

Retailers worry about Internet, e-commerce



The e-commerce shopping season officially starts Friday, right along with the regular retail season. But already, signs are strong that this year, shopping on line may actually start to put a dent in some traditional store shopping.

"You owe a loyalty to your local retailer," read an angry e-mail I received this past week from a merchant whose store in an Oakland County suburb "downtown" is fairly well known.

"Every time you promote shopping online, you're shooting us in the back and causing prices to rise."

I'm not promoting anything. But I'd sure be remiss if I didn't point out what's happening out there in cyberspace.

For the past two weeks, so many people have logged onto the huge Toys R Us Web site (www.toysrus.com) that, if you do get through, you're greeted with this message:

"...we have been getting millions of visitors to our Web site over the last few days. Right now, we are processing thousands of new orders every hour! Because of the high demand, we are at full guest capacity and are therefore currently unable to process your request to enter our site right now."

And the real reason has yet to start.

Last week, according to a survey commissioned by the investment banking firm Goldman Sachs, Internet shoppers spent \$222 million. Just last week. That's up \$21 million over the week before. And, according to the survey, the vast majority of those who bought online said their spending had nothing to do with holiday shopping. That, they said, was yet to come.

Last year, some \$3.1 billion was spent online during the holiday season. This year, estimates range from \$10 billion to \$12 billion.

Cameron Meierhofer is an online analyst for PC Data Online. He told Cnet News (www.cnet.com) that the data doesn't suggest that brick and mortar retail stores will be com-

pletely neglected. Indeed, while 90 percent of those online shoppers polled said they immensely enjoy Internet shopping, 60 percent of them still intend to buy their gifts from real stores.

But the trend is clear. Retailers will feel the competition from e-commerce. "Each week (Internet shoppers) spend a little more time online," Meierhofer says.

Meierhofer isn't alone. "Books, CDs, and computer sales are still the drivers, but apparel is the fastest growing segment," says Brett Azuma, vice president for electronic business at DataQuest, a unit of Gartner Group (www.infoedge.com/gartner.htm).

Shop till you drop

Azuma says the growth rate simply shows no sign of tapering off. "This is not a niche market, this is not an emerging market, this has become a mainstream market," he contends.

Jupiter Communications (www.jup.com) is another online marketing firm that is trying to chart this trend. Jupiter predicts that there will be 10 million new online buyers this holiday season. Those shoppers will be spending more — from \$412 per person last year to \$919 in 2003.

Allen Weiner, a vice president for Nielsen/Net Ratings, says his company has started a special Internet holiday e-commerce index. "We anticipated that e-shopping would start earlier this year, but not this early."

Convenience is cited over and over as the main reason folks buy online. People like clicking a mouse instead of hoofing it through a mall.

And the so-called "dot-com" folks are also undoubtedly helped along by a blit of advertising. I watched the Lions game the other day on TV and was amazed to note that during one commercial break, literally every advertiser was advertising their shopping site. This coming Tuesday, I'll be in New York doing a coast-to-coast satellite TV tour, reporting for more than a dozen stations from California to New York about the coming online shopping season.

Everyone, it seems is ecstatic over e-commerce.

Except most retailers. And the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Governors' Association.

Last week leaders from both

groups called for taxes to be collected on all those billions being spent online. All the paranoia and hand wringing is going to increase as the Net becomes still more pervasive. The smart retailers, of course, will realize that there is still a need to physically inspect the things we buy, to try them on, kick the tires, smell the perfume, look at the jewelry sparkle. And they'll figure out how the Internet can be used to turn Net surfers into face-to-face buyers.

So the smart ones will open up their own Web sites to showcase their wares and attract the eyeballs of Net surfers. A good example: The Toy Soldier and Doll Hospital in Berkeley (www.toy-soldier.com).

Jack Zagrodski, vice president of marketing, has put together a very creative and compelling Web site that showcases the store's emphasis on non-violent, old fashioned toys, classic playthings and learning aids.

"We decided to move forward with technology," Zagrodski wrote me in an e-mail. "The Internet is not going away."

Instead of finding the Internet a threat, Zagrodski has found it to be a great opportunity. While his store's Web site builds loyalty and strong relations with local customers, it opens up the store to a worldwide audience, who never would have heard of the place were it not online. And online, it's of course open 7-by-24.

This shopping season will be pivotal, I predict, in the Internet's evolution. Online shopping will truly mainstream this year.

And, I also predict, the threat of retailers to this trend ... as a threat or an opportunity ... will seal their fates within a few years.

What do you think? How has the Internet impacted your shopping habits? E-mail your response to me. And also send along Web sites from local retailers you think have done a good job using the Internet to draw people to their bricks and mortar stores.

Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Internet for NBC-television stations coast-to-coast. His radio show is heard every weekend on TalkRadio 1270, WXYT. You can reach Mike through his Web site at www.pcmike.com

"It was peaceful and it felt so good."

Miller said she would recommend it to others both for the healing and calming effect the therapy provided. The Wayne senior, who was about to be transferred to Arbor Hospice in Washtenaw County, was hoping the therapy would be provided at the Ann Arbor hospice as part of her care.

"I would really like that. I loved it," said Miller.

Barb Welser, RN, BSN and certified Healing Touch practitioner, can be reached for Healing Touch sessions at her in-studio home by calling (248) 348-7271. On special request she will provide treatments at the hospital or at your home. A reduced rate is offered to seniors.

Wayne resident and patient at Oakwood Hospital, received a Healing Touch treatment while on the third floor unit where she was being treated for cancer.

"It was beautiful," said Miller.

muscles.

Initially a complete history of the patient is taken including cranial measurements, past medical conditions, active diseases, prescription medication, prior injuries and symptoms.

Then West and Krajovic work with their client toward addressing the physical and emotional issues they hope to resolve, and focus on helping the body learn to heal itself through their guidance.

"People want to gain control of their lives and are tired of feeling bad and living with pain. We offer natural healing options for them to shed all the emotional and physical baggage many of us carry around," said Krajovic.

"We encourage people to come in and see what's here. Some people just stop in and spend a few minutes here because they say they feel better after they leave."

Jama Cuellar, a clairvoyant consultant, is also on staff at BodyWorks Healing Center. She began psychometry and clairvoyant readings in 1994. She teaches Tarot, ESP and conscious awareness classes.

BodyWorks retail hours are 1-6 p.m. Monday through Thursday; Friday and Saturday, 12-5 p.m. Readings are available on a walk-in basis during retail hours as well as by appointment. Massages are by appointment only.

BodyWorks Healing Center is located at 819 N. Mill Street, Old Village, Plymouth.

For information or to schedule an appointment call, (734) 416-5300. Classes at the Healing Center include Tarot; Reiki I, II and Reiki III Master certification; Astrology - Level 1 and 2; talks on rocks, crystals, gems and other minerals; and intuitive Feng Shui.

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Clarkston
Tuesday, November 23
9:30 a.m.
at Big Boy
6440 Dixie Hwy.

Lake Orion
Wednesday, December 1
10 a.m.
at Lake Orion Library
825 Joslyn Rd.

Madison Heights
Friday, December 3
9:30 a.m.
at Big Boy
31270 John R Rd.

Rochester Hills
Wednesday, December 1
2 p.m.
at Bill Knapp's
3010 W. Walton

Royal Oak
Monday, November 22
Friday, December 3
2 p.m.
At Royal Oak Library
222 East 11 Mile Rd.



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