

# VOWS:

*The VOWS Profile:*

## **VOWS Bridal**

**Olivia DeAngelo honors  
legacy with bold,  
strategic pivot.**

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**Unknown to Unstoppable...  
turn cold brides into  
hot appointments!**

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**Book – and sell – more brides  
with DM automation**

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**The Social Platform no one  
is using... yet!**

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**Gen Z's money mindset  
matters... here's why!**

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**Olivia DeAngelo, second generation  
owner of 34-year-old Massachusetts boutique.**



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A woman with long blonde hair is wearing a strapless, floor-length wedding gown. The dress features a lace bodice with a ruched waist and a full, flowing lace skirt. She is standing against a light gray, textured wall. The gown's train is visible on the dark floor.

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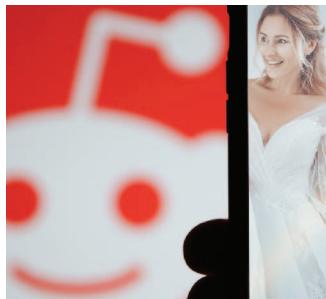
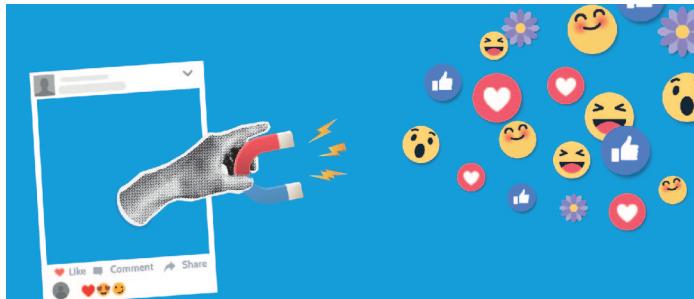
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# VOWS:



Credit: William Hall, Perla Images

## Taming Tech

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How bridal stores turn cold brides into hot appointments.

by Mark Chapman **36**

### Make Instagram Work for You

Book more brides with DM automation.

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Reddit's anonymous, trust-based conversations shape brides' decisions – what you need to know before participating.

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### Help Brides Feel Seen, Supported and Confident

Navigate body image, social pressure and sizing realities to build trust – and better outcomes – in every appointment.

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## The VOWS Profile: VOWS Bridal

### Leading Legacy into the Next Era

How Olivia DeAngelo honored VOWS Bridal's roots while executing a bold, strategic pivot.

by Katie Roberts **64**

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# VOWS:

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Natural lighting from the ceiling at VOWS Bridal contributes to a bright, spacious feel.

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### On the cover

Olivia DeAngelo, owner of VOWS Bridal, in her Watertown, Mass. boutique

Credit: William Hall, Perla Images

## So We've Got That Going for Us...



**To paraphrase** an old Monty Python line... "And now for something completely different!"

What does 2026 hold in store for us, according to predictions from the two age-old forecasting systems of Numerology and 12-year Chinese zodiac cycle?

Essentially positive news... predictions of the excitement and energy of new beginnings, a new cycle... one that could be further interpreted for us as brides being more decisive, less tied to tradition, ready for a fresh start.

(BTW: It's not just Numerology and Chinese zodiac cycles predicting a newness. Some Biblical and Torah scholars also suggest based on their readings of scripture and texts that 2026 is a year of new beginnings with a renewed positive, moral and spiritual awareness.)

As background, according to Wikipedia, Numerology is "the belief in an occult, divine or mystical relationship between a number and one or more coinciding events. Number symbolism is an ancient and pervasive aspect of human thought, deeply intertwined with religion, philosophy, mysticism, and mathematics."

Here's how it works: any given number is reduced down to 1 through 9 to determine what stage, cycle or qualities that number represents.

For example, the year 2026:  $2+0+2+6=10$ , reduces further to one, a Universal Year 1 which indicates a fresh start and suggests it may be felt as a rebuilding year in which new designers, planners and venues gain traction; when the number of first marriages may rise slightly in comparison to later years that are often viewed as completing a cycle; when couples who have delayed marriage may now feel ready to do so; and brides may be more non-traditional.

In Chinese astrology, 2026 is the Year of the Horse, beginning February 17, 2026 and ending February 5, 2027, with its themes of movement, energy and new beginnings, "encouraging individuals to embrace change and pursue their goals with confidence."

Combining 2026's Universal Year 1 with the Year of the Horse "creates a very specific – and powerful – symbolic profile for weddings. In the wedding industry, this combination is read as bold beginnings, independence-driven love, and momentum-forward marriages," with more confident, original and future-focused brides.

Oh if only...

But still fun to think about, right? How these ancient systems and texts may be better at providing insights into circumstances affecting us than my attempts to predict the future by reading tea leaves!

And since I'm quoting movies and comedies... here's an all-time favorite line paraphrased from the movie Caddy Shack that feels appropriate:

"So we've got that going for us... which is nice."

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*Mariza*  
BRIDAL VEILS





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# The New Rules of Bridal Retail

How today's brides are rewriting the playbook – and what every boutique must know to keep up.

**There was a time** when running a successful boutique meant mastering a familiar formula: beautiful gowns + strong vendor relationships + well-trained stylists = a calendar full of appointments. While those fundamentals still matter, the reality is this: today's bridal world is operating by a new set of rules.

Brides are no longer discovering boutiques the way they once did. They arrive having researched anonymously on Reddit, exchanged messages through Instagram DMs, compared values, budgets and reviews, and formed opinions long before they ever walk through your doors. For better or worse, technology now shapes first impressions. Data influences loyalty. And emotional intelligence plays just as large a role as merchandising.

In our Jan/Feb 2026 issue (the first of the New Year. . . can you believe it?!), we explore what those new rules look like in practice.

"From Unknown to Unstoppable" (pg. 36) talks about the importance of committing to a steady, multi-touch online presence to capture brides' attention. "Make Instagram Work for You" (pg. 40) talks about how smart automation can turn casual inquiries into meaningful appointments. "Gen Z's Money Mindset" (pg. 52) gives insight into this demographic's spending habits and what truly motivates their loyalty. "The Bridal Platform No One is Using" (pg. 46) details how anonymous platforms like Reddit are quietly shaping brides' decisions – and how you can engage without losing

authenticity. Finally, "Helping Brides Feel Seen, Supported and Confident" (pg. 58) discusses how to navigate the tricky and far-too-common world of body image issues and sizing realities that many of your brides face.

That last article is very personal to me, as body image is something I struggled horribly with in the past. In high school, severe anorexia nearly killed me, and I spent 10+ years recovering. Physical recovery was "easy" (in quotes because not really, just way easier than fixing the mental part). The real challenge involved getting my mindset right. During this time, I was hypersensitive to comments about my appearance from anyone. Even looks or what someone didn't say could have a deep impact. I had weird rules about clothing sizes I followed that made no sense to outsiders, but served to calm my anxious brain. If something fit baggy, it would literally trigger panic attack flashbacks that made me feel like I was starving to death again.

To be fair, this issue was deeper than any store could be expected to

fix. But it's important to remember that your customers could be tackling similar challenges internally, and most likely they aren't going to share these things with you. It's important to approach every bride with sensitivity on this topic. Our article provides many great suggestions for the best things to say and do.

Finally, our profile of **VOWS Bridal** in Watertown, Mass. (pg. 64) celebrates second-generation leadership that honors the past while building boldly for the future. This boutique's story proves that evolution doesn't mean abandoning tradition – it means strengthening it.

The bridal industry has always been built on relationships; that won't change. What has changed is where those relationships begin, how they're nurtured and what brides expect from them.

As we step into 2026, the boutiques that thrive will be the ones willing to adapt, listen and lead with both innovation and heart.

Welcome to the new rules of bridal retail, and Happy New Year!

May 2026 be your best yet!

## Boutique Contributors (+Instagram handles – give them a follow!)

**Bridal Chateau**, Williamsville, N.Y.

@bridalchateau

**Bustle**, Baton Rouge, La. @bustlebridal

**Della Curva**, Tarzana, Calif. @dellacurva

**Lili Bridals**, Tarzana, Calif. @lilibridals

**Mirror Mirror**, Baldwinsville, N.Y.

@mirrormirrorincbridal

**Platinum Bridal**, Thornton, Colo.

@platinumbridalco

**Sophia's Bridal and Tux**, four locations in Ind. & Ken. @sophiasbridalandtux

**Taylor Lawrence Bridal**, Fayetteville, N.C. @taylorlawrencebridal

**VOWS Bridal**, Watertown, Mass. @vows\_bridepower



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Also check the VOWS online calendar for updates and additions:  
<https://www.vowsmagazine.com/events>

### 2026 International and Domestic Market Dates

#### February 21-23

**Sposaitalia Collezioni**  
 Milano Bridal Week, Milan, Italy  
<https://sposaitaliacollezioni.fieramilano.it/en>

#### February 22-26

**New York Fashion Week**  
**Designers at the Essex House**  
 JW Marriott Essex House  
 New York, NY  
[www.designersattheessex.com](http://www.designersattheessex.com)

#### March 15-17

**National Bridal Market Chicago**  
 Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com)

#### March 22-24

**London Bridal Week**  
 London, England  
[www.bridalweek.com](http://www.bridalweek.com)

#### March 22-24

**Rome Bridal Week**  
 Rome, Italy  
[www.romebridalweek.com](http://www.romebridalweek.com)

#### March 28-30

**European Bridal Week**  
 Messe Essen, Germany  
[www.europeanbridalweek.com](http://www.europeanbridalweek.com)

#### March 30-April 1

**ANDMORE Formal Markets**  
 Apparel Mart, Atlanta, GA  
[www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets](http://www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets)

#### April 8-9

**New York Luxury Bridal Fashion Market**  
 Design house members of The Bridal Council  
 showcasing bridal collections at individual  
 showrooms, New York City, NY  
[www.thebridalcouncil.com](http://www.thebridalcouncil.com)

#### April 8-9

**Designers at the Essex House**  
 JW Marriott Essex House NYC  
 160 Central Park South  
 New York, NY  
[www.designersattheessex.com](http://www.designersattheessex.com)

#### April 8-9

**Melange de Blanc NY Bridal Market**  
 Starrett-Lehigh Building  
 New York, NY  
[www.melangedeblanc.com](http://www.melangedeblanc.com)

#### April 8-9

**One Fine Day Bridal Market**  
 CANOE STUDIOS  
 601 W 26th St, New York, NY  
[https://onefinedaybridalmarket.com/pages/our-events](http://onefinedaybridalmarket.com/pages/our-events)

#### April 8-9

**The Fringe Collective**  
 Starrett-Lehigh Building, New York, NY  
[www.thefringecollective.com](http://www.thefringecollective.com)

#### April 8-9

**Union Square Couture**  
 The Lotte New York Palace Hotel  
 455 Madison Ave, New York  
[www.unionsquarecouture.com](http://www.unionsquarecouture.com)

#### April 22-26

**Barcelona Bridal Fashion Week**  
 Barcelona, Spain  
[www.barcelonabridalweek.com](http://www.barcelonabridalweek.com)

#### August 3-7

**ANDMORE Formal Markets**  
 Apparel Mart, Atlanta, GA  
[www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets](http://www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets)

#### August 16-18

**National Bridal Market Chicago**  
 Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com)

#### September 13-15

**Harrogate Bridal Week**  
 Harrogate Convention Centre  
 Harrogate, England  
[www.bridalweek.com](http://www.bridalweek.com)

#### October 2026 TBA

**NY Luxury Bridal Fashion Week**

**Designers at the Essex House**  
 JW Marriott Essex House NYC  
 160 Central Park South, New York, NY  
[www.designersattheessex.com](http://www.designersattheessex.com)

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Readers are invited to submit letters via mail, email or fax. VOWS: reserves the right to edit for length and grammar. Wedding-product vendors also may submit material, 250 words or fewer preferred, for our Marketplace section. Opinion pieces of 1,300 words or less are always welcome for our Perspectives column. All materials can be returned if requested.

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## Heard Around the Industry...

### Industry News

#### Hers Bridal celebrates 50th Anniversary

Hers Bridal celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last month with a high-energy vogue and fun glamour event in which the Minden, La., retailer featured couture gowns, iconic boutiques, statement bows, signature cocktails, high-



A moment of pure bridal joy unfolds as **Cat Teague** glides down the runway.



Bold sophistication takes center stage as **Harvey Robinson** commands the Hers runway in a striking red suit, redefining modern formalwear with confidence and edge.

fashion photo moments and an elevated runway show.

"This event was not just to showcase Hers Bridals as one of Louisiana's longest-standing bridal boutiques by bringing big city fashion energy to the heart of Minden," explained current owner **Alicia Adams**, "but to also show the wedding industry's growth and ex-



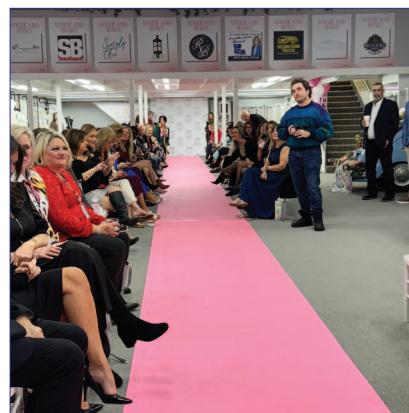
Romance fills the **Hers Bridal** runway as **Bella Guin** steps forward in an ethereal gown, complete with delicate off-the-shoulder sleeves and a timeless silhouette.

panding economic impact within the state and Minden specifically."

The event featured local models, wedding vendors and creators collaborating to bring something magical to Main Street, added Adams. Runway and event sponsors included **Say Baby**, **Simply Chic**, **Sloans Formal** and live streaming by **SB** magazine. Additionally Hers Bridal's latest product addition **His Department** featured an exclusive and limited speakeasy featuring a bourbon bar, mash potato bar and cigar giveaway.

For additional information and photos of the event, visit [www.HersBridalBoutique.com](http://www.HersBridalBoutique.com).

*Tidbits* continued on page 32



The pink runway stretches through the heart of **Hers Bridal**, setting the stage for an unforgettable celebration of style and love.



**Alicia Adams** and her team that worked tirelessly to create the life moment event of the year, **Hers Bridal's** 50-Year Anniversary, in Minden, La.



# DEMETRIOS

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Continued from page 30

### Market News

#### MCA Chicago event draws strong retailer attendance

##### The National Bridal Market

**Chicago** at THE MART hosted the highly anticipated **Mon Cheri Academy** last month, December 8-10, where more than 90 bridal retailers gathered to learn from industry leaders **Steve Lang, Nayri Kalajian, Julianna Granito** and **Peter**

**Grimes** during an engaging three-day event filled with valuable insights and strategies.

Participants left the Academy equipped with essential knowledge to enhance profitability, outshine competition, boost online sales and expand their professional networks. The event emphasized actionable strategies retailers can implement to thrive in the dynamic bridal industry.

"This event marked the first in-person Mon Cheri Academy in Chicago in several years," explained **Monique Kieler**, vice president of marketing, apparel for the Mart, "and we are excited to plan more sessions, both in-person and virtual, throughout 2026."

The next in-person event will be held one day before National Bridal

### Heard Around the Industry...



More than 90 retailers attended the three-day MCA event held in December in Chicago at the Merchandise Mart, home of the **National Bridal Market Chicago**.

Market Chicago on Saturday, March 14.

"Education remains a cornerstone of our mission," she added, "with the March National Bridal Market Chicago set to feature an enriching Educational Series. This will include over seven compelling seminars covering crucial topics for bridal retailers, culminating in a full day dedicated to furthering education through the Mon Cheri Academy."

The National Bridal Market

Chicago is the largest premier tradeshow in the US featuring the industry's top designers. The one-stop-shop market floor is designed to help attendees network, learn and celebrate all things bridal and special occasions. The show runs twice a year at THE MART in Chicago. The next show will run March 15-17, 2026.

For more information on the National Bridal Market Chicago visit [www.nationalbridalmarket.com](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com).

### Preparing for an Emergency

**With the turmoil** in the world, and marketplace, it is crucial to be prepared for the possibility of a crisis whether personal, staff or customer-related.

Though the hope is not to have to use it, an emergency crisis action plan should have the following features:

- **A manager you can lean on.** Make sure this person feels appreciated and valued in ways that are meaningful to him/her.
- **Let your staff get to know your family.** While clear lines should be drawn between personal and professional lives, it's helpful for your staff to know your partner, children, etc., so it's not awkward for them to help in a crisis. Same goes for getting to know your staff's family – they'll feel better accepting help if you're more than "just a boss."
- **Protect yourself.** Own disability insurance and institute



other financial measures that could protect your business in the event of an emergency.

- **Teach one trusted staffer how to find important information.** This includes business notes, logins/passwords, and any vendor or customer information that they may need should you suddenly not be available to manage the store.
- **Be wise about how much you share and with whom.** While it's smart to have a back-up person in case of emergency, not everyone needs to know everything.
- **Empower your team to be autonomous.** Figure out what trainings, skills and tools are needed so your staff could run the business successfully in your absence.
- **Lead with your heart, not just your head.** When you choose to help someone, celebrate that feeling. If you choose not to help for some reason, be at peace with that decision. Surround yourself with happy people and activities that will eliminate any guilt.

## Following Up with the Be-Back Bride.



**We reached back** into the VOWS article archive to look at articles produced about the follow up necessary for the bride who leaves the boutique without committing to a gown.

What follows is a summary of that article, still especially pertinent today.

Proactive and thoughtful follow-up remains necessary to advancing relationships and closing sales with those brides who did not purchase during their first appointment. Ongoing dialogue enhances credibility, builds trust and establishes your store as a caring, bride-focused operation.

Here's how to do just that:

**1) Create a follow-up system.** To effectively follow up with brides, you first must know which customers require follow-up. Utilize your customer relationship management (CRM) platform. After the initial appointment, the stylist can add any pertinent notes into the bride's file, such as what dress(es) she liked and her points of hesitation. Most CRM systems can then generate automated reminders to prompt a follow-up.

**2) Know the bride's preference.** From phone to e-mail to text to social media, follow-up can take various forms. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach or trying to guess a bride's preference, simply ask her. When collecting the bride's information, whether via an online appointment questionnaire or a pre-appointment phone call, directly request how she would like to be contacted. And after the appointment before she leaves the store, ask her if you may follow up with her chosen preference.

**3) Make the follow-up personal.** As much as possible, personalize the follow-up so it is authentic. Use the bride's first name. Refer to particulars of her appointment and be a friendly, expert resource. If she is most likely to special order, will she need to do so soon to ensure a safe arrival? Send a photo of the gown(s) the bride enjoyed or of new

arrivals she might like. Let the bride know she's a singular individual you remember, not another sales statistic. But keep it short and sweet. Pleasantries are fine, even necessary, but respect your bride's time by getting to the point.

**4) Provide value.** Avoid reaching out to the bride with the expressed purpose of "checking in" or "touching base," which screams generic. Rather, have purpose behind your contact and, perhaps most importantly, bring something of value to the table by leaning on what you know about the bride and her wedding plans. Show empathy and acknowledge that the dress-shopping experience can be daunting and explain the ways your store minimizes the stress, whether that's offering payment plans, in-house alterations to streamline fittings or an on-call troubleshooting line to address any wedding-day snafus. If you want to be more aggressive, consider offering a bounce-back deal such as a discount on a gown purchase or a half-price accessory to incentivize the return visit. In such cases, put a time limit on the deal to create urgency.

**5) Offer alternatives.** Consider a bride's specific pain points and present relevant remedies. If she told you she could not commit to the dress without the opinion of mom, dad and grandma, yet current appointment guidelines limit the bride to one guest, then offer an after-hours VIP appointment as a workaround. View the bride's "be back" rationale as an opportunity to devise a creative solution, not a barrier to the sale.

**6) Include a call to action.** Ultimately, you want your follow-up to produce some result, so include a call to action. Otherwise, the sales process becomes an ongoing – and, ultimately, frustrating – game of cat and mouse. Ask questions to advance the conversation. Invite them, with one touch, to book an appointment or call the store. Encourage them to follow you on social media, where they can keep abreast of store information, new inventory and relevant resources. Maintain the relationship by clearly defining a next step.

**7) Be persistent – but know when to call it.** Persistence stands a necessary ingredient to building relationships, overcoming obstacles and creating a healthy, sustainable bridal business. If multiple e-mails or texts fail to generate a response, follow up again with additional valuable information and a different call to action. Maybe consider a handwritten note to stand out from the clutter. Share testimonials or reviews to highlight your credibility and service. At the same time, know when to cut your losses – and to resist becoming annoying. If the bride remains silent, then make one last contact and announce it as such. Confirm you would love the chance to be a part of the bride's wedding day and remain open to answering any questions. Such "break-up" notes tend to spur action from sincerely interested customers while allowing you to cut ties with less serious prospects.





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# From Unknown to Unstoppable



How bridal stores turn cold brides into hot appointments.

We are living in an "Attention Economy." And in bridal, attention equals appointments.

**If there's one brutal truth** I've learned from managing more than \$30 million in paid ads for bridal, it's this: If they don't know you exist, they can't buy from you.

That sounds obvious, but every day I see bridal stores quietly waiting for brides to "discover" them – while the loud, visible, sometimes less amazing competitors scoop up the appointments.

Visibility is no longer optional. You're not just in the bridal business... you're in the attention business.

We are living in an "Attention Economy". And in bridal, attention = appointments.

In this column, you'll learn five key lessons (and practical actions) we've discovered from mastering bridal advertising, turning cold brides into warm, excited, ready-to-book appointments.

## Lesson 1: Attention Comes First (You Can't Just "Dip Your Toe In")

Brides don't move in a straight line from seeing one ad to booking. Their journey could take a myriad of different steps, looking more like this:

- They see your name in a Google search
- Later, they scroll past your Instagram content. A friend sends them a TikTok video you created. They check your Google Reviews
- They click to your website, poke around your collections, check out your About page, and of course learn your price range
- Days (or weeks) later, and with a few more exposures to your store online from Google, Instagram or TikTok, they finally decide to book

Your ads, organic Google presence, website, Instagram, Google Reviews, short-form video, About page, collections, text/chat, appointment booking page... these are all touchpoints working together as one attention system.

That's why the question, "Should I just dip my toe in the water with ads to see if it works?" is dangerous. If your strategy is a tiny ad budget on one platform, for a short burst of time...you're guaranteed to conclude: "Ads don't work for my store."

The reality of today's attention economy is that brides must see you in multiple places, multiple

times, before they fully understand who you are, what you offer and how you're different.

This doesn't mean you need a six-figure budget. It does mean you need a consistent, always-on presence across core platforms where brides are searching, scrolling and deciding:

- Google Ads & Google Business Profile – capturing active intent ("bridal shop near me")
- Meta (Facebook/Instagram) – nurturing curiosity and emotion through images, Reels, carousels and stories
- TikTok – building trust and familiarity with short, educational videos. Attention is not a one-time event; it's a drumbeat

## Lesson 2: Once They Find You, They Must Instantly See What Makes You Different

Most bridal shops think their competition is other stores in their city. In reality, your biggest competition is sameness.

Almost every store talks about "great service," "beautiful gowns" and "memorable experience," leaving the bride with nothing to grab onto. She can't tell you apart, so she chooses the shop with the most reviews, the closest location or the one a friend mentions first.

Instead, you want her to encounter your brand and immediately think:

"Oh, they're the store that \_\_\_\_\_"

This is where specificity matters. It's better to be meaningfully different than generically "better." Here are examples of clear, memorable differentiation:

- "Most extensive in-store selection of plus-size gowns in Ohio"
- "Love is love – fully inclusive boutique for every body and every story"

Those aren't just slogans – they inform your ad copy, your videos, the way you structure your website, even your in-store experience. When you're planning ads, ask yourself: if a bride sees my Google ad, then my Instagram Reel, then my homepage... will she see what makes us completely unique, clearly and consistently, everywhere?

Or will she see a generic message everywhere and walk away uninspired?

## Stop doing so much entertaining and do more educating!

### Lesson 3: Match Your Creative to the Platform (and Educate More Than You Entertain)

Once you're clear on what makes you different, show it off – properly – on each platform.

Different platforms need different creatives.

#### On Google Ads, a strong ad should:

- Include your brand name, city and what makes you completely unique
- Speak to what brides are actually searching for that you carry ("plus-size wedding dresses in Toledo")
- Include every "Asset" (site link extensions, link to Google Business profile, click-to-call, etc.)

#### On Meta (Facebook & Instagram), you should use a variety of formats to get attention:

- Single-image ads to feature a hero gown or moment
- Carousel ads to show multiple gowns or tell the story of the appointment experience
- Short-form videos that educate the bride about what makes you different and/or help her prepare for dress shopping ("Three things to know before shopping for your gown")

#### On TikTok, lean into simple, raw, helpful content:

- 15-second "snackable" videos (try-on reactions, quick tips, "POV you found the dress")
- 30-second educational videos ("Three things to know before shopping for your gown")
- Photo carousels (TikTok now allows swipe-through photos, which can be powerful for before/after, detail shots, or "top five dresses from this week")

One of the biggest shifts I recommend to store owners for creating videos that achieve results is this: Stop doing so much entertaining and do more educating!

Here are the questions you should ask of every video your team produces and posts or creates an ad with:

- Does it show what makes us completely unique?
- Does it tell the story of our appointment experience?
- Does it convey the emotion of finding the dress here?
- Does it make her want to get to know us as humans, not just a brand?

- Does it educate and set the bride up for success?

You don't need an endless content treadmill. You need content that shows what makes you completely unique and educates the brides who consume it.

### Lesson 4: Trust Is Built Before She Ever Walks Through Your Door

Once a bride knows who you are and what makes you different, she's still asking:

"Can I trust them to deliver the experience I want?"

Trust is not just about five-star reviews (though those matter). It's about repeated, positive exposure to you in low-pressure environments - especially short-form video and social media.

#### Here's how to build that trust online:

- Show your face and your team. People buy from people
- Educate generously. Share tips that help her even if she never books with you
- Respond to every comment and DM. Use tools like ChatGPT to help if you're stuck, but don't ignore incoming engagement
- End your replies with a question. Keep the conversation going and invite next steps ("Which are your favorite styles?")
- Invite and celebrate reviews. Feature them in Stories, on your website and in your ads
- Be clear about who you are – and who you're not. The more specific you are, the more your ideal brides will feel, "This is my place."

Furthermore, it's important to know that websites have more impact than most owners realize on whether a cold bride trusts you and converts. Most bridal websites make brides work too hard to figure out whether the store is a fit.

Your website should include these five basic elements that turn cold traffic into appointments:

- Let visitors simply ask questions without handing over their life story in a contact form (chat and text generate the most conversations, which generates the most booked appointments)
- Clearly display pricing or at least ranges, so you don't waste her time or yours
- Tell your personal story – how you got

into bridal, what you care about

- Show your space through video so she can visualize herself there
- Communicate your location and what makes you different at the very top of your homepage

### Lesson 5: Incredible Lead Follow Up Is Equally Important To Powerful Ads

Here's the part most people don't want to hear: Often, your ads are working... your follow-up just isn't. Common problems we see:

- Forcing brides to communicate in a format they dislike (phone calls only, no texting)
  - No automated responses to acknowledge inquiries ("Did they even get my form?")
  - Long, heavy e-mails that never get fully read
  - Not texting – or texting in a way that feels cold or robotic
- (Fact: 33% of e-mails get opened whereas 98% of text messages get opened)

### From Unknown to Unstoppable

Bridal stores that are winning appointments consistently aren't always the biggest, fanciest or most well-funded. They're the ones who:

- Accept that they're in the Attention Economy and show up where brides are
- Refuse to "dip a toe in" and instead commit to a steady, multi-touch presence
- Get crystal clear on what makes them different – and say it everywhere
- Use platform-appropriate creatives that educate more than they entertain
- Build trust with human, helpful, repeated contact
- Invest in websites that actually convert cold traffic into warm leads

You don't have to overhaul everything overnight. Pick one area from this article to work on first!

From there, keep auditing, keep improving and keep showing up. In a world where attention is scarce and sameness is everywhere, bridal shops that are brave enough to be visible, specific and genuinely helpful don't stay "unknown" for long.

They become unstoppable!

**Mark Chapman** and his team at **The I Do Society** have helped thousands of wedding industry businesses use Google Ads, Meta Ads and TikTok Ads to reach and convert their ideal couples. To contact Mark, visit [TheIDoSociety.com](http://TheIDoSociety.com), e-mail [hello@TheIDoSociety.com](mailto:hello@TheIDoSociety.com), and/or text 760-647-0403.



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# Make Instagram Work for You

Book more brides with DM automation.

When booking becomes effortless, brides take action.

**This scenario** probably sounds familiar: You know you should be posting on Instagram because that is where Gen Z brides spend their time. You have heard the advice about behind-the-scenes content, styling tips and real bride features. So you post your Reels, share your Instagram Stories and watch the likes trickle in.

But here is the part no one talks about: *How does any of your Instagram content actually turn into booked appointments?*

You are feeding the content monster, posting consistently, trying to keep up with trends and spending precious time you do not have creating content. Yet you have no idea whether any of it is actually driving revenue. It feels like you are on a hamster wheel, chasing an algorithm you do not understand, posting into the void and hoping something sticks.

Meanwhile, your appointment book is not getting any fuller. You begin to wonder if Instagram is simply a time-consuming task that looks good on paper but does not move the needle for your business.

This disconnect between “being on Instagram” and “Instagram driving sales” is the reality for most bridal retailers. It is also where one strategic shift can completely transform how social media contributes to your bottom line.

That shift is to a strategy of DM (direct message) automation.

You benefit from this strategy more than most industries. Brides do not simply browse dresses on Instagram. They plan their entire wedding journey there. When you make it easy for them to move from your content to your calendar, everything changes.

## Why “Click the Link in My Bio” Is Not Working

Here is the truth about most Instagram advice: It stops at “post good content.”

But what happens after someone watches your Reel featuring that stunning ballgown? Traditionally, you are told to end with “Click the link in my bio to book your appointment.”

And then nothing.

You might receive a few likes or a comment about how gorgeous the dress is. Actual bookings rarely follow. That is because “click the link in my bio” creates an obstacle course that most brides will not complete.

Imagine her experience. She is scrolling during her lunch break. She sees a gown she loves and feels that spark of excitement. Then you ask her to stop scrolling, tap your handle, search through multiple links, open a landing page inside Instagram’s browser and complete a form.

By step three, she has already moved on.

Link-in-bio click-through rates hover around one percent. Links delivered through DMs convert at 46 percent. That is not a small difference. That is the difference between your content working for your boutique and your content simply existing online.

The problem is not your content. The problem is the lack of a bridge between interest and action. DM automation builds that bridge.

## What DM Automation Actually Does

If you have never used DM automation, it might sound technical. It is not. Think of it as hiring a virtual assistant who lives in your Instagram inbox and responds instantly 24/7.

You create content as usual. Instead of ending with "link in bio," you say:

***"Comment MYDRESS and I will DM you the private link to book your appointment."***

When someone comments this keyword, your automation sends a personalized message with exactly what she wanted. No hunting. No confusion. No friction. And the possibilities go far beyond sending links.

DM automation can collect e-mail addresses or phone numbers directly inside Instagram. It can answer your most common questions about pricing ranges, appointment availability, what to bring to a fitting and more. It can send invitations for trunk shows, VIP previews of new collections or styling guides based on body type or wedding theme.

It transforms your content from something pretty into something

## Make booking effortless and increase appointments instantly.

profitable. Every Reel becomes a potential appointment. Every Story becomes a chance to capture contact information. Your content finally has a job.

### Why This Matters

The most frustrating part of Instagram for boutiques is not knowing whether it is actually working. DM automation removes the guesswork because you can see exactly what happens after someone engages with your content.

When a bride comments your keyword, she is raising her hand and signaling genuine interest. Your automated message meets her immediately, at the exact moment her excitement is highest.

This is critical in bridal retail. Brides often research multiple boutiques at once. They compare styles, availability and overall experience. The boutique that responds first and makes the next step simple usually wins.

DM automation ensures that you are always the boutique that responds first, even if the comment comes in at 11 p.m. when your team has gone home for the night.

I have watched my clients shift from posting and hoping to posting and booking. Their calendars fill with qualified leads and ideal customers. Their e-mail or text lists grow automatically. Instagram becomes their most effective marketing tool, without requiring paid ads.

### A Real Bridal DM Funnel That Works

Here is exactly what this looks like in practice.

Imagine you post a Reel showcasing the top three wedding

dress trends for 2026. It is visually compelling and instantly catches the attention of your ideal bride. Instead of ending with "DM us if you have questions," you give her one clear next step:

***"Want to try this dress on? Comment MYDRESS and we will send you our private booking link to reserve your VIP appointment."***

A bride comments "MYDRESS."

Within seconds, she receives a warm, personal message.

***"Congratulations on your engagement! We would love to help you find your dream dress. Here is the link to book a private appointment with one of our stylists. We cannot wait to meet you."*** She taps the link and books. There is no friction, no searching for the correct link and no delay.

Meanwhile, you may be with another bride, unpacking a new gown shipment or spending time with your family. The system handles every high-intent inquiry immediately.

Brides who comment on a Reel are already imagining themselves in your gowns. When booking becomes effortless, they take action.

Boutiques using this strategy consistently report fuller appointment books, more qualified brides and fewer no-shows. When a bride books while she is excited and engaged, her commitment increases significantly.

Reducing friction leads directly to increased revenue.

### Mistakes That Make DM Automation Feel Spammy

Before we go any further, it is important to address the hesitation many business owners have around DM automation. The fear

## Start with one funnel, one keyword and one clear goal.

often comes from real experiences. Many of us have commented on a post only to receive a completely irrelevant or unexpectedly pushy message. It feels off and it gives automation a bad reputation. That is not the approach we are using here.

Boutiques that misuse automation tend to make the same mistakes:

### 1. Replying automatically to every comment.

If someone comments “This dress is stunning,” they should not receive a booking link. Automation should trigger only when a bride types your intentional keyword.

### 2. Choosing keywords that are too common.

Words like “dress” or “love” fire constantly by accident. Button-style keywords such as MYDRESS, BOOKVIP or FITTING2026 eliminate confusion.

### 3. Assuming automation replaces the personal touch.

It does not. Automation handles the predictable tasks. Your team steps in when a bride asks a meaningful question or shares something personal. The combination creates both efficiency and connection.

Automation opens the door. Your team, expertise and warmth close the sale.

### The Simplest Way to Start

If you are intrigued but feeling slightly overwhelmed, start with ONE simple funnel.

### 1. Choose one goal: more booked appointments.

**1. Create one valuable piece of content that serves your ideal bridal customer.** Think about how you can inspire, educate, or entertain her. For example, you might share “Five Secrets to Finding a Dress Shape That Flatters Your Figure” or “I Wish I Knew This Before I Said Yes to the Dress.”

**2. Deliver on the promise of your video.** Whatever you tease in your hook should be demonstrated in the Reel and expanded on in the caption.

**4. Choose one unmistakable keyword,** such as MYDRESS or BOOKVIP, and include that call to action at the end of your video using on-screen text as well as in your caption.

**5. Set up one automation that instantly sends your booking link** the moment a bride uses that keyword.

Then let your content do the work so you and your team can focus on your zone of genius.

- One funnel.
- One keyword.
- One direct path from interest to action.

Once you see the results, you will be hooked on this simple and effective strategy for driving leads and sales with your organic content.

### Why This Is the Future for Bridal Boutiques

DM automation does not make your boutique less per-

sonal. It makes it easier for the right brides to take the next step when they are excited and ready.

Your ideal brides are already on Instagram. They are already looking at gowns, following boutiques and planning their appointments. The question is whether you are making it simple for them to choose you.

DM automation removes friction. It captures real interest. It turns your Instagram presence into measurable business growth. Most importantly, it frees you from the content hamster wheel. Instead of posting and hoping, you post with strategy. Instead of guessing, you track real results. Instead of wondering whether Instagram is worth your time, you watch it become one of your strongest revenue drivers. Boutiques that embrace this approach now will have a clear advantage in 2026 and beyond.

Your brides are ready. Your content is ready. And now you have a strategy that makes the two finally work together.

I am genuinely cheering you on. You pour so much heart into what you do and you deserve a marketing system that supports you back. DM automation can be that system. It is simple, it is effective, and it is absolutely within your reach. You have everything you need to make Instagram work for your boutique in a bigger, more aligned way.

If you would like to see DM automation in action, you can follow me on Instagram at [@elizabethmarberry](https://www.instagram.com/elizabethmarberry) and DM me the keyword LEADS. My sexy robot assistant will instantly send you a simple one-page guide that walks bridal boutique owners through the exact steps to set up their first DM automation. You will also receive a link to try my favorite automation tool, ManyChat, completely free for one month.

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# The Bridal Platform *No One is Using*

Reddit's anonymous, trust-based conversations shape brides' decisions – what you need to know before participating.



**Gain unprecedented insight into how brides truly think.**

**What if we** told you there was a social-media platform that...

1. Has been around for more than 20 years
2. Is currently utilized by very few bridal shops
3. Could make an enormous, positive difference in your business?

Meet Reddit. While the online discussion platform isn't exactly a new name, having been founded in June 2005, it isn't one that's typically on the radar of most boutiques. An internal review of VOWS profiles dating back to 1991 revealed that only ONE out of 100+ stores maintains a business presence. Among non-profile stores, this same trend holds true.

And yet – especially in the age of AI overload where information is plentiful and users increasingly crave authenticity – Reddit holds enormous possibility as not only a market research tool, but also an educational platform and commu-

nity-building opportunity.

What follows is a detailed analysis of what Reddit is, how best to use it and the benefits it could bring to your boutique.

## **Starting with the Basics**

Reddit – aptly named as a play on the words “I read it” – is a long-standing online platform built around conversation where people gather to tell stories, share experiences and seek advice.

Often referred to as “the front page of the internet,” Reddit is divided into 100K+ active niche communities called subreddits or “subs”, each centered around a specific interest – from cats and Major League Baseball to weddings, engagement rings, alterations and dress regret. There’s even a community to find a specific community: [r/find-reddit](#).

Users choose which communities to follow based on their interests, and their personalized feed is shaped accordingly.

Members, called redditors, can post

## Personal accounts reveal unfiltered opinions and buying signals.

text, links, images or videos. Other users then vote their content up or down, which means posts that resonate get lots of exposure, while content that doesn't quickly fades.

A good rule of thumb: usefulness wins, sales pitches don't. Reddit users expect unbiased, candid information. They enjoy discussing it with others in the community and use these insights to form opinions that drive real-world decisions.

Reddit uses a reputation system called karma, which users earn by participating in discussions and when others upvote their posts or comments. While karma has no monetary value, it acts as a trust signal – many communities require a minimum amount before allowing users to post. This helps keep conversations spam-free and high-quality.

One of Reddit's most defining features – and biggest advantages – is anonymity. Users interact through pseudonyms and avatars rather than real names and photos, which encourages honesty. People are often more candid on Reddit than on Instagram or Facebook, especially when asking sensitive questions or sharing frustrations.

This gives you unprecedented insight into how brides truly think, feel and decide.

Importantly, boutique owners can engage with Reddit in two ways: via an individual or business account. The former uses an avatar and pseudonym and doesn't need to be strictly bridal. The latter is created under your boutique's name, represents your brand and is expected to contribute value-driven expertise without overt selling.

We'll explore both.

you're free to engage in any communities that interest you. They don't need to be bridal-focused – and in fact, shouldn't be exclusively so. (For example, the author of this article may or may not spend time in subreddits dedicated to true crime, Major League Baseball and the care of feral cat colonies).

That's the norm on Reddit: people show up as whole humans, not brands.

A personal account is ideal for learning, listening and understanding – not gaining visibility. It allows you to observe conversations as they naturally unfold, without the pressure or expectations that

### About Reddit [www.business.reddit.com](http://www.business.reddit.com)



#### Compelling stats, per Reddit's own data:

- 443M+ people visit Reddit weekly
- 90% of visitors trust Reddit to learn about new products & brands
- 51% of total online mentions of purchasing discussions are on Reddit
- 85% of Redditors agree that people post things that are honest & truthful
- 90% of users trust Reddit to learn about new products & brands.

For context, that's higher than Google, Amazon, Twitter, Instagram & Snapchat



Taylor and Lawrence England celebrate the one-year anniversary of their Fayetteville, N.C. boutique with a ribbon cutting.

## Contribute value, not promotion, to earn karma in Reddit subs.

come with a branded presence. “I would tell stores not to jump straight into Reddit using their store name,” advises Lawrence England, who owns Taylor Lawrence Bridal in Fayetteville, N.C. with his wife Taylor – one of only a handful of boutiques to maintain a business presence ([u/TaylorLawrenceBridal](#)). “You need a regular account first. Learn how people talk, what’s acceptable and what’s not. Because if you say the wrong thing under your business name, suddenly you’re in the middle of a public situation with your reputation on the line.”

Reddit is also an effective tool for market research. You can search for wedding-dress shopping topics and read what brides are actually thinking, feeling and worrying about. Unlike reviews or surveys, these conversations are unsolicited and unfiltered. Brides aren’t performing for a business; they’re simply talking to each other. **The insights gained here** are often far more revealing than what appears in Google reviews or post-appointment surveys.

While exact figures are impossible to know due to Reddit’s anonymous nature, many boutique owners, consultants and industry insiders participate on the platform under personal accounts. **In numerous threads**, they’ve **answered questions, offered perspective and shared behind-the-scenes insight** – all while remaining anonymous to protect their businesses and brands.

It’s important to note that participating anonymously does not mean being deceptive. The most effective – and appropriate – approach is to avoid promoting your store on Reddit. Instead, think of participation as contribution: an-

swer questions honestly, share general industry knowledge and offer perspective when it’s genuinely helpful.

### Business Account: Proceed With Intention

If you want to take the next step you can create a Reddit account under your boutique’s name. In fact, Reddit itself recommends a dedicated business account for any company planning to engage officially, whether for advertising, customer service or public participation. Doing so creates transparency and keeps business activity clearly separated from personal use.

That said, this approach is far from common in the bridal industry. In fact, it remains the exception rather than the rule – and for good reason.

Reddit is not a platform where you can show up casually, post content and expect goodwill. It’s a community-first environment that requires a significant time investment, and business accounts are often met with skepticism unless they clearly understand – and respect – the culture.

One store intentionally navigating this space is Taylor Lawrence Bridal. Lawrence England says their decision to engage on Reddit came from recognizing how rapidly the digital world is changing – particularly with the rise of AI.

“You have to look at your online presence as an ecosystem – almost like a living system,” England says. “All of these AI platforms have to source their data from somewhere, and Reddit is more likely to be trusted

because it’s authentic. It’s open, community-run and unfiltered.”

For England, Reddit isn’t about increasing visibility, it’s about understanding – and contributing to – real conversations.

“What Reddit gives us is completely honest insight into what brides are thinking and the questions they’re actually asking,” he says. “We use that insight to educate brides, not just market to them. Education builds a relationship in a way constant marketing doesn’t.”

That mindset is shared by Esther Flint, marketing specialist for Sophia’s Bridal and Tux ([u/sophiasbridalandtux](#)). Flint sees Reddit, which Sophia’s joined within the past year to strengthen its local digital footprint and diversify how it connects with brides online, less as a marketing channel and more as both an investment in the future and learning opportunity.

“It helps us stay connected to real conversations, real concerns and real experiences brides are having right now,” Flint says. “That



Marketing Specialist **Esther Flint** works on content in-store at **Sophia's Bridal and Tux** in Louisville, Ken.

insight ultimately makes us better at what we do in-store. It can feel overwhelming at first, but persistence matters. Not every comment or post will gain traction, but those that do will have the potential for lasting impact."

To gain traction, remember that on Reddit, education is currency - promotion is not. A business account should always clearly be identified as such, maintain complete transparency and follow the rules of each subreddit, many of which have strict guidelines about self-promotion.

A common rule of thumb is Reddit's informal 9:1 ratio: for every promotional post or comment, contribute at least nine high-quality, non-promotional contributions that exist solely to add value.

Even then, promotion is never guaranteed to be welcome. And having a successful Reddit presence requires time.

"Reddit is significantly more engagement-based than other platforms," England says. "It's not like Instagram where someone leaves a three-word comment. These are deep, thoughtful responses – and if you're going to participate, you have to give that same energy back."

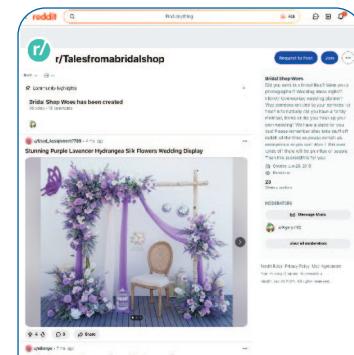
England estimates he spends close to an hour a day actively reading, responding and contributing - far more than other social-media platforms.

While Reddit does offer paid advertising and sponsored posts, England is skeptical of its effectiveness for bridal retailers.

"People on Reddit don't like marketing," he says plainly. "They don't want it to turn into Facebook or Instagram. They want it run by the people."

## Follow This Subreddit: r/talesfromabridalshop

**Created in June 2019**, it is a sub where anyone who worked in bridal field can go to vent, learn from each other and just generally share experiences!



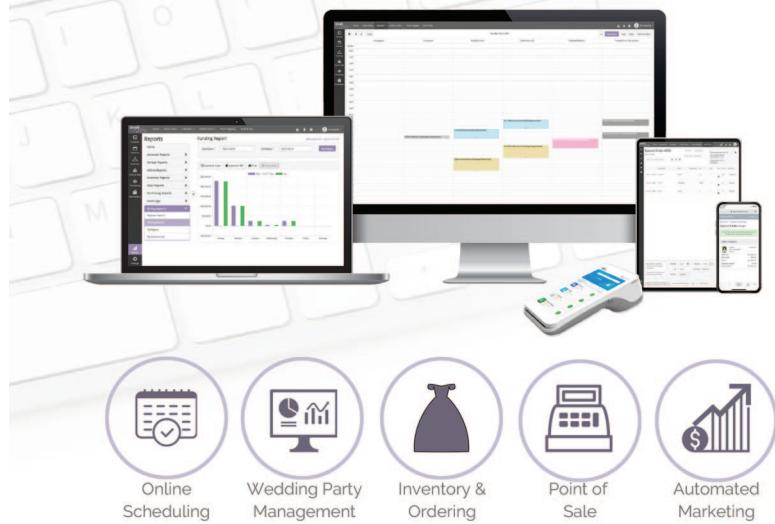
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*Authenticity  
matters more than  
ads on Reddit.*

This doesn't mean paid ads never work but boutiques who use them should do so thoughtfully, with a clear understanding of who actually uses the platform and why.

One thing to keep in mind is that Reddit is moderated at the community level, not by a central entity. If a post is flagged, it may or may not be removed. Conflict is handled publicly, and the anonymity can feel uncomfortable to anyone accustomed to more controlled platforms.

The bottom line is this: A business account on Reddit is not about selling or building follower counts. It's about community participation, credibility and long-term trust.

If you're willing to invest the time, learn the culture and prioritize education over promotion, Reddit can become a meaningful extension of your boutique's broader digital ecosystem. It can provide valuable insight into your brides' mindset, spark ideas for educational content and build meaningful relationships with your community.

But joining Reddit is not a shortcut – and it's not a strategy to adopt lightly. Make sure you have the time available to participate meaningfully.

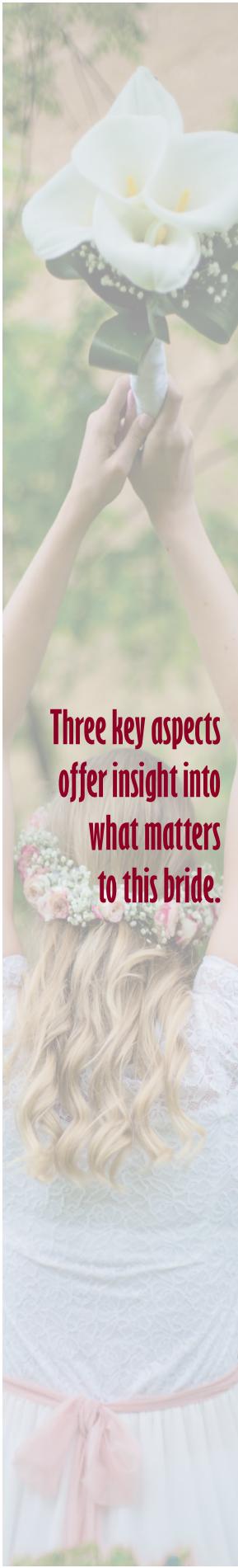
"Go in with the mindset of contributing, not converting," Flint says. "Reddit users are incredibly perceptive and authenticity matters more there than almost anywhere else online. If your goal is to sell immediately, Reddit will likely push back. But if your goal is to help, educate and show up consistently, the long-term value is real!"

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is the central figure. She is wearing a white, off-the-shoulder wedding gown with intricate lace and floral patterns. The dress features a fitted bodice and a full, flowing skirt. She is also wearing a delicate necklace with a central diamond pendant. Her pose is elegant, with one hand resting on her hip and the other on the back of her neck. The background is a bright, sunlit outdoor setting with green trees and a path.

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**Three key aspects offer insight into what matters to this bride.**



**British author** LP Hartley famously wrote, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."

And he was right – with every new generation comes changes to culture, to beliefs, to what's important. And it's essential to keep on top of these.

A generation that's now buying bridal gowns, and will for some time, is Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, which makes them 14 to 29 years old.

These young women are slightly different than the generations that have come before, and this means they not only expect different things from their bridal shopping experience but also have a different mindset when it comes to money and how much to spend on the dress of their dreams.

To understand their money mindset, it's important to look at three key aspects of what matters to this customer:



#### **I: They demand authenticity and trust**

More than anything, Gen Z brides are looking for an authentic experience. If a boutique is pretending to be something

it really is not, they'll sniff it out.

In its report, *Spend Z – Gen Z Changes Everything*, market research company NielsenIQ points out that "authenticity is a top value for Gen Z." In fact, where previous generations might have been interested in Hollywood celebrities, women in this age bracket are more interested in authentic relationships with social-media influencers and brands.

As a store, it's important to know what you stand for because these things are really important to Gen Z brides.

When it comes to bridal, they want to find a store that resonates with them personally, which means it has the right staff and vibes, and this is more important than the actual dresses the store carries, says Sarah Jeansonne Wampler, owner of Bustle in Baton Rouge, La..

"This bride wants to make sure the store vibe matches hers," Jeansonne Wampler says. "I know we will lose some brides but it's important to connect with the brides we do get. They're more likely to post on Instagram and tell their friends about it and tag us on their wedding photos if they feel really connected to us."

Inclusivity is a core value for Mirror Mirror in Baldwinsville, N.Y., and the store attracts a lot of LGBTQ+ customers and customers of different sizes and religions.

"It's our responsibility to understand the culture behind the wedding traditions; it's not the responsibility of the customer to educate us," owner Stephanie Long says.

She teaches her staff constantly, through videos, articles or even inviting speakers into the store.

This authenticity can and should also come through on social media, so in videos, employees at Bustle talk to the camera in the same way they talk to each other, so it's completely authentic. After all, there's someone on the other side of that camera.

If Gen Z shoppers find the right store to buy their wedding gown, they want to trust it. So it's very important to follow through, says Tori Washington, co-owner of Platinum Bridal in Thornton, Colo., with her sister, Monica Washington.

If you tell these brides you'll get them a price, or let them know when something might be in stock, it's important to do so.

"Trust is big, so we make sure we always follow through with what we promise, we over deliver on everything, and we make sure to always be clear and set up good expectations so they know what's next in the process," says Jessica Limeberry, owner of Sophia's Bridal and Tux In Indianapolis, Ind. "The moment a bride feels left out or out of control of what's next, that's when you start to lose them."

## 2: They expect a digitally integrated, IG-worthy experience

Because most of these brides

*Authenticity can and should come through on social media.*

were born into a world with technology, social media and a phone in their hands, they are very technologically literate. They're also well aware of other people's life experiences so it's harder to impress them than ever before.

This means boutiques need to offer an over-the-top appointment.

"We need to surprise and delight them with an experience that cannot be replicated elsewhere," Long says.

And you need to ensure that employees give brides all of their



Appointments at **Mirror Mirror** have become a performance for social media, says owner **Stephanie Long**.

## What About Gen Z as Employees?



**Just as Gen Z** are starting to make up a good percentage of bridal customers, they're also starting to fill out the workforce.

This generation has grown up in the midst of the 2020 pandemic, and is used to flexible work schedules, so working around staff members' lives and plans can help them feel valued. Working flexible hours is more important to this group than a big paycheck and they really value their work-life balance.

Jessica Limeberry, owner of Sophia's Bridal and Tux in Indianapolis, Ind., has noticed they want more purpose and involvement.

And they're very vocal, Limeberry says, "always pushing me to align with brands that make sense, and get involved in the community in meaningful ways."

These staff members tend to do a great job connecting with brides, who are often close in age to them.

There are some downsides with Gen Z employees, but good managers or owners can work with them. They're less detail-oriented than older employees and take less initiative.

"They require a little more hand-holding," says Tori Washington, co-owner of Platinum Bridal in Thornton, Colo., who creates task lists for them to keep productivity on track.

"We have to communicate to them that there's something always to be done and we lay out the tasks for the day, every day," she says.

This can be very time-consuming, and even with the lists, employees often have to be reminded that once they've finished one task, it's time to move on to the next, according to Washington.

Just like their bride counterparts, Gen Z employees want to be recognized for the individuals they are. So pay attention to their personalities and the best way to train them. Some might be more verbally focused, some are more financially focused. This extends to feedback too, and overall, this age group prefers to receive praise as a group rather than individually.

## Attention, empathy and presence close the Gen Z sale.

attention.

Today's Gen Z bride has done lots of research before she walks through your door so she has a good idea of what she wants and which designers she likes. She's used to being prepared, so stores are sending information to customers in advance, giving them a full run-down of how the appointment will go.

Brides at Bustle want to know all kinds of details, including what the employees are going to be like. So the store tries to make it open and communicative "to make it feel like it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Gabrielle Godbery, operations manager and head of social media and marketing, and a Gen Z employee.

Because Gen Z has seen everything online, it's harder to wow them.

"Appointments have become a performance for social media," Long says.

To add an element of complete frivolity, Mirror Mirror asks

brides what they'd like to try on just to go crazy for Instagram.

"How fun; it takes some of the pressure out of the appointment," she says.

She's even taught her employees how to take good pictures, how to play with settings and lighting.

To add another layer of pampering to appointments, Mirror Mirror has been focusing on bringing wellness into the store. Brides take off their shoes — there's often snow in the area — and wear slippers to invite them to feel at home and cozy.

Then they're offered lavender towels on a silver tray (warm in the winter; cool in the summer) "so they can have a little spa moment before they get started," Long says. "It feels nice and bougie. With Gen Z we say we're taking just a moment of self care before you get started — that's

their vocabulary; we're meeting them where they are."

If you don't lean in to what these brides are looking for, everyone will feel friction, there will be no connection and they'll shop elsewhere. And they want to get some great photos to post on their own social-media accounts after their appointments.

Limeberry loves working with Gen Z brides and personalizing experiences for them.

"We want to really wow them and their group," she says. "They love knowing they're different than others, whether that be customizations to dresses, or to the experience."

It's important to remember that this is a generation that has really embraced thrift store shopping. They want to wear different clothes than everyone else. So there are more changes to wedding attire than ever before, whether it's rebuilding a bodice, removing a layer of glitter tulle, adding plunge, removing plunge, "so they feel what they wear on



**Mirror Mirror** strives to provide an experience brides can't get anywhere else because it's hard to impress Gen Z.



The staff at **Sophia's Bridal** in Indianapolis set expectations up front with Gen Z brides so they know what to expect and feel in control.



(L to R): **Miranda Collins**, **Alyssa Wray** and **Cierra Jones** from **Sophia's Bridal** at market. These employees seek purpose and involvement, says owner **Jessica Limeberry**.

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## Gen Z brides have a strong fear of missing out.

the most special day of their life was crafted for them as an individual," Long says.



### 3: They plan to shop around

Gen Z brides have a strong fear of missing out (FOMO) because of everything they see on social media. Because of this, the typical bride shops at between four and seven stores, and sometimes continues shopping after she's made her final choice.

Since it's a process, these consumers don't want to be pressured into making a decision – preferring to do it in their own time, not influenced by incentives to buy. To keep front of mind, it can be a good idea to follow up regularly after an appointment, maybe send brides photos of their favorite gowns, or ask if they have any questions, or if they're ready to schedule their second appointment.

This isn't designed to overwhelm them, "but to remind them of how excited they were about a dress," Washington says. "That's a really good way to connect with them."

Because these brides are shopping around so much, they can be apt to miss what's right in front of them.

"They feel they haven't found the best until they've seen every gown," she says. "Then they blend together and feel nothing feels new."

Even if a bride has bought a dress somewhere else, Platinum Bridal asks to see a photo so someone from the store can comment on the dress. This often leads to a good review, according to Washington.

"This generation loves that – they're all about the attention and being celebrated in the moment, so we follow all the way through," she says.

### How Do These Elements Impact Their Spending?

Today's Gen Z brides are mostly buying their wedding gowns themselves, compared to Millennial brides, their predecessors, who often had more help

from their family.

They're also "unprecedentedly wealthy," according to NielsenIQ, with household incomes – for the older ones of this generation – that far exceed previous generations' incomes at their age.

And although a lot of them have second jobs, they're not averse to spending money – they just want to spend it where it matters. So what they're paying for is the entire experience.

"Connection comes first," Long says.

They also want to align with good brands, and this extends to the bridal store itself. They're willing to pay more to companies who are doing what they consider the right thing. They like to shop at responsible stores whose ethics they believe in, who are involved in the community, whose story resonates with them, and which treat their employees well.

These brides are all about purpose and when it comes to their gown and accessories, they're interested in everything from the way it's shipped and the emissions from shipping, to the chemicals on the fabrics to the way the people at the workshop are treated.

Attributes like these really appeal to Gen Z. Examples of companies doing things that Gen Z appreciates include a veil company that no longer uses formaldehyde, and a wedding gown preservation company that only uses organic and safe products. This type of messaging, says Long, "truly resonates with our Gen Z customers."

NielsenIQ's report revealed that 77% of Gen Z refuse to buy from countries with poor environmental standards and that responsible companies are so important



Gen Z brides want to trust a store they buy from. Here a bride has found her dress at Platinum Bridal.

to them that products with two or more sustainability attributes sell 2.5 times better than products with just one.

Buying a wedding dress is a very emotional purchase, "so they want a story. They don't want to buy from nameless, faceless companies. They feel like supporting your business because you support those manufacturers. It shows our companies are aligned because we carry them," Long says.

At Mirror Mirror, when stylists pull dresses they talk to customers to give them the story behind the dress and/or designer but they make sure to keep it minimal so the brides don't get overwhelmed.

It's vital for stores to make sure they show why a dress is important and worth the cost.

"Brides will spend money, but not unless they see that value," Limeberry says.

Stores can show value by talking about the story behind the dress.

"This is the generation that understands the value of a dollar," Long says. "Quality is very important to them and this is good news for our industry. They are looking for something worth preserving."

Gen Z is more willing to spend on "little treats" according to Datassential, a market research company in Chicago, especially compared to older generations, "often justifying these purchases as self-care," it points out in its report, Little Treat Culture. People of this age group also actively budget for such treats, with many viewing them as financial tradeoffs for emotional benefits.

Their money views can make

sales a little easier because they are more focused on getting exactly what they want than on money. At the same time they are slower to spend money because they are shopping a lot.

Budget is secondary to these brides, and comes after getting exactly what they want. They are prepared to pay, Godbery says.



*Gabrielle Godbery, a Gen Z employee and operations manager/head of social media and marketing at Bustle, works on campaigns.*

"A wedding dress is a luxury item they don't need, so it had better be awesome quality. They're not skimping on something important. They put their money where their values are."

## Join the Conversation!

Email your thoughts about brides, the industry, VOWS... whatever is on your mind to:

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*Bustle hires many Gen Z employees. Shown L to R: Justine Bernard, Reese Perron, Gabrielle Godbery, Sarah Wampler, Katie Bonnette and Abby Fabre.*

**Navigate body image, social pressure and sizing realities to build trust — and better outcomes — in every appointment.**



**Body image** and self-confidence issues aren't new to bridal. Brides have always come in all shapes, sizes and degrees of self-assurance.

There are brides who worry that the right dress for their body just isn't out there, that they don't fit the media image of a beautiful bride. There are brides coping with eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia or body dysmorphia. There are also brides with non-weight-related concerns, such as disabilities.

And unfortunately, the age of social media seems to have amplified these issues.

"Brides are shown perfectly polished and photoshopped images from designers who are typically unattainable," says Beth Clark, owner of Bridal Chateau in Williamsville, N.Y. "The models in these images are size six or smaller, with photoshopping every natural line or wrinkle in the fabric. When they see the fabric on their bodies move and not look like a still image, they think that there is

something wrong with their body."

Unfortunately, we are living in a time where GLP-Is are the new norm and skinny is in and being pushed down our throats on social media, says Sarah Merrick, manager of Della Curva in Tarzana, Calif.

"I'd say about 95 percent of our brides are vocal with us about their body image issues, even before we meet them in store," Merrick says. "In the pre-appointment questionnaire that our brides fill out, we have a prompt asking if there is anything they'd like us to know before the appointment and more often than not, this prompt is where brides tell us they want to hide their arms, or they feel insecure about their rolls or being the largest member of their family."

Given these realities, getting to the ideal result, a bride confident in her purchase, can be challenging. You must create a welcoming place to shop and build trust with every shopper. It takes some extra effort, but it's more critical than ever.

## Let brides share in the way that feels safest.

### Registration: Gathering Vital Info

The registration process is your first opportunity to learn about any body image concerns. The more information you can glean beforehand, the better prepared you will be for the appointment.

Beyond a basic questionnaire, it's good practice to ask the bride if she has any specific concerns. Typically, there's a spectrum from reluctance to eagerness in how much they're willing to reveal. You must be prepared to listen patiently and use your expertise to get brides relaxed and excited to find the perfect dress for them.

"We ask the right questions," says Lisa Litt, owner of Lili Bridals in Tarzana, Calif. "We have a full questionnaire that really gets to the heart of it."

After the basic questions that many shops use to register brides, Litt suggests asking directly if the bride has any questions or concerns the store needs to know about.

"Sometimes they'll answer and they'll write a book," she says.

Another good question is if they've shopped before and if they have inspiration pictures or photos from other sites.

"That usually opens up the floodgates," Clark says.

Consider, too, how you are asking. Some brides feel naturally more comfortable sharing personal details via a specific platform. Clark finds text to be particularly successful.

"They seem to feel more comfortable sharing information that way," she says. "If they want to call, we'll welcome that, as well. We'll ask for pictures of them as a couple; that tells us so much more than a bride can. Sometimes (they

are) anxious. . .before they come in. So it can take a lot of patience, a lot of time, a lot of work."

### The Appointment: Tuning into Clues

Even the best registration process won't identify every bride with body image issues. They also commonly manifest during appointments.

A bride may ask for a more private dressing room or a tour of the shop to scope out your inventory. There can be subtle clues

such as covering her arms or another area of her body. Or some member of her entourage may suggest the bride is nervous about trying on dresses.

Most of the time brides feel they are excluded from trying on certain types of styles because of a certain body part they don't want to accentuate. For example, they might not want to try on any fitted styles or insist on a gown with sleeves so their arms will be hidden.

"We've had many brides cry, and sometimes not even want to come out of the fitting room - even when they are in a dress that looks amazing on them," Clark



Photos of real brides happily working with real consultants in the salon, like this appointment at **Della Curva** in Tarzana, Calif., can help tell the story of your brand. Della Curva specializes in mid-to-plus size bridal.

## Align with influencers, but always advocate for the bride.

says. "Body dysmorphia is a real thing."

Sometimes the issues come from friends or family. The hardest times are when the mom makes negative comments about how a gown looks on a bride, Clark adds.

"With the way that bridal gowns are structured, even trying on a gown in the bride's size will have gaps due to alteration needs," she says. "And, before we can even address how that process will work, the person comments that they don't like how the gown looks on their body."

When an issue does surface, this puts the onus on the stylist to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully and deliberately.

Brides who haven't spent hours watching video tours or viewing photos of your store might appreciate a brief look around to get their bearings. Surveying your inventory and its variety of styles and range of sizes can be reassuring.

"We like to use certain terms because sometimes smaller-size dresses are just easier for people

to envision, so that's what they're being drawn to, the size four on the rack," Clark says. "If I have a size 34 on the floor, the fabric may drape so that it doesn't look the same. We like to have our best-sellers in at least three sizes so that we can say, 'okay I see that dress, let me pull it in a more successful size (meaning a size the bride can actually try on)'."

Based on any inspiration photos shared and your expertise and experience, you can begin to pull two or three silhouettes that would best flatter the bride. Keep in mind there is not a hard-and-fast rule that a certain size can't wear something; it is dependent on that bride's confidence and desire as to what she wants to accentuate.

It's not unusual for added tension to come from a bride's entourage. Typically, the loudest person is the decision-maker. Try to align yourself with them and

make sure they feel heard. At the same time, you have to stand up for the bride. Explain, "This is the style the bride likes; I'd love to see her in it."

You can add, "I know Mom has always wanted to see her in a ball gown. We can try that afterwards too."

You also can play around with accessories a little more to take the focus off the body. For example, have the bride try on a gorgeous veil or headpiece with her favorite dresses and compliment how beautiful and striking it makes her eyes look. You can even involve (and distract) the overbearing mom by asking her to look through the accessories and pick out a few items she thinks would look great on her daughter.

## Create an Atmosphere That Welcomes Everyone

It's important to remember that body issues don't always refer to size. There are other things, such as disabilities, that people can be self-conscious about. Therefore, it's important to make certain your store is inclusive of everyone.

For example, if someone is in a wheelchair are they able to navigate around? Clark notes that if you can take a double stroller and walk around your store, then a person in a wheelchair can navigate it as well.

"You need a five-foot turning radius for a wheelchair, so our handicap-accessible dressing room meets that standard," she says. "It has a wall-mounted bench and handrails."

If her store is informed a bride is deaf, staff brushes up on ASL (American Sign Language) skills so they can at least ask the bride her



Posting images of iconic "Yes" moments, like this one at *Della Curva*, is another way for bridal shoppers to see someone with whom they can relate.



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## Make sure your online promise matches your in-store reality.

name, about silhouettes and “Are you saying yes to the dress?”

“Those little things make such a big difference to our brides,” Clark says. “We are always making sure that we are meeting our brides where they’re at.”

In terms of size, displays should reflect diverse sizes, shapes and silhouettes. Photos in look books should represent the range of happy brides you’ve worked with. Testimonials should do the same, with special attention to those that comment on how you helped a bride deal with her concerns during the shopping process.

Ideally, you can offset any display space limitations with a focused use of various social-media platforms. For example, posts or chats might purposely show off your dressing room areas featuring photos of staff and shoppers.

If you are a smaller store or a one-woman show, you may not have a diverse staff, but when brides are scrolling online they should be able to identify themselves as your clients.

“We like to cover all the options on our media checklist: brides of different sizes, from dif-

ferent ethnicities, and so many different abilities,” Clark says. “We try to make sure that it is very equally spread out.”

You have to try and hit them on all of the different platforms. And, importantly, the experience online must be the same as what’s inside your store.

“We have brides who come to us and say, ‘I booked an appointment with a store at a bridal show, and they clearly saw what size I was when I was there, and they were happy to take my appointment. I went in four months later and they did not have a single dress they could put on me. I was very disappointed.’ So, you always want to make sure that whatever your messaging is, it’s true to what you offer in your store, first and foremost.”

### The Dreaded Bridal Sizing

Bridal sizing, and how it differs from ready-to-wear or streetwear sizing, can introduce yet another hurdle to meeting the needs of shoppers with body image issues. Although it might not be logical, a lot of people assign great importance to what number size they’re able to fit in. As long as a piece of clothing is in that size or smaller they feel beautiful. If the number is larger – no matter how the item looks – it ruins their confidence. This is NOT the ideal mindset for feeling gorgeous or saying “Yes” to the dress.

While it would be great if you could avoid the sizing subject entirely, it’s definitely best to address it early on.

When explaining bridal sizing

to a client who may have body image concerns, it’s important to use empathy, neutrality and education, not numbers. Talk about measurements, tailoring and the end result rather than the size on the tag. Use calm, factual language to explain that bridal sizing follows older measurement standards and hasn’t adopted modern vanity sizing, making the number itself largely meaningless.

Reassure the bride that ordering a gown is about choosing the size that best supports alterations and comfort, not about labeling her body. Avoid comparing bridal sizes to street sizes, and never frame a size as “bigger” or “smaller” – instead, emphasize that the goal is to find a beautifully tailored dress that fits their body exactly as it is.

Above all, reinforce the fact that their body is not the variable that needs fixing; the dress is.

It’s also important to remind brides that bridal sizing is not standardized across designers, so the same person may wear a different size in different gowns. Framing sizing as a designer-specific reference tool rather than a personal measurement helps normalize these differences and reduces the emotional weight placed on a number.

Nonetheless, the discrepancy between bridal and real-world sizing can absolutely impact appointments and sales.

“We feel tired and frustrated,” Merrick says. “It breaks the bride’s heart (and ours) a little bit each time we have to explain that we know she usually wears a certain size, but that we’ll be ordering however many sizes larger because of the designer’s size chart. It starts the appointment at a dis-



**Bridal Chateau** in Williamsville, N.Y., uses positive images of brides of all shapes and sizes in its posts to counteract the negative social-media impact on body image. Every positive post can build a bride’s confidence to reach out and ask questions.

advantage to the retailer."

"I don't think that we'll ever solve the discrepancy between bridal and ready-to-wear sizing," Clark adds. "When you have such expansive size charts, it's almost impossible to regulate. I think the focus for most retailers is their presentation of their gowns."

She notes seeing an increased usage of plus-sized models in ad campaigns and on the runway, as well as trunk shows including a wider range of sizes.

"This is where our focus has been and we have been partnering with the designers that are like-minded in our quest for the inclusivity of all bodies. Some of the designers have been really great about being more inclusive," says Clark, who urges retailers to utilize these designers and sources if they can.

### When Your Own Body Image Enters the Chat

An owner or manager's relationship with their own body image can directly influence how brides experience your shop.

"We all come from different backgrounds and different life experiences, and with these can come certain biases that may be unfounded," Clark says. "The nature of a business such as this; it is not just a sales job. You have to make sure that you are treating everyone fairly."

That awareness matters at the leadership level, Merrick agrees.

"As an owner or manager, you will set the entire vibe and energy for your team," she says. "If you struggle with these issues, your staff will pick up on them. You want to be relatable and honest but still be professional as well."

Staff composition can be an

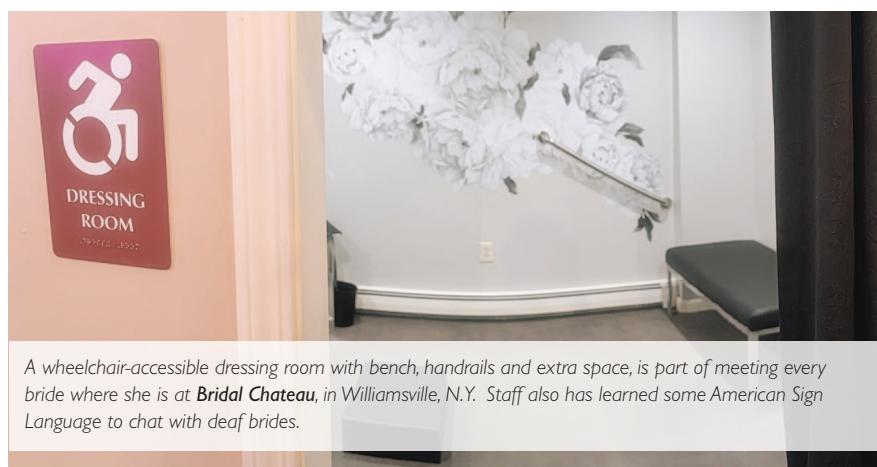
*The energy you bring becomes the energy brides feel.*

asset as well. At Della Curva, Merrick says all current team members that work with brides are curvy and have experienced some sort of body image issues. As the store caters exclusively to plus- and mid-size brides, this relatability has helped build trust and comfort.

"Brides feel a lot more comfortable because they know that we experience many of the same fears that they do, on a daily basis," Merrick says.

However, she notes that this relatability, while building camaraderie, can also present challenges. Hearing brides or their family members speak negatively about their bodies, particularly when those brides are significantly smaller than the stylist, can be emotionally difficult.

The takeaway: self-awareness matters at every level. You must acknowledge how your own experiences shape the environment you create, support staff when emotional strain arises and consistently reinforce a core message - for brides and stylists alike - that a dress size does not define a person's worth.



A wheelchair-accessible dressing room with bench, handrails and extra space, is part of meeting every bride where she is at **Bridal Chateau**, in Williamsville, N.Y. Staff also has learned some American Sign Language to chat with deaf brides.

# Leading Legacy into the Next Era

Credit: William Holl/Papa Images



How Olivia DeAngelo honored VOWS Bridal's roots while executing a bold, strategic pivot.

**Where Is It?**  
**VOWS Bridal is located in Watertown, Mass., which is about 15 minutes outside of Boston. Brides come from all over New England due to the boutique's service and expansive selection.**

**Growing up** the daughter of not one but two successful bridal store owners, Olivia DeAngelo didn't exactly plan to follow in her parents' footsteps.

No question about it, she enjoyed growing up in the family business of VOWS Bridal, a successful boutique located in Watertown, Mass., about 10 miles outside Boston. She also has many cherished memories of her industrious and ingenious parents, Rick and Leslie DeAngelo, a husband-wife business duo who launched their venture after their own wedding in 1992.

Having spotted a big gap and sizable demand for off-the-rack, value-based wedding dresses, the couple curated a small number of gowns from their one-bedroom apartment. Once they had a stockpile of 50 dresses, they set up shop in a 500-square-foot store, the first of three locations in which they operated VOWS Bridal over three decades of ownership.

Over time, VOWS Bridal became a trusted mainstay in the greater Boston community, ultimately settling into its current location in 2008 – a 10,000-square-foot space nearly 20 times larger than the couple's original shop. The store

didn't just succeed in drawing brides from throughout the Boston area, but also from much of the Northeast, particularly at one point of popularity when the award-winning salon starred in TLC's television show, *"I Found the Gown,"* which ran for three seasons starting in 2012.

To put it bluntly, their business model centered on off-the-rack gowns was more than an achievement. And for Olivia, the store's success was more than milestones for her parents and all the hard work and creative energy they had invested over the years. She had formed lasting memories of growing up in a family-owned business, watching her parents take a very intentional, caring approach toward caring for customers, honoring brides in need of off-the-rack wedding fashion, and sourcing quality gowns that could meet that demand. She also recalls lending her parents a hand and learning skills, doing odd jobs along with her brother, such as making little blue tickets that would be hung on the hangers of gowns that brides would try on during appointments.

"For every stack of blue tickets made," Olivia says, "We'd get a penny!"

## One smart pivot turned tradition into modern success.

Yet while the business was clearly a family-business fairytale in the making, Olivia, as a high school graduate, wasn't ready to imagine herself part of that dream. Eager to pursue her education and not quite sure of her professional calling, she attended the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she enrolled in the Isenberg School of Management.

That time away, however, proved less of a detour and more of a reinforcement. The exposure to hard-earned pennies and - on some small yet important level - gaining a sense for how business works, undoubtedly contributed to Olivia's spark for becoming an entrepreneur herself. She majored in business, with a minor in psychology, an area that, along with fashion, fascinated her. In 2017, post-graduation and while thinking about next steps, it hit her: Olivia wanted to open a bridesmaids' and mothers' boutique within VOWS Bridal itself.

"I wanted to do my own thing," she recalls. "And my mom was like, 'Oh my God! This would be such a great fit for you.' It was right in front of me, and I just hadn't seen it! From there, I started my own little entrepreneurial venture within VOWS, which allowed me to learn the ropes of the other (bridal) side of the business."

And that venture is how she officially joined the VOWS Bridal team.

### New Trends, Transitions & the Passing of a Torch

While skilling up in her new role, Olivia, along with her parents, had been taking note of a changing consumer trend, directly affecting their business strategy:

increasingly, brides were shifting away from purchasing off the rack and requesting more special-order gowns instead. For VOWS Bridal, making such a change presented a bit of a dilemma, as its core strategy was based on off-the-rack sales – and what had proven a fast and firm competitive advantage.

Yet recognizing the undeniable change in this customer expectation and their overarching desire to stay relevant in a changing consumer marketplace, the DeAngelos – along with their daughter's support – made a decision and, breaking from mostly off-the-rack sales, began a massive shift toward special-order bridal.

"We knew we had to pivot," Olivia says. "And that's when I came on board the VOWS side and basically led the rebrand from an off-the-rack store to a high-end

special order store."

Over the course of two years, VOWS Bridal underwent a major, but carefully planned, transformation. This happened with Olivia's management and planning skills, her parents' retail and bridal expertise, lots of customer research, questionnaires and focus groups, plus guidance from a marketing agency that helped evolve the brand to align with the owners' new vision, goals and customer audience. They also made the decision to step away from bridesmaids and mothers, focusing exclusively on bridal. As these changes proved successful, Rick and Leslie felt confident transitioning the business leadership fully into their daughter's hands in 2021 – just four years after Olivia had joined the store full time.

For the DeAngelos, who had envisioned stepping back and moving into retirement "someday," the transition allowing their daughter to take the reins and the



Half of the bridal showroom at VOWS.

Credit: William Hall, Perla Images

### Most Memorable Moment

**One of the moments** Olivia DeAngelo will never forget was when a bride came into VOWS Bridal with her mom. The mom mentioned that she had bought her gown from Olivia's mother years ago.

"The daughter had grown up hearing about that experience, so being back in the store felt meaningful to both of them," Olivia says. "It was a really special, full-circle moment."





The front desk at VOWS.

move away from their off-the-rack foundations felt somewhat bittersweet, Olivia recalls.

But emotions aside, her parents truly wanted the business to remain relevant to viable goals, operate with integrity, thrive for years to come, and continue under the guidance of someone they could trust.

You could say all that, and more, has been achieved under Olivia's leadership.

## Honoring Roots While Evolving a Brand

Today, while VOWS Bridal is well known for offering custom gowns and exclusive shopping experiences, it maintains a selection of off-the-rack gowns and is famed for big off-the-rack sales events, which happen twice a year.

These sales, which are part of a larger strategy to boost events and in-store experiences for its customers, feature loads of gowns priced at 50-80 percent off: a true tribute to the DeAngelo roots and the not-insignificant category of customers who flock to the store when those biannual sample sales happen. Looking back at how it all happened seemed a bit like it was meant to be.

"I just jumped on board and kind of dug in deep to this new venture," Olivia says, reflecting on the time when all this transition happened, and her parents started stepping back from the business. "I love that we overlapped for a couple of years in what was a shifting moment for VOWS."

What's more, beyond some of the core business aspects holding steadfast to this day, Olivia and her parents have contributed their own unique ingredients to what's



Olivia (center) with two of the VOWS Bridal managers.

Credit: William Hall, Perla Images

Credit: William Hall, Perla Images



MADI LANE  
BRIDAL



One of the store's private bridal suites.

become and remains a collective, yet evolving recipe for success.

"We have very similar perspectives about customers being at the base of all our decision-making and the driving force behind the decisions," Olivia says.

Given that, however, they naturally have differences, which over the years really complemented one another...her parents being very quick responders to market changes and decision-making, leadership characteristics that Olivia says she admires and knows have enabled many aspects of the store's incredible adaptability, growth and success.

However, as someone who ardently strives to uphold her parents' legacy while trusting her own instincts, she says one of her better-known, self-admitted traits is being more of a "marinator." When faced with decisions - some small, some big - she may move forward swiftly but then tends to "sit with all the possibilities," remaining open to changing course if a different perspective or understanding becomes clear over the following days or weeks. Conscientious, she puts a lot of thought into getting details exactly right, such as in what's reflected in marketing, branding and communication.

For example, she says, "anything Instagram, brand or website related, I always take a beat to think about the messaging... but I do think the way you word something or present yourself is very important. With the rebrand, we had to be so focused on that...so I'll say, 'I like that but let me take a minute and think about how that's going to be perceived or portrayed.' And this really helps



Seating area in the showroom.

## Every bride is a VIP in this culture-driven boutique.

me to feel very confident in decisions because I have thought through every angle."

Olivia brings a similar, intentional approach to cultivating a healthy workplace culture. For instance, overseeing a staff of 25 women, including three managers, can come with some challenges, yet she's 100-percent focused on maintaining an environment that's warm, engaging, supportive and built on trust.

How does she do it? Transparency and integrity are the key, she says. Olivia and her managers role-model those values, and the stylists and other staff members – knowing what's clearly expected – follow suit. These are values ingrained in the culture's DNA. Meeting three times a week with managers and weekly with all staff helps ensure everyone is on the same page, communicating openly and effectively, addressing concerns or challenges consistently, and collaborating creatively.

The workplace culture doesn't just support the functionality and friendly feel of the staff, but carries over into the customer experience as well. For instance, helping someone find "the dress" is far more than a transactional event in a beautiful store.

"It's about creating a comfortable environment, where brides feel they can be honest with us, share insecurities, or share what they may be feeling in that moment," Olivia says. "I think it's honestly about being a good person. There's nothing contrived about what we do. All of our stylists are genuinely warm, comfortable and curious people; it's this very comfortable atmosphere that sets us apart."

That warmth and authenticity translates to genuine, customized service – where every bride is perceived as "unique" and treated as such. When asked if they offer "VIP Packages" or "VIP Experiences," Olivia is quick to respond, "No... with us, everyone is a VIP."

### Voices From the Past, Eyes on the Future

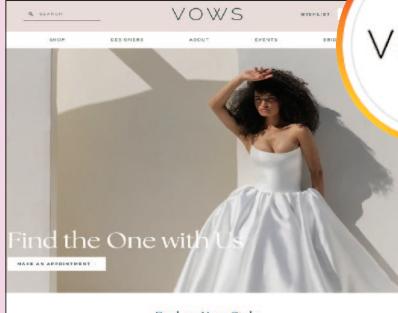
There's something to be said for both starting a new career and then almost immediately helping transform the place in which you work to align with a new

business strategy – challenges that demand innovation and real strategic smarts.

But as we know, the unexpected often reshapes the best-laid plans in business – and in life. For Olivia, that moment arrived with the pandemic. Like so many retailers across the country, she was quickly forced to get creative simply to survive, but just two years into her fledgling career. Navigating those times was something that would test her leadership and the store's resilience.

"We had to furlough employees so that was horrible," she said. "But we did well during COVID."

We'd come in, answer



**VOWS**

Price Range of Gowns: \$1,500-\$15,000

Other Niches Carried: Bridal accessories

Total Lines Carried: 24

Staff: 25

Database Management System: Quickbase

Alterations: Trusted partners in the area

Website: [www.vowsbridal.com](http://www.vowsbridal.com)

Social-Media Stats:

- Facebook - 35K followers
- Pinterest - 1K followers
- Instagram - 41.7K followers

Goodwill Causes: Bridal gown donations to various charities

**In The Spotlight: VOWS Bridal**

**Established:** 1992

**Size:** 10,000 square feet

**Number of Dressing Rooms:** 12



phones and ship gowns out for bridal consultations over Zoom, so brides knew we were here and open for business."

The uncertainty and need to navigate the unknown didn't sidetrack the store and, in fact, Olivia looks back on the experience, realizing all the pressure and roadblocks enabled some new efficiencies they still maintain today – in short, it led to progress.

For now, Olivia is focused on finding her rhythm, cultivating a positive, productive work culture while delivering exceptional, deeply personal experiences for every bride. And she's also working fervently to add value to the store, building in events customers will appreciate and considering how she might meet growing demands for the business with a possible expansion someday in the works.

The pace can be demanding and, at times, stressful. But Olivia has developed strategies to steady herself, including one that has proven especially grounding in recent years and particularly given her parents are no longer in the store to help guide her

through busy days or challenging moments. (Happy ending for them: Leslie and Rick are retired!)

"I always just try to minimize the level of stress that I feel and think about my parents because they are very level-headed people," she says. "So when I'm having a stressful day, I have their calming voices in my mind."

More than a comfort, those

voices have become a compass, ingrained for years at VOWS Bridal and remaining a guiding force today. The steady, inherited reassurance – rooted in perspective, empathy and trust – continues to shape the way Olivia leads, ensuring the business remains as thoughtful and human-centered as the legacy she carries forward.



*with VOWS Bridal owner  
Olivia DeAngelo*



**Q: What approach do you take to market buys?**

**A:** I always go into market buys with an open mind. I think it is essential to understand what brides are loving right now, but equally important to forecast what's next. That balance of data, instinct and future-focused buying is what keeps our assortment fresh and resonant.

**Q: How is your business dealing with rising costs?**

**A:** Our priority is always the bride. While costs have increased across the industry, we work hard behind the scenes to keep our gowns as accessible as possible. We've expanded our range of price points, partnered with designers who offer incredible quality for value and absorbed certain costs ourselves.

**Q: What is one piece of advice you'd give to other storeowners?**

**A:** I think staying nimble is key. This industry changes constantly, so we never let ourselves get stuck in one lane. We're always open to new ideas and willing to try different approaches as things shift.

**Q: What is your advice for dealing with the indecisive bride?**

**A:** My advice is to listen and be patient. We take the time to understand what each bride is drawn to stylistically, but also how they want to feel on their wedding day. Choosing a gown isn't just about picking a style, it's about connecting to the feeling the bride wants when they walk down the aisle.

**Q: How do you keep stylists motivated?**

**A:** We keep our stylists motivated by fostering a positive, collaborative environment. Our team works closely together, shares ideas and supports one another throughout the day. When people feel valued and connected, I think motivation happens naturally.

**Q: Tell us about VOWS Bridal's experience with the TLC show, "I Found the Gown."**

**A:** After watching the success of "Say Yes to The Dress," Rick and Leslie DeAngelo – my parents and the store's founding owners – thought there should be a show about brides on a budget who also have the same dreams and fantasies as the "Say Yes" brides. They called the producers of "Say Yes to the Dress" and pitched their idea. The next day, the producers flew up to Boston to meet the VOWS team, and, one year later, the show started airing and ran three seasons, from 2012-2014. Having a show airing every Friday evening had a huge impact on the business. Brides would charter tour buses and road-trip to VOWS. Some even traveled from all over the world because the show also aired in the UK and South America. Over a decade later, brides still come in and say they loved watching the show as little girls. Without a doubt, it left a mark on many brides and people in general... I remember at college how I had photos of my parents on my wall, and a girl came into my dorm room and said how much she loved the show! It was a core memory!

**VOWS**

**Looks & Lines**

**Bridal**

Galia Lahav, MWL, Martina Liana, Paloma Blanca, Mikaela, Enaura, Essense of Australia, Berta Muse, Berta Privee, Watters, Enzoani, Blue by Enzoani, Willowby, Stella York, Locket, Allure, Alyssa Kristin, Justin Alexander, Nouvelle, Amsale, Pen-Liv, Hera Couture, Jessica Couture, Miss Chloe, Ouma, Trish Peng

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