

Excellence Award Winner

# Holly Yaskowsky

PRESIDENT » BLUSH BRIDAL CONSIGNMENT BOUTIQUE » NEWPORT NEWS

**B**lush is an upscale bridal consignment boutique offering more than 400 new designer samples and once-worn gowns at a fraction of their original cost in a comfortable and inviting boutique atmosphere.

**When did you start the business and what gave you the idea for it?**

Blush officially started in October of 2004 when we opened for consignments and launched to brides in January of 2005. After my wedding in 2003 I started thinking about selling my dress. I looked for consignment shops, but none in our area accepted wedding gowns. I began searching the Internet and found the closest bridal consignment store was in Maryland. I contacted the owner and after a first meeting with her the real research began.

**What was the hardest part of launching your company?**

The hardest part was letting go of a stable, 9-to-5 job with reasonable pay and benefits to leap into the world of the self-employed. There was also the uncertainty of whether our market would accept the relatively new concept of bridal consignment.

**What lesson did you learn that you wish you'd known back before you started?**

I have learned that you can't be everything to everyone. No matter how great your product or service, you won't meet the needs of every consumer out there. You can't close every sale and there are bound to be at least a few grumpy customers you won't be able to please.

**What risks did you take?**

Starting a business for the first time is a huge risk no matter who you are or what the business. Leaving the security of employment to go out on my own was the biggest risk. Also, we took a risk on the new development of Port Warwick, hoping it would become what we needed it to be. Starting a business that is a relatively new concept adds another element of risk.

**What was the biggest obstacle you overcame?**

Changing the misconceptions of consignment was the biggest hurdle I faced. You would never know it walking in to Blush that most of the merchandise is consigned because I created an environment that brides would feel comfortable in to ensure the consignment factor wouldn't be an issue. Luckily, the consignment trend has taken off and customers understand the value. Brides now realize consigned items also include designer samples and brand-new gowns.

**What or who has helped you the most in establishing your business?**

I am very fortunate to have a supportive and trusting husband who was skeptical at first, but believed in my ability to succeed. His business background and knowledge complemented mine and we were able to commit to the project together. I also had the financial backing of my family to get the ball rolling.

**What do you consider your greatest innovation?**

Bringing the upscale bridal and formal consignment concept to Hampton Roads has been my greatest innovation. When I started looking into the idea of consigning my own dress, there were many consignment shops, but none in the area that specialized in bridal and formal. I wanted to take the concept up a notch and create a true bridal salon with the same service and atmosphere as a traditional boutique, but with better prices. There were very few stores such as Blush in the country, but almost five years later, the concept has caught on and aspiring entrepreneurs contact me on a regular basis seeking advice on starting their own such endeavor.



**How has the company grown, both in terms of employees and revenues?**

Blush has seen a steady increase in sales each year. The sluggish economy, while hurtful to some in the wedding industry, hasn't had as much of a detrimental impact on bridal consignment. If anything, more women are open to the concept. It has always been my intent to run Blush as much on my own as possible to save on payroll expenses. Due to the appointment-based nature of my business, I've been able to work one-on-one with each bride, but will be adding part-time employees soon.

**Has the company earned a profit? If so, how long did it take to get there?**

Blush has been able to turn a profit since our second year in operation. With new marketing opportunities I hope to continue the trend in profit growth and sales increases.

**Discuss future plans for the company.**

As I approach year five in business, I see great potential for Blush. A second location is under consideration or possibly a move to expand the merchandise offered. As business grows I hope to be able to hire additional staff to take on daily responsibilities so I can focus on marketing strategies.

**What is your biggest challenge now and how do you plan to handle it?**

Like most industries, the wedding business may decline over the next year or two; however, I'm offering brides the same quality merchandise at a fraction of the retail cost, so a struggling economy may not be as harmful. The main challenge is to continue to get the word out to new brides and sustain the image and reputation we have earned while changing the misconceptions about consignment. ☐

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