

Going to the Chapel

Marketers and marriages make the perfect couple **By Michele Meyer**

Here comes the bride — and as a marketer, you'd be foolish not to catch her. After all, she's been planning her big day since she first tied a toilet-paper veil to her Barbie for that march down the aisle with Ken, and since then those dreams have only grown grander.

Today's weddings cost an average of \$26,327 — nearly 20 percent greater than just three years ago, reports the *American Wedding 2005* survey from Fairchild Publications, publisher of *Bride's*, *Modern Bride*, and *Elegant Bride*. The happy couple devotes 17 months to this planning and spending bonanza, from the engagement, through the bridal shower and bachelor party, to the post-wedding brunch and new-home housewarming.

Marketers who think engagements and weddings are seasonal, with the former on Valentine's Day and the latter in June, have already missed out. Engagements are almost evenly split among all 12 months, though 10 percent of proposals occur in November and 16 percent in December.

Are They Registered?

You don't have to be Crate & Barrel, Williams-Sonoma, or Bed Bath & Beyond to say "I do" to a bridal registry. Starwood Hotels found bliss in its partnership with the online regis-

try of WeddingChannel.com in May 2004. "Online is where it's moving," says Eric Beardsley, manager of weddings program development at Starwood Hotels and Resorts, based in White Plains, N.Y. "Brides and grooms spend up to three hours

ily can contribute "honeymoon," in denominations of \$25 to \$200, to the fantasy trip. The Web site's 1.5 million personal registries link Starwood with WeddingChannel.com's retail partners, including Bloomingdale's, Crate & Barrel, Macy's, Tiffany, and Williams-Sonoma.

Starwood also flaunts the 100 resorts that the chain has determined to be most appealing to honeymooners at its Web site StarwoodHoneymoons.com. Free honeymoon concierges (or teleservice representatives) help couples make their honeymoon decisions, including extras like a Crete cruise, a beach picnic in Sardinia, or snorkeling in the Bahamas. "We found that a lot of people who call in have no idea where to go — but will spend a lot on dining and activities once they arrive," Beardsley says. Starwood markets to men and women alike. "Our direct-response media mailings show the honeymoon is a joint decision," he adds.

For Him and for Her

Knowing that 295 million guests attended a wedding in 2005, every retailer wants a piece of the wedding cake this year. But in contrast to the honeymoon, wedding gifts tend to be the domain of the bride. New York City-based Macy's East reaches women through its online and onsite



online daily planning their wedding. Since the \$4 billion honeymoon market is extremely cluttered, we wanted a creative angle so we would reach them, rather than someone else."

By using WeddingChannel.com, couples can register for honeymoons at any one of Starwood's 740 St. Regis, Luxury Collection, Westin, W, and Sheraton hotels worldwide. Through the registry, friends and fam-

registries, but it has learned to approach grooms more creatively.

"Based on our research, we realized that more men shop on their own — and need guidance," says publicity manager Katherine Wadhams. Last year, Macy's sent a DVD providing shopping and fashion tips from Donald Trump, Sean Combs, and *Esquire's* Nick Sullivan to 350,000 men. The chain plans to repeat the offering, and who knows, perhaps more than one dapper gent caught the eye of his future bride, thanks to the new garb.

Not everyone successfully courts couples through registries, as New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art has learned. While shoppers regularly buy wedding gifts at museum shops, the Met's bridal registry didn't take off seven years ago. Though gifts attracted guests, brides weren't interested in a registry that lacked a full range of crystal, flatware, china, and linens. "We put our heart and soul into it, but it's not our niche," says a spokesperson.

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However, a lack of crystal hasn't discouraged outdoor outfitter REI from entering the fray. Citing survey findings that men and women enjoy spending time with their better half while playing outside, REI recently announced its gift registry, which includes, among 40,000 other products, a set of "mating" sleeping bags that zip together.

The Books of Love

Despite their popularity, registries aren't the nuptial end-all. There's a reason bridal magazines are bigger than many a gown: 71 percent of brides first seek advice there, be it the Fairchild trinity of magazines, *Bridal*

Name Dropping

IT'S A RITE of passage: Say "yes" to that special proposal, and then buy every bridal magazine on the newsstand. The following lists can help you find the brides most devoted to spending.

BRIDE'S

Quantity: 62,223

CPM: \$105/M–\$125/M

Selects: Geographic (\$7/M), 1-month (\$17/M), 3-month (\$12/M), 6-month (\$7/M), gender (\$7/M), gift givers (\$12/M), key code (\$2/M), new movers (\$12/M), new to file (\$12/M), paid (\$7/M), renewals (\$12/M)

MODERN BRIDE

Quantity: 87,252

CPM: \$105/M–\$125/M

Selects: Geographic (\$7/M), 1-month (\$17/M), 3-month (\$12/M), 6-month (\$7/M), gender (\$7/M), gift givers (\$12/M), key code (\$2/M), new movers (\$12/M), new to file (\$12/M), paid (\$7/M), renewals (\$12/M)

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Guide, or the new *Ritz-Carlton Weddings*. Marketers also can reach their audience through bridal or home magazine subscription lists before sending out appropriate catalogs and direct mailings. Or they can place banners on bridal-themed Web sites, where one-fourth of brides begin their research on places such as TheKnot.com and UltimateWedding.com.

"At Starwood, we're just scratching the surface, especially with

an outside vendor, and it's a worthy investment.

"We don't target brides and grooms specifically, but often when you marry, you merge two households," says spokesperson Carolyn McMannama. "We've found that we're able to track the purchases — and we have a very high-dollar volume per customer — because they come in needing everything from shelving to storage."

The chain also displays within each store creative ways to package gift cards, such as placing one for a cookware store in a recipe box or a spa certificate in a shower tote — purchases toward which themed bridal shower guests might gravitate. And that could be big business: 75.5 percent of consumers bought at least one gift card in 2005, according to the National Retail Federation.

With all these companies turning their attention to weddings, one stand-by industry now has to redouble its marketing efforts. Joyce Hrinya, a marketing executive at Helzberg Diamonds in Kansas City, Mo., is helping her company reexamine the market. "This is one of the key areas we're working on," she says. "We're in the throes of figuring that out. In a few months, we'll have clarity." ■

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