

# Pay Day Disparities

**LABOR COSTS GOT YOU WORRIED?** If you live in certain parts of the country, you're probably more worried about this than other retailers. The highest wages in the United States are paid to workers in New York County, which includes Manhattan, according to a report from the U.S. Census Bureau. Others in the top five include Santa Clara County in California's Silicon Valley; Fairfield, Conn.; San Francisco, and Fairfax, Va. The region with the highest payroll annually? Los Angeles, primarily due to its 3.8 million workers—1.8 million more than Manhattan. **PARTING SHOT:** Labor costs always seem high to business owners and meager to workers.

# School Bells Ring Early

**IF YOU'RE A RETAILER** whose business attracts back-to-school shoppers or if you have a student heading back to the classroom this fall, you already know that back-to-school promotions started earlier this year than ever in history. Fall coats and sweater sets began appearing in many apparel stores in mid-June. School-themed merchandise in general began appearing almost at the same time most students were packing for summer camp. The early start for back-to-school shopping could have mixed impacts on retailing, according to analysts. If retailers wait too long to bring out back-to-school merchandise, they may face the wrath of consumers who say their needs are being ignored. If they break too soon, stores run the risk of not having anything fresh and new when the bulk of consumers are ready to shop. Concerns about high gasoline prices and the impact they may have on consumer shopping trends also fueled the early surge in back-to-school interest. **PARTING SHOT:** Timing is everything in retail.



# Security Issues Cloud Online Sales

**IDENTITY THEFT IS STEALING BUSINESS** from Online retailers, according to a report issued by The Conference Board. More than 13 percent of all Internet users say they or a member of their household has already been a victim of identity theft, according to board research. The board creates and disseminates knowledge about management and the marketplace to help businesses grow and thrive. The survey also found that nearly 70 percent of consumers have installed additional security on their computers, and 41 percent said they're purchasing less Online. The majority of those asked said they were more concerned today about Online security than they were a year ago. Despite the concerns, Online sales are expected to hit a record \$172 billion this year. A survey conducted by Forrester Research Inc. and Shop.org pegged Online sales at \$141.4 billion in 2004. Profitability also improved, with average operating margins at 28 percent, up from 21 percent in 2003. More women are shopping Online than ever. Meanwhile, computer giant IBM is touting technology that will allow consumers to get information about products from kiosks and handheld devices while they shop. **PARTING SHOT:** This is good news if you're a brick-and-mortar retailer trying to fend off Online competition, but bad news—maybe—if you're an Online-only retailer. ☑

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