

## E-Commerce Challenges Traditional Stores

From VOA Learning English, this is the Economics Report in Special English.

Americans are buying more products and services than ever before through the Internet. And experts say the popularity of online sales is likely to spread to other countries.



Online sales now represent as much as one-tenth of all retail sales in the United States. This has led traditional stores to seek new ways to keep their customers loyal.

Lynne Shaner used the Internet to buy everything she needed for her wedding and holiday gifts for her husband and step-daughter. Other than food, 90 percent of her purchases were made on her home computer.

“I find that, by being able to go online and choose the things that I need to choose, and have them delivered to me right at my doorstep, I eliminate all the driving, all the crowds, all the noise of that, and I usually get a better selection.”

There are a lot of people like her. Experts say American online shopping hit records in both November and December. Fifty-seven percent of Americans have bought something electronically.

Store owners worry that this growing amount of online sales will hurt their business. Cornell University marketing professor Ed McLaughlin says they should be worried. He spoke to VOA by Skype.

“Anything that can move online, will. And it’s just a matter of time.”

Professor McLaughlin says traditional stores can keep their customers by selling goods like clothing, which buyers may want to see and try on before purchasing. He says the stores could also offer things that are difficult to ship. He also says some stores can please customers by offering to set up or repair electronic products.

Bill Martin is the founder of ShopperTrak. His business helps stores learn about their customers. He told VOA by Skype that traditional stores offer a social experience that some people enjoy.

“There is still a lot of emotion in the buying decision, you know, that takes place. Oftentimes, you know, you need that last sense of ‘Boy, this is exactly what I want’ -- that feeling before you’re ready to part with money, and you can’t always get that on-line. It’s a rather cold process.”

Bill Martin says traditional stores can provide goods to buyers more-quickly than online stores. And some retailers are using websites to persuade people to visit their stores.

While e-commerce worries some business owners, the only worry for delivery services like FedEx and UPS is keeping up with the number of packages. UPS Manager Dana Kline says her company is very busy at this time of year. UPS is so busy that it has filled 55,000 temporary worker positions during the holiday season.