

The countdown to Christmas has begun, so what can retailers expect from shoppers this year? By **George MacDonald**

Seasonal spending plans

As Halloween passes retailers are fully focused on the make-or-break Christmas period and the red letter days along the way, such as Black Friday.

The fight is on for every penny of spend but there is evidence that many shoppers aim to maintain a tight hold on their purse strings, despite signs of an improving economy.

While 12% of consumers expect to spend more this Christmas than last, half do not, a survey of 2,000 consumers by ICM for *Retail Week* revealed.

However, the poll also showed the proportion expecting to spend less has been declining year on year.

ICM associate director Kate Bewick said: "The downward trend of people expecting to spend less is, perhaps, evidence of people feeling better again financially."

Consumers planning to spend more this Christmas than last are also anticipated to do more online shopping this year, so that channel is likely to play a central role.

But 45% of people think they will buy the same amount online in 2014 as they did last Christmas.

Technology such as smartphones is likely to attract high spend the study showed, but consumers are also expected to devote significant sums to experiences such as theatre outings rather than products.

Warm weather has got retail's golden quarter off to a slow start for fashion groups.

The countdown to Christmas is likely, as ever, to be a nail-biter.

"There is, perhaps, evidence of people feeling better financially"

Kate Bewick, ICM

