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### Retailers ring up charitable giving with shoppers

By Lorrie Grant, USA TODAY

Charity may start at home, but for many holiday shoppers, it continues at Wal-Mart, Target and Talbots.

After a year of natural catastrophes — from the tsunamis in South Asia to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina — many consumers are looking differently at possessions and are increasingly eager to connect gift-giving to worthy causes, retail trend analysts say.

Retailers often link with charities during the holidays, but many of the largest have stepped up those efforts this year. "Holiday 2005 will be remembered as the year of giving to those in need," says Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at NPD Group. "Retailers want consumers to feel good about buying and helping others."

More retailers are donating a portion of each purchase to children's hospitals, relief organizations and humanitarian funds. The issue has struck a chord not only with consumers but with the media. *Time* on Sunday named "good Samaritans" Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono as its Persons of the Year for their charitable efforts to improve world health.

David Hessekiel, president of the Cause Marketing Forum, a company that teaches businesses about mutually beneficial alliances, says the increase in retailers starting cause-related programs is part of an overall shift in corporate citizenship.

"The disasters have demonstrated what companies will do. But the upswing really goes back to the public perception of corporations and corporate leaders falling from a low perch after years of scandal. Many corporate leaders woke up to say, 'We have to turn this around,'" Hessekiel adds.

Charitable donations ranked fourth in spending categories, according to a Holiday Mood Survey of retail spending and trends by Deloitte & Touche. That exceeds planned spending for holiday entertaining at home, non-gift clothing and holiday furnishings.

While the options for giving at retail are plentiful, consumer psychologists dispel the notion that consumers' donations are fostered by guilt.

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- "A lot of times, the offer to purchase and contribute to a cause is a justification or rationalization to purchase with a particular retailer," says Kit Yarrow, consumer psychologist at Golden Gate University in San Francisco.

Retailers have to make judgments, too. The cause they embrace has to be important to consumers to win charitable patronage as well as loyalty.

When price and quality are equal, 86% of Americans will reward companies that support a cause, according to cause-marketing firm Cone. That's up 30% over the past decade. "The range of natural disasters has created an oversensitized consumer who would like to multitask when they're holiday shopping. So why not go to a retailer supporting a key cause," says Carol Cone, founder and chairman.

Some of the offers:

- Talbots.** The retailer wanted its first charitable tie-in for the holiday season to be in sync with women's and children's causes. So during the first weekend of December, it donated \$1 for every purchase in stores to Save the Children. Talbots promised a minimum contribution of \$50,000.

- Wal-Mart Stores.** The world's biggest retailer, which won kudos for its quick response after Hurricane Katrina, doubled its long-running Red Kettle fundraising effort with the Salvation Army to 28 days. Last year, \$17 million was raised at Wal-Mart and Sam's Clubs stores. Total Red Kettle funds, which remain in local communities: \$102 million.

- Target.** The tony discounter and the Salvation Army joined forces online. Through their Wish List ([www.target.com/salvationarmy](http://www.target.com/salvationarmy)), patrons buy clothing, household items, personal products and gift cards to be donated to those affected by the hurricanes, as well as individuals and families in need across the USA. The campaign runs through Jan. 25. Donations can also be made at the Salvation Army's website

- **Kay Jewelers.** The mall-based jeweler sells plush, limited-edition teddy bears each holiday in its annual partnership with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which serves children battling cancer and other catastrophic illnesses. Winter, the name of this year's teddy bear, sells for \$9.99, and all profits (no less than \$4) are donated to the hospital. Winter is the seventh in Kay's series of bears.

Over the past six years, \$6 million has been raised for the hospital.

- Brooks Bros.** The high-end retailer known for tailored men's clothing sponsored a two-day fundraiser for the Make-A-Wish Foundation earlier this month that raised up to \$50,000.

As part of its first partnership with St. Jude this year, the retailer started selling a special ornament for \$58. Half of the sales are earmarked for the children's hospital. About 500 have sold.

- Best Buy.** The consumer electronics retailer formed Toys for Teens in concert with the U.S. Marines' Toys for Tots program. Best Buy's program stresses the need to donate holiday gifts for teens. Bins are set up in each store to collect the gifts. Customers unsure of what to get a teen can donate money at checkout.

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