

Male grooming

A WOMAN TELLS HER FEMALE FRIENDS SHE'S GETTING MARRIED, AND THERE'S COOING OVER DRESSES, VENUE AND RING. THE HUSBAND-TO-BE'S MATES ONLY GET THAT EXCITED ABOUT THE BEER THEY'LL CONSUME ON THE STAG DO. BUT, SAYS RETAIL JOURNALIST **ANDREW DON**, JEWELLERS SHOULD INVOLVE GROOMS IN THE WHOLE PROCESS IF THEY WANT THEM TO SPEND MORE ON THE JEWELLERY AND BECOME A LIFELONG CUSTOMER

I am decisive in everyday life. The moment I met my wife, I knew I was going to marry her. Six weeks later, we were engaged to be married. But when the thought of choosing engagement rings left me a blustering wreck, I decided to leave it to my fiancée Liz.

The thought of buying her the diamond filled me with dread. If it was too small, would she think I did not love her? If it was too big, would she have thought it ostentatious? If I spent £300, would she think I was a cheapskate?

No thank you!
John Greenway is the managing director of Greenways International, the UK sales agent for the EGF-Eduard G Fidel wedding ring company. He says this anxiety is common among men, who are particularly fearful about visiting jewellers, preferring instead to spend their disposable income in electrical appliance retailers and car showrooms. "Most men hate shopping and few have visited or made a purchase from a jeweller, with the exception of an engagement ring or possibly a watch," he says.

But side solely with the female half of the duo and her mates at your peril. Men may feel disenfranchised from the wedding once they have slipped the ring on their betrothed's finger, but they still have a large say in the wedding spend. If you keep them involved in the wedding, you stand a better chance of seeing more of the budget for their nuptials spent in your store.



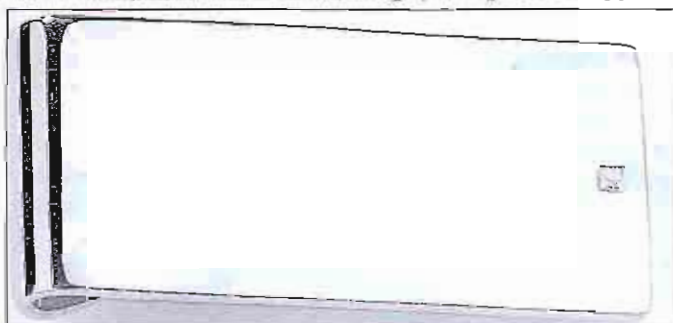
Most men feel comfortable buying a band (such as these from Domino) for themselves, especially if they are not too flashy. It's often their first jewellery purchase, and a great chance for jewellers to encourage a new customer

Weddings are big business, with much of it monopolised by department stores, Greenway says, so welcoming, well-trained staff that can handle questions and make it easy for the groom are essential. Make the groom feel comfortable with buying the engagement ring, and he'll bring back his bride to choose their wedding rings, and consider your shop for placing their wedding list or for buying presents for best men, ushers and

bridesmaids, not to mention anniversary or birthday gifts. It's not just one big sale – it's a whole world of sales opportunities, and jewellers who miss this point are missing out.

Natalie Jerreat, marketing and PR manager of Halcyon Days, in Brook Street, in London's West End, says men feel hassled and anxious by shopping, and particularly in making the most important jewellery purchase of their lives.

These silver ranges from Halcyon Days with blue sapphires (left) and diamonds (centre and right) make good wedding gifts for the man who wants to feel well-adorned



CONSUMERS ON CHOOSING WEDDING AND ENGAGEMENT RINGS



"We wanted something a bit unusual for Eliza's engagement ring. We found a beautiful amethyst one in Islington, London, but it was set in a cheap ring. We approached an upmarket jeweller in Bath to get it reset. It was business-like but friendly, with the jeweller

talking us through all the options. We were casually dressed but I never felt we were talked down to."

NIC PATON, 26, BARNSTAPLE, DEVON



"We bought our wedding rings together in a small independent high street shop. I don't recall feeling uneasy about the process. There may be times when some privacy would be nice. I bought the engagement ring alone because it was a surprise proposal and I also bought a locket as a wedding present."

STEVE HOBSON, 44, SUTTON, SURREY

"As an insider in the jewellery business...I would find it difficult to opt for an off-shelf ring. I feel it is important to match the individuality of the event by

firstly choosing a designer whose style I like and then writing a brief to have a unique piece made."

NICK SHIELDS, 37, ELEMENT JEWELLERS, HEBDEN BRIDGE, WEST YORKSHIRE



"I chose my engagement ring because I had a specific idea of what I wanted and Alex knew this. Alex would be happy to turn up on the day with everything organised and I think if he did start to get excited about the flowers and jewellery I wouldn't be marrying him. He will choose

his own wedding band and cufflinks."

LISA APPLETON, 24, EASBURN, WEST YORKSHIRE, IS MARRYING THIS AUGUST

"We wanted something a bit different for Clare's engagement ring so we went to this posh old-style jeweller, the sort you only really get now in places such as Cambridge. I had noticed they sold antique rings, which appealed to us because they weren't off the shelf – and appealed to me because they were cheaper. I bought Clare a Georgian garnet and pearl ring – it cost me a whole month's wages, which she indulgently decided was romantic of me."

ALASDAIR WRIGHT, 44, ACHNASHEEN, WESTER ROSS, SCOTLAND

Jewellers could increase the value of the sale if they win men over because a man can be less emotional and more impatient than women when buying, and tends to spend more to speed up the process, according to Jerreat.

She believes offering men a female personal shopper would encourage them to get more involved because it would make them more comfortable about asking advice. "They could ask from a female point of view what would be the most desirable gift or ring to buy."

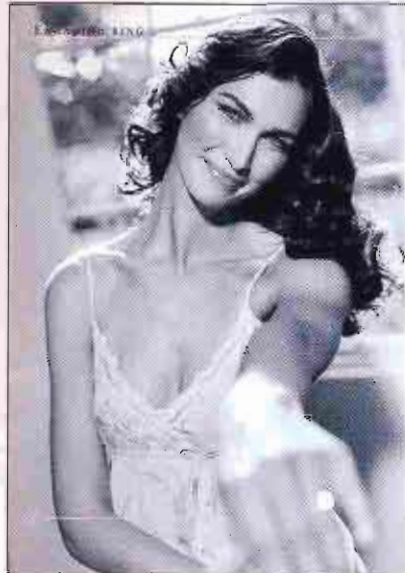
Web-sites for those who don't enjoy face-to-face shopping could offer a personal shopping facility. A live one-to-one chat room could offer advice and a selection of styles to suit the bride.

In shops, make leaflets available with interesting facts and figures and helpful hints. Few do this better than Boodles, whose booklet, *Look Before You Leap, A man's guide to buying an engagement ring*, uses humour to help men feel at ease, but also provides the facts and a cut-out section to help them select the right size – as well as a few ideas for romantic proposals.

Astrid Walsh, who manages Boodles's Royal Exchange store in the City of London, tries to encourage men to choose the ring themselves.

"We think anything that guides them on quality, design and how to pop the question is a brilliant idea."

Literature from Boodles offers technical advice about rings without losing the romance of the moment of proposal



He says the onus is on the shop to understand for whom the jewellery is intended, putting the man at ease and finding out as much about him as possible. "Is he an investment banker who would wear a different type of jewellery to a manual worker for example?"

Showell says the retailer needs to be armed with questions to whittle it down to the most appropriate items. "Does the best man have the odd cigar at special occasions? Maybe a cigar cutter would be appropriate."

Getting technical

Melanie Harcourt, jewellery editor at bridal magazine *Wedding Day*, says men can get more involved when they buy for their best men – or when they choose their own jewellery for the big day. She says staff must know what they're talking about style-wise because many men admit they don't know what they are doing and need help in-store.

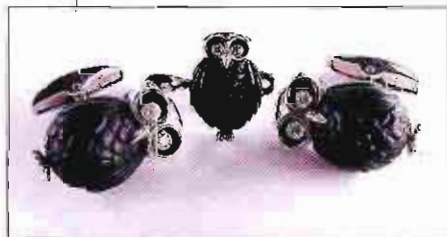
"If staff are well trained, it doesn't matter if it's a woman or a man serving. Men need to realise if you go to the right store, you can get the right kind of help and be led to the right decision," she says.

Men like to know technical information about the jewellery, but in layman's language, so Harcourt suggests telling them about the differences between, say, platinum and gold, what it will do, how long it will last. "That will make a man feel at ease with his purchase if something is expensive. Men often don't like high finishes. They think it looks a bit effeminate so go through different finishes such as sand blasting or hammered. Men want to know the facts; women want to know about the aesthetics."

She identifies men's main fears as getting their choice wrong, that the recipient will not like the gift and that they will spend too much.

Marketing manager of manufacturer and retailer B&N The Wedding Ring Company Amber Saunders says one way to involve men is a bespoke service, which is offered by B&N. She also says shops need to have a neutral look to attract male customers. "Icons such as David Beckham, have made shopping for jewellery acceptable for guys. They realise it's OK to desire more than just plain square cufflinks and

Let the groom's personality shine through with these quirky and stylish cufflinks from Deakin & Francis



TIPS FOR MAKING WEDDINGS APPEAL TO MEN

- Explain the benefits and features of jewellery – this generally makes men spend more
- Let the man know there is scope for discounting or finance deals
- Try to understand the person for whom the jewellery is being bought
- Find out the budget, if there is one and the groom does not mind telling you
- Never make assumptions about people from their clothes. Some of the most casually dressed men could have the most to spend
- Sit down with the man, offer him a drink and show you are interested in him – striking up a rapport is essential
- Offer bespoke personalisation and engraving service on wedding bands and gifts
- Provide information on a web site so the man can learn a little bit about gems and metals first
- Offer an appointment-only service – men feel more special if they know they will be personally dealt with and won't have to hang about
- Make sure all staff know about the products
- Acknowledge the man when he enters but don't pounce. Let him know help is available
- Put something male-oriented in the window
- Make eye contact with the man as well as the woman if shopping as a couple so he does not feel like a spare part
- Put up a sign: "Put together your wedding gift list here"
- Keep a list of other local shops and services that will be helpful to the groom
- Offer to engrave any gifts free of charge
- Make a display of the various gifts the groom is responsible for or set aside a Wedding Room if you have the space



EGF-Eduard G Fidel rings (also pictured in headline) pick up on the trend for diamond-set pieces

don't want to rely on their wife to choose for them." She says this has come about in the last two years and men are now trading up to platinum, sometimes even with diamonds.

Wedding lists

Many jewellers miss out on being a destination for the wedding list, leaving it to the likes of department stores to clean up on the guests' generosity. But Showell says lots of couples are leaving it until they are older to marry so they already have the toaster and dinner service, and may be more interested in luxury gifts.

William Asprey, director of William & Son in London, says: "We suggest our customers have two wedding lists, one at Peter Jones for their friends, and one here for their parents' friends, so they can get fun and luxury items."

Mike Howarth, managing director of Howarth Jewellers, with two stores, in Bolton, Lancashire, has engraved watches for the male wedding party, and says he is considering offering wedding gifts on his UK Jewellery Award-winning web site. "After all, a lot of men get tankards, cufflinks, tie-pins, even watches."

But ultimately, that relationship with the customer all starts with their purchase of one ring. As Neill Swan, marketing manager at Johnson Matthey, says: "Traditionally men have chosen the cheapest band, but now their attitude is, 'I'm spending all this money on an engagement ring, why shouldn't I have a nice ring as well?'" Your store is just the place to find it ■

The groom will also want to indulge himself, so offer him something precious such as these Michael Birnie cufflinks

