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# Bridesmaid-Dress Rental Startup Vow To Be Chic Gets Hitched With \$5M Series A

By **Yuliya Chernova**

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Bridesmaid-dress rental startup Vow to Be Chic Inc. wants to free women from the burden of wasting money on dresses they loathe.

The startup has raised \$5 million in Series A funding, said the company's founder and Chief Executive Kelsey Doorey. Existing investors Pritzker Group Venture Capital and Wavemaker Partners contributed to the round, as did new backer Women's Venture Capital Fund. A New York investor that didn't want to be named led the round, Ms. Doorey said. Vow To Be Chic raised \$3 million in seed funding before this deal.

The Santa Monica, Calif.-based [Vow To Be Chic](#) is one of several attempting to make a dent with new business models in the wedding industry.

Vow To Be Chic rents out designer dresses for between \$50 and \$95 to bridesmaids, as well as little white dresses for brides. The company launched operations in January 2015 and has served about 10,000 customers, Ms. Doorey said.

"You go through a wedding decade of your life," said Ms. Doorey, 31, who added that she has been a bridesmaid seven times. According to Vow To Be Chic's research, about 86% of bridesmaid dresses are worn only once. Part of the reason is that "it's the one time where someone else tells me what to buy," Ms. Doorey said, referring to the usual set up where the bride selects the style of the bridesmaids' outfits, whether they like it or not.

Ms. Doorey said that the wedding industry, which requires expensive purchases, doesn't fit with the lifestyle young people are used to. "We tend to live in cities. We don't want to keep a ton of extra dresses," she said, evoking the movie *27 Dresses*, about a woman who had a closet-full of bridesmaid dresses she loathes.

Several startups that had launched to challenge the massive wedding industry remain small. Vow To Be Chic had about 45,000 visitors to its website in May, according to data from SimilarWeb.com, which tracks web traffic. Ms. Doorey confirmed the statistic. [Union Station](#), another venture-backed bridesmaid-dress rental startup, previously called Little Borrowed Dress, which had launched before Ms. Doorey's effort, had even fewer May visitors, with about 35,000.



## DATA PROFILES

Vow to be Chic

Provided by Dow Jones [VentureSource](#)

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The most popular website in the wedding category is The Knot, with some 11.7 million visitors, according to SimilarWeb. The Knot is operated by publicly traded XO Group Inc., whose share price has been increasing in the past few years. David's Bridal remains one of the leading sellers of affordable wedding gowns and bridesmaid dresses.

Vow To Be Chic buys its dresses wholesale from designers, including Monique Lhuillier, Nicole Miller, Theia and Jenny You.

"We've got to rent them out a few times to make money," Ms. Doorey said. "It took a while to get the designers on board. Luckily, Rent The Runway paved the way."

Rent The Runway Inc., where Ms. Doorey worked briefly, is one of the first startups to come up with a clothing-rental business for women. The New York company [has raised about \\$115 million in funding](#) to date.

"A woman's closet is one of the most inefficient spaces," said Dan O'Keefe, general partner at Technology Crossover Ventures, which backed Rent The Runway in 2014. He said he's happy with the progress Rent The Runway is making.

Vow To Be Chic has about 20 employees. Some of them are occupying a warehouse filled with thousands of dresses in Hawthorne, Calif., ready for the current wedding season, Ms. Doorey said.

**Write to** Yuliya Chernova at [yuliya.chernova@wsj.com](mailto:yuliya.chernova@wsj.com)