

Show off your GOWNS

Our training guru, Maria Musgrove, takes a look at trends in displaying dresses to help you to decide what will work for your boutique



When I said “Yes to the Article” on displaying dresses, I’d foolishly forgotten that the deadline was only 72 hours after the Bridal Buyer Awards! With the *Harrogate Hangover* hovering and zero inspiration, I opted for the millennial’s equivalent of *Phone a Friend* and did a ‘shout out’ on Facebook to fellow retailers. Paul Simon sang that there are 50 ways to leave your lover, and my findings revealed that there are almost as many ways to showcase gowns in your boutique.

The majority (66%) favoured frocks arranged by silhouette, and then by fabric. This helps to guide both brides and sales consultants through the collection, as well as helping the shop to look neat. Nearly 20% favoured grouping by look – classic, contemporary, boho, beaded etc. One shop had even numbered its gowns to ensure they would always be correctly ordered on the rails.

Displaying by designer was favoured by only one shop out of 40; the majority of boutique owners felt that brides don’t always have a preferred designer, but they did know what shape they liked – organising by style will allow you to start appointments at specific sections.

Does size matter? Well 12% of those who replied thought that it did as their brides only try on dresses that fit. Ideal if you sell off the peg, but as one retailer said: “They wouldn’t have much choice if they only picked the ones that fit them.”

Bridal Buyer columnist and owner of

Abigail’s Collection, Abi Neill, told me:

“There is no right or wrong except that rails must stay looking gorgeous and fresh. This is a feature that has to pull in the bride, as well as be easy to work with for staff during the appointment. If customers select gowns themselves then merchandising by shape and look is important. If they’re being guided then it’s less important”.

Emma Marshall, of Miss Bush and Luxe Bride, says: “We rotate constantly to keep the space looking fresh. No dresses in bags, no signage, no clutter of any description”.

This brings me to the big issue, to bag or not to bag: that is the question. And, even more contentious, the subject of attaching laminated tags with a visual of the dress to every dress. Bags and tags? Almost as naff as photos of food outside restaurants. Imagine my horror when one of my coaching clients confessed that her gowns are in bags at her insurance company’s insistence because of a discolouration problem, and that she’s added a laminated tag...and that her brides love it!

I asked how and if it was affecting sales, and she told me: “Brides love it as it minimises them picking the wrong shape, they can see from the photo that it looks really different on a person than it does on the hanger.” Still to be convinced? I discovered that one shop had trialled half of its dresses with and half without photos and, you’ve guessed it, laminates equal more sales.

Before rushing off to buy your laminator,

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reflect on the ‘Seven Layout Secrets of the Big Retail Chains’ (read it online: entrepreneur.com/article/223808). We’ve all heard about steering customers to the right, but what about ‘offering hugs’ and ‘creating breaks’? Apparently, we are attracted to round and U-shapes as these make people want to stop and enter the space, which resembles a person extending their arms for an embrace. More by good luck than good management, my fitting rooms have circular columns and an arched wall. Brides often comment on how welcoming they are.

Research also shows that 20% of a shop’s merchandise gets missed because long, uninterrupted aisles don’t get people’s attention. If you’re now calculating the cost of a re-fit, why not group gowns according to look and colour, as that will naturally create a break. Alternatively, to interrupt that continuous line of gowns, and create a stopping point, position features part way along, such as a mannequin or a mirror.

Other layout secrets include ‘make windows shine’ (think Mr Selfridge) with less being more as ‘space equals luxury’ (think Tiffany), and ‘make an arresting first impression’. The latter should lead them somewhere – preferably to your credit card machine and another sale. Maybe I don’t need that laminator after all... ■

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