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10 Retailers Talk About the Start to the Holiday Season

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New York—Each year during the holiday, National Jeweler checks in with jewelers across the country to see how business is going.

We quiz them about foot traffic, the promotions that are getting people into their stores, and what products are moving.

This week, we took a couple of days following Thanksgiving to contact two jewelers in five distinct regions of the country: the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, South Central and West.

Here's what they had to say.

Northeast

Rain and less-than-ideal weather in Vermont lead to a slight decrease in traffic for Evan James Ltd. in Brattleboro, but that didn't stop sales from inching up during the Thanksgiving weekend.

Evan James Deutsch said while the store doesn't normally get tourist business, it did a decent amount over the weekend, as it seemed that more people were in town.

Located in the retail side of the Latchis Hotel, Evan James Ltd. always offers a discount to guests, but over the weekend the store also offered an extra 20 percent off all jewelry and watches to customers.

The store promoted the deal primarily on social media ahead of the weekend to garner interest.

He added that people bought a wide range of jewelry; the store sold some color, opals, diamond studs and engagement rings, and there was an increase in gold buying from customers as well.

As for the rest of the season, Deutsch said he's feeling "pretty optimistic." He expects the store will do well overall, as there's a lot carrying over from the weekend, including custom pieces and layaways, to help him feel enthusiastic.

In New York, Scott Udell of London Jewelers said foot traffic in their stores



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was about on par with last year but sales were “ahead, and ahead pretty robustly.”

Reiterating what many jewelers are saying about the customers who are out shopping this year, Udell said that though foot traffic was about flat, those visiting the store are purposeful with their shopping and ready to spend.

This year, London Jewelers did a web-driven promotion to build up the business’s online sales that ran throughout the weekend, marking the first year they have focused on that aspect. Udell said it has been great for them so far but also notes that the majority of sales continue to come from in-store visits.

Over Thanksgiving weekend, London Jewelers sold a lot of “classics,” like diamond tennis bracelets, diamonds studs, eternity brands and stacking pieces.

The retailer also did a promotional gift guide this year that launched last week in select print and digital platforms, and Udell said plenty of clients came to select items from the guide.

He added that the stores’ branded business is strong right now—London carries Rolex, Audemars Piguet, Patek Philippe and David Yurman, among others—and he is hoping that continues.

Southeast

For Cumberland Diamond Exchange in Smyrna, Georgia, the weekend proved to be a strong one.

Mark Jacobson said the store sold a greater quantity of higher-ticket items this year, with some of its more affluent customers “ready to part with some money.”

He also said some clients who usually shop later in the season decided to shop earlier this year.

All in all, the weekend was “very upbeat.”

Jacobson said customers were lingering in the showroom longer and the longer they stayed, the more money they spent.

What’s more, the holiday shopping weekend—for Cumberland, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday—was perhaps the strongest in the company’s history.



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The weather worked for the store, with the cold putting people in the mood to shop, and the competition coming from an SEC football game on Saturday meant that people visiting the store that day were purposeful shoppers who were ready to buy.

When it came to what people were buying, Jacobson said it was the standard: diamond earrings, larger fashion necklaces, some colored stone pieces, and even estate jewelry for its “perceived value and uniqueness.”

He added that they also did well with bridal the day before Thanksgiving.

Steve Allen of Allen’s Jewelers in Albany, Georgia said was “probably the best Thanksgiving (they’ve) ever had sales wise.”

The strong momentum started on Wednesday and carried through Saturday and Sunday up until about 4 p.m., when it started to die down.

He said the holiday weekend performance was a surprise since Black Friday shopping isn’t usually a big deal for an independent, freestanding store.

Based on how the season’s start, he said he is “hopeful” the store will have a good Christmas, especially given the cyclical nature of its performance.

“Every other year is better for us,” he said. “We should be on an up year.”

Midwest

For Jeffrey Mann Fine Jewelers in Toledo, Ohio, the weekend was busier than normal, store owner Jeff Mann said.

The store operated with a reduced staff, expecting a lighter turnout for the freestanding independent over the holiday weekend, but with a couple of nice sales, the shopping weekend ended up “greatly exceeding expectations.”

Even Saturday, when an important college football game had locals’ attention, turned out better than expected, Mann said.

The bustling weekend carried over into Monday, surprising the jeweler even more.

So, what does he think led to such a strong weekend?

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“It seems to me that customers are very happy shopping right now,” he said, adding that those who do come in have money to spend and are ready to spend it.

It has led him to think that the customers’ “only limitations are any that we put on them.” So now Mann is encouraging his staff to show clients bigger, higher-priced items.

“I haven’t been this optimistic for a holiday season for as long back as I can remember.”

Mann said the store’s staff has done a good job of planning for the holiday season, including watching inventory and buying well, and monitoring best sellers and ordering more.

For another retailer in the Midwest, college football also presented an obstacle on “Small Business Saturday.”

Still, Randy Cole said that only meant those who came into the store that day were, in fact, not “football oriented”—or, probably there to buy—and said overall, the Diamond Vault of Troy in Michigan had a “really good weekend.”

Engagement rings were hot over the holiday weekend, though Cole said they were really selling a lot of different diamond products.

He is “super optimistic” about the rest of the season.

“With the amount of shopping that’s going on across the board and the crowds that are turning out, I don’t think it will fall off.”

One thing that the store is doing differently this year is getting rid of a well-known and locally loved “Wine and Diamonds” event usually attended by hundreds of people in December.

Why? To take the money the business normally invests in the event and donate it.

“There is so much need in the area,” he said. “It’s a dynamic shift for us, but the times we’re at now demand it.”

South Central

Though the weekend following Thanksgiving isn’t usually a big one for

Newton's Jewelers in Fort Smith, Arkansas, this year was a little different.

"We're not really part of the Black Friday ordeal, but it certainly looked like we were," Kelly Newton said this week.

People were out and ready to spend, a trend Newton said he's been seeing all year, with increases in business each month.

Consumers weren't necessarily looking for certain price points over Thanksgiving weekend, as they were buying "all over the place," but certain brands were standouts, like Rolex, which Kelly said has been performing "exceedingly well," as well as Forevermark and Roberto Coin.

The store will continue to pay attention to those, as well as its usual increase in bridal at this time of year.

Unless something happens that impacts the holiday spirit in a negative way, Newton said he expects to continue to be busy.

"I've noticed a lot more charitable giving this year, and when people are in that frame of mind, the buying tends to follow."

Susan Eisen, owner of her eponymous store in El Paso, Texas, also had a strong start to the holiday season.

She said the store received a lot of "big stone calls"—people looking to buy 1-, 2- and 3-carat diamonds for engagement rings, a mixture of first marriages, second marriages and already married couples looking to upgrade.

Eisen also is introducing her own custom design for the season, something she plans to do at least once a year going forward.

It is an asymmetrical take on the "Star on the Mountain," the well-known holiday decoration that rests atop Franklin Mountain in El Paso.

And Eisen has put up a billboard to attract more women buying jewelry for themselves, noting, "I don't really have as many of those (customers) as I could."

West

For Alan Goldfarb Jeweler in Bellevue, Washington, the fact that it was a "normal" weekend meant it went better than expected for the retailer, given the usual sleepy nature of the days after Black Friday for the independent.