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## CHAIN STORES ARE BIG LOSERS IN DECEMBER SALES BONANZA

Retail sales were up in December, 2006 over last Christmas, but the big losers in the end-of-the-year holiday shopping frenzy were retail chain stores, according to the latest Consumer Mind Reader™ survey conducted by America's Research Group.

Nationwide sales were up six percent overall from 2005 December sales, and comparative store averages grew by three percent. But in our survey of 1,000 shoppers across the country, only five of the 25 retail categories we survey showed increases in both the number of shoppers and the amount of their purchases over the previous Christmas. More consumers said they shopped sporting goods stores, furniture stores, musical instrument stores, jewelry stores and outlet mall/factory outlet stores than in December, 2005, and their spending levels were also higher in these stores.

Consumers clearly shifted away from chain stores to independent retailers for Christmas shopping in 2006.

I believe, and our research confirms, that the reason consumers abandoned the big box stores in favor of independent retailers is that many of the chains adopted policies of not decorating their stores for the Christmas holidays and would not allow employees to wish shoppers a Merry Christmas.

America's Research Group conducts national shopping surveys each weekend in December prior to Christmas, and in our December 16-17 survey, 38.8 percent of shoppers complained that stores they visited were not decorated for the holidays as they had been in prior years. This was obviously a major concern among shoppers, and one in five said they wouldn't shop the stores again that refused to acknowledge the Christmas holiday.

Best Buy was one of the chains that ignored outward signs of the holiday season. When asked for the Consumer Mind Reader if they would have shopped Best Buy had they known the store didn't decorate or allow employees to say Merry Christmas, only four in nine said they would have shopped anyway. An almost equal number – 39 percent – said they would not have made the effort to shop Best Buy had they known in advance that the store would not be spruced up for the holiday.

Chain stores should take heed in their planning for next Christmas promotions. Political correctness can be costly and the cost will almost certainly come in the form of lost sales. Consumers still want to shop in stores brightly decorated to reflect the season, and they want to hear Merry Christmas when they hand over their shopping dollars.

Britt Beemer, founder and chairman of America's Research Group, is the country's leading authority on retail buying habits of consumers. ARG tracks consumer buying habits more than any other survey research firm in the nation. The company conducts customized surveys for retail and manufacturing clients across the United States, designed to provide clients valuable marketing recommendations to grow their businesses. . Beemer is author of two best-selling business books, *Predatory Marketing* and *It Takes a Prophet to Make a Profit*. More detailed information is available on the America's Research Group website at [www.americasresearchgroup.com](http://www.americasresearchgroup.com)