

IBM Report Reveals Potential Rebound for Travel and Event Spending, End of Traditional Shopping Season

Due to Waning Vaccination and Safety Measures, Many Surveyed Consumers' Return to Public Life Has Been Indefinitely Delayed



ARMONK, N.Y., Oct. 21, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- According to the findings of a [new global consumer study](#) released by IBM's (NYSE: [IBM](#)) Institute for Business Value (IBV), respondents are feeling slightly more festive for the 2021 holiday season than they were in 2020, and are reporting higher household budget allocation for travel and local activities. However, the survey suggests COVID-19 pandemic-related concerns are hindering the return of the traditional shopping season

Almost three in four respondents said they're concerned about new variants of COVID-19, three in five said they're concerned about interacting with unvaccinated people outside of their families and more than half of those surveyed said they are worried about spending time with unvaccinated family and friends. Holiday shopping budgets are still 13% lower than they were in 2019; however, they did increase 30% year-over-year, and 87% of surveyed consumers say they may shop for the holidays this year, up six points compared to 2020.

"The most effective industry leaders may be the ones who can meet the customer where, when and how they want," said Jonathan Wright, Managing Partner & Global VP for Supply Chain Consulting, IBM Consulting. "Based on the survey findings, consumer respondents may continue to demand safety requirements for in-person activities, as well as modern-day fulfillment models such as contactless pick-up, same-day delivery; ship-from-store; buy online, pick up in-store, etc. Deploying artificial intelligence, intelligent automation and analytics across an enterprise can build a more adaptable business that can rapidly respond, pivot, and scale up or down, which may be a pivotal enabler when it comes to this holiday shopping season."

Noteworthy survey findings include:

An Earlier Start to the Holiday Shopping Season

Holiday shoppers are concerned about shortages, so to increase their chance of getting everything on their wish lists, more than one in four surveyed adults started shopping in September or earlier. Twice as many people surveyed plan to start in October as compared to last year and just under half of consumers surveyed plan to jumpstart holiday shopping before November, weeks earlier than the traditional "Black Friday" start date in the US.

Online Shopping Still Reigns

While there is notable demand for local products and merchants, online shopping is likely to hold on to its leadership position this holiday season for those surveyed. This statistic is noteworthy when compared to [February 2021 IBV data](#) which found that 73% of surveyed shoppers wanted and expected to return to shopping malls and shopping centers after they were vaccinated. Instead, 43% of consumers surveyed say they plan to buy products online and just 36% surveyed say they plan to buy products in a physical store, citing the increasing concern about new COVID-19 outbreaks and variants.

Holiday Travel & Experiences/Activities could be on the Rebound for 2021

According to the survey, travel is predicted to account for a larger portion of the holiday budgets overall for those surveyed, rising to 8.2% from 5.7% in 2020. Though still lower than it was in 2019, almost 40% of respondents said they plan to travel to see family and friends over the holidays, up from 28% last year. Travel budgets are also on the rebound, up 43% over 2020, with international lodging and air travel budgets growing more than domestic air travel and lodging budgets for those surveyed. Local outings and activities, as well as dining out, may see the biggest lift in 2021 with consumers surveyed planning to spend 30% more in this area than they did last year.

Consumers Still Care About Sustainability

Environmentally friendly products may also have a leg up this holiday season. Four in five consumers surveyed say they may consider sustainability to some extent when they're shopping for the holidays this year, which is consistent with last year's survey results. This group plans to change their behavior by avoiding single-use plastics, shopping locally and buying more products locally or made locally.

***IBV Study Methodology**

The IBM Institute for Business Value polled more than 13,000 adults across nine countries (Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States), to better understand consumers' COVID-19 pandemic-related concerns and the impact on how people plan to celebrate the holiday season - how it may affect their perspectives on a number of issues, including retail spending, traveling and future event attendance. The full study is available at: <https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/2021-holiday-shopping-travel-outlook>.

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