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details. To avoid confusion, note that a formal invite will follow.

You can get the news out instantly to a computer-friendly crowd without spending a penny via www.sendomatic.com. Dress up your message with music and motion if you wish. Or send a handwritten note to guests, namely Grandma, who may not be internet savvy. Another cost-cutting move is to combine save-the-dates with your engagement announcement. You'll answer everyone's very first question and avoid mailing the same people twice.

There are only three reasons to skip sending save-the-dates: If your budget doesn't stretch, your timetable is too short (less than six months), or if all your guests are local.

So what might this save-the-date look like? Wedding planner Samantha Goldberg of Gold Events in Bridgewater tells us that "magnet save-the-dates are so been there, done that. Why not be a little different?" So here are some outside-the-box save-the-ideas:

- Mail your message in a plastic bottle with a dash of sand, shells, or confetti. See www.capeimages.com or www.bottlemeamessage.com.
- Send a mock boarding pass for your destination wedding.
- Share a taste of what's ahead: a morsel of your wedding cake inside its own tiny box. Ask your baker to create one, or bake your own.
- Send a heart-shaped monogrammed cookie. Visit www.rollingpinproductions.com or www.cookiesbydesign.com.

"Because it's often so fanciful, the save-the-date sometimes gets more raves than the invite itself," says Gregoli.

And Goldberg offers another piece of advice: "Just keep in mind that if you wow your guests with a big-budget save-the-date, they'll expect an even more elaborate invitation."

INVITATIONS AND ACCESSORIES

The Bag Lady

154 South Lane, West Windsor
609-426-4001

email: stewcards6@comcast.net

Patricia Stewart of the Bag Lady creates custom-designed invitations for any type of wedding. There are many styles to choose from, with embellishments or classic designs.

The Blue Tulip

The Promenade, Route 73 South, Marlton
856-596-3073

www.bluetulip.com

Inspired, custom-designed wedding stationery, from invitations to place cards and thank-you notes. Open daily; no appointment necessary. Graphic designer on staff.

Calligraphy Arts

Maplewood, 888-478-6400

www.calligraphyarts.com

Calligraphy Arts is a calligraphy studio offering hand-lettered calligraphy.

Calligraphy by Jennifer

973-335-6326

Offering a variety of distinctive, hand-inscribed styles, Jennifer's calligraphy enhances envelopes and place cards with elegance and sophistication.

Designs by Stephanie

Little Egg Harbor, 609-812-1383

www.sdesigns.biz

Graphic designer Stephanie Somodi offers more than 70 unique handmade invitation designs, each with multiple layers and embellished with such details as Austrian crystals, colorful ribbons, shimmering papers, frosted snowflakes, starfish, and raffia to ensure that each invitation is unique to your personality. Many of her designs have seasonal themes. She also designs programs, place cards, and menu cards. Samples can be viewed on her website.

The Front Porch

24 S. Main Street, Pennington

609-737-0071

www.thefrontporchnj.com

The Front Porch specializes in all kinds of wedding invitations, including save-the-date cards, shower invitations, and thank yous. They also carry an extensive array of gifts for the entire wedding party, including custom and personalized items, unique wedding albums, and frames.



IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Samantha Goldberg of Gold Events in Bridgewater offers an inexpensive, personal option: Record your news on a CD. Imagine this: "Hi! I want you to be the first to know that Jack popped the big question last weekend, and of course I said 'YES!' We're going to get married May 1st on Long Beach Island, so mark your calendar. Can't wait to see you there. We love you!"

You can even add a mix of your favorite songs to your announcement to get your guests in the mood, as on the CD above.

Or try a DVD showing you opening a ring box, trying on a sparkly diamond, and introducing your fiancé. Aunt Susie and all your nearest and dearest will be thrilled to hear the good news directly from you. And you better believe they're going to save that date.—P.K.

Heather Baird Loya Couture Invitations and Event Styling

Bernardsville, 908-638-9910

Hoboken, 201-232-4502

www.handmadebyheather.com or

www.lepaptique.com

Designer and stylist Heather Baird Loya's innovative approach to letterpress invitations and all coordinating accessories gives any formal event elegance and style. She offers couture ensembles that include boxed invitations, rhinestone embellishments, luxury ribbons, custom monograms, wax seals, addressed envelopes, ceremony programs, escort cards, custom favors, menus, table numbers, and silk table linens. She specializes in the "Stuffed, Stamped, and Sent" package, in which the invitation can be fully assembled, addressed, stamped, and posted in the mail. She has personal consultations in Hoboken, Bernardsville, Mendham, and High Bridge. Home consultations are also available.

Invitations Et Cetera

129 South Livingston Avenue, Livingston

973-992-3020

Here you can browse through books of invitations, place cards, napkins, favors,