

It's Time to Hop Aboard the Custom Design Train



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Today's technology allows all jewelers to move full steam ahead into custom design.

Women have adored jewelry since Adam gave Eve a ring he made from twisted vines — the first custom-made ring. As time passed, man developed techniques to do a better job.

Since the early to mid 1900s, we have advanced to sketching in front of the customer then carving a wax from a block by hand to make the ring. This uses the lost wax process everyone is familiar with. If you're good, you get a great item. If you're just fair at hand-carving, you get a so-so piece of jewelry.

Now, using CAD software, we design the perfect ring and the computer carves the wax on a separate machine, doing a better job at a lower cost. But the customer is typically involved only at the beginning.

That's changing. Now, the customer can start the process online without ever speaking to you (saving you a lot of time and hassle). She then invites you to create the piece for her, make the sale and deliver it.

How's this done? When the client goes online and starts searching for "engagement rings," she could find a link to start designing. She begins by browsing through thousands of designs. She could choose Ring A but ask for it to be made like Ring B. You quote a price and get a deposit online, and you haven't even seen her face yet.

This is an amazing leap forward, especially when selling bridal to millennials. Having the manufacturing done elsewhere can save you headaches and overhead. Moreover, your youngest sales associate can assist with this online treasure.

Star Gems is one vendor I know that is offering this kind of turnkey service through a system called Customer Studio that your client can access online through her phone or tablet. They can do it all for you from design to manufacture, and they will ship the ring to your store so you can deliver it and get the applause from your customer. (Star Gems also makes sure that all online customers are funneled to their local retailers.) You make the sale, keep the customer and she only knows about you, not the manufacturer.

If I had a store today, I just might bypass making waxes and casting in the store. I kind of like happy, profitable, easy customers.

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