

Open your own bridal shop!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Bridal Salon
Owner**



ALISA GORDANEER

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1. Introduction

“The bridal business is THE business to go into. Our daily job is to help create the perfect look for our customers’ dream wedding. What could be more fun? Furthermore, whether the economy is up or down, thousands of weddings take place every year.”

— Keri Chantler and Jenni Hailer, owners,
Twirl Boutique, Scottsdale AZ

Congratulations on saying “I Do” to your dream of becoming a bridal salon owner. You’re taking the first step toward a career that will let you experience all the joy of a perfect wedding day, over and over again. You’re about to be surrounded by beautiful gowns made from gorgeous, luxurious fabrics. You’ll get to sell lovely shoes, exquisite accessories and even sparkling, exotic jewelry. You’ll feel like a fairy godmother every time you help an excited client into her perfect wedding dress. Every day, you’ll have the satisfaction of knowing you’ve helped to make someone’s most cherished dreams come true.

People who choose to run bridal salons tend to have a lot in common with each other, and you're probably already more like seasoned bridal industry professionals than you think. You've probably got a romantic streak, as well as a sense of beauty that draws you to the finer things in life. You may find yourself drawn to fashion magazines and boutiques where you can see the latest and most beautiful couture outfits.

You've probably already got a good sense of style, and have an eye for what looks best on just about anyone. Or maybe you've helped a friend or family member choose her own wedding gown and fell in love with the whole glamorous world of weddings. In any case, you're in the right place, because your love of beauty, fashion and the glamour of weddings will help you achieve success as a bridal salon owner.

Chances are, you might have already worked in retail, and perhaps even in fashion retailing. If so, you'll find that nothing compares to the satisfaction of running your own store and seeing first-hand the rewards that come with all the hard work you put in.

This chapter sets you out on your path towards becoming a bridal salon owner. We will discuss aspects of the wedding industry and briefly touch on the different types of bridal salon niches you can choose (we'll explore possible niches in more depth in section 3.1). We'll also discuss the benefits of this exciting career and outline the steps you'll need to take in order to get started.

1.1 A Growth Industry

No matter what the current economic climate, women will always get married. The wedding industry in the United States alone is currently estimated as being worth approximately \$86 billion a year, according to the Association for Wedding Professionals International. This includes everything from wedding gowns to caterers to photographers and entertainment, but the market for bridal wear represents a significant portion of the total.

According to The Wedding Report, American brides in 2008 spent an average of \$1,266 on their gowns, and a combined total of more than \$600 on their veil or headpiece and accessories. In 2007, the most recent year for which U.S. Census demographic information is available, there were

more than 2.2 million weddings in the United States alone. This means that total spending on brides' outfits alone could be estimated at more than \$4 billion in one year. Add in bridesmaids' dresses, tuxedos rentals and other bridal wear accessories and you have a booming industry.

A significant factor in the North American bridal wear market sector is the fact that the median age of those getting married for the first time has increased over the past 30 years. For example, in Canada in the 1970s, the median age of first marriage was 25 years old for men and 22 years old for women. In 2003, the median age of first marriage had increased to age 30 for men and 28 for women. The trend toward later age of first marriage is similar in the U.S., although not as dramatic. In the U.S. in the early 1970s, the numbers were 23 years for men and 21 for women. By 2003, the median age of first marriage had risen to 27 for men and 25 for women.

The rising age of first marriage across North America suggests that men and women are waiting until their jobs and careers are established, when they possibly have more financial resources to spend on the weddings of their dreams. This is supported by the fact that average spending on weddings has increased during the same period.

Another growing sector in the wedding is that more countries, including Canada and some U.S. states, are beginning to recognize same-sex unions. As a result, the market for wedding wear has started to grow even further. According to Statistics Canada, 42% of same-sex couples who married in 2003 in British Columbia (the only province that kept track of marriages by the gender of marrying couples) were female, which could indicate a new niche in the bridal wear market.

A few other encouraging trends in wedding spending have been reported by The Wedding Report as recently as October, 2008. The first is that, while they are willing to cut costs by inviting fewer guests and reigning in their wedding budgets in other areas, women are not willing to spend less on their wedding dresses. Brides are also more frequently opting for more expensive dresses. Further, because more brides now come from multicultural backgrounds than ever before, they are purchasing more than one dress for their weddings because they are undertaking more than one ceremony. All of this suggests that the bridal salon market will continue to flourish through the coming years.

1.2 Owning a Bridal Salon

As a bridal salon owner, you'll be helping brides put together the outfit of their dreams for their big day. To do this, you'll stock a selection of products that they can buy to wear for their wedding celebrations. You'll also offer a range of services that helps ensure those products fit perfectly, are exactly the right color, and are even worn in just the right way.

1.2.1 Products

A bridal salon sells apparel and accessories for members of a wedding party to wear and use before, during and after their wedding ceremony. It may also sell formalwear for other occasions, such as proms, graduations, fancy events and cocktail parties. Here are just some of the products you might choose to carry in your bridal salon.

Wedding Gowns

This is the mainstay of your business—the dresses of a bride's dreams. Bridal salons sell a range of gowns, from custom and couture gowns that are made specifically for a bride, to ready-to-wear and off-the-rack dresses that are available right away. These dresses may be designed by an outside designer or couture house or they may be designed by the salon's in-house designer. A wedding gown is often the biggest single clothing purchase a woman will ever make. Some salons now also offer modest gowns for brides being married in religious ceremonies, as well as gowns meant to reflect different cultural traditions.

Bridesmaid Dresses and Formal Gowns

Gowns, cocktail dresses and party dresses are all being worn by a bride's attendants these days, so most bridal salons stock a wide range of styles and colors to help co-ordinate a wedding party's overall look. These gowns are typically less elaborate than a bride's gown. In addition to wedding parties, these dresses may be purchased by customers for proms and other events.

A bridal salon also sells gowns to be worn by mothers of the marrying couple, and dresses to be worn by children in the wedding party, including junior bridesmaids and flower girls.

Men's Formal Wear

A bridal salon may stock a selection of tuxedos and formal suits to be worn by the men in the wedding party, along with accessories such as waistcoats, cummerbunds and pocket squares or handkerchiefs that co-ordinate with the wedding party's outfits. These items may be rented or purchased outright. Renting of men's formal wear is also suitable for proms and other formal occasions when renting is preferable to purchasing such a suit.

Shoes

Some salons stock wedding shoes in a variety of styles and colors to co-ordinate with the gowns they sell. As an added service, many offer custom dyeing services to co-ordinate shoes purchased elsewhere with dress colors.

Lingerie

From the classic garter to brassieres, bustiers, corsets, girdles, slips and hosiery worn beneath a wedding dress to ensure its flattering shape, to elegant or saucy nightwear meant to be worn on the wedding night, many salons carry lingerie items as additional sales items.

Accessories

Many brides want an elegant veil or sparkly tiara to accent their wedding dress, but there are many more accessories made just for weddings. These include gloves and wraps for elegance or warmth, fancy umbrellas for sun or rain protection, hair accessories such as jeweled clips and barrettes, jewelry such as earrings, or necklaces and brooches to complement a bridal look. Other accessories include secondary items like pillows for the ring bearer to carry the rings on, guest books and pens, decorated cake knives, and even purses and tote bags for the wedding party to use on the big day.

To-Be-Wed Gear

Many brides now choose to outfit their bridal party for the events leading up to the ceremony, including the bridal shower, the rehearsal

dinner and the bride's "bachelorette" party. Many of these events are more casual than the wedding itself, and so there is now a range of casual wear to stock, including embellished t-shirts, hoodies, tank tops, baseball hats and underwear. These are often printed with funny sayings like "Bride-to-Be" or "The Future Mrs. Smith."

1.2.2 Services

A bridal salon owner may choose to offer a number of services to clients. Some of these services, such as fittings, are more crucial than others. Most bridal salons offer measuring and fitting services, but more complicated services, such as custom-designed gowns, can be offered if you choose. Here are some services that your bridal salon may offer.

Measuring

Making notes of a client's measurements ensures that their gown will fit perfectly. A bridal salon employee will measure the client's body with a measuring tape to gather information about the length of their body from the hollow of the neck to floor, their bust, waist and hips, and their arms from shoulder to wrist.

Fittings

When a dress arrives, or sometimes as it is being sewn if it is a custom dress, a client must try it on to make sure it fits correctly. These fittings are held at the bridal salon, and require a staff member to oversee the process to ensure the dress fits well. The staff member will also make note of any changes needed.

Custom Design

If you or a staff member is a keen fashion designer, you may choose to offer custom-designed wedding gowns based on clients' descriptions and desires. This is a premium service, as each gown must be designed, sewn and fitted well in advance, and requires numerous hours of work time. To offer this service, you will need to ensure you have sufficient staff, materials and time in order to deliver this service in a timely manner, while still maintaining your store's regular operations.

Custom Alterations

If you employ a seamstress on your staff, you may offer custom alterations in-house. This service ensures you are able to pay particular attention to a client's needs, and to change a dress to meet her wishes or size. However, if you are not able to offer this service yourself, you may offer referrals to skilled seamstresses in your area, who can help ensure each gown fits perfectly.

Personal Shopping

A personal shopping service helps brides find options for outfits for themselves or their wedding party. The personal shopper searches wholesalers' and designers' catalogues to find the types of outfits a bride has in mind, and makes suggestions to her. They may also do the same for accessories and other items.

Hair and Makeup

Some salons offer hair and makeup services for brides on their wedding day. If you do not have the ability or resources to provide these, you could offer a referral service to trusted hairdressers and makeup artists in your area.

Wedding Dressers

A wedding dresser attends to the bridal party in the place they are dressing for their event and helps the bride and attendants into their outfits. This is particularly important if there are elaborate outfits or if there are many members of the wedding party who will need to be dressed in a short amount of time. Having a dresser who knows how the outfits are meant to be worn, and who can be on hand for last-minute styling, is an invaluable service to many brides.

Wedding Gown Cleaning and Preservation

After the wedding, many brides choose to have their gown preserved in an archival-quality case that will let them keep their dress as pristine as their memories. While the actual cleaning service is typically provided by a drycleaner, some salons offer this service as well. If you don't have

the facilities to clean and preserve a dress, you could arrange with a local drycleaner to provide this service to your customers.

Rentals

Some salons offer rental apparel, including wedding gowns, formal-wear and tuxedos. Whether or not you offer this service depends on your clientele. If you are located in an area where short engagements or “quickie” weddings are the norm, it may make sense to offer rentals to accommodate bridal parties who simply need something to wear, and soon.

Service Coordination

Because many wedding parties now live great distances away from each other, some salons offer coordination services to make sure that attendants’ outfits are coordinated, fittings are scheduled in a timely way, and even let family members weigh in on a bride’s choice of dress. Using the Internet and computer scheduling software, salons are able to help keep an entire wedding party’s outfits organized and on time.

1.3 Benefits of Being a Bridal Salon Owner

Having your own bridal boutique is exciting enough, but being a bridal salon owner is about more than just having your own shop. It comes with a number of other built-in benefits, too.

Sharing Other People’s Happiness

Being a bridal salon owner lets you have a window into people’s lives at one of their happiest moments. You’ll feel good about helping brides find the perfect dress, and helping attendants look their best. The results of your work will be displayed in treasured photographs and held in customers’ dearest memories for years to come. “Most of your customers are happy!” observes Haley Hughes, of En Vogue Events in Houston. “You get to deal with clients who are planning an event together to celebrate their love, and you get to be a part of it.” As Lillie Garrido, owner of White Couture Designer Bridal and Tuxedos in Park City, Utah, says, “Weddings are a happy occasion and working with brides and their families is rewarding because of it. You’re helping to make their day.”

A Fashionable Business

As a bridal salon owner, you'll have the opportunity to see and buy the latest fashions in wedding wear from around the world. You'll read fashion magazines to look for the latest trends in wedding couture, and watch fashion television to keep up on fashion news. As Susan Alexander Shapiro, founder of BravoBride, puts it, "It's rewarding to help brides find items that make their big day perfect. Every year styles change and every bride is different, so it is definitely never boring!"

Travel

To find inventory for your salon, you'll have the opportunity to travel to fashion shows, bridal expos and trade shows around the country and overseas. Combining work with pleasure you'll visit exciting locations to gather beautiful fabrics and inventory. And best of all, you'll be able to write off these trips as a business expense.

Community Connections

Being a bridal salon owner offers you a chance to connect with your local community and its most important celebrations. Not only will you get to know members of local society, but you'll get to be part of prom season, graduations and holiday events as customers turn to you for all their formalwear needs.

If you go out to a lot of events, or have lots of parties, you'll always have something fabulous to wear. You'll have an inventory of hundreds of cocktail gowns, party dresses and formalwear to choose from. And what better advertising than to say the gorgeous dress you're wearing came from your own shop?

Beautiful Surroundings

Your inventory of gorgeous gowns, fabrics, accessories and more will let you be surrounded by beautiful things all day long. You'll have lovely textures to feel, sights to see and even perfumes to smell. You'll work with your hands to create beautiful ensembles, and use your sense of style and fashion to help every customer become a beautiful bride.

Financial Rewards

Even if you aren't in it for the money, it's hard to ignore the fact that there's a lot of money to be made in the bridal salon industry. A wedding dress is typically the most expensive single clothing purchase a woman makes in her life. According to The Wedding Report, in 2007 brides in the United States spent, on average, \$1,334 on their dress alone. In addition, they spent an average of \$301 on a veil, and \$321 on accessories to go with their wedding outfit.

These are just averages, though. A custom-designed or couture wedding dress can cost as much as \$10,000 or more. Average spending on weddings is in the range of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per wedding, but some brides today choose to spend much more. By providing the products brides want and helping to make their big day as special as possible, you could find yourself earning an income that's limited only by your energy and salon capacity.

1.4 Inside This Guide

The FabJob Guide to Become a Bridal Salon Owner is organized to help take you step-by-step through the basics you will need to open and operate your own salon. The chapters are organized as follows:

Chapter 2 ("*Developing Your Skills*") explains how to learn the skills you will need as a bridal salon owner. It covers ways of learning from experts and through observation. You will also discover how to "earn while you learn" by getting a job in the retail clothing industry or in another business related to the wedding industry. You'll also find resources for learning more, both through formal fashion industry training programs and through self-study options.

Chapter 3 ("*Starting Your Bridal Salon*") will help you decide what kind of salon you should open. This chapter discusses different niches you can fill, from couture to resale bridal salons. It will also help you decide whether to buy an existing store or open a new store. It also explains what you need to get started, including your business plan, start-up financing, store name, and other important matters.

Chapter 4 (“*Setting Up Your Store*”) offers the information you need to actually set up your store. It gives advice on how to choose a location, get merchandise to sell, and arrange displays. You will also discover what equipment and supplies you will need.

Chapter 5 (“*Store Operations*”) takes you into the day-to-day challenge of running your store once it’s open. It explains how to develop a procedures manual, and covers inventory management, financial management and pricing.

Chapter 6 (“*Marketing Your Business*”) shows you ways to bring customers into your store through advertising, promotional opportunities, and special events like Bridal Expos and trunk sales. You’ll also learn about customer service, particularly as it relates to brides.

By following the steps in this guide, you will be well on your way to living your dream — opening your own successful bridal salon, and helping your joyful clients find the wedding gowns of their dreams.