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## Early Easter May Impact Spring Sales Kickoff For Some Retailers

*By Amanda Ferrante, Assistant Editor*

Although St. Patrick's Day and Easter aren't blockbuster holidays for driving retail sales, retail insiders are keeping a watchful eye on the impact of this year's calendar shift where for the first time in 88 years the two holidays fall just six days apart.



With most retailers managing to meet or beat their modest sales forecasts in February, analysts are concerned that this year's early Easter might throw off consumer spending patterns. "The shift is more on Easter, not so much St. Patrick's Day," says George Whalin of Retail Management Consultants. "Retailers prefer Easter to be in the first week of April to give that nice kickoff to spring, but with it coming this early, we still have a lot of bad weather ahead."

While St. Patrick's Day is still a significant revenue driver for bars and restaurants, analysts point out that the holiday's impact on sales is minimal, and Easter has also been waning as a sales driver. "In the USA, Easter has become a less important holiday sales event every year for many years now," says Mark Lilien, Consultant with Retail Technology Group.

Beyond the tighter timeline on the two holidays, analysts point out that weather could have a bigger impact on sales for the month of March. "Fewer and fewer customers are buying Easter specific

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outfits anymore and if they do this early Easter is a disaster, says Jim Dion, president of Chicago-based consultancy Dionco Inc. "It will be too cold for spring clothing in many northern markets. These are two very small sales blips for most retailers."

### SHIFTING SALES

Other analysts suggest that the calendar shift actually help comp store sales for the month of March and may get consumer spring fever kicked into gear earlier. "On the positive side, this will bring consumers to spend more this quarter, adding some kick to the sluggish first quarter," says Susan Rider of Rider and Associates, a consulting firm. Rider advises retailers to start promoting spring earlier. "It has been a cold, dull winter, and many are ready for spring. So getting into the spirit will also come with dollars."

There's speculation that one holiday or the other will be overlooked, but Kathy Grannis, Media Relations Manager for the National Retail Federation, says there's possibility to promote both at once. "Holidays that fall close to one another basically mean that retailers have to create extra shelf space in their stores, which can definitely be done."

This year, consumers intend to spend approximately \$35.04 on St. Patrick's Day, barely up from \$34.89 in 2007, according to the National Retail Federation's 2008 St. Patrick's Day Consumer Intentions and Actions survey, conducted by BIGresearch.

"Many consumers have opted out of St. Patrick's Day this year and opted in for Easter, which is why we see a small dip in spending and participation," says Grannis.

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