

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Is the bridal gown market ripe for DTC disruption?

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*Amsale is offering brides more DTC options. Image credit: Amsale New York*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Bridal fashion platform Amsale New York is ramping up its digital options for consumers, encouraging brides who are already researching online to buy a dress via ecommerce in a move that has the potential to alter the traditional wedding gown path to purchase.

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While most brides-to-be rely on mobile applications to begin their research, digital offerings have not yet caught up to in-store experiences for wedding dress purchases. Among Amsale's new launches is digital customization tool, Amsale x You, which allows brides to customize their wedding gowns sight-unseen, but the question remains whether brides-to-be are willing to forego the salon try-on for their big day.

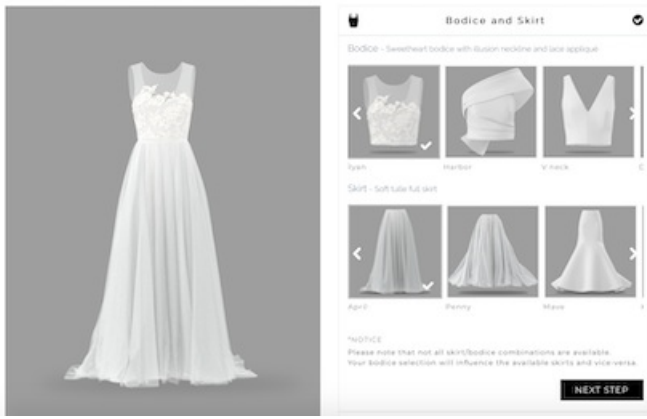
"A wedding gown is an exciting and emotional purchase, with many brides picturing themselves in wedding attire long before they're even engaged, so being able to physically touch the materials and try on various styles and designs is an important component on the shopping experience," said Shelley Brown, senior fashion and beauty editor at *The Knot*, New York. "Bridal consultants at local bridal salons have made it their life's work to help to-be-weds find a gown that makes them feel amazing, which is probably why 93 percent of brides report that the helpfulness of a consultant during their shopping experience is a top consideration as they're choosing where to purchase their attire.

"This one-on-one attention really only happens in-store, which is why the majority of brides continue to shop at local bricks-and-mortar for their wedding gowns, she said. "Shopping in-store also creates an opportunity for to-be-weds to create memories and involve family and friends as they navigate their wedding journey."

### Digital brides

According to *The Knot 2018 Wedding Attire Study*, less than 10 percent of brides purchase gowns online. A quarter of brides, however, purchase custom, special order or custom made-from-scratch wedding gowns whether in-store or online.

Amsale New York has introduced new offering to appeal to both types of brides.



*Customized dress options on Amsale. Image credit: Amsale New York*

Through Amsale x You, brides-to-be can choose a bodice and skirt from the label's most popular designs to create a gown that best suits their personal style. Sizes range from 0 to 24, and customers have the option to do split sizing.

The Amsale customized gowns retail for \$5,000.

"With Amsale x You, we virtually invite the bride into our design room, to peruse our library and empower her to design her own bespoke wedding dress," said Sarah Swann, chief creative officer of [Amsale New York](#). "We beta tested the concept at our Madison Avenue Salon and the response has been overwhelmingly positive."

Additionally, Amsale has expanded its direct-to-consumer options online.

While many of the label's bridal gowns can still only be ordered in-store, its Nouvelle Bridal, Little White Dress and bridesmaids collections are now available to order online. All dresses are made-to-order, and the Amsale Web site lists information on which sizes, if any, are available to ship immediately.

Online chat is also available for brides who have additional questions. This accessible customer service is vital since Amsale's made to order items are not returnable.

Assistance from a bridal consultant is among the primary reasons most brides opt to search for gowns in-person, according to The Knot. Other reasons brides turn to retailers include store atmosphere, reviews and designer and style variety.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Introducing #AmsalexYou You choose the skirt, bodice and an optional belt from a range of the most celebrated couture dress designs from #Amsale's library. Try it now at [amsale.com](https://amsale.com)! Modeled here by #realbrides at our Spring 2020 runway show hosted by @infor! Click the link in our bio to learn more #nybfw

A post shared by Amsale (@amsale) on Apr 12, 2019 at 2:59pm PDT

### *Instagram post from Amsale New York*

The vast majority of brides-to-be, 84 percent, use mobile applications to research wedding day attire, but 95 percent of couples visit bricks-and-mortar stores before selecting their gowns, tuxedos or suits. Brides visit an average of 2.5 bridal salons during their shopping process.

Eighty-nine percent of brides make their final dress purchases in-store, compared to the 7 percent who purchase online.

Even though only a small percentage of brides are buying online today, Amsale says its sales have been doubling month-over-month since launching ecommerce in December.

"Just as every wedding celebration is a true reflection of a couple's personal interests, love story and style, so is their wedding attire," The Knot's Ms. Brown said. "Gown alterations on existing styles created by designers can certainly create a sense of customization, but the Amsale x You collection is unique in that it allows to-be-weds to curate a more customized look with mix and match dress necklines and skirt, specifically designed to match their exact vision and style."

### **Bridal trends**

The wedding industry is flourishing, propelled by the growing population of millennials reaching marriageable age.

About one in five couples' wedding budgets top \$1 million, with spend on luxury apparel and accessories part of their plans for their big days, according to a report from Fashionbi.

While millennials are the prime consumer group for these ceremonies and receptions, those who spend upwards of \$1 million tend to be more mature than those who spend less. These clients are also the most educated and do significant research before making a bridal purchase ([see story](#)).

The way that brides- and grooms-to-be plan and envision their wedding has also evolved, as social media provides both inspiration and the impetus to achieve Instagram-worthy shots.

According to data from Lyst, in an effort to be on-trend and photo-ready, both brides and wedding guests are spending more on their dresses, with 23 percent of brides opting for two looks for their big day. The search terms "vintage" and "secondhand" have jointly risen 42 percent, pointing to the circular economy's potential disruption of bridal dressing ([see story](#)).

"Seven in ten couples report relying on social media to gather wedding inspiration," said Whitney Little, associate director of social media at *The Knot*, New York. "Some of our most engaged with images across The Knot social platforms include photos of gowns, so we know brides-to-be are using the platform to discover looks they like, tagging friends in the comments to get their feedback, too."

"Bridal salon owners share with us that it's quite common for a bride to arrive at her appointment, phone in hand, showing photos of gowns she discovered on Instagram or Pinterest," she said.

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