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*The Centurion Reports:  
Bridal Bootcamp*

*Inside the Prestige Bridal Market 2012*

## **A Note from Howard Hauben & Hedda Schupak**

Dear Friends,

The bridal jewelry category continues to be a mainstay for prestige jewelers throughout the US. As such, we are pleased to present our second PDF Book, ***Bridal Bootcamp: Inside the Prestige Bridal Market 2012.***

Inside you'll find quite a collection of bridal-related stories. The first section profiles prestige jewelers who do an especially great job in the bridal category. Section two offers a unique viewpoint from the editors at *The Knot* ([www.theknot.com](http://www.theknot.com)). They offer insights to jewelers as well as a look at today's bridal market.

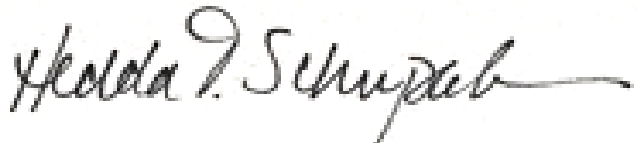
Our third section is brand new research on the bridal market, from the front lines, the Centurion 2012 Bridal Sales Survey. Check out this original research for a peek at better retailers' showcases and P&Ls.

We know you'll enjoy this bridal-focused PDF Book, thanks to our generous sponsors. You'll find their ads on the lower portion of many pages throughout this book. Click on each ad to visit the sponsor's website.

Wishing you the best in bridal sales,  
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Howard Hauben  
Editorial Director/Publisher



Hedda Schupak  
Editor


# Table of Contents

<b>I. Section I: The Retail Interviews</b>	
Long’s Jewelry, Boston, Massachusetts .....	5
David Gardner Jewelers, College Station, Texas.....	12
EE Robbins, Seattle, Washington .....	30
<b>II. Section II: Bridal Bootcamp</b>	
Five Myths Holding Your Bridal Business Back .....	41
Five Ways to Attract Today’s Brides and Grooms .....	46
All About Engagement Rings and the Sizes, Shapes and Metals that Sell Best .....	49
The Knot Tells How to Keep A Customer For Life.....	53
Building Incremental Bridal Business: How to Dress the Bride For Her Big Day.....	56
<b>III. Section III: Data from The Front Lines</b>	
Centurion 2012 Bridal Sales Survey .....	62

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*The Centurion Reports:  
Bridal Bootcamp*

***Section I:  
The Retail Interviews***

Long's Jewelers

David Gardner Jewelers

EE Robbins

## HOW HIGH-LEVEL LONG'S SNARES 40% OF SALES WITH BRIDAL 'ATTITUDE,' STRATEGY

By Caroline Stanley

**Boston, MA**—With five store locations in Massachusetts, an extensive bridal inventory, well trained salespeople, and smart marketing, **Long's Jewelers** excels in bridal sales. *The Centurion* spoke at length with Long's president Craig Rottenberg to learn more about the store's success in the bridal category.



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**The Attitude.** “Customers here in New England are often in industries like finance and tech. Most have done research and are knowledgeable before they come in our door. Our biggest focus is on being experts [in bridal],” said Rottenberg. “We do lots of training and have lots of training tools. For instance, if a customer wants to look at loose stones, we have the expertise to do that.”

“We know this [buying an engagement ring] is a major decision. House, car, diamond, those are big decisions. We take it seriously and strive make our customers comfortable. Understanding that mindset, being serious but understanding, those are key,” said Rottenberg.

**The Bridal Merchandise Mix.** “Bridal is about 40% of Long’s inventory, accounting also for about 40% of the firm’s business. It’s our biggest and most important category,” said Rottenberg. Long’s carries a variety of styles and metals in its wedding band selection, but platinum sales have been, and remain, strong. Rottenberg tells *The Centurion* what its sales associates tell customers: “We truly believe

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# DIADORI

By Cherie Dori

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that if you spend a fortune on a wedding and all the things that go with it, spending a little more on platinum [is a good idea]. In the grand scheme of a wedding, it's relatively small. And it's the only thing you'll be wearing the rest of your life. The rest is for one day – the cake, the dress, etc. Make sure your ring lasts; go platinum."

Long's also carries 'recycled' diamonds; i.e. diamonds that are not new. "The whole idea of 'recycled diamonds' is getting bigger and bigger. Over the last five years, [our sales] were insignificant. Now, we buy over-the-counter and take lots of trade in (when a customer is upgrading). We do consistently advertise and have periodic buying events throughout the year."

Non-traditional bridal customers also comprise a significant part of Long's bridal business. The store advertises regularly in *Boston Spirit* magazine, targeted to the gay community. "Our wedding band business for same sex couples is very strong," said Rottenberg. "We've built a nice business in wedding bands."

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### The Marketing Mix.

Long's has a multi-pronged marketing approach to the bridal customer, including billboards, social media, online advertising, radio, and print, along with in-store events. A recent billboard campaign, for example, featured a series of ads that were meant to be shocking and different—and it worked.



"We had lots of responses, both positive and negative," said Rottenberg. Certainly the billboards did what they were intended to do: provoke a response. The one that was most controversial was the

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one that read, "Make her your wife. Before she breaks up with you."

Special events are another part of Long's Jewelers strategy. Every March, Long's holds a 'wedding band weekend' in its flagship store. They host about 2,000 people over the weekend and it's all about wedding bands. "Our traffic is strong," said Rottenberg. "Our bridal partners (Ritani, Goldman, A.Jaffe and Memoire) were thrilled [with the most recent event.]

**The Social Media / Bridal Connection and Strong Supplier Partnerships.** These days, it's taken for granted that a couple already has been online looking at engagement rings by the time they come to the store. As a result, says Rottenberg, jewelers rarely need to begin the conversation with basic 4C's education; instead, they can start the diamond discussion farther along.

But digital marketing is key to the store's bridal success. Rottenberg uses social media to connect with a younger audience. "We had a



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contest to give away a Memoire Bouquet engagement ring on Facebook. We really believe in social media and reaching that audience. It's been a big effort, last year and this year, leveraging it to reach the diamond market. This year, we've moved efforts to include a younger audience and build a database of future diamond customers. We get people to 'like us' with prizes that are engagement-focused." **Long's busy Facebook** page has much to entertain and educate the bridal customer.

"In terms of social media, Ritani is a strong partner of ours in bridal," said Rottenberg. "They have a gazillion Facebook followers. We're planning a Facebook-driven event later in the year with Ritani. Ritani has answers [for getting the public engaged in social media]. They are getting people to tell engagement stories, how they plan to propose, etc., and the response through Facebook has been tremendous. It starts with Facebook, and leads to event in our store."



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Rottenberg also uses online advertising to target to specific customers, and not just on Facebook. "We buy a network of websites (which covers news, lifestyle, sports, special interest sites and more) and target online visitors by demographics. Facebook is a small part of our overall online advertising strategy," said Rottenberg.

At the end of the day the training, the product and the strategies all come together to make Long's a bridal leader in its marketplace. "Our brand is quality diamonds in quality rings that we stand behind," concluded Rottenberg.



Something blue...the Sapphire Lace ring.



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## DAVID GARDNER'S BOASTS TEXAS-SIZED BRIDAL BUSINESS



**By Caroline Stanley**

**College Station, TX**—A number of interesting, relevant, and surprising facts came to light when *The Centurion* spoke with David Gardner of **David Gardner's Jewelers** about his successful and busy bridal sales category.



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First, while the metro area that includes College Station already has about 200,000 residents, the student population from two local colleges, Texas A&M and Blinn College, adds another 68,000 potential customers—all at the right age to target for bridal jewelry. That’s a little surprising.

A little more surprising is the fact that David and his wife, Julia, read approximately 20 bridal magazines *a month*, including international publications.

But what’s most surprising is that Gardner Jewelers’ average engagement ring sale—typically to college students in their final years or those just graduated—is about \$9,000, just shy of the average price of \$10,000 many luxury jewelers reported in the recent **Centurion 2012 Bridal Survey**.

Of David Gardner’s \$9,000 average, about \$2,000 is spent for the semi-mount and the rest for the diamond.

  
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THE LOOK IS 3X THE ACTUAL CARAT WEIGHT!

How do college students—many who rely on loans and part-time employment just to pay tuition—afford a luxury engagement ring?

This inside look at a savvy prestige jeweler with a growing bridal business shows how.

**The history.** David Gardner handles the business side of the business, while his wife Julia and two employees, Sophia Sissamis and Tiffany Torregrossa, run the marketing aspect. Together, these two halves of this prestige jewelry business combine to offer customers of all ages a great ring buying experience.

Gardner’s store began as a community store, heavy in education and design. As students began to get married, they shopped at David Gardner’s Jewelers and liked what they found. According to Gardner, his store has only pursued the bridal market for about 12 years. The first line he bought was Scott Kay, at the first Centurion Show in 2001. The line caught his eye because he liked their advertisements. Afraid of the line’s higher price differential, Gardner investigated and found

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the price difference was in the marketing: they used great photography and showcased great romance. That was the start of his pursuit of the bridal market and his first bridal brand, which he still carries today.

**The brands.** Today Gardner carries 8-10 brands. They also have a full shop on the premises and do their own designs as well. Bridal makes up about 45% of their business. Of that, 10-15% is their own designs and 18-25% is from semi-mounts.

Among the bridal brands the jeweler carries are Precision Set, Hearts on Fire, Ritani, Christian Bauer, Efune, Tacori, Verragio, Memoire, Natalie K, and Scott Kay.

On the inventory side, center stones come from Gardner's loose diamond inventory, which overlaps with several other sales categories. His semi-mounts and wedding band inventory is approximately 15-18% of inventory.

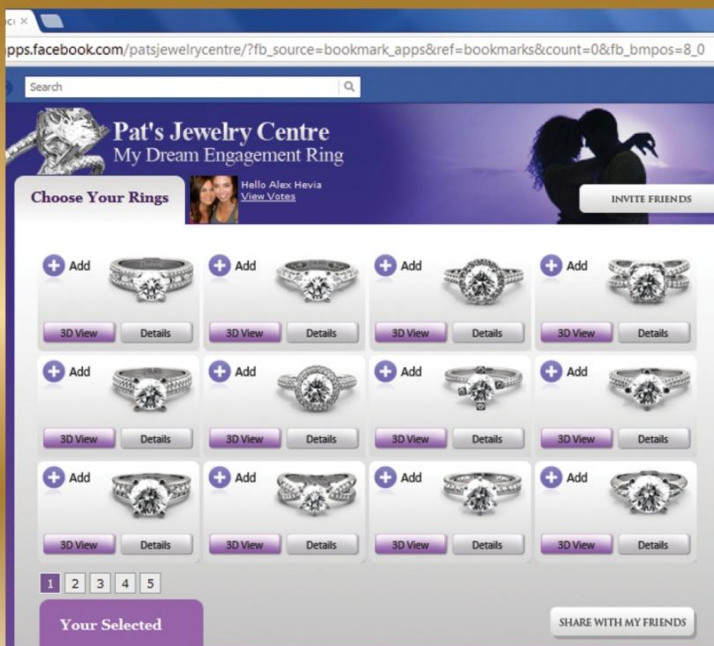


“We love the brands we have,” said Gardner. “We’re almost a test case for a bridal brand; we see how the college kids react to a brand. We see how the brands market themselves and how their salespeople work and how that’s changed their success and sell through.

According to Gardner, the success or failure of a brand depends heavily on the relationship between the brand’s sales representative and his or her relationship with the front line salespeople. “Companies that understand the sales reps need a great relationship with the sales gals and develop that do better. And it depends on service. If a brand has great service and delivers as promised, it will sell. If a brand is difficult to deal with, the sales gals will steer them away [to another brand].”

The brands that have been most successful at David Gardner’s Jewelers are those with “a tremendously connectable representative, and those that have embraced social media on their own. It used to be

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[the most successful brand was] who had the biggest ads in bridal magazines.”

But no longer: “It’s a game changer with social media,” he says. Gardner’s approach to connecting with his customers relies heavily on social media. “It’s constant,” he said. “Our strongest is Facebook right now. It’s suitable for visual images and our brands are on Facebook. Twitter is pretty successful.” Gardner says they are just getting started with Pinterest, finding out what capabilities for images it has and how they can connect to their customers using that technology.

**The students.** So just how does a college student afford a luxury engagement ring? With a lot of help.

Gardner tells of two recent sales. One was to a college student and one to a student just out of college. Each sale was approximately

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*The bridal area at David Gardner's Jewelers has enough space to serve several couples at a time, sitting far enough apart so they don't overhear each other.*

\$15,000 total—and, as with many other aspects of Millennials' lives, their parents are a big part of it. So is a helpful bank.

"The purchase price has a lot to do with their parents' place in life," Gardner said. "When the guy takes the new wife to Mom and Dad's country club, the parents want to make sure she has the right ring. We

  
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see parents a lot as co-signers and Wells Fargo works well with us [on financing].”

On weekends, David Gardner’s Jewelers can handle five to seven couples at a time--some who come with their friends—all due to the store layout, which includes areas where college students can sit with their friends and browse. “We try to provide each with a one-on-one experience and we try to separate them a bit so they don’t overhear each other,” he said.

**Selling the couple.** “Selling a couple couldn’t be more different,” said Gardner, referring to the two halves that make up a ring-shopping duo. “I can still remember when the guys bought the ring by themselves,” says Gardner. “Not anymore. 90% of the selection is done by the female. If you don’t recognize that you’ll fall behind.”

“The female is the ultimate decision maker with no checkbook in hand. If you just have closer salespeople, they are out of the game,” he said.



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*A seating area at David Gardner's Jewelers encourages students and their friends to relax and browse.*

“Our bridal customer is basically going to buy from the person who can explain value. Not lowest price, but in the environment where they can get help making a decision based on value. That’s the guys’ deal.”

In Gardner’s experience, “Girls shop in groups. Guys are alone, with their gal, or including parental support. Groups of gals have been a common experience for at least five years. Sometimes it takes a while



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to figure which one, or ones, are actually 'in the market.' It can be a great deal of fun. They enjoy looking and experiencing *all* the possibilities. Guys are the opposite... [they want] three to five options, *please!*"

Gardner's marketing reflects these differences between the two sexes. They have a **traditional website**, a **Facebook page**, and a site with a sense of humor targeted at the soon-to-be-engaged at **www.whereaggiesgetengaged.com**. This site features two 'doors' on the homepage, inviting a guest to click through to the girls or guys section of the site. Both sides of the site have tips for each sex. Here's a sample from the guy's side on the topic of proposals:

### Top 5 Proposal Don'ts

- Don't hide the ring in her food. That's not the choked up you're looking for.
- Don't ask via JumboTron at an Aggie Football Game. Most women would prefer a little more intimacy.

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- Don't get down on one knee while cooking and ask, "Will you marinate me?" That's just mean.
- Don't ask in front of family; the moment is about the two of you. Celebrate with the family after.
- Don't ask at someone else's wedding. You might have seen this in a movie, but in reality you don't want to upstage the happy couple's big day.

### **Top 5 Proposal Do's**

- Do ask her parents for their permission or blessing. It's tradition and they will say yes.
- Do have a diamond ring. Diamonds possess the power to persuade.
- Do make it a surprise. No one in a 5-mile radius will ever forget that high-pitched "What are you doing what are you doing are you serious oh my gosh are you serious Yes Yes of course Yes!"
- Do drop to one knee. Yes, you will feel vulnerable and off-balance, but you'll get used to that.



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- Do say, "Will you marry me?" This is how it's been done since the beginning of time, and who are you to rewrite history?



Grooms enter the David Gardner's bridal website on the left, brides on the right.

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David Gardner's Jewelers does sell to non-traditional couples, but they don't promote it. "We don't market to same sex couples," said Gardner. "We live in an incredibly conservative area, but we do sell and service that market."

**The merchandise mix.** "Platinum still is the desirable metal; still the big dog in the room," he says. "18k is next, then 14k. We're open [to what the market wants]. Two years ago, white was 99.9% of bridal market under 99 years. Yellow is now about 10-15%. Customers are looking for it, saying 'is it OK?' [to wear yellow gold]."

Gardner is seeing a yellow gold resurgence. A few months ago, he called each designer brand they carry and asked for several yellow rings. Not just the platinum or white rings made in yellow, but rings designed in yellow. And in their own shop, he did the same.

"Each design has its own characteristics," said Gardner. "Not the same look in different metals. I'm absolutely fascinated because the yellow

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rings will look different than those in white. New color and new designs.” He says he’s seen less of colored gemstones since white has been popular, but he is looking forward to what’s coming next as different colored stones work well with yellow gold.

Gardner does take trade-ins and encourages customers to trade up. They do some buying, but they are not aggressive about it. Says he, “It’s not our passion.”

**Student input and the future.** Gardner has a student advisory council meeting about once a month. They feed the council dinner and drinks (for those of age) and pick their brains.

“Julia runs the Student Advisory Council meetings. She is absolutely amazing at getting them to open up, honestly, about the topics discussed. It’s a very necessary ingredient for this to be mutually



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beneficial. It's not just a social gathering," enthused Gardner. "Pretty cool the way she does it!!"



*David Gardner gets a lot of advice from his student advisory council.*

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The council keeps David Gardner's Jewelers up to date on what the students think and how they shop. The interaction also keeps Gardner up on what's new. "I'm not quite so sure that this next wave is [into] branding," said Gardner of his recent interactions with the council. "I could be wrong. Our challenge is to stay relevant; if we can't stay ahead of the curve, we try for at least close to the curve. This next group of students is not as impressed with the brands as the groups we saw a few years ago."

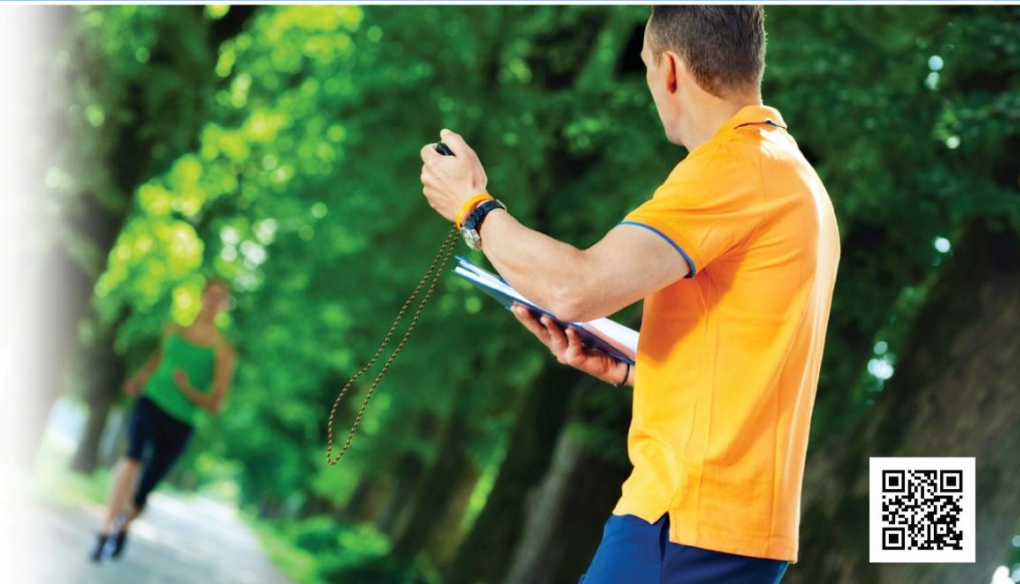
Sophia Sissamis, part of the marketing department, agrees that the former council was more about brands. "The new one is more about design and value," she said. She and Gardner aren't talking any changes right now, but wanting to see what new trends settle for the future.

**Retaining customers.** "I think we're terrible at that," said Gardner candidly. "We make them work at that for us," he said. "We have lots of customers that have been customers for 20 years, but it's because

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the customer has made the effort. We don't have an organized system to connect and maintain those customers. That's an area of opportunity for us."

He says many students buy rings from his store, then move to bigger cities. It can be challenging to keep in touch. "There's a drought of jewelry after the bridal purchase," said Gardner. "They need to buy a house, then kids, etc. Jewelry is not a priority; they have to get through all their 'firsts.' Even if you stay connected, they may not be buying. When things calm down, then they become a customer again."

**Oh, and about those bridal magazines?** How often does Gardner really read bridal magazines? "Way more than I'd like to admit," says David. "Julia and I look at 20 magazines a month, including some out of Europe. The international ones are at the forefront of fashion and color changes (not necessarily bridal jewelry). The American market is very independent in their jewelry designs. We try to read them all; we want to see what our customers are seeing. "

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There's no doubt that David Gardner finds the bridal market fascinating and that his marketing team really knows what they are doing when to bring in customers.

"Bridal is a sport, things are changing, teams are changing and it's fun trying to win. Our customers want to have that touch and feel experience and see our selection and experience our service. Once they come in, it's our sale to lose," says Gardner. "It's lots of fun."



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## EE ROBBINS: ALL BRIDAL, ALL THE TIME EQUALS SUCCESS



**By Caroline Stanley**

**Seattle, WA**--There's absolutely no doubt from the [EE Robbins website](#) or the [EE Robbins Facebook page](#) that this company is *all* about bridal—or at least, about 99% bridal. Emerson "Skip" Robbins, founder of the two-story chain in Seattle and Bellevue, WA, calls it "maybe the most niched jewelry store in the world." The stores do



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carry a small amount of non-bridal jewelry, but even those are mostly stud earrings and wedding day type of bridal items.

Robbins has no title on his business card, although he founded the stores in 1999 and 2002, respectively. He did have a third store for a while, in Tacoma, but the outlying areas around Seattle could not support it and it was sold in 2011. He and his close-knit staff all wear multiple hats: one store manager is also the diamond buyer, the controller also is the IT guy, and one of his buyers also is a good portion of the marketing department. Robbins will admit to being the “Big Cheese” from time to time, even without a formal title.

EE Robbins has a number of awards and recognitions, including being named Best of Seattle for engagement and wedding rings for the past seven years, as voted on by *Seattle Bride* magazine, and for the past four years, being voted “BEST Rings of Western Washington” by local NBC-TV affiliate KING 5, for the past four years.

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**The merchandise mix.** When EE Robbins first opened, inventory was largely made up of designer bridal lines. Initially that worked very well, but Robbins found over time that the designers didn't or couldn't always keep their word on exclusivity. As Robbins felt a woman should never go to the grocery store or go to work and see another woman with the same ring on, that exclusivity was important. He did get exclusivity from some vendors, but if he did not or if the firm lost its exclusive, he retired the vendor.

When the recession hit in late 2007, Robbins said they started getting resistance to [the price of] designer lines. And not just in the jewelry business, he observed. In many businesses, the word "designer" became code for "overpriced," he said.

"And many times they were right," Robbins says bluntly. "At that point, we decided to design and manufacture our own merchandise. The more traditional jewelry we did ourselves. The more boutique [designer] lines and those lines with stronger relationships to the



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designer, we kept those. You can't have the depth of styling and do it all yourself." The firm manufactures in the United States.

While many jewelers have turned to off the street buying as a way to boost margins, EE Robbins sells mostly new inventory, at least for its larger stones. "We take our own diamonds back as trade-ins," says Robbins. "Only a few outside diamonds make our standards. We do try and buy diamonds off the street, but only about 10% meet our quality standards. We're very selective. Our buyer goes overseas, to Tel Aviv and Canada and buys."

**The customer.** When asked "who is your bridal customer," Robbins' answer is simple: "In reality, it's everyone. When you're marketing, you have to focus." Robbins' focus is on the most prevalent bridal age group, which used to be 18-25 years of age but now is 25-34. He uses those breakdowns as they match advertising demographics.

Robbins also markets to the gay population. "We believe that love comes in different forms," he says. Robbins words his radio ads so

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they don't mention him or her or he/she; instead they focus on the couple. There's a lesbian couple featured on his **EE Couples** website. A sister site to the EE Robbins site, it features stories of couples that have become engaged through EE Robbins.

**The Internet as competition.** Robbins has a methodology of working with the customer who has started the diamond search on the Web: "We tell them, if you really care, you need to see the diamonds and compare them. Almost any diamond will look good by itself, but put it next to a really beautiful one and it doesn't look as good." It's like looking at white paint chips, he says: they all look white until they are next to each other, then it's easy to see that one is pinkish white while another is yellowish white, and so forth.

"It's the same with diamonds," he says.

**Extreme marketing.** "If you want to be successful in business, you have to take a path different than your competitors. Lots of different niches are successful," says Robbins. In addition to creating a niche as

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an all-bridal jewelry store, Robbins also has carved out a niche for his creative marketing, which has been very successful.



*An EE Robbins billboard takes a playful riff on an old motel "Vacancy" sign, in this case, the ring finger.*

"With technological changes now occurring at hyper-speed, we can no longer advertise and market the way we used to. The influence of the Internet and the impact of cell and smart phones has been absolutely world-shaking in changing customers habits," said Robbins. "Every major media has been fragmented. It's impossible to get a strong reach and frequency in mid-size market and a normal budget." Robbins found a way for his business around those issues.

"We do radio and little niche things that get attention," says Robbins. His comprehensive list of 'little things' is well detailed on the EE Robbins website. He's made an art of creatively engaging his customers. A few samples:

**Popping the question, Seattle style.** Robbins published a book about five years ago titled *Popping the Question Seattle Style*. He ran

a contest for the most romantic and creative proposals. The winner received a trip to Hawaii and a \$10,000 shopping spree. He chose the best 99 stories for the book. It's free to shoppers today and is still sold locally in **Barnes & Noble** and copies are also available on **Amazon**.

**The "Proposer."** From the EE Robbins website: "No, he won't do the proposing for you. As a free service to our customers, this impressive gentleman will bring your ring to your pre-determined Seattle-area location at the precise moment you're ready to propose. Dressed in a sharp black suit, The Proposer will arrive in a smoke-grey 1959 Cadillac limousine, transport your ring in a steel briefcase handcuffed securely to his wrist, open the steel briefcase and simply hand you the ring with a cordial 'Here's your delivery,' then disappear faster than she can say, 'YES.' It'll definitely grab her attention. The rest is up to you."



*The Proposer with the EE limo, a rare 1959 Cadillac--fins and all--whose license plate reads "RINGS."*

The Proposer stays busy. According to Robbins, he is booked three or four times each month. The history of The Proposer at Robbins has had its ups and downs. Initially Robbins ran ads on Craig's list to find the right person; i.e, someone nice looking with a pleasing personality, who could drive safely and be trusted with an engagement ring. They couldn't seem to find that combination. Then Robbins' wife, Sherri, was shopping at a local Whole Foods market and thought the guy behind the meat counter would be perfect. He wrote his name and number on meat wrapping and became the first Proposer. But even he wasn't without problems: apparently he was *too good looking*, which was a bit intimidating for the guy who was proposing. So, when he left, he was replaced with the 'regular-looking' limo guys, who now go out on the calls.

**The EE limousine.** The EE limo, a rare 1959 Cadillac with a license plate that reads, "RINGS," is often seen around the Seattle area. It's available for loan for a customer's proposal or wedding, and also is often seen being driven by The Proposer. It's shown with the Proposer and also at the top of this article.

"Do things that are different," says Robbins. "The same old thing doesn't get attention." This philosophy seems to embody his whole approach. The same old thing indeed!

**The Attitude.** "We treat people [customers] with the golden rule," says Robbins. "We don't use sales trainers; we just do not believe in manipulative selling. Instead, we educate the customer and trust they then make the decision that's best for them. Karma driven, that's how we run our business."

"We inform. We don't sell. We educate," he concludes.

### **The EE Robbins Back Story**

How the bridal store, EE Robbins, came about is an interesting story.

In the late 1980's, Robbins and his brother, Steve Robbins, had 14 mall stores, all doing pretty well. Today they're in separate businesses.

When they started, most malls had only a few [jewelry] stores. The brothers marketed using mainly direct mail. But by the early to mid-1980's, malls began to see profits in jewelers and some malls would have 20-25 jewelers—all using direct mail.

"Soon, customers would come to mall [jewelry] stores and were not even sure which store they were in," said Robbins. Sales volumes were leveling out, and the brothers' stores were no longer *always* the sales leaders in their respective malls.

So the brothers decided create a complete engagement ring store. They traveled the United States to see better bridal stores. "Everyone in the industry thought we'd lost our brains," said Robbins. In 1991 they ran a complete liquidation of the company and changed everything: the name, the marketing, the inventory, etc. They packed their stores with engagement rings and changed their marketing from direct mail to using only radio.

Their idea worked to a degree. The revamped stores did OK. But while they found they were bringing in shoppers, those same customers felt they needed to shop *all* the [jewelry] stores in the mall. Then they opened Robbins Brothers, a non-mall destination store in Fullerton, CA. Business there immediately took off; it doubled what their mall stores had done in the first year.


"We said WOW," said Robbins. "We sold our mall stores as fast as we could, opening super-destination stores. Wedding and anniversary rings, too, along with engagement rings."

Of the two brothers, Skip Robbins was the marketing and merchandising guy. His brother Steve was operations and finance.

They worked well together. "Steve was the hardest working guy I ever met," said Robbins. Robbins wrote the now iconic Southern California radio ads touting "Skip and Steve" at Robbins Brothers. A little kitschy, the ads gave the stores personality and sales soared.

The Robbins Brothers stores had very healthy sales from the start, thanks to the brothers. But their approaches differed. Skip Robbins was more of an entrepreneur and did not enjoy the corporate structure. Born in Seattle, he loved the Northwest. His kids were getting out of high school and he wanted to open his 'dream store.' He told his brother he wanted out, retained a minority interest, and had enough to open that dream store. The rest is history, but the brothers are still close today, talking three or four times a week, says Robbins.





*The Centurion Reports:*  
*Bridal Bootcamp*

## **Section II:**

# ***Bridal Bootcamp***

Five Myths Holding Your Bridal  
Business Back

Five Ways to Attract Today's  
Brides and Grooms

All About Engagement Rings and  
the Sizes, Shapes and Metals  
that Sell Best

*The Knot* Tells How to Keep A  
Customer For Life

Building Incremental Bridal  
Business: How To Dress The  
Bride For Her Big Day



## BRIDAL BOOTCAMP: FIVE MYTHS HOLDING YOUR BRIDAL BUSINESS BACK



**By Laura Cave, Director of Education and Industry Relations, TheKnot.com**

**New York, NY** — Beyond the \$11 billion in annual sales it generates, the bridal jewelry market is an opportunity to be part of a consumer's first fine jewelry purchase and to create loyal relationships that will bring you business for years to come.

Who are today's brides and grooms? Where are they shopping? How can you extend your relationship beyond the engagement ring purchase? With data from **The Knot's** *2011 Engagement and Jewelry Study*, we'll be answering these questions and more in our *Bridal Bootcamp* series over the next few weeks. But first things first: let's get rid of some common myths about how to sell to today's couples.

### **Myth #1: The engagement ring is a gift from the man to the woman, and she is not involved in choosing her ring.**

Wrong! Two thirds of the 10,000 brides we surveyed told us they were involved in their engagement ring purchase. Of the brides who were involved with the purchase, approximately half purchased or shopped together for the ring, the other half openly discussed with her fiancé what she wanted in advance.

**Myth #2: If she's reading a bridal publication, she's already got a ring.**

Actually, 40% of brides told us they came to TheKnot.com for the first time before they were engaged, and it's not just for gathering ideas: according to our 2011 *Real Weddings Study*, 16% of brides begin actively planning their weddings *before* he pops the question! Once he does, the average length of engagement is 14 months, during which the bride is typically on a spending spree for the wedding and the new home.

**Myth #3: Stone size and quality is most important to her.**

Guess again! She cares most about stone shape and the style of the setting. Just over half of brides received round center stones, with 30% opting for a princess cut. The remaining 20% is divided between more unusual cuts including as marquise, cushion, and emerald. Three-fourths of brides' engagement rings are set in white gold.

**Myth #4: Online doesn't play much part in ring shopping.**

Only one in 10 grooms will actually buy at least part of the engagement ring online, but the Internet was the number-one resource brides used to research rings. Our research found that even those brides who weren't involved in the ring purchase still researched rings online. Retailer sites and search engines are the most popular online sources, followed by designer sites, TheKnot.com, diamond industry sites, and online-only sites like BlueNile.com.

**Myth #5: Bridal is a niche market.**

Consider how much you already know about your bridal customers. Naturally, they now have an anniversary to celebrate every year, and they typically have their first child within three years. These major life events, plus regular holidays, create fine jewelry gifting opportunities over and over. The engagement ring sale is your entrée into the lives of these customers, and with the average number of both bridesmaids

and groomsmen being between four and five according to the Real Weddings Study, that's a lot of additional potential for gifts and wedding day jewelry sales.



Separately, The Knot/The Wedding Channel's just-released *2011 Real Weddings Study* reveals these additional data:

- Wedding budgets are on the rise for the first time since 2008, with the average wedding budget in the United States coming in just above \$27,000 (excluding honeymoon).
- Couples are getting older: the average bride is now 29 years old at first marriage; the average groom, 30.
- The cost of the engagement ring is one area where couples are spending less than they did a few years ago: \$5,130 down from \$5,392 reported in 2010, and certainly lower than the typical \$7,000 reported by prestige jewelers in 2011. But The Knot's findings still come in above than the overall industry average, which experts estimated last year to be about \$3,500.
- High-end weddings are far more traditional and last longer. The **luxury wedding** segment (those spending an average of \$100,000 on their wedding) had approximately 85,000 weddings in 2011 and represents a \$9 billion industry. Luxury weddings are more formal/black-tie (46% vs. 15% of the non-luxury market) and larger (204 guests compared with 141 guests attending non-luxury weddings). Luxury weddings are also longer affairs, with 74% of couples hosting three or more days of events. The look is also more traditional: Ivory/champagne and metallics are the most popular wedding color palettes among luxury brides, compared with purple, blue, and green among all brides. Brown, the "it" color of 2008, is out.
- Every wedding has a website. Couples increasingly communicate with guests online. The vast majority of couples now have **personal wedding websites** (69% of couples created one in 2011 vs. 65% in 2010 and 60% in 2009), and brides are increasingly using social media to share wedding details with guests (45% of couples did so in 2011 vs. 32% in 2009). Nearly

one in six brides (15%) even kept in contact with their vendors via Facebook and/or Twitter.

- The costliest place to have a wedding? Manhattan, NY, with a \$65,824 average spend for the day.
- Pinching pennies? Get married in West Virginia, where an average wedding costs \$14,203.
- September has overtaken the traditional June as the most popular month for weddings, and almost one-fourth of couples (24%) now favor a destination wedding.

*Follow us on Twitter @TheKnotB2B or email questions to The Knot's jewelry specialist, Nikki Spangler, at [nspangler@theknot.com](mailto:nspangler@theknot.com) for more information about reaching brides onTheKnot.com.*



## BRIDAL BOOTCAMP: FIVE WAYS TO ATTRACT TODAY'S BRIDES AND GROOMS



**By Laura Cave, Director of Education and Industry Relations, TheKnot.com**

**New York, NY** – Today's brides and grooms are smarter and busier than ever, and, as the marrying age gets older (most marry at 28), many are in better financial shape than first-time brides and grooms used to be. In fact, couples that shop with local independent jewelry stores—

the number one source for engagement rings, according to Knot.com data—are a little older than average at 29 years, more affluent, and spend on average \$6,700 on the ring.

(*Centurion* research among prestige jewelers shows the average ticket even slightly higher, at about \$7,000.)

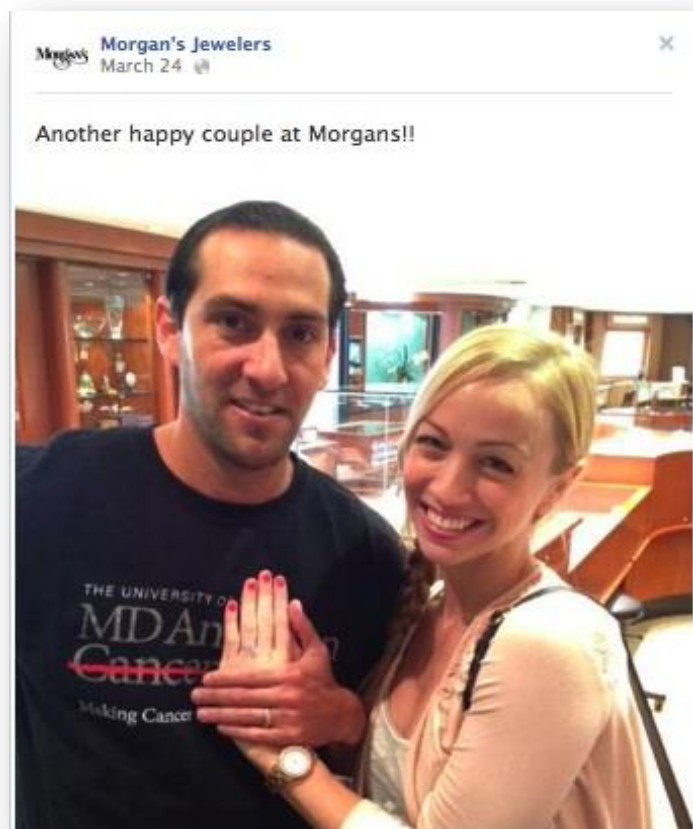
Bridal consumers rely on Internet research for virtually every purchase decision they make, from choosing a doctor to trying a new restaurant. So when it comes to getting engaged, it's no surprise that they turn to the Internet to learn about diamonds and search for jewelers. How you represent your business online will have a huge impact on whether they ever walk through your doors.



**Laura Cave**

Try these tips to attract more brides and grooms online:

1. **Don't play hard to get!** Make sure your website is clutter free and easy to navigate. Show them your engagement ring selection and list your address and phone number in the header or footer so it's visible on every page. Use Flash carefully; while it adds visual interest once the customer is on your site, Google and iPads can't read it, so be sure you have enough text and keywords to earn a high ranking on search engines.
2. **Harness positive word of mouth.** Encourage happy customers to review their purchase experience on sites like Yelp and WeddingChannel.com. A little incentive goes a long way! Try sending out a small gift card to clients who leave positive reviews to encourage a repeat visit.
3. **Keep up with clients on Facebook.** Nearly all brides use Facebook, so encourage grooms to post a picture and engagement story on your store's Facebook page after she says "yes". Then 'like' the post and congratulate them. New clients will love to see your store was involved in so many happy engagements!



*A just-engaged Facebook post from Morgan's Jewelers in South Bay, near Los Angeles, CA.*

4. **Showcase your news.** Show off new designs, photos from store events, etc. on Facebook if you're not able to update your website regularly. This gives your Facebook fans the inside scoop and will keep you top of mind when they see you periodically in their newsfeed.
  
5. **List your store online where brides will find it.** Yelp, Google Places, and even your local newspaper's website can drive valuable traffic to your website and store. But to reach brides, try listing your business with local bridal shows or in specialized directories published by national or regional bridal publications. These sites are geared more toward your target customer and to your unique needs. On TheKnot.com, for example, when a bride falls in love with a ring in our designer ring tool, she can click to find the stores in her area who carry it. If your store isn't listed, these referrals may be going to the competition!

*For more bridal news and education follow us on Twitter @TheKnotB2B or visit our blog at [www.theknot.com/b2b](http://www.theknot.com/b2b). For more information about the Jewelry Store Referral Program contact Nikki Spangler, [nspangler@theknot.com](mailto:nspangler@theknot.com).*





## BRIDAL BOOTCAMP: ALL ABOUT ENGAGEMENT RINGS AND THE SIZES, SHAPES, AND METALS THAT SELL BEST



**By Laura Cave, Director of Education and Industry Relations, TheKnot.com**

**New York, NY** – So far in our *Bridal Bootcamp* series we've dispelled common myths about the bridal jewelry customer and discussed how to use the Internet to build a relationship with these customers.

But no matter how well you market to them, the sale will always depend on whether or not you actually have the ring they want to buy! According to *The Knot's* research, the average groom shops for three months, goes to four stores and looks at 27 rings before he makes a purchase. Clearly you can see why having the right inventory is important to keeping him (and his sweetheart!) shopping with you.

What exactly are brides and grooms looking for today?

**Stone Cut & Shape:** The bride has the most influence on this one and two out of three brides receive their first choice. Kate Middleton notwithstanding, majority of engagement rings (95%) are set with diamonds, while only 5% of brides choose a stone that is not a diamond. More than half want more than a simple solitaire: 58% of brides choose a diamond center stone with diamond side stones or accents. The solitaire is still popular with 26% of brides who want to make a statement with a single stone.



*More than half of brides want side or accent stones in their setting. This set is by PeJay Creations.*

**The Shape of Things.** It's still a round and square world with these two shapes accounting for more than 80% of engagement ring sales. A little over half of diamonds are round, and 30% are princess cut.

**Setting Metal and Style:** The bride also has a lot of influence over the metal her groom chooses for her setting. Nearly three quarters of rings are set in white gold, followed by 16% in platinum. Yellow gold, while popular for fashion jewelry, only accounts for 7% of bridal jewelry now. The prong setting is the most popular (35%!) followed by cathedral (15%) and halo/shared prong settings (7%). Other diamonds are most often set pave style (15%), channel set (11%), or with baguette side stones (8%).



*Princess cut, left, is the second-most popular shape. This ring is from Peter Storm. The halo setting, like this one from Ritani, right, is gaining popularity.*

**Stone Size:** The groom has the most influence over the size of the center stone. The nationwide average for the center stone is 1 carat with an additional 0.4 carats of accent stones. Nearly half of rings contain a center stone between 0.5 and 1 carat while 27% were between 1 and 1.5 carats. 14% of brides surveyed by *The Knot* indicated their stones were larger than 1.5 carats.

**Wedding Bands:** If you sold the engagement ring, are you competing to sell them their wedding bands? Our research shows 22% of couples purchase the bride's band as a matching set with the engagement ring. Fewer than 2/3 of engaged couples (63%) purchase at least one band from the engagement ring retailer--but that figure is down from 69% two years ago. There is more metal variety in grooms' bands, but like the engagement ring, white gold still is the most popular.

**Wedding Day Jewelry & Gifts:** Jewelry and gifts for the wedding day can be a huge opportunity to grow the average value of your customer. Eight out of 10 brides purchase or receive an average of \$600 in jewelry to wear the day of the wedding. 30% of grooms purchase or receive more than \$300 in jewelry for the wedding day. Over 60% of brides give jewelry to their bridesmaids with an average spend of \$73 per bridesmaid. With the average bridal party usually numbering four or five, that's \$365 and four or five potential new customers.

As always, you can follow us on Twitter @TheKnotB2B or visit our blog at [theknot.com/b2b](http://theknot.com/b2b) for educational ideas and market trends to help you grow your bridal business. To inquire about advertising on The Knot, email Nikki Spangler at [nspangler@theknot.com](mailto:nspangler@theknot.com).





## **BRIDAL BOOTCAMP: THE KNOT TELLS HOW TO KEEP A CUSTOMER FOR LIFE**

**By Laura Cave, Director of  
Education and Industry  
Relations, TheKnot.com**

**New York, NY** — Bridal is a great business. Take it from us! ***The Knot*** has weathered two

major recessions, because every year more than two million American couples get married. But even though brides are still walking down the aisle and overall wedding spending was up in 2011, it's taking longer for engagement ring spending to rebound. That's why it's more important than ever to view the bride as your gateway customer.

What do we mean by gateway? Let me tell you a secret: we're not in the bridal business for the weddings opportunity alone. Bridal is our gateway to everything this couple needs to buy for their new life as a family, from home furnishings and appliances to insurance and financial services. It's not their age that triggers these purchases—it's their stage of life. *(Editor's note: The Knot has already spun off two new post-marriage sites, ***The Nest***, all about setting up a home, and ***The Bump***, all about welcoming a child. At press time, a third spinoff site, ***The Blush***, all about style in general, had just debuted.)*

We can predict what they need to buy when, and market to them at the right time. We know they just got married and are about to embark on five years of firsts. Every time you sell an engagement

ring, you have the same opportunity because you know what they'll be looking for and when.

So how are you going to capture and keep the bridal customer?

- Solidify the relationship with service: Only 22% of couples we surveyed told us they received information about ring cleaning and care, and only 17% said their jeweler followed up about their satisfaction with the engagement ring.
- Keep in touch: Only 48% of couples have heard from their engagement ring jeweler since the purchase and only 18% received a thank you card. Social gestures make a huge impact and could earn you a loyal customer for life!! This is a huge missed opportunity.
- Anticipate their wedding related needs: Nearly all couples purchase wedding bands and more than 80% of brides purchase or receive jewelry to wear on their wedding day. Over 60% of brides purchase jewelry to give to their bridesmaids. Necklaces and earrings are the most popular wedding day jewelry purchases both for the bride and her attendants. Approximately 30% of grooms purchase or receive



*Brides need jewelry to wear on their wedding day. Here, jewelry by Niessing. Photo: PGI Germany.*

jewelry for the wedding day—cufflinks and watches are most popular.

- Anticipate their future needs: Find a way to capture their wedding date and you'll know when their anniversary is approaching every year. In addition to birthdays and other holidays, our research shows that the average couple will have their first child within three years of their wedding, so new gifting opportunities will arise in the years to come if you stay in touch with your bridal customers.

For more insights and market trends, you can follow us on Twitter @TheKnotB2B or visit our blog at <http://www.theknot.com/b2b>. To inquire about advertising opportunities, email Nikki Spangler at [nspangler@theknot.com](mailto:nspangler@theknot.com).



## **BUILDING INCREMENTAL BRIDAL BUSINESS: HOW TO DRESS THE BRIDE FOR HER BIG DAY**

**By Hedda Schupak, Editor, The Centurion**

**New York, NY** — Jewelers know a wedding-day ensemble isn't complete without beautiful jewelry to go with a beautiful wedding gown. But what do brides want?

Jennie Ma, fashion editor of bridal website *TheKnot.com*, answers the most urgent questions jewelers have about how to help a bride accessorize for her big day. Here are her top 10 tips, plus an extra one just for the wedding party!

**The Centurion: What are the most popular trends in wedding-day jewelry? What styles, colors, metals, and gems, do brides want to wear?**

**Jennie Ma:** Brides seem to gravitate towards earrings and bangles and surprisingly less toward necklaces. They are opting for silver, platinum and white gold metals and one trend we're seeing become more popular is colorful jewelry. This is a great way to add some personality to the wedding day outfit.



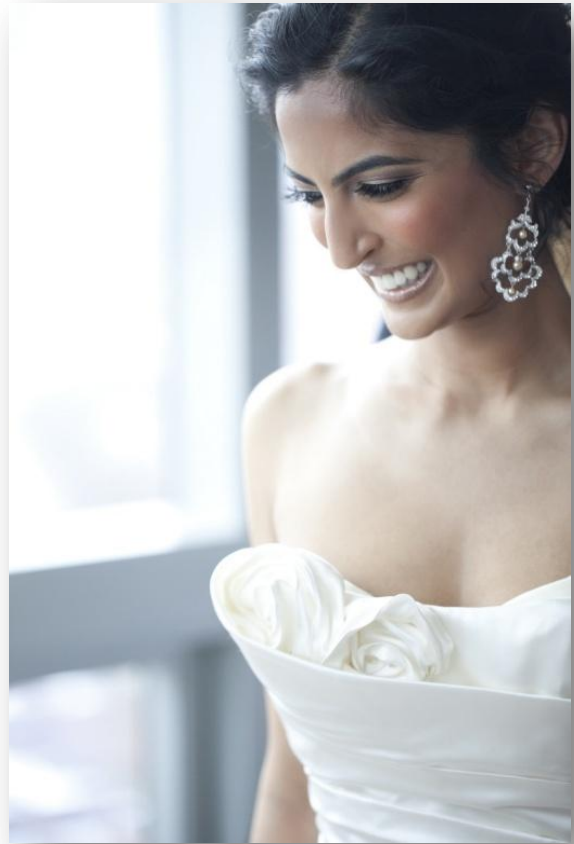
**Photo: Yazy Jo/TheKnot.com**



**Centurion: What matters more in choosing earrings—the gown or the hairstyle?**

**Ma:** The hairstyle is a bigger factor. If a bride is going to wear her hair down, she might go for a bigger statement earring since the hair will cover some of the jewelry, but if she wears her hair up then the statement earring may feel too dramatic.

**Centurion: So many brides are choosing strapless gowns for their big day. What kind of earrings should a bride choose to go with a strapless gown and an up-do?**



**Photo: Mel & Co/TheKnot.com**



**Photo: Tinywater/TheKnot.com**

**Ma:** The style of earrings will also depend on if a bride is choosing to wear a necklace. If she wants a bigger statement necklace, then she should go with smaller earrings. If she is going without a necklace, big earrings would be a great way to fill up all the space.

**Centurion: What about if she wears her hair down?**

**Ma:** The same rules apply here. If a bride decides to go big with the necklace, she should go smaller with the earrings and vice versa. You

don't want your jewelry to be competing with each other.

**Centurion: What kind of necklace works best with a strapless gown—a collar style or one that has some kind of pendant?**

**Ma:** Both styles will work with a strapless neckline, it depends on the dress itself. If there's a lot of beading, sparkle and embellishment on the bodice, a smaller pendant necklace is the way to go. But if the bodice is relatively simple, a statement collar style is a great way to add sparkle.

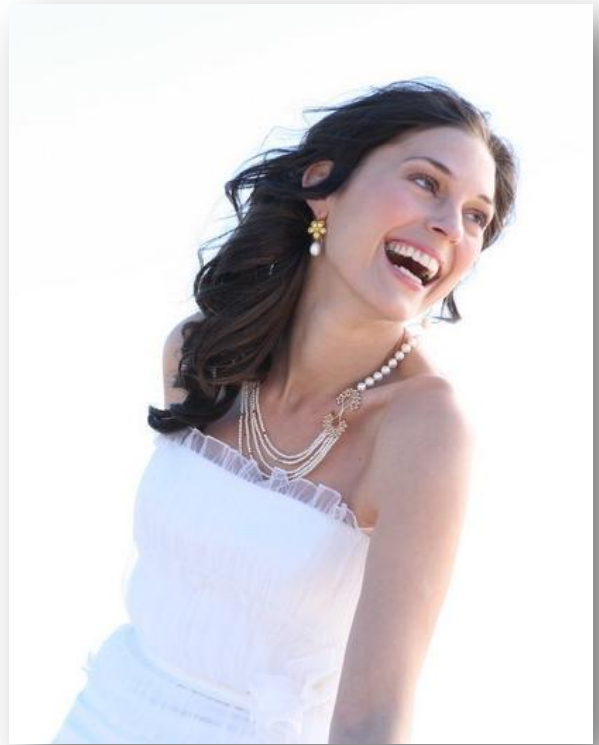


Photo: Laura Doss/TheKnot.com



Photo: Daymion Mardel/TheKnot.com

**Centurion: What necklaces and earrings work best with non-strapless gowns, such the more modest style that Kate Middleton wore for her marriage to Prince William?**

**Ma:** On a dress similar to Kate Middleton's style, since there is a more closed neckline and a lot of lace, a smaller pendant is a great accent. Finish the look with drop earrings.



**Photo: Ericka McConnell/  
TheKnot.com**

**Centurion: Are brides wearing necklaces or are they taking cues from the red carpet and going bare-necked?**

**Ma:** We are noticing some brides taking their fashion cues from the red carpet and opting out of necklaces, as I mentioned above, and just choosing to go with earrings and bracelets instead.

**Centurion: Are bracelets important for the wedding day? If so, what styles?**

**Ma:** If a bride is choosing not to wear a necklace and just earrings, adding a bracelet is a great way to

balance the look. Crystal bangles are a popular choice. *(Editor's note: Diamond bangles would be a wonderful choice to keep forever!)*

**Centurion: What about non-bridal rings for the right hand? Do many brides choose to wear one, and if so, what style?**

**Ma:** We are definitely seeing brides choose cocktail rings. If they go this route, it's usually something colorful and more modern. It has to be a bigger statement piece so as not to be confused with the wedding and engagement rings.

**Centurion: What about the groom? Does he typically wear anything other than the wedding ring he will receive?**

**Ma:** Many grooms also wear cuff links and watches, in addition to their new wedding ring, of course.

**Centurion: What's a popular gift for bridesmaids? Is it jewelry to go with the bridesmaid outfit, or something non-jewelry? If it is jewelry, what's the most popular choice?**

**Ma:** Jewelry is a very popular gift for bridesmaids. Many brides opt to gift their bridesmaids with something beautiful they can wear on the big day. It should match both the dress and their personality, so the bridesmaids can re-wear the piece.



**Photo: Eclectic Images Photography/TheKnot.com**





*The Centurion Reports:  
Bridal Bootcamp*

***Section III:  
Data from the Front Lines***

The Centurion 2012 Bridal  
Sales Survey

## EXCLUSIVE CENTURION BRIDAL SALES SURVEY SHOWS \$10K MINIMUM RING SPEND AT ONE-FOURTH OF STORES

By Hedda Schupak, Editor, The Centurion

**Merrick, NY**—Luxury jewelers are bucking the trend on weddings: while recent research shows **fewer couples getting married**, and those that do **spending less on their engagement rings** than a few years ago, a



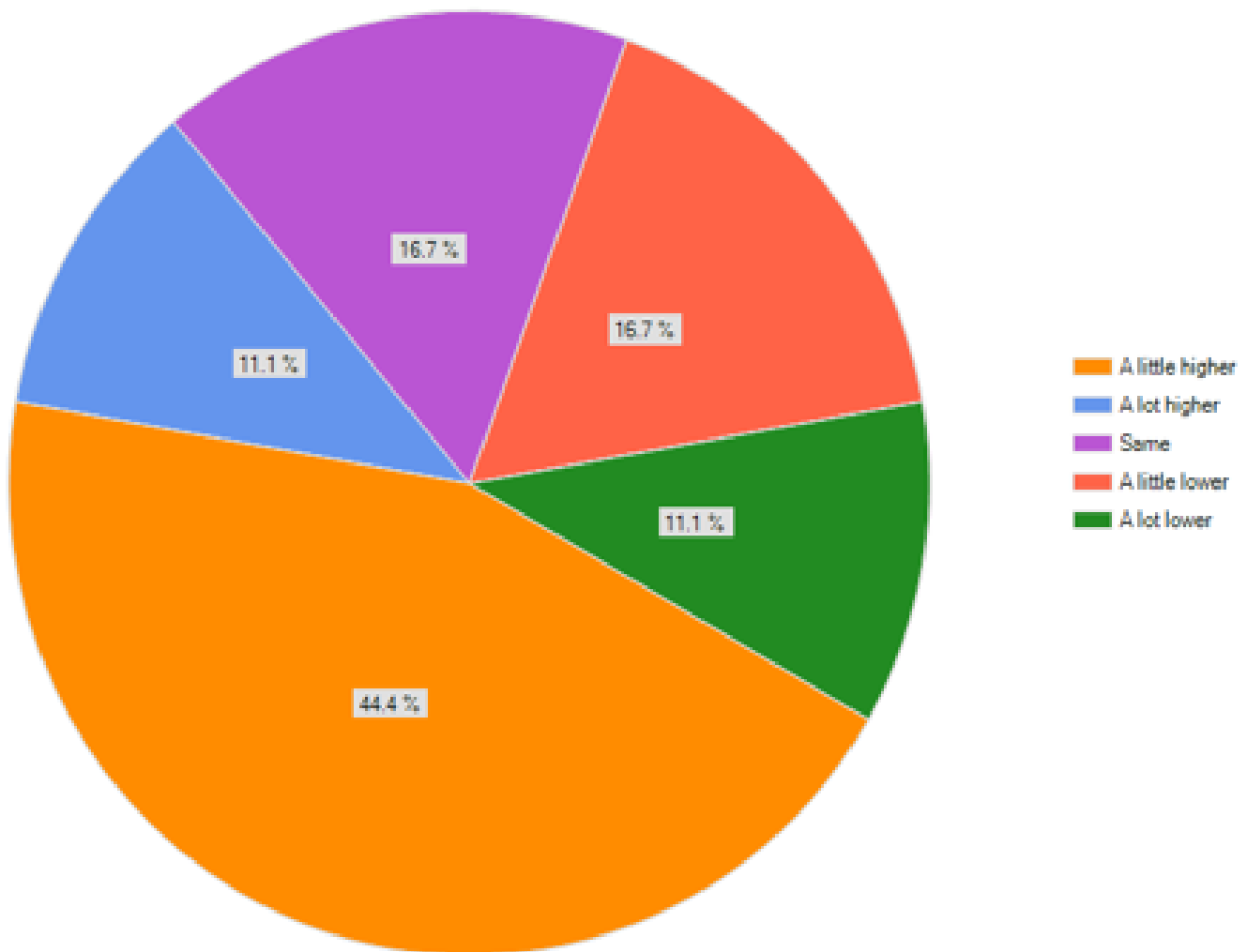
recent *Centurion* survey of luxury jewelers shows that affluent couples still will make an investment in both the day and the ring.

According to figures from the most recent *Centurion Bridal Sales Survey*, conducted last month, more luxury jewelers are reporting the \$10,000+ category as their best-selling price point for engagement rings, and more than half say their typical engagement ring sale is higher now than it was a few years ago.

More than one-fourth—27.8%—of respondents said their best-selling engagement rings are those costing more than \$10,000. 22.2% each cited rings between \$3,001 and \$5,000 or \$5,001 and \$7,500 as their

strongest category. But the survey showed some fall-off in rings priced between \$7,500 and \$10,000; only 16.7% of respondents say this is their strongest category. These findings suggest that luxury jewelry, like many other categories, has seen a drop in aspirational shoppers, while both value and super-luxury prices are solid.

#### Best-selling engagement ring price today vs. two years ago



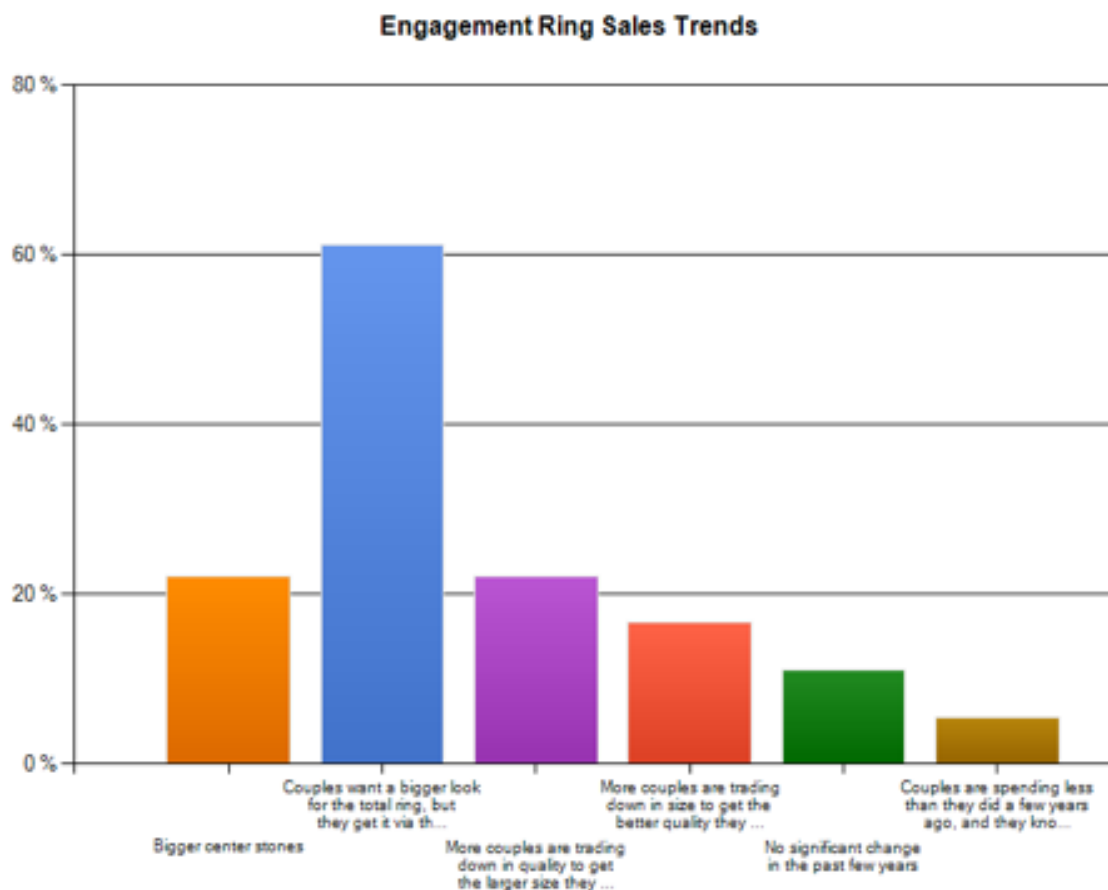
*Most jewelers have seen a slight increase in engagement ring spend over the past two years (yellow slice). Some have seen a significant jump (blue slice) while others say the typical spend has stayed fairly static (purple slice). But 16.7% of respondents say couples are spending a bit less on the engagement ring now than they did two years ago (red slice) and 11.1% have noticed marked declines in DER spends (green slice).*

A major trend in engagement rings the past few years has been a shift in emphasis from the center stone to the setting, say jewelers. While size matters (22.2% of respondents say they're selling larger center stones today than two or three years ago), almost two-thirds of respondents—61.1%—say couples are focusing more on getting a big look via the setting than the center. Indeed, when asked to name their best-selling size for a center stone, a surprising two thirds of respondents said it was one carat or smaller. According to ***The Wedding Report***, the average engagement ring is 1.18 cts., so the *Centurion* figures suggest that affluent brides aren't necessarily getting the supersized ring one might have assumed they were. One-third of luxury jewelers surveyed by *The Centurion* said their best-selling center stone size was more than one carat, but most of those still cited stones of 1.5 carats or less.

Speaking of settings, respondents unanimously say it's diamond or nothing. The fashion world may be seeing the "Kate Effect" in sales of wrap dresses, nude pumps, and skinny jeans inspired by the simple, elegant style of Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, but jewelers aren't seeing it in engagement ring sales. The new duchess is every bit as much of a fashion icon as the late Princess Diana, whose sapphire-and-diamond ring she inherited upon her engagement to Prince William. But while a replica of the ring sold out in costume jewelry form after the couple's engagement was announced, it's not having much impact on traditional diamond bridal jewelry.



Non-branded bridal jewelry still sells best, with 94.1% of respondents indicating it's the bulk of their business. But branded or designer lines are a close second; 88.2% of jewelers say those account for a significant chunk of bridal business. Almost one-fourth of respondents credit custom design for bringing in between 10% and 20% of their bridal sales, but vintage or estate jewelry accounts for only incremental bridal sales in most stores.



*The overwhelming trend in the past few years has been an emphasis on the setting, rather than the center stone. More than 60% of respondents say couples expect the setting to provide the big look they want (blue bar). 22% of respondents each say they are selling bigger center stones, but seeing couples trade down in quality to get the size they want (purple bar). About 18% of respondents (red bar) say couples will sacrifice size but insist on quality, but relatively few jewelers say couples still don't want to settle for a smaller ring to stay within in their budget (brown bar). About 10% (green bar) say the makeup of their engagement ring business hasn't changed appreciably in two years.*

What role does advertising play in driving desire for a luxury bridal brand?

According to respondents, it's significant. 26.7% of respondents say it's not uncommon to lose a sale over a particular ring—the customer comes in with an ad or a photo of a particular ring and they will consider no other, so if the jeweler doesn't have or can't get that ring, the customer will leave. One-third of respondents say they're usually able to sell the customer on something else—often even another brand—and another third say customers often come in with a brand in mind but not a particular ring.

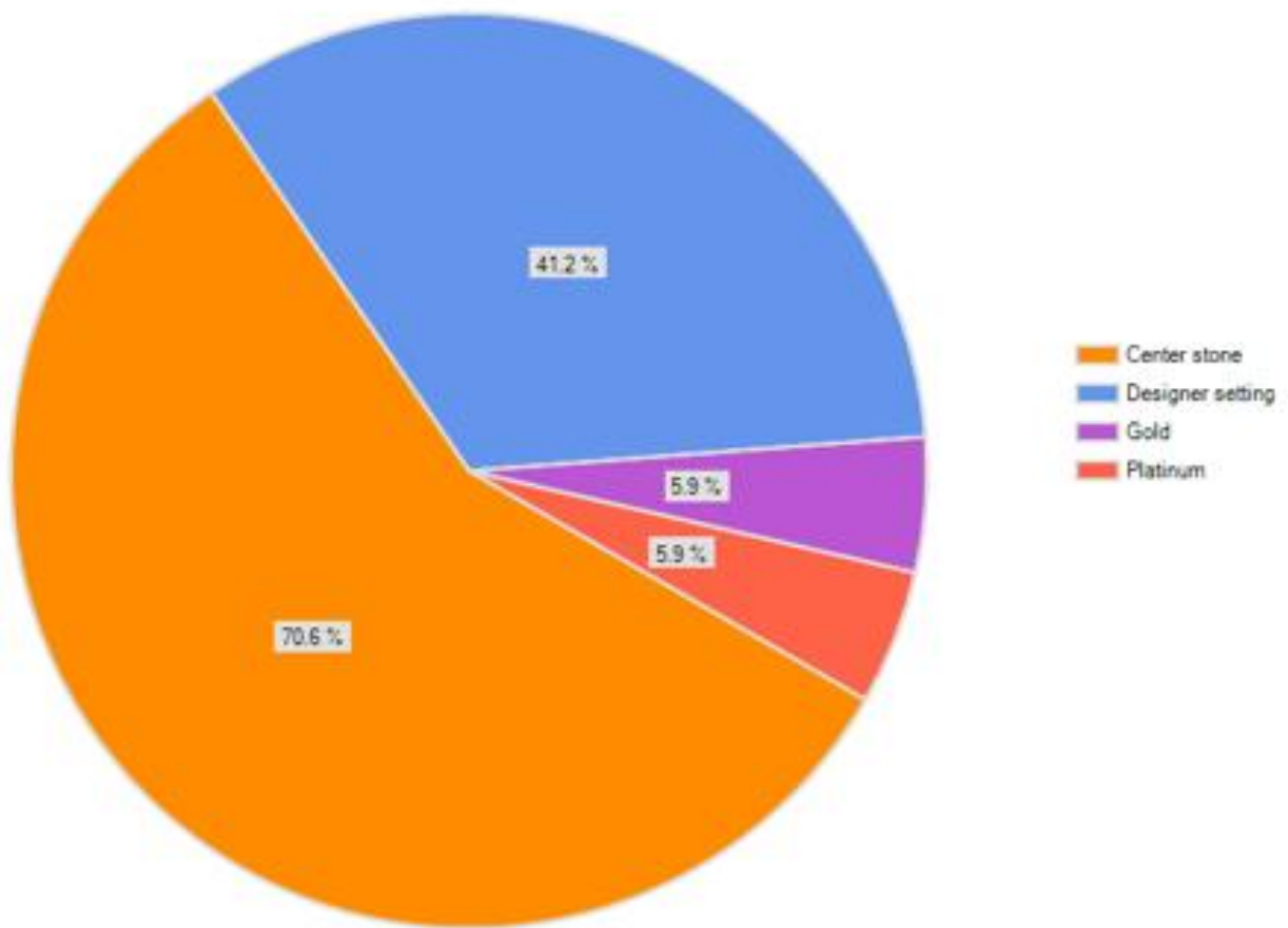
The top-selling bridal brands among respondents were Hearts on Fire, Simon G. and Tacori. Other mentions include Verragio, Kwiat, Coast, JB Star, Kattan, Parade, and 2012 Henry Daussi.

Age-wise, luxury jewelers' bridal customers track fairly closely with the national average (average age at first marriage is 28, according to TheKnot.com), but 37.5% of respondents to the Centurion survey have a slightly older (and presumably more affluent) bridal clientele, typically early thirties.

Just because they have more money doesn't mean luxury bridal customers aren't taken aback by what they perceive as high prices. 83.3% of respondents say their bridal customers "often" are surprised by the price of a nice ring. 70.8% of respondents say the biggest

surprise is the price of the center stone, while 41.2% say it's the price of a designer setting. But despite the current flurry of news about gold prices, jewelers say their customers are curious but rarely put off by the price of either gold or platinum. It's still the diamond or the setting that gets the most price resistance.

**What's the bigger price surprise or resistance, the center stone or the setting?**



When it comes to getting the customer in the door, jewelers say it's still the old fashioned word of mouth—a referral from family or friends. But in the absence of familial advice, the next most popular that

customers end up in a particular store is because of an online search, including mobile.

Local print or broadcast advertising still works best for 27.8% and 22.2% of respondents, respectively, and 11% credit Facebook with driving traffic.

Finally, as more states legalize same-sex marriage, jewelers are benefiting. 89% of respondents say they've served same-sex customers at least occasionally, if not frequently.





*The Centurion Reports:  
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