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FOOD WILL GET FESTIVE - TILLS RINGING

ALTHOUGH SOME RETAILERS PUT OUT THEIR FESTIVE DISPLAYS AS EARLY AS OCTOBER, ANTOINETTE COETZEE, RETAIL ANALYST FOR REDEFINE PROPERTIES, SAYS THE FESTIVE TRADING PERIOD IS LIKELY TO BE A SHORT ONE THIS YEAR, CHARACTERISED BY SHOPPERS OPTING FOR QUALITY OVER QUANTITY, AND DRIVEN BY PROMOTIONS AND THE DESIRE FOR EXPERIENTIAL OFFERINGS.

Coetzee points to the fall in the rand and general global macro-economic pressure as the primary forces affecting spending patterns. She says: "Disposable income is down, but even credit growth is deteriorating from previous periods. The combined effect is more circumspect spending.

"Indications are that people, especially those who are very organised, will complete their shopping early in December. Because Christmas day falls on a Friday, which marks the end of a full working week for many, it's possible that we see more last minute shopping in the days leading up to the 25th.

This year people are however approaching the festive season in a more muted way, and predictions are that they will focus instead on the values of the season, namely tradition and family. While gifts will always form part of the festive season, unrestrained spending will give way to practical indulgences on one or two small luxuries rather than vast quantities of presents.

An interesting phenomenon most likely to affect festive sales is the growing popularity of food shows. In recent years, prominent figures in business have referred to food as the new black, and recently market commentators have noted that food is the new fashion. Trading patterns suggest that there will be a greater focus on home entertainment dominated by increased spending on food for a traditional Christmas meal. This trend toward food and tradition will translate in an increased demand for popular festive fare such as turkey, poultry, gammon and festive puddings. Festive decorations for the home are also likely to be popular.

With respect to shopping, customers are demanding an easy and safe one-stop-shopping experience. Large well maintained malls which offer easy parking, a varied tenant mix as well as experiential extras such as restaurants and children's play facilities are more likely to attract the most shoppers as many would prefer to do their entire festive shopping under one roof.

25 December itself is always extremely quiet, but retailers expect an increase in footfall on 27 December as people exchange or return gifts, or redeem gift vouchers. "With so many people travelling over the festive period, specifically from Gauteng to holiday destinations such as Durban and Cape Town, there are also spikes in footfall in these holiday regions. For example, Redefine Properties sees this increase at its Blue Route Mall in Cape Town and South Coast Mall in KwaZulu-Natal," says Coetzee.