

THE FUTURE
OF RETAIL

MASTERS OF THEIR DOMAINS

Five stellar retail jeweler websites sure to give you ideas, inspiration, and motivation

BY MARTHA C. WHITE

As businesses of all kinds climb aboard the social media bandwagon, it's easy to forget that having a website that draws traffic and drives sales is just as important as all the new media bells and whistles. Web design has come a long way in recent years, thanks to better software and hardware enabling pages to load faster and pictures to display brighter and in greater resolution. Faster Internet connections have also made video possible.

Unlike Web retail behemoths like Amazon, though, most jewelry retailers say e-commerce is a small fraction of their business. "We found our online sales are usually under \$500 and most often under \$125," says Dorothy Vodicka, vice president of the Gem Collection in Tallahassee, Fla.

Still, the benefits of a well-designed site cannot be overestimated. We rounded up five independent retailers from around the country who each do a terrific job executing a particular aspect of the Web experience. From a search-engine whiz to a bridal biz with a healthy splash of local color, read on to see how fellow retailers are using the Internet to build their businesses.

THE BLOGGER

DavidNygaardFineJewelers.com

David Nygaard, owner of David Nygaard Fine Jewelers in Chesapeake, Va., channels his ideas into three blogs: **PassionFireDiamonds Blog.com** is about his branded diamonds; **JewelersInformationSource.com** is for fellow jewelers; **TheNygaardStory.com** is about, well, Nygaard. "The bigger the footprint, the broader your search results will be," he says.

He started blogging after revamping his website in '08. Last year, he broke into video: **GottaLockThatDown.com** boasts short, scripted, comical videos aimed at jewelry-buying young men. "The idea was to give men a good experience with our site, and we use that to funnel into the Passion Fire site or the main site," Nygaard says. One video—a spoof on the superhero pic *The Green Lantern*—drew more YouTube hits than the official movie trailer.

Home
Online Design Boutique
Passion Fire Diamonds
About David
Buying a Diamond
Style Discovery
Videos
Contact Us
Skype David

Have A Question?
CLICK HERE
for LIVE Chat

Passion Fire Diamonds are
Premium Cut Diamonds available
at online prices.

Online Boutique
Great selection of loose perfectly cut Passion Fire diamonds at special online prices.

We are please to announce our new online boutique featuring our patented Custom Design Process. Design the ring of your dreams in the convenience of your home or office in 3 easy steps.

1. Take the Style Discovery Quiz or simply browse our online collections.
2. Note which styles you like and register your wish list.
3. Call, Skype or e-mail David for an online appointment.

David is the nations first Matrix CAD Certified -Master Gemologist/ Custom Design Specialist. His Patented Custom Design Process will help you design the ring of your dreams at his Custom Design Center.



David Nygaard uses multiple Web platforms to convey his message.



Daniel Parisi of Arden Jewelers in Sacramento, Calif., considers the wealth of informative articles on his site a competitive advantage.



"We went very high on picture and image content so people can see more of what we carry in the store, which has been very helpful in bringing in traffic."

—DOROTHY VODICKA, THE GEM COLLECTION



Ruthann Carroll of Baltimore's Smyth Jewelers worked with a local marketing firm to create a clever microsite for bridal customers.

THE BRIDAL EXPERT **GetEngagedHere.com**

"We felt like we'd plateaued and we needed to get those young buyers," says Ruthann Carroll, director of advertising at Smyth Jewelers in suburban Baltimore. The retailer collaborated with Baltimore-based marketing firm MGH, and they came up with the idea of an interactive, informative microsite targeting the bridal market that would be separate from the business' main site, SmythJewelers.com.

The microsite includes a ring builder and information about selecting diamonds, in addition to more lighthearted

elements, such as a page on which couples post their engagement stories, a map of romantic "pop the question" locations around Baltimore, and a Mad Libs-esque "proposal generator."

Carroll says the microsite has proven quite popular. "They come in with rings they built on the site, papers in hand. They appreciate the amount of information that's there." The customers' favorite parts, she says, are the "panic button," which lets users click on to a news page if their partners walk in, and the "dating duration timer," which allows users to send their partners an email indicating how long they have been dating...down to the second.

THE EDUCATOR **MyGemologist.com**

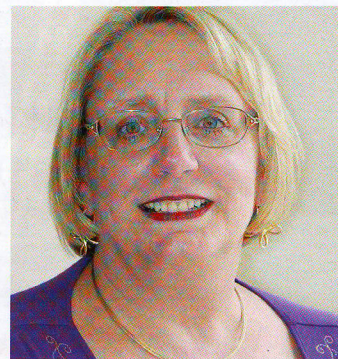
Daniel Parisi, partner at Sacramento, Calif.-based Arden Jewelers, says people from all over the country log on to his website's blog, *The Jewelry Insider* (mygemologist.com/jewelryblog), to learn about topics such as mounting styles and diamond selection. "It's basically a service to the community," he says. "We put it out there so people in Dallas or Philadelphia can read it."

But the goal isn't merely altruism. "That's our competitive advantage," he says. "We position ourselves as professional gemologists. That's our added value, and we try to communicate that through the website." New posts are added to the 5-year-old blog about twice a month. "We write it like a newspaper," says Parisi. "We take some time to research the articles."

The response has grown so much that Arden is ramping up the amount and quality of its video content. Parisi says they plan to add a new video tutorial roughly every other month, choosing the topic based on the questions people send them or post in the blog comments. The most recent installment was about cathedral mountings, and Parisi plans to tackle equally technical topics in the future.

THE SUPERSTORE **GemCollection.com**

"I think when we set up our new website, we went very high on picture and image content so people can see more of what we carry in the store, which has been very helpful in bringing in traffic," says the Gem Collection's Dorothy Vodicka. The wealth of content has been successful at drawing traffic from a local radius of up to 100 miles,



Dorothy Vodicka, vice president of the Gem Collection in Tallahassee, Fla., credits her extensive, well-photographed catalog as the hook that often leads to in-store sales.

she adds. "We get probably one or two emails a day asking us questions about items and services that actually come to us through the contact portion of the website. Usually they're very serious, and they come in and buy when we give them more information."

The easy-to-navigate site lets users browse by designer and category. Vodicka says the site's heavy emphasis on a large number of designers, many of them lesser-known, has paid off. Instead of just a click-through to the designer's website, the Gem Collection keeps browsers on its own site with detailed write-ups and clear, sharp photos of much of its inventory—done in-house at the store's photo studio—so shoppers can get a good feel for what's at the store before making the drive.

THE SEARCH ENGINE KING

SatowGoldsmiths.com

"New customers walking through the door seem to be at least 25 to 30 percent Internet-driven," says Steve Satow, owner of Satow Goldsmiths in Henderson, Nev. Even though there's no shortage of jewelry stores in and around this Las Vegas suburb, Satow says his work with Brad Simon, co-owner of Spartanburg, S.C.-based Web marketing company Internet 4 Jewelers, has given his store a tremendous, and lucrative, edge in its search-engine ranking.

Simon says a common mistake is getting the keywords in place for a site's home page and then abandoning the effort. "I see a lot of sites where a page will be titled something like 'catalog



one.' Having keywords in the title is the most important thing," he says.

Relevant keywords—say, *unique jewelry*—in the title and description of each page, plus references to Henderson or nearby Las Vegas, help Satow's site catch the attention of search engine algorithms. Descriptive text about the business and Satow's specialties contains keywords that boost the site's ranking even more. In addition to emphasizing the store's location with keywords, using Google Places helps get Satow more (free) visibility. ■



Steve Satow of Satow Goldsmiths in Henderson, Nev., knows sales and search are closely linked.

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SITES FOR SORE EYES

Thinking about sprucing up your store's website? Here are five tips to keep in mind.



Short and sweet videos work best online.

1 Spring for good photos. "To do it right, the photography can cost more than the production of the website," says Matthew Perosi, founder of Jewelry Website Advisory Group in Totowa, N.J. And don't use CAD images in lieu of photos, he adds.

2 Skip Flash. Search engines can't "read" the words included in a flash banner, which hurts your ranking.

3 Keep videos short. "People usually get bored after about 45 seconds," says Perosi.

4 Make your site faster. "It's always a big conversion improvement driver when you can shave a few seconds off your load time," says Craig Smith, founder of Trinity Insight, an e-commerce consulting service in Philadelphia.

5 Avoid music. "Don't do anything on your site that'll turn customers off," advises Perosi. Music—especially if it reloads every time a user clicks another page—can send would-be customers fleeing.