

November 5, 2015

Brace Yourself for Holiday Shopping (Already)

RETAIL
BY SEAN SMITH

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I haven't even finished our leftover Halloween candy, yet I'm already seeing retail point-of-purchase displays for this year's holiday shopping season. Amazing as it may seem, we're really just three weeks away from Black Friday and the resulting maelstrom of holiday shopping ads and promotions.

The web is already bursting with "leaked" Black Friday ads, giving us a preview of the best deals to be found on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Running shoes. Cell phones. Cameras. Christmas Sweaters. Once well-kept secrets until Friday morning, the best deals are now pseudo-leaked in advance to give shoppers the added advantage and ability to plan their midnight shopping runs.

Black Friday exists online, too...you don't even need to get out of your pajamas to find access to be best deals on electronics, jewelry or any other "gotta have" holiday gift. (And, we already know to hold out for free shipping, or free in-store pick-up.) This year, more than half of all holiday shopping will be conducted online, which should -- in theory -- reduce the lines at your local brick-and-mortar store.

Retailers enjoyed a huge holiday season in 2014, as the average consumer spent more than \$800 on holiday spending, representing the highest total in 12 years ([according to the National Retail Federation](#)). The industry hopes the escalating spending trend will continue.

So what's in store for 2015? It depends on who you ask.

After scouring several industry publications, I've decided we just don't know yet. I've seen forecasts for a sunny holiday shopping season, resulting in a sales increase of 4%-5% over last year. Similarly, other forecasts predict a slower than normal rate of as low as 3%. The consumers will determine the outcome, and we won't know until the after-Christmas sales have ended.

In truth, the results may be determined by just how dramatically retailers cut costs as the season progresses. Many big-box retailers are reportedly committed to avoiding the domino-theory-like price slashing that reduces overall spending (while saving consumers money). If the season begins with a slow start, however, that resilience may fade. It's likely as least some retailers will return to the fire-sale pricing to salvage the season.

Let the shopping begin!

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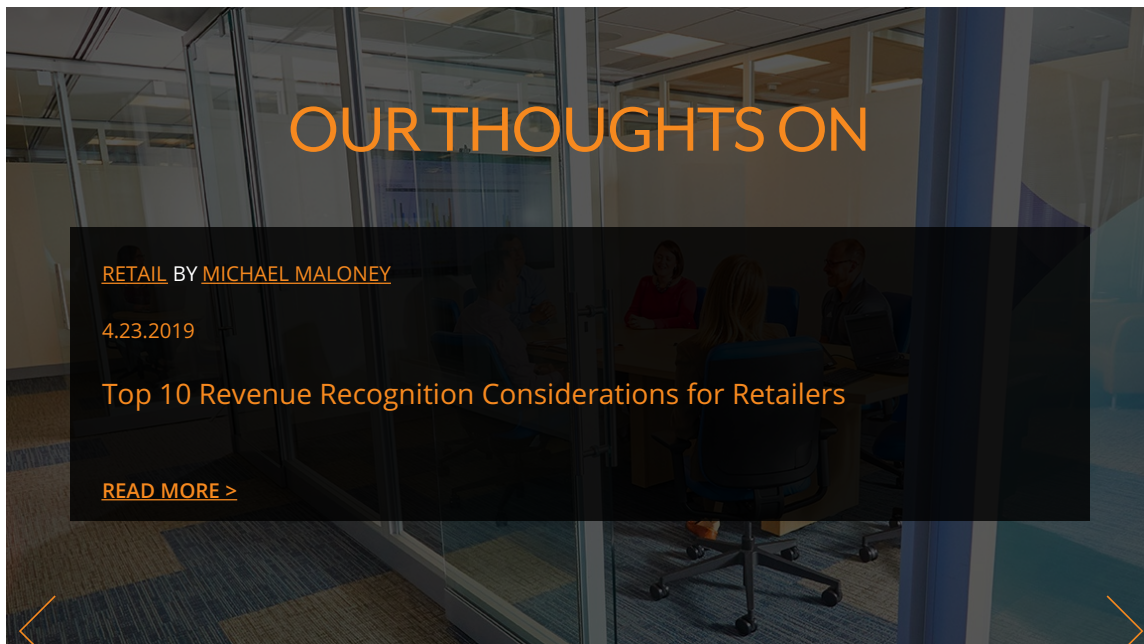


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PITTSBURGH

One PPG Place, Suite 1700
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

contactsd@schneiderdowns.com
p:412.261.3644 f:412.261.4876



COLUMBUS

65 East State Street, Suite 2000
Columbus, OH 43215

contactsd@schneiderdowns.com
p:614.621.4060 f:614.621.4062



WASHINGTON, D.C.

1660 International Drive, Suite 600
McLean, VA 22102

contactsd@schneiderdowns.com
p:571.380.9003



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