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retailroundup

By Paul Wahl, Editor

Will Cash Registers Be Jingling?

What will the holiday shopping period hold for equine retailers? If recent experiences are a harbinger, things might not be so rosy. Summer sales and back-to-school shopping trends were weak. Most willing to make a guess expect holiday sales growth to be at least 5 percent below last year.

Uncertainties include the high price of gasoline and if it will limit driving to shopping areas.

Retail Forward, an Ohio-based consulting firm, comes in on the optimistic side of predictions, saying this holiday shopping season could be the best since 1999. Davidowitz & Associates, a national retail consulting firm based in New York, expects much less growth.

The National Retail Federation is also optimistic, predicting a 4.5-percent sales growth figure, with home-related merchandise and consumer electronics leading the way. The International Council of Shopping Centers suggests the holidays will be merry for high-end retailers such as Nordstroms and Neiman-Marcus because of growth in personal income among upper-middle class households.

A recent survey on the *Tack 'n Togs* Web site found the bulk of respondents to be optimistic to overly optimistic about holiday sales. More than half said they believed this shopping period would be the best in many or years or at least as good as last year. Fourteen percent said they were "pessimistic," 10 percent "very pessimistic" and 17 percent thought it could go either way.

One thing in retailers' favor this year ... 29 shopping days between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the most since 2001.



Western Canada Booming

National retailers surveyed in September by the Retail Council of Canada point to British Columbia and Alberta as their strongest markets. The comeback showing in British Columbia is in part due to a comparison to a pretty soft 2003. Results east of Alberta are mixed, but members report growth in all regions.

Many respondents are also showing increasing confidence in their outlooks for the rest of the year.

The 9,000-member Retail Council of Canada conducted in-depth surveys and interviews with small-, mid- and large-sized retailers collectively operating more than 10,000 stores as part of its quarterly Retail Conditions Report.