

It all starts with a GREAT IDEA

A new year, a new rethink. Training expert Maria Musgrove says that hitting on the right strategy to develop your business is key in these competitive times

By the time you're reading this you're probably packing away your Christmas sweater hoping that 2018 doesn't have the same peaks and troughs of last year... when things went quite in 2017, it could be likened to the first verse of my favourite Christmas book:

*T'was the night before Christmas
When all through the house
Not a creature was stirring
Not even a mouse*

Traditionally, a quiet December was followed by a cracking January. For the past three years, however, our December has rocked and January has bombed. Mondays and Fridays are now the new Saturday (possibly to avoid our £25 weekend charge). We've had Saturdays with waiting lists and Saturdays without a single appointment! The pattern is that there is no pattern with days when I call the shop like a BT engineer checking the line and "phone a Facebook friend" before crying "Houston we have a problem!" So... in the spirit of that Christmas book:

*If your shop is like the Marie Celeste
Here are some ideas
To make you different from the rest*

Poet Laureate I am not! Here are my suggestions for a successful 2018: 'You cannot be everything to everyone, if you decide to go north, you cannot go south at the same time', so said Jeroen de Flander author and strategist. Many shops give



little thought as to who is 'their bride,' meaning their gown collection is as random as a four-year-old at a Pick 'n' Mix counter. Whatever your view of WED2B they have a crystal clear offer which is affordable gowns (under £699), off the peg, in a range of sizes, open seven days a week without appointment.

Michael Porter in his book *Competitive Advantage* says: "The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do" and Jack Welch wrote: "If you don't have a competitive advantage, don't compete." With this in mind, here are a few ideas:

IDEA 1: Define your competitive advantage and who your bride is. Think about why she should buy from you. Ask some of your current and past brides the same question either

individually or in a focus group. Then, be prepared to change.

We all know that knowledge is power. I prefer Dale Carnegie's "Knowledge isn't power until it's applied." We can't know everything about every designer but what is key is knowing how to access and use that information.

IDEA 2: Ask your team to write 'the Dummy's Guide' to each of your designers and then hold a Mastermind Chair session on key facts (not just lead times, colour and train lengths) such as provenance, the designer, how they came to be part of your collection and how you select the gowns. Their story becomes part of your story and when incorporated into your 'sales talk' you're reinforcing your competitive advantage.

Helen Keller wrote "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." David's Bridal joining forces with Vera Wang et al is an example of a partnership being a win-win for all players. Hubspot's article on co-branding is a fascinating read at <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-cobranding-partnerships>

BMW and Louis Vuitton's pairing outlines that what they have in common is they're both in the business of travel, value luxury and are well-known, traditional brands. Few of us have the clout to co-brand at these dizzy levels so my final thoughts are:

IDEA 3: Connect with like-minded suppliers to promote each other. Luxe Bride asks us to name our preferred suppliers and I'm now collaborating with brands like The Ivy and the Queen's jewellers, Collins & Sons (both in Tunbridge Wells) to re-inforce Pantiles Bride's longevity and luxury.

IDEA 4: Join an association such as the RBA, BBSA, Luxe or a Facebook Forum. Why not buddy up with another retailer or contact me to discuss coaching, training and/or to join my new Bridal Business Owners Club with monthly webinars and lots more. I promise you it will be better than my poetry!

*For more details visit
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