



Spirit of Christmas makes way for Scrooge

By Bridie Smith

Consumer affairs reporter

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Victorian retailers have created their own monster - disloyal shoppers who buy on price with little regard for brand loyalty. Shoppers who demand discounts, regardless of the time of year.

The pre-Christmas sales, which started last month, are feeding consumer expectations with sales continuing with just nine days to Christmas.

"The consumer has been trained or conditioned to buy in a sale," said Michael Morrison, research director at the Australian Centre for Retail Studies. "They won't pay full retail when they know retailers are going to go into sale mode very early.

"The problem here is we are too discount-led and I don't see any loyalty in that. People just cherry-pick for the best price but you wonder how long that can last."

While big department stores are leading the pre-Christmas sale charge, smaller retailers want a slice of the market.

Australian Retailers' Association Victorian director Brian Donegan said more retailers were having a November sale, with Christmas spending contributing an extra \$1 billion to sales nationally in November.

But he said smaller retailers were often forced to trim their margins to compete.

Consumer psychologist Michael Edwardson said the lure of pre-Christmas bargains was powerful. "Early sales are a way of getting people to spend... but it is also a way of getting people to start their shopping earlier," he said.

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