



# Holiday spending surges 9.2%

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**Zlati Meyer**  
USA TODAY

That jingle-jangle sound that you've been hearing isn't just sleigh bells.

Rather, it's the sound of cash dropping into the pockets of retailers at a faster pace this holiday season than at any time in the past four years, according to a new report.

Retail spending rose 6.6% between Oct. 28 and Monday compared with the same period last year, according to a new report by credit card processing company First Data. The firm also found that retail online sales continued to outpace those at traditional stores — 11% vs. 5.4%.

Overall spending on everything except gasoline was up 9.2%, First Data said. For both overall and retail spending, 2017's were the highest in four years.

Retailers are feeling holiday joy.

"People are spending money more freely than in the last few years," said Sam Pollard, co-owner of Mud Puddle Toys in Marblehead, Mass. "We've been pleased with the season overall."

Last holiday season, the average tab was \$70; this year, it's \$75, Pollard added.

First Data points to high consumer confidence, low unemployment and relatively favorable weather as the reasons for this jump.

The report shows:

■ **Winners.** In retail spending growth, the biggest winner was the electronics and appliances category, which jumped 11.8%.

■ **Losers.** When it came to non-electronic entertainment, whether it was sporting goods, hobbies, books or music, they were collectively down 0.7%.

■ **Hot regions.** The Southwest and West were the regions that saw the most growth, while the Mid-Atlantic area had the least.

The big city with the biggest spend was Houston, which is recovering from Hurricane Harvey; Houston saw retail growth of 21.9%, with the biggest bumps in building materials, up 45%, and furniture, up 34%.

Consumer spending jumped \$87.1 billion, or 0.6%, in November, according to U.S. Department of Commerce data released Friday.

For Amy Routson, her Christmas budget was about the same as last year — \$1,000 for the 15 people on her list. Where the 46-year-old Mechanicsburg, Pa., resident did spend more was on herself, because she confessed she has a bad habit of buying duplicates.

This year's treats include a couple pairs of shoes, a blanket and a slim-design travel water bottle. Routson's 2017 self-splurge was \$200 higher than last year's.

"A lot of people I know are feeling better this year, and they're doing more Christmas shopping. People are feeling more secure about where the economy is headed," she said.