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Mother's Day Spending Down: What Presents Can Mom Expect?

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Recession-weary moms should put their game face on this Sunday, and be ready to grin and bear it when presented with slightly less luxurious presents on Mother's Day.

Consumers are expected to cut back on Mother's day spending by around 4% from the previous year, according to Robert Paskoff, Founder and President of BrandKeys, a research consultancy based in New York City. This year, the average Mother's Day present will cost around \$135, down from last year's cost of \$140.

"Mom is not exactly being shortchanged because of a weak economy, but you are talking generally about a smarter consumer," said Paskoff. Consumers aren't necessarily buying presents of a lower quality for their moms, he said, but are shopping at discount stores rather than department stores to save money.

However, one item that is up in sales is cards, Paskoff said. This year, 97% of people are giving paper greetings, up 2% from last year. Other products showing a difference in sales this year include electronics, down by 3%, spa services, down by 1%, and jewelry, down by 2%.

One jeweler that's noticed a downturn in sales is Robin Robin Levinson, co-owner of high end jewelry boutique Levinson Jewelers in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

"This is different from anything we've seen in years prior," Levinson said of sales at her store. "Maybe customers feel bad that other people aren't spending as much so they've cut back, or maybe they've had to take a pay cut or help out their relatives. We are still selling, but we're selling at lesser price points."

Two years ago, per-item sales at Levinson ranged between \$5,000 and \$8,000 per item. Today, sales are between \$500 and \$1,000. More customers are opting for Levinson's accessory items like picture frames and perfume bottles over expensive watches and gold jewelry.

But even though sales are smaller, consumers are still interested in taking care of Mom, according to Yahoo (YHOO: 14.85, -0.3, -1.98%), the number one comparison shopping Web site in the U.S. In the last month, searches for "Mother's Day gifts" have been up 2,240%. The top five most popular gifts for Mom under \$50 include digital cameras, kitchen gadgets, digital picture frames, sterling silver jewelry, and gift baskets, according to Yahoo.

Not surprisingly, it seems females are more interested in Mother's Day gift-giving, as 64% of Yahoo shoppers are women, while only 36% are men. But of those shopping, many are looking for economic gift ideas. According to Yahoo!, searches for "brunch ideas" and "free mother's day cards and poems" are "off the charts" in the last week.

But haven't some cost-conscious shoppers always looked for more economical gift ideas? Yes, but there's a difference in consumer behavior this year, according to Christian Gordun, founder and CEO of CouponCraze.com, a company offering coupons on everything from food items to car repair.

"There is a mind shift in how consumers are thinking. They are not going for the big expensive items," Gordun said.

This "shift" is reflected in the most popular categories for Mother's Day purchases on the site. This year, the top category is "Clothing and shoes," while last year the top category was "Travel and Hotel." In fact, travel and hotel searches fell by 26% since last year. This shows that consumers are more eager to buy mom a sweater than a trip to the Caribbean, Gordun said.

Yet flowers are one category that represents a Mother's Day "standard," and hasn't fallen at all, Gordun said.

"Indications are good," said Jim McCain, CEO of 1-800 Flowers, about flower sales for Mother's Day this year. "We've tried to offer a better value to our customers, offering 30 bouquets under \$30. Although our average ticket price will be down for this holiday, we've tried to make up for it by getting some good customer accounts"

The most popular seller this Mother's Day for 1-800 Flowers is the "Mother's Embrace Bouquet," which ranges in price from \$40 to \$60.

McCain said that overall, Mother's Day is a holiday that inspires people to spend.

"You know the moms in your life really well, and if you're looking to treat them during the year, Mother's Day will be really high on that list of good opportunities," he said.

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