We wish you a 'cautious' Christmas

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Latest research from MINTEL finds a definite air of caution amongst this year's Christmas shoppers, as they tentatively get ready for the festive season. While last year well over half (54%) of British adults said that they "usually spend more than they plan to" at Christmas, this has fallen to just 44% this year and more people than ever are also planning to stick to their budget. What is more, one in ten (10%) adults say that they will be spending 'a lot less than last year', which is twice as many as the 5% who said this in 2003.

Back in 2003, 15% of adults said that they 'tend to go into debt over Christmas', by increasing their overdraft, spending on their credit card or even taking out a loan. In just one year, this has fallen to as few as one in ten (10%).

"Generally research points to an increasingly cautious consumer this Christmas. Increased interest rates and the uncertainty of the housing market have undoubtedly taken their toll on people's spending confidence. Many people are now starting to feel the pinch and are less inclined to borrow money. This means that although this is unlikely to be a bad Christmas, many people may well be reigning in their spending. What is more, we have no doubt that there will be some discounting in the run-up to Christmas in order to get stocks back into balance," explains Richard Perks.

Spirit of Christmas still strong with the Scots
Research shows that the Scots are truly crackers about Christmas, with as many as four in ten (39%) highlighted by MINTEL as the real "enjoyers" of Christmas. These Christmas lovers are the most likely to enjoy buying Christmas gifts and are happy to hit the shops early to spread the cost.

In Scotland there will be plenty to celebrate, as a staggering one in four (24%) plan to shell out in excess of Â£500 on presents, compared to just one in ten (10%) in Wales, the West and the South West.

The Scottish are also the least likely to say that they are going to be making cutbacks, saying that they will be spending "a lot less this year than they did last" (5%). While stockings are set to shrink the most in London, as some 13% of adults say they plan to "spend a lot less this year than last".

When looking for scrooges, simply head to London and the South, as just 27% of adults here can be called Christmas "enjoyers", the lowest in the country.

Bah, Humbug - more scrooges than you think
Across the UK fewer than half (47%) really enjoy buying Christmas presents and around the same number say that they actually find buying presents a chore. It would seem that Christmas is loosing its sparkle for many.

A large number of people simply no longer enjoy the festive period, as one in four (25%) are "apathetic" towards Christmas and they don't really put a lot of thought into their shopping.

On top of this, a further one in five (22%) adults are real scrooges and "budget buyers", as they are the most likely to feel that buying gifts for friends and family is a chore, so often leave it to the last minute.

www.onlinechristmas.com
For the first time, the Internet has overtaken catalogues in terms of Christmas spending. Today some three in ten (30%) people say that they will do some or all of their Christmas shopping on-line, this is compared to less than a quarter (23%) in 2003. One in ten (10%) actually prefer doing their Christmas shopping on-line, while one in three (32%) say that they like to browse the Internet for ideas or to compare prices. Shopping on the Internet is now second nature to many 25 - 34 year olds as half will be playing Santa on-line this Christmas.

"If someone wanted to argue the case for "the death of the high street", this would be a good place to start. The sharp decline in planned usage of traditional shopping locations in favour mainly of the Internet is extremely worrying for retailers. Internet shopping still has many drawbacks, but at Christmas the attraction of convenience over-ride many of the shortcomings and it will be very interesting to see whether these intentions turn out to be what actually happens," comments Richard Perks.

Mrs Christmas just as generous as Father Christmas
In previous years men have been the clear big spenders at Christmas time, spending on average around Â£25 more than women on Christmas gifts. This year, women and men are expected to spend the same. Men will be showering their friends and family with an average of Â£332 worth of presents, while women will in fact be spending a couple of pounds

more (Â£334).

Women are much better organised than men when it comes to the Christmas rush. Almost half of men say that they leave Christmas shopping until the last minute, compared to just over one in four (27%) women. They are also much more likely than men to spread the costs, as well over half (56%) of women start Christmas shopping early to do just this, compared to fewer than two in five (37%) men. Despite this, women (49%) are considerably more likely than men (37%) to spend more than they plan to.

"The majority of Christmas shopping for extended family and friends is usually left to women and so they have to be organised to get it all done in time, this may also explain why they are more likely than men to overspend" comments Richard Perks.

Have a peep at what's under the tree
This year, the majority of shoppers (80%) will pile the staples of clothing, shoes and jewellery under their trees, along with plenty of pre-recorded CDs and DVDs.

By contrast, books and traditional toys and games - i.e. non-computer games are loosing their appeal. While back in 2001, almost seven in ten (67%) adults had already or were going to buy toys and games for Christmas, this has fallen to 59% this year.Â
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