



BEST PRACTICES FOR WEDDINGS

Follow these steps to ensure you are making brides happy while adding to your bottom line.

BY CINDY HANAUER

Alas! There's a brand-new wedding planner on the scene who has placed herself at the center of 2 million weddings a year in the United States. Who is she? Her name is Pinterest.

Currently, there are 150 million female Pinterest users, of which 70 percent have active wedding boards. They are planning and organizing every detail of the big day, from fashion to food to flowers.

Gone are the days of the one-to-one wedding planning between the bride and her florist of choice. Today, a traditional bride-to-be comes to the initial consultation prepared with the overall vision, color palette, décor and components, down to the very last boutonnière. In fact, the bride often has two weddings prepared: the one inspired by Pinterest and the one she can actually afford.

Technology applications, community websites and free access to a multitude of vendor websites have created more informed, savvy and discriminating brides-to-be. As part of the leadership team, it's important for you to create a business plan for each store based on its individual ability to successfully satisfy this customer segment, while adding profitable sales to the organization. So let's join hands and walk down the aisle of best practices together so that your wedding business will live happily — and profitably — ever after.

decide what's right for you

There's no shame in not offering bridal services in every store. In fact, weddings can be complicated to assemble, difficult to source and expensive to undertake if a given store does not have a substantial wedding demand in the area.

In addition, weddings require the highest of design skills — skills in which many florists and floral managers may not have been fully trained. An unskilled florist unsuccessfully attempting to fulfill a wedding order can hurt the company tenfold versus every wedding completed successfully. The negative backlash of a wedding that is not well-executed will last a lifetime, and it will ultimately hurt the entire store's reputation.

assess skills

Of course, there may be some trained and qualified florists within your network of stores who have the expertise and skills to successfully execute wedding business. In this case, it's wise to bring in an independent master floral designer to assess the skills of these potential wedding designers to make sure they are well-versed in any style of bouquet, boutonnière, corsage and wedding décor that may be requested. The master designer should sanction only those designers who are able to demonstrate competency in each basic wedding style.

For those florists who don't quite make the cut, offer a training or apprentice program to help them cultivate their skills in the areas of deficit. This will provide a steady flow of new wedding designers who are ready to move up or serve as backup when needed.

choose locations strategically

If the number of your stores is small and they are close together, you may be able to cover the wedding requirements of your company with three or four wedding stores and/or design centers strategically placed throughout your operating area. Your real-estate department can provide you with the defined trade areas of your company, so the placement of your wedding locations can be coordinated accordingly. A primary trade area (PTA) refers to that area from which a given retail store will draw approximately 70 percent to 75 percent of its business, including a population base that will make the area a primary shopping destination on a weekly basis.

Once you've analyzed the specific location of each wedding store, use a website called **Free Map Tools**, www.freemaptools.com, which can provide all cities within a given radius of each store's ZIP code. This will allow you to know to which cities you can confidently market wedding services. Both the PTA and the store circumference map will provide everything you need to target-market potential wedding customers.

ask the right questions

Once you have identified your skilled designers, store locations, PTA and each store's customer radius, it's time to look at the inner workings to make sure each store is efficiently set up to manage a wedding business. Here are questions to ask:

1. Is there a quiet location on the sales floor or backroom where wedding consultations with brides can take place undisturbed and uninterrupted? Is there a place in this area where samples can be shown and photos of past wedding work displayed? This is the first meeting with a bride, and this is where she will either gain or lose confidence in the establishment.

2. Is there sufficient cooler and backroom space in the store to keep additional wedding supplies and refrigerate the finished pieces where they won't be destroyed by carts, grocery stock and employee traffic?

3. Is there an out-of-the-way location in the back of the store to assemble large production work?

4. Are there enough employees covering the floral department so the sales floor is sufficiently staffed while a wedding is being built in a secondary location of the store? Are there enough employees covering the store so that a wedding can be delivered and set up?

5. Have labor and transportation protocols been determined to transport and set up the weddings that require this service?

6. Has each wedding store in the company been provided with financial training on margins, markups, labor charges, delivery and set-up fees? It's very easy for wedding work to be unprofitable if the correct charges are not reflected in the sale. A \$2,000 wedding with negative margin can easily wipe out the week's margin of the entire floral department.



lucrative opportunities

Each year, 2.3 million couples are married in the United States, which equals more than 6,000 weddings a day. Now more than ever, there's room for all types of floral retailers: traditional florists, mass market and e-commerce.

With an overarching business strategy and a specific store plan, the wedding business can add new sales and higher profit margins to your company during the months they are most needed — and from this day forward. **sf**

marketing and promotion

Marketing is the fun part of offering weddings. This is the time to show your stuff and inspire new customers to become fans. Here are a few tips:

PROFITABLE TIMING Did you know that June is the most favored month for weddings, but the fall months are a close second (August, followed by September and October)? If marketed in these time frames, wedding sales are the perfect way to bolster your company's floral revenue during these months when overall floral sales are weak.

GO DIGITAL Does your company generate e-newsletters? Does your company have a website? If so, these are perfect places to advertise the addresses and design work of your wedding stores.

PUT IT IN PRINT Produce fliers, pamphlets, business cards and bag stuffers to advertise your wedding locations. Place the pamphlets in key tie-in locations throughout the store — cash registers, greeting card aisle, bakery department, the wine/champagne aisle, near bridal magazines and in the floral department, of course.

YOUR ROI Today, the average cost of a wedding is \$20,000, and the floral percentage of a normal wedding is 8 percent to 10 percent. For marketing return-on-investment (ROI) purposes, this means that the expected floral income on an average \$20,000 wedding budget is \$1,600-\$2,000.

how all stores can participate

There are many ways in which every store can participate in weddings, without being specifically trained.

- Sell wedding décor products such as corsages, boutonnieres, bows, ferns, large foliage plants, blooming plants, table centerpieces and the like.
- Promote small hand-tied bouquets for small, informal or casual beach weddings. These bouquets can easily be made using grouped consumer bunches and coordinating ribbon.
- Create a contest in which the store that sends the most brides to a wedding store for a consultation receives a prize. This creates an incentive for non-wedding stores to participate, and it also generates additional revenue to the company as a whole.



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