



Womenswear Articles 11/18/2004

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HOLIDAY SPARK

apparel tops shopping lists

With Thanksgiving right around the corner, an overwhelming majority of consumers will be making their holiday lists and checking them twice. And sure to top those lists are a variety of apparel items for those near and dear.

That's because apparel is a highly desirable item for most women, both for themselves and those on their shopping lists. When asked by the Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™, what percentage of holiday gifts they would purchase across all categories, apparel was the popular choice at 33%. This category is so favored, it edges out another important holiday category: toys, which garnered 25%.

"Apparel is a key category for women, whether they are shopping for themselves or for gifts for others," offers Johanna Cap, a partner in ShopGotham, a company that hosts guided tours through New York City's fashion hot spots. "Women want fashion. Even if a woman doesn't necessarily follow trends, it's always nice for her to have something new and fresh."

And add comfortable to that list, relates Irma Zandl, president of The Zandl Group, a trend research firm based in New York. "Soft to the touch, nurturing fabrics and colors will be especially appealing, like luxurious poncho tops or comfy well fitted T-shirts." "A little luxury goes a long way toward fulfilling consumers' fantasies," agrees Kenneth Hirst, president and creative director of Hirst Pacific Ltd., a strategic design firm. But be aware that a touch of luxe is highly individualistic, he cautions. "Luxury is not a brand, a label or a price tag; rather, it is a distinctive quality. It is the pleasure one receives from such quality that allows for higher prices. Luxury is liberation, empowerment and an emotional high."

"Finding that perfect gift, regardless of its brand status, is a truly emotionally fulfilling experience," adds Kimberly Canzani, director of marketing for Manhattan Mall, a retail emporium located in New York's fabled Herald Square. "At such a busy time as the holidays, crossing yet another thing off your to-do list is the real luxury."

And it looks as if Canzani can look forward to seeing lots and lots of shoppers this season seeking to complete those lists and part with their dollars. According to the Monitor, a considerable 43% of female respondents related that they anticipate spending



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- Johanna Cap,
ShopGotham

WHEN DO YOU START BUYING CHRISTMAS GIFTS?

(FEMALES 16-70)

I buy all year	6%
January to August	16%
September	10%
October	22%
November	17%
December	18%
During the after Thanksgiving sales	4%
After Christmas sales for next year	0%
Don't buy Christmas gifts	4%

as much /the same on Christmas as they did last year. Furthermore, 30% anticipate spending even more than they did last year, which bodes well for the retail environment at large this holiday season.

"Despite a less than stellar economy, consumers indicated that they intended to spend more this year than they did last year," notes Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys, a retail consultancy. "An ongoing trend Brand Keys has observed is that, while consumers are willing to spend a bit more, they want to be perceived as 'wise shoppers.' They'll spend money, but they want it spent well, and will spend time searching for the best deals."

With regard to timing, it does seem that the majority of shoppers wait until the fourth quarter to start their holiday shopping. When asked by the Monitor when they start buying Christmas gifts, more than one in two female respondents indicated October through December. Twenty-two percent began in October, 17% in November and 18% in December. An additional 4% indicated that the after-Thanksgiving sales sparked their holiday hunting.

"The two weeks after Thanksgiving are the busiest time for us," states Cap of ShopGotham. "There are so many people who come to New York for the whole holiday experience, which of course, includes shopping. The holidays just give consumers another great reason to shop while the city is all dressed up."

And taking the guesswork out of the process always helps, shares Rochelle Mangold, a spokesperson for Sears. "Giftable items, like luxurious soft sweaters, are always invitingly folded on a table, which makes it easy for shoppers to envision the garment in a box under the tree. If it looks nice and is served up at a great price, it's a no-brainer."

As always, there is the temptation to buy for one's self while shopping for others. Cap relates, "We see so many women who are taking the philosophy of 'one for them, two for me' while shopping. It's like a little reward for yourself."

Sears' Mangold agrees, "There's a natural tendency to pick up a gift for yourself, especially if it seems like a great deal."

According to the Monitor, 15% of female respondents stated that they regularly buy something for themselves while shopping for a holiday or birthday gift, while 37% claim they sometimes do. Stumped for a gift? There are always alternatives that let the woman on your list choose for herself.

"Fashion is a great way for women to express themselves," asserts Zandl. "However, as female consumers further develop their individuality, I believe we'll see gift cards for apparel retailers taking a bigger piece of the pre-holiday dollar. Gift certificates and cards will also become more popular as consumers are more time stressed and object to the return process."

So whether they're receiving it in a box or an envelope this season, apparel will continue to top the list of what women want for the holidays.