BUSINESS

Shoppers spend on hard goods

Sales up for 9th straight month

By Anne D'Innocenzio
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Consumers bought less clothing and footwear in April than they did in the same month last year but opened their wallets for electronics, major appliances and status goods, purchase data released Wednesday show.

The month's rainy weather contributed to mixed results, including a sharp increase in online sales, according to the latest numbers from MasterCard Advisors' SpendingPulse.

It was the ninth-straight month that online sales rose compared with a year earlier.

The figures, which include transactions in all forms including cash, signal that spending is recovering but remained sensitive in April to one-time factors.

Another factor dampening April's sales was a drop in tourism resulting from travel restrictions after Iceland's volcanic eruption, said Michael McNamara, vice president of research and analysis for SpendingPulse. He said spending is stabilizing and there wasn't any broad-based heavy discounting. In clothing, the average transaction amount rose 3.5 percent from a year ago.

"(April) was lumpy," said McNamara, adding that it was "OK" combined with March.

Because an early Easter — like this year's on April 4 — can boost March's results and depress April's, analysts combine the two months when trying to gauge consumer behavior.

April figures benefited from relatively easy comparisons to April 2009, when consumers also cut their spending.

Here are SpendingPulse's figures comparing sales April 4 through May 1 with the same period a year earlier, by product category.

- Clothing: Sales fell 3.9 percent from April 2009.
- Appliances: Enjoying increases since September 2009, this category rose 3 percent for April.
- Electronics: Sales rose 9.7 percent from a year earlier.