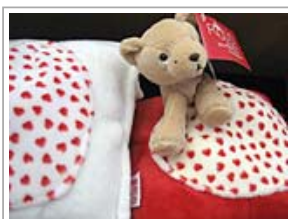


Hasty V-Day shoppers spend more to avoid conflict



Specialty Valentine's Day items such as these rake in plenty of profit despite a rather short selling period. (CTV.ca / Ashleigh Patterson)



Secrets From Your Sister, a Toronto store specializing in women's lingerie, stands to benefit greatly during the Valentine season. (CTV.ca / Ashleigh Patterson)

Ashleigh Patterson, Special to CTV.ca

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A U.S. consumer study suggests that as the Valentine's Day gift-giving deadline approaches, a last-minute shopper's goal shifts from finding the perfect gift to finding a gift that avoids a relationship meltdown.

Researchers from the Universities of Chicago; California, Berkeley; and Stanford found that consumers are drawn to products with positive outcomes when there is ample time to consider the purchase.

In contrast, shoppers are drawn to products that will help prevent negative outcomes when Valentine's Day is fast approaching.

"Consumers facing an imminent decision are confronted with the negative possibility of failing to fulfill their purchasing goal," said the authors of "Time Will Tell: The Distant Appeal of Promotion and Imminent Appeal of Prevention."

"When the purchase is still far off in the future, however, consumers are likely to be fairly optimistic about succeeding and less concerned with the possibility of goal failure," they said in a written statement on their findings, which were published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in February.

Last-minute shoppers spend more

Participants were asked to consider a trip to Europe. Some were told to consider a last-minute summer vacation while others were told to consider one several months away -- over the winter holidays.

They were then shown ads from a non-existent website, PriceAlerts.com. Some ads were cast in a positive light, for example: "Give yourself a memorable vacation!" and "Get the best deal!" But others had negative undertones: "Don't get stuck at home!" and "Don't get ripped off."

Participants planning a last-minute trip were willing to pay \$178 more on average, the researchers found, when presented with "negative" ads rather

than "positive" ones.

In contrast, those planning a trip that was months away responded to the positive ads and were open to paying \$165 more, the study found.

Linda Brigley, owner and operator of Spirit Urban Spa in Halifax, told CTV.ca that when the Valentine's Day deadline is looming, consumers are not as likely to be planning an elaborate day of relaxation for their loved one. Instead, they're looking for a quick and easy fix.

"I think the last-minute shoppers are the flowers-and-chocolate type. Or they'll call and try to do something but often we're all booked up," she said.

Brigley said couple's spa packages for Valentine's Day are often booked three to four weeks in advance, leaving hasty buyers with limited options.

"What happens for a lot of last-minute shoppers is they're buying gift certificates. I think that's sort of the same as buying flowers and chocolates," she said.

The study, published in the February edition of *Journal of Consumer Research*, suggests that consumers are even willing to pay more for a last-minute gift in order to avoid a negative outcome.

Liliana Mann, owner of specialty lingerie boutique Linea Intima, told CTV.ca that feelings of guilt often prompt shoppers, most often men, into spending over budget.

"The guilt trip gets them to buy things that are more expensive," she said from Toronto during a recent phone interview.

"Sometimes they try to be very specific but it's the last moment and they can't find that specific request because it might be sold out. So then they'll buy whatever they can find and will spend more because they see they have no choice."

Mann says the wrong size, an obnoxious color, improper gift wrapping, or a card without a heartfelt message, are tell-tale signs that a gift was purchased under time constraints.

Samantha Conover, manager of lingerie boutique Secrets From Your Sister, says men will be prompted to spend more on Valentine's Day in an effort to look like they really did their homework.

Do your research

Before whipping out the credit card, Conover says some research is in order.

"Look at what your significant other likes already, what they already have. If everything in their drawer is really simple and cotton, they are most likely not going to want this see-through, netted, lacy over-the-top

thing," Conover said from the Toronto store.

If you don't have a month to prepare, a piece of jewelry can convey emotion and a sense of preparation when crunched for time. The key is finding a jeweller who asks the right questions.

Susan Outerbridge, jewelry designer and buyer with Touch of Gold in Halifax, told CTV.ca that being able to convey your partner's tastes goes a long way in picking the perfect gift at the last minute.

"Most cases we are trying to help them choose something that is going to really be greatly appreciated and is going to be suitable," she said.

"We take the time to ask questions about who they are shopping for and help them to choose something that is going to be very meaningful."

Knowing if your partner prefers white gold to yellow gold, if they like sporty over sparkle or have a modern versus classic sense of style is a good place to start.

What if the gift you receive is off the mark? The key is to provide some sort of positive reinforcement, Mann said.

"If he got it wrong and you're going to be upset with him because he got it wrong, if you're going to be negative about it, you might as well forget about a gift the next time," Mann said.

"If you have a positive attitude about it and you make a joke about it or take it in good stride, they will remember next time."