

Perfect Prom Promotions

By Patti Acquisto

Two wedding dresses on the wall and one in the window do not make your shop a bridal boutique. A small rack of eight pink scrubs in XL will not send medical workers scurrying. Consequently, three prom dresses and six mature formals will not make your shop prom headquarters. If you want to do something, do it big and do it right.



There is serious money to be made selling prom dresses but there are some big do and don't's. First of all, clear a very large area of at least 300 square feet. You need tall racks, either free standing or wall attached. Buy the latest issues of prom magazines as soon as they come out in the fall so you can begin planning for the prom season. We start taking prom dresses the first of January. Learn the brand names and know the styles popular in your local schools. Carpet the area under the dresses and in the fitting rooms. A large mirrored area is vital. They want to see themselves from all angles. If possible, a small seating vignette for parents, grandparents or boyfriends is a nice touch. Have available on a table the latest issues of the prom magazines and perhaps some framed pictures of the hottest dresses.

Advertising is critical. Ads in the local high school newspapers are inexpensive and valuable. Decide if you will buy or consign or a combination. You must buy cheap. You cannot pay anyone a big amount and certainly nothing close to a large percentage of the selling price. Sometimes the girls don't understand because their parents have told them they should get some astronomical amount because of the initial cost. They need to consign or sometimes, take the dress back home. Word will spread rapidly through the teen grapevine.

Be careful and realistic with your prices. Customers will not pay next to new prices. You rarely can sell a \$450.00 dress for \$400.00 but you may sell it for \$200.00. Add on your buyers fee and you will show a nice profit.

Create an attractive display area with grid, good lighting, ample fitting rooms and plenty of rack space. No one wants to dig through crowded racks of formals. Be sure to SIZE them.

You may want to purchase clear frosted torso forms for displays. The dresses display 100% better on the forms than limply suspended from a hanger. We buy them by the case and it's worth the investment! We use them for all of our displays, except during prom season when all of them are used in our prom department.

Use classified ads, school bulletin boards and high school teachers to help spread the word. You may buy small ads in the surrounding county weekly papers. Signage out front and in your windows with large words PROM dresses will attract drive-by traffic.

Knowing how to manage the American teenager is an art form in itself. They usually don't know what they want. They are not insecure—they merely lack the ability to make a choice. Sometimes, they have designed a dress in their mind and then search the world for it dragging their family behind them in frustration. They are not accustomed to dressing up and cannot envision themselves looking like Cinderella at the ball. It's your job to gain their confidence. Be truthful, be patient and keep smiling.

We choose to not "Hold" dresses while they shop for one they like better because first of all, we don't "Hold" anything and it's not fair to the consignor. The girls need a sense of urgency so they can make up their minds. We do provide a non-refundable layaway with a 50% deposit. We always make certain they are completely sure about their choice.

Prom season opens the door to the teen market and they usually look around at all of the other great stuff we have. We encourage them to clean their closets and make some money. Turn them into suppliers.

If you can't do most of these things, perhaps prom dresses will not work for your present shop. Consider stocking a scaled down version of formalwear for other events such as pageants, homecoming, dances, cruises, weddings, military balls, etc.—as we do for the remainder of the year.

It's a great market. Do it big and do it right.

Patti Acquisto owns Patti's ReSale in Owensboro, KY. With over three decades of resale experience, Patti is a frequent industry speaker and a NARTS Board Member.