from the traditional artisan stationers? YOU STATE THAT THE TREND IS TO ORDER ONLINE, SO YOU NEED TO FINISH THE THOUGHT AND TALK ABOUT HOW BUSINESS FOR TRADITIONAL~~

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STATIONERS HAS DECREASED OR WILL DECREASE.HOW HAS THE TRADITIONAL  
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