

RETAIL

## Retailers showcasing comfort, empathy to draw early holiday shoppers

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*Bloomingdale's flagship department store in New York. Image credit: Bloomingdale's*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

High-end retailers are preparing for a holiday season like no other, as many in the United States remain weary about in-store shopping and consumer confidence dips in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

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In an effort to extend the shopping season and make up for time lost due to prolonged shutdowns, retailers have already begun to kick off the holiday season. However, they must be careful to strike the right tone in their marketing and highlight safety measures to draw shoppers to stores.

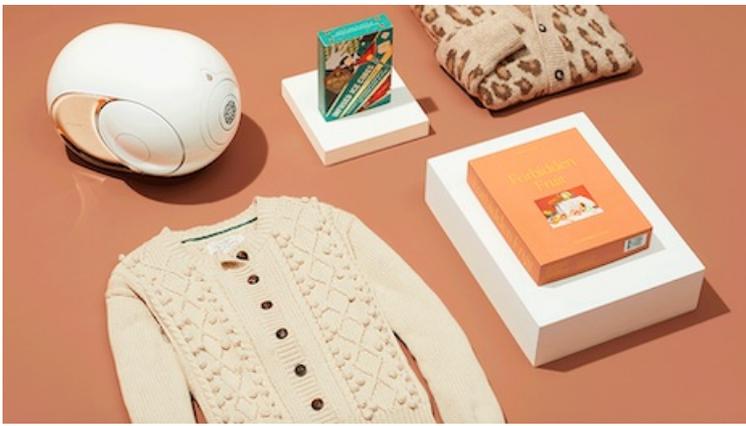
"A personalized and empathetic tone around easing the stress of the pandemic will strike a chord with many shoppers during this holiday season," said Zach Zalowitz, director of product management at [enVista](#), Atlanta.

Feeling festive?

As consumer confidence wanes and coronavirus cases climb in the United States, high-end retailers have begun emphasizing joy in their holiday campaigns.

Earlier marketing and promotions may help extend the shopping season. It could also lead to fewer visiting bricks-and-mortar stores each day, giving consumers the physical space they need to feel comfortable shopping ([see story](#)).

Department store chain Bloomingdale's introduced its "Give Happy" campaign in mid-October, highlighting togetherness and curated gifts that can be enjoyed at home.



*Highlighting comfortable and cozy gifts will be key for luxury retailers. Image credit: Bloomingdale's*

"We know our customers may be celebrating the holiday season differently this year, and we at Bloomingdale's want to be the bright spot for them with our Give Happy' holiday campaign, which provides an uplifting message that embodies positivity and togetherness," said Frank Berman, executive vice president and chief marketing officer at **Bloomingdale's**, New York. "No matter how they shop and interact with us, customers can experience innovative activations, entertainment, new shopping services and an incredible gift curation."

Some of the gift themes Bloomingdale's is highlighting include cooking and entertaining, at-home relaxation and games and activities.

Bloomingdale's "Give Happy" campaign will be an omnichannel experience, complete with virtual events and a charitable component.

"For the first time, we are bringing the magic of the holidays at Bloomingdale's to customers' homes nationwide through our Virtual Holiday Benefit [on Nov. 23,] with innovative performances from singer Andra Day and the American Ballet Theatre," Mr. Berman said. "This experience will support the vital work of our philanthropic partner the Child Mind Institute."

From Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, in-store and online shoppers will also be able to make donations to Child Mind Institute.

Similarly, department store chain Nordstrom is taking a cheerful but measured approach with its "Make Merry" campaign.

"Comfort clothes are the best thing to sell, and a dearth of florid prose in marketing would be a good idea," said Paula Rosenblum, managing partner at **RSR Research**, Miami. "I see Nordstrom is already doing that in their marketing: comfy clothes, slippers and useful items that can be worn around the house."

Nordstrom holiday campaign includes simple, rather than extravagant, vignettes that show people embracing loved ones. New Orleans-based singer Sabine McCalla sings a soulful cover of Marvin Gaye's "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)" to add to the cozy spirit of the campaign.

*Nordstrom is highlighting its customer service in its "Make Merry" holiday campaign*

The retailer is also hoping to "make it easy" for consumers to enjoy the holidays after a stressful year. In the holiday campaign videos, Nordstrom touts its holiday services such as gift-wrapping with pickup order and virtual gift help.

Nordstrom's decision to showcase its expanded customer service offerings is business-savvy as it can reassure shoppers the retailer is taking their comfort levels and safety seriously. This attention to safety guidelines must also be apparent at bricks-and-mortar stores.

"As always, clear and concise signage prior to the store entry and throughout the store indicating the steps that the retailer has taken to provide a safe environment will put a lot of consumers mind at ease," enVista's Mr. Zalowitz said. "Specifically, digital ads indicating those steps ahead of the store visit will help make up for what is sure to be a lower than expected season for foot traffic."

Both Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom are launching festive in-store activations to further encourage shoppers to visit physical locations.

"For our customers who shop in stores, they can expect special socially-distanced activations, as well as a variety of

all new outdoor activations at our 59th Street flagship like Happy Hour' at the Daikanyama to-go window and Barefoot Dreams outdoor palm tree lot," Bloomingdale's Mr. Berman said.

The Carousel @ Bloomingdale's will also launch a holiday iteration at the brand's flagship as well as online.

Select Nordstrom locations will be decked out in high-end artificial Christmas trees from Balsam Hill. The Joy of Pop-In@Nordstrom will also return in early November, with hope of celebrating "togetherness after a year of social distancing."

#### Gift fulfillment

After a turbulent year, a growing number of consumers are comfortable returning to in-store shopping in time for the holidays.

According to a recent study from Mood Media, 71 percent of shoppers are comfortable returning to bricks-and-mortar stores, with two-thirds of global consumers having already returned to non-essential stores.

While 49 percent of consumers worldwide are concerned about catching the coronavirus while in-store shopping, 80 percent are comfortable with the safety measures retailers have put in place.

Mask requirements which have been put in place by the majority of luxury retailers were cited as the most important safety regulation. Only 8 percent of consumers reported that safety measures have negatively impacted their in-store experiences ([see story](#)).

"In store, compliance to CDC recommended standards is critical," Ms. Rosenblum said. "Social distancing, masks and enforcement of the mask-wearing rule, downplaying cosmetics make-overs and plexiglass at check-out stands."

Retailers are also expanding their fulfillment options, so consumers will have more than a binary choice between ecommerce or in-store shopping.

In addition to buy-online-pickup-in-store and curbside pickup, Bloomingdale's is offering same-day and next-day delivery through DoorDash at all stores nationwide, including during the week leading up to Christmas.

For a festive touch, Nordstrom is surprising the first 50 shoppers who pick up curbside orders with thank you gifts and special offers at each store location daily through Christmas Eve. Younger shoppers can also drop off letters to Santa in-store or curbside starting on Nov. 27.

According to Kibo Commerce's "2020 Guide to Holiday Commerce," options such as buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS) and buy-online-pickup-at-curbside (BOPAC) can reduce customers' exposure to coronavirus while remaining convenient. Online shipping timelines have increased during the pandemic, as delivery services face heavy volume while dealing with staffing shortages due to coronavirus and quarantines.

Incorporating BOPIS and BOPAC will also help retailers if stores need to close or reduce hours due to outbreaks ([see story](#)).

"Maybe most importantly, the ability to have curbside pickup will make a difference," RSR Research's Ms. Rosenblum said. "Contactless payments would be great."

"Retailers will also need to put new focus on their workforces, both in-store and in distribution centers," she said. "Again, sticking to CDC guidelines is critical."