VOWS Bridal Outlet needed a solution to reduce the time staffers spent booking, confirming, and rescheduling appointments by phone. Store owner Rick DeAngelo found the answer in an Intuit QuickBase application that automates the process through an easy-to-use web interface. Hundreds of brides every month schedule their own appointments and receive automated confirmation emails via the QuickBase system. The application has saved DeAngelo’s staffers more than 240 hours in phone calls in 2013.

"With QuickBase, I feel like I am in control of my own destiny.”

Leslie and Rick DeAngelo, owners of VOWS Bridal Outlet
PROFIL
VOWS Bridal Outlet is a unique discount bridal store in the Boston area. By
purchasing liquidated and sample gowns from larger retailers and manufacturers,
VOWS is able to offer high-quality designer wedding gowns at a 50-80% discount
from traditional bridal stores. The success of VOWS led to a partnership with TLC,
which films the hit reality TV series “I Found the Gown” at the store.

URL
http://www.bridepower.com

The challenge
• Manage high demand for appointments with self-service scheduling application
• Customize schedule by day, time, and staff availability
• Promote self-service scheduling through public-facing website
• Create and track confirmations, reschedules, and other customer communications
• Re-focus sales staff on customer service

The solution
• Public-facing scheduling app built on the Intuit QuickBase platform
• Internal scheduler to define and track available appointments and staff
• Automated confirmation emails customized by date and time
• Prioritized waiting list
• Automated notifications for appointment cancellations and reschedules
• Built-in reporting for sales rep assessments

The benefits
• Improved operational efficiency via self-service appointment scheduling
• Reduced time to schedule appointments by 173 hours in 2013
• Reduced time spent confirming appointments by 76 hours in 2013
• Integration with back-end QuickBase system for tracking and reporting of sales goals
VOWS Bridal Outlet Manages Growth with Self-Service Scheduling Application

When every bride should be the center of attention, making hundreds of them happy every month is a real challenge. At VOWS Bridal Outlet in Watertown, MA, balancing high demand with a strong commitment to customer service required help from a self-scheduling application built on Intuit QuickBase.

The result is a more efficient organization in which the sales staff can focus more on making brides beautiful, and less on answering phones and shuffling schedules.

A unique business model

Rick DeAngelo and his wife Leslie founded VOWS in the early 1990’s after spotting a business opportunity in the booming bridal industry — offering sharp discounts on liquidated gowns from larger bridal stores and manufacturers. The DeAngelos find gowns in attics, backrooms, and warehouses in the U.S. and Europe, reselling them at VOWS for 50-80% off standard retail prices. The company also created its own line of gowns, called Liv Harris, to accommodate sizes not readily available through other manufacturers.

In the early days, VOWS relied on word of mouth to gain new customers, and prioritized customer service over everything.

“Our mission from day one was to make brides feel like they were not in a discount store. We made the shop really nice — as nice as all the traditional stores — and we treated the brides with a lot of respect,” says DeAngelo.

Scheduling poses a challenge

Business changed in 2012 when VOWS became the setting for the TLC reality show “I Found the Gown.” The popularity of the show drove demand at VOWS, which in turn created a need to rethink how the shop scheduled its customers.

Previously, VOWS scheduled hour-long appointments by phone. Brides would call to arrange an appointment with a staff member, and VOWS staff would call to confirm within 24 hours of the appointment. Cancellations and reschedules were also handled by phone.

Once demand hit a tipping point, this process became a challenge. Instead of helping brides find the right gown, the store’s 18 staffers were busy on the phone scheduling and

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rescheduling appointments. Something had to give. VOWS needed a way to schedule hundreds of appointments per month with more predictability and fewer time-consuming phone calls.

DeAngelo evaluated several out-of-the-box scheduling software solutions, but found them too restrictive to fit his unique business model. Instead, he opted to build his own solution using Intuit QuickBase, which he already used for tracking sales and inventory.

“We had another scheduling system at one point, but I felt like I didn’t have any control with it,” he says. “The other systems I looked at either didn’t do what I wanted, or I’d have to violate my license or be on the phone with them for hours to figure it out. With QuickBase, I feel like I am in control of my own destiny.”

Building the solution

After building a prototype application on his own, DeAngelo worked with Eric Segal of The Data Collaborative to hone the QuickBase application. The result is an easy-to-use web application that allows customers to schedule their own appointments via the VOWS website (www.bridepower.com). Brides enter their name, date of wedding, and contact information into a simple online form, then choose their preferred month of appointment from a simple drop-down list. Once the month is selected, a separate drop-down list allows brides to choose from available appointment times for that month.

Once a bride selects an available time, an in-house scheduler at VOWS receives a notification and can manually confirm the appointment in QuickBase. Once the appointment is confirmed, the QuickBase application automatically sends a series of confirmation emails. The content of the confirmation emails differs based on the date, day of the week, and time of appointment. For example, brides scheduled for the first appointment of the day are encouraged to show up on time, while brides scheduled for later appointments are encouraged to show up 15 minutes early. The system also generates a waiting list that is prioritized by date, so in the event of a cancellation the longest-waiting person with a matching preference can be confirmed quickly.

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Segal says the biggest challenge to building the solution for VOWS was factoring in the human element.

“What we were replacing was a phone call, in which on one end you have an emotionally wrought bride and her mother, and on the other end you have a bridal consultant who is a wonderful person but not a techie. So we tried to create a system that works for both of those people,” he says.

Centralized data for fast reporting

Because VOWS already used QuickBase to track and report on inventory and sales figures, it made sense to integrate customer data via the scheduling system. DeAngelo already
relied on reports from QuickBase to quickly measure ROI on individual gowns and styles (among other KPIs), so the ability to track customers from appointment to sale was an attractive benefit.

“I know I can glean all the data I want out of QuickBase, such as ‘What did they buy? Who was the sales person? Why didn’t they buy?’ I can get all that information, whereas in a traditional scheduling system it seemed like too much work to make that happen,” says DeAngelo. “QuickBase gives me a really quick and accurate look at what’s happening on the floor.”

Automation pays off

With the QuickBase solution in place, VOWS staff can focus its attention back on its customers. DeAngelo estimates the automated scheduling solution has saved 249 hours of phone time in 2013 — 173 hours for booking appointments and another 76 hours in confirmation calls.

Meanwhile, DeAngelo can focus attention on analyzing sales figures and driving even more productivity.

“QuickBase gave me a lot of control. It’s very easy to get information out and create reports,” he says. “I never feel like I’m going to hit a wall with QuickBase. There’s no excuse for me to not have the information if I really want it.”