

Holiday Shopping Guide

Seasonal Cheer For Consumers

(NAPSA)—What's bad news for the economy could be good news for holiday shoppers—more last-minute shopping deals, easier access to credit and improved service.

According to its third annual Retail Finance Outlook study conducted by CIT, retail executives are pessimistic about the pace of the U.S. economic recovery but remain optimistic about their own outlook for the coming year.

The make-or-break periods for retailers are the major shopping days between Thanksgiving weekend and New Year's Day. Nearly three-quarters see holiday sales improving slightly or staying about the same as last year. That's good news for consumers in several ways:

More Last-Minute Deals

If you are looking for deals, consider waiting till the last minute to do your shopping. Sensing that cost-conscious consumers will be looking for bargains, 37 percent of retailers predict that last-minute shopping will increase. Similarly, 38 percent of retailers expect post-Christmas shopping days to be stronger.

Deals Are Available Through New Media

Whether you plan on paying in cash or with credit, it might be a good time to embrace social media. The roles of social media, mobile applications and the expanding Internet mean traditional sources of sales are taking a backseat.

Fully 58 percent of executives report that their companies are shifting marketing dollars away from established sources and toward new ones, including social media campaigns. As part of that shift, 68 percent of respondents



Retailers expect last-minute holiday shopping to increase.

report increases in marketing and deals through providers including Facebook, Twitter and others.

Look for the shift to new media to continue. Some 58 percent of executives believe they need to improve their new-media marketing strategies, while a further 7 percent of retail respondents characterize their companies as "late starters" in the new-media game.

Exceptional Customer Service

A commanding majority (86 percent) of retailers believe good old-fashioned customer service will be the key method of ensuring customer loyalty.

Loyalty, in turn, is seen as a primary factor in boosting profitability in the coming year. When executives were asked how they could improve profits in the next 12 months, the most-cited factor was their customer loyalty program, selected by 47 percent of respondents.

Free Report

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