



Will the Holidays Be Jolly for Retailers?

The short answer is they could be. As always, it depends on the confluence of events. Many retail analysts still don't understand the disparity in the reported increase (or decrease) of 2018 holiday retail sales from the US Census Bureau and many reputable organizations, such as the National Retail Federation and Adobe Analytics.

Although few if any forecasts for retail sales during the 2019 holiday season have been released, Shopkick did publish some advanced data during July. Its consumer survey revealed most would maintain or increase their spending compared to 2018 and the vast majority, 77.5%, said they would shop in-store.

The Census Bureau and publications, such as *Internet Retailer*, seemed to agree about the growth of e-commerce sales during the 2018 holiday period. The Census Bureau official category designation is "electronic shopping and mail order houses" (NAICS #4541), and its sales increased 7.4% during Q4 2018.

Internet Retailer and Adobe's post-holiday reports were even more robust, with *Internet Retailer* reporting a 17.4% increase for the November–December 2018 period and Adobe, +16.5%, for the Nov.1–Dec. 31 period. (These sources' estimates were considerably more than the Census Bureau, probably because of any differences in what kind of businesses are included in both categories.)

E-commerce retailers seem to expect a repeat of last year's significant increase. A June 2019 survey from *Internet Retailer*/Bizrate Insights found 33% of respondents anticipated an 11% to 24% increase in 2019 holiday sales, and another 27%, a 25% to 49% increase.

Of course, the "event" that could move the needle either way is the economy. It is slowing, but consumers continue to spend, but will they during the holidays? The job market is relatively good. The US-Chinese trade war is the big wild card. The tariffs delayed until December should help the holiday retail season, but, as with all wild cards, who knows.

As always, local retailers must steer a course across this landscape – and you can be their trusted guide to a successful holiday season. Share the insights and strategies in the many Media Group Online reports focused on the holidays, especially the two Early Holiday Shopping 2019 Profilers.



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Media Group Online, Inc.
103 Sterling Mine Road
Sloatsburg, NY 10974
Phone: 866-921-1026
www.mediagrouponlineinc.com



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