



> Swarovski's Crystallized brand puts new shine on old wedding traditions and customs.



> Princess-cut diamond and platinum engagement ring by Lieberfarb. www.lieberfarb.com



> Cento-cut diamond wedding band from Roberto Coin, with signature ruby on the inside of the shank. www.robertocoin.com



> Diamond and platinum wedding bands for both bride and groom, from les Magiques collection by Furrer Jacot. www.furrer-jacot.ch

Additional tips on tapping into bridal sales in the coming year:

- Package bridal jewellery as a three-ring set in order to clinch a sale for all three items: the engagement ring and his and her wedding bands.
- Take the opportunity to sell rare natural-coloured diamonds, which, because they are not commoditised, represent one of the most potentially profitable categories for retailers.
- Remember that "bridal" includes more than engagement and wedding rings. Gifts for the bride and groom, wedding party, and parents and children of the couple are opportunities for additional sales, as are services such as jewellery repairs, enhancements and custom design.
- Selling bridal jewellery is an excellent opportunity to start an ongoing relationship with a client, supported by customer service, anniversary or birthday gift suggestions and maintenance. Offer a gift certificate for free maintenance down the road.
- If platinum and even gold are too expensive during the downturn, remember that much bridal jewellery is now being made with palladium, which is about half the price of gold and a third of the price of platinum. As a platinum group metal, it has the purity and whiteness of platinum, and is hypoallergenic.
- If you live in California, join the lobby to ask the California Supreme Court to dismiss Proposition 8, a constitutional amendment that would override the court's May 2008 decision to overturn a ban on gay marriage. The reason? According to The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy at the UCLA School of Law, same-sex weddings could generate up to US\$683.6 million in additional revenue for the wedding industry over the next three years. Some of this will be spent on wedding jewellery.

THE INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

The forecast for the bridal market is not completely unaffected by the recession. The Wedding Report updated its outlook in February to "reflect current market estimates: Spending is estimated to be down about 6-8 percent across the board in 2009," it says. And while people will still fall in love and get married, and still require bridal jewellery, they might be choosing smaller diamonds. Online retailer Blue Nile reported last fall that its sales indicate a shift from solitaires to diamond bands, representing a price shift from about US\$6,000 to US\$3,000. Steve Polacheck of Polacheck Jewelers in Southern California says that while his bridal business is strong, the spending of brides in the second-marriage market, who generally purchase diamonds of US\$10,000 and up, has tapered off. "I've sold more wedding bands than large diamonds in the past four months," Polacheck told us in March.