

Weekly Update: Snow Slows The Start Of Christmas Shopping, Says Synovate

Contributed by Synovate
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The first week of December (w/c 28th November) saw 14.5% fewer shoppers in non-food stores than the same week last year, according to the Synovate Retail Traffic Index (RTI), linked to heavy snow and freezing weather conditions that struck the UK.

At the height of last week's bad weather, shopper numbers were down by 22.3% year-on-year, between Monday 29th November and Thursday 2nd December. The RTI was also down against the previous week (w/c 21st November) by 1.5%.

Dr Tim Denison, Director of Retail Intelligence at Synovate Retail Performance comments

"Sackfuls of snow will have delighted many children, but they were not what retailers would have wished for at this early stage of their seasonal campaigns. We had anticipated 2010 being a 'slow burn' Christmas, but we certainly didn't envisage double digit drops in shopper numbers against last year, in the first week of December. Most alarming of all, is that footfall last week was actually lower than the previous week's. If we compare the week's 1.5% drop in traffic against the previous week (w/c 21st November) against the corresponding 10 year average of +7.9%, we can begin to understand how damaging the wintry weather has been for retailers over the course of this last week. It will be impossible for them to recover all the lost ground, though it underlines the benefit of having a multi-channel operation nowadays. That said, the distribution and logistics services deployed for internet retailing will be tested by the extra demand created out of the cold snap as well as the conditions themselves. Online order fulfilment will be challenged by the inevitable delivery delays."

Around the country, the regions most affected by the bad weather were those that saw the weakest footfall levels.

In Northern England, store traffic for w/c 28th November was 20.4% lower than last year and 8.7% down on the previous week. In Scotland the numbers were almost as bad: -19.3% year-on-year and -2.5% week-on-week.

"It's very easy to just pick up on the negatives about our latest release of footfall figures," concludes Denison, "but we should also point out the upside. All too often in the first week of December I hear shoppers saying that they don't feel festive and they aren't prepared to start thinking about Christmas just yet. This year is different.

The snow will alert people to the fact that Christmas Day is under three weeks away and will help kick start people's Christmas planning and gift buying.

In parts of the country where shoppers are less affected by the wintry conditions, we should therefore see numbers strengthen considerably this week. Elsewhere the outlook for this week remains bleaker."

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