

The holiday shopping countdown

FAMILY FEATURES

“BLACK FRIDAY” has long been regarded as the kick off of the holiday shopping season. However, now that retailers are unveiling their Christmas products earlier every year, and catering to the needs of late shoppers, the stores are filled with people in pursuit of the perfect gift anywhere between Labor Day and Dec. 25.

In fact, according to the National Retail Federation, the number of “extreme” early birds and procrastinators has been on the rise in recent years. Last year, 40 percent of all consumers began their holiday shopping before Halloween, and 15 percent of consumers reported that they had not begun any of their shopping by Dec. 5. As a result, retailers are updating their products, merchandising and marketing plans to meet the needs of these two very different sets of shoppers.

One clear example of how this has affected the retail world can be seen in the greeting card industry. Christmas remains the top card-sending occasion, with nearly two billion cards sent annually, and greeting card manufacturers have taken note of this evolving consumer demand.

“We have definitely noticed the trend of consumers pushing up the unofficial start of the holiday shopping season,” said Heather Bentley, Christmas program manager at American Greetings. “In response to this, shoppers will start to see the cards in stores by Nov. 1, and the complete holiday card line is available before Thanksgiving.”

The early bird gets the special ...

For those shoppers getting out early, remember: time is your friend. Holiday trend experts offer the following tips for taking advantage of the extra time you have given yourself to get everything done.

- **Use that extra time to actually shop:** Reward yourself by taking more time to peruse the aisles to find the perfect gift, card, wrap and accessories for everyone on your list.
- **Enjoy the lack of traffic:** Congratulations, you have ensured yourself the avoidance of long lines and crowded malls. Take advantage of your situation to actually enjoy your shopping experience in a leisurely fashion. Since you’ve given yourself the luxury of allowing for additional shipping time, you can even utilize the convenience of online shopping.
- **Spread out your holiday tasks and hunt for bargains:** Starting your holiday preparations early means that you’ll have more time to commit to all of your various seasonal tasks. This includes sending holiday cards, grocery shopping, baking and cleaning. It also means that you can bargain shop for the essentials.

Make a list of everything you need to get done and then spread out your holiday chores as you go. Take advantage of early sales and specials as you go.

- **Solicit help:** Make sure to get some help from your family and friends. Enlisting help for this busy time of year is essential. And since you are likely to

Early start or last minute – retailers are ready for all shoppers



Every Christmas wish list seems to have tech gadgets on it, and even the card aisles are reflecting the trend. American Greetings will debut tech-inspired cards this holiday season as the perfect pairing for all of the hottest gizmos. The cards will feature special extras like blinking lights, sounds of the season and popular holiday songs.

be helping others as well, you will have an even bigger pool of helpers to choose from.

- **Dress up your gifts:** In addition to having more time to get everything done, the early bird also has more time to dress up their gifts. You took extra time to choose that thoughtful gift, so take care to make it look like it from the outside in.

Procrastinators can still get it all done

Procrastinators usually are in the scrambling mode not because of short sightedness, but rather because they haven’t had the time to get their shopping done. This year that isn’t a bad thing, as retailers are becoming even more last-minute shopper friendly. Holiday trend experts have tips to make that mad dash to the holiday shopping finish line stress-free.

- **Make the best use of the time you have:** Use modern conveniences and opportunities to get last-minute gifts and cards out. Many busy professionals send cards to colleagues via inter-office mail, or hand deliver gifts during pre- and post-season get-togethers or office parties. In short, if you can put off buying the gift right this second, do so.
- **Escape the traffic:** Try to take advantage of the usual extended hours and plan your shopping for earlier or later in the day. You will be able to eliminate a lot of the casual shoppers and those just “hanging out” by doing so, which will make your trip much more efficient.
- **Take advantage of sales ... seriously:** Just because you weren’t able to get a jump on your shopping doesn’t mean you will have to pay top dollar. Retailers, recognizing the trend of

procrastination, are introducing late-season sales to lure some of this growing market. So be sure to check online and in your newspaper to see what specials are being offered before heading out.

- **Beg for help:** Trying to get everything done at the last minute is difficult; trying to find the perfect gift for everyone with no time to spare, well, that is just impossible. Ask friends and family members for tips to ensure that you choose the right color, size or style.
- **Be craftier and flexible in your gift presentation:** Trendy gift bags can add style to any present. Fun gift card holders instantly increase the personalization of a convenient gift card to a favorite store or restaurant. If all else fails, you can always head to the gift-wrapping station at your mall. Just make sure no one sees you.

All materials courtesy of American Greetings



True early birds can use their spare time to wrap packages with warmth, texture and color. For instance, new or gently used scarves can act like “ribbon” while mittens and gloves continue the cozy theme as “bows.”



Few items are more cherished for a late-season shopper than a trendy gift bag, and this year’s options have stylish finishings and details. Enhancements such as fabric attachments and 3-D features make them much more than just glorified shopping bags.



*From all of us
to all of you.*

*Wishing you the
happiest of holidays
and a
prosperous
New Year!*



Samuel Little Graphic Design
Marketing and Advertising
804.545.7503 • www.slgd.com
1659 East Oak Lake Blvd.
Midlothian, VA 23112