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The Online Gold Standard

By [RUTH LA FERLA](#)

CLACK, clack, clack. That's the sound of fingers tapping, as holiday shoppers forsake their Excel spreadsheets and arid texts for the heady allure of the Web. Judging by holiday purchases, online buying sprees are turning even the most solemn of sobersides into saucer-eyed children mesmerized by glitter and gilt.

At the height of the gift-giving season, their aggregate taste for diamond-drop earrings, sequin slippers, dome-shape rings, and gold-plated cameras, has given a vigorous push to luxury sales on the Internet. Indeed, from late November through mid-December, a time when conventional retailing has been sluggish at best, e-commerce is flourishing, with spending ahead by 30 percent over the same period last year, according to a study by MasterCard Advisors. The company reported an increase of 10.8 percent in luxury purchases.

Shopping online "has become such a way of life for many people," said Eva Jeanbart-Lorenzotti, the founder of Vivre, a luxury catalog and Web business, where customers are buying gold-tone leather Anya Hindmarch clutch bags and Miriam Haskell necklaces that drape like scarves. "People shop when they want to and how they want to," she said. They are logging on to upscale sites as well as mass-oriented competitors that are expanding their luxury offerings.

At [Portero.com](#), a Web site selling used status brand goods, shoppers have been drawn to niche designers like the jeweler Anthony Nak as well as to classics like Seaman Schepps earrings. They find Internet shopping "high tech and efficient," said Stephanie Phair, the vice president for merchandising at Portero. "That's why they are going online to fill their holiday shopping lists."

Spurred by shopper's bon vivant tastes and by the growing online presence of prestigious brands like Cartier, Burberry and [Christian Lacroix](#), even [Amazon.com](#) has dressed up its offerings. This year the company is selling watches and diamonds priced from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

Amazon is responding to a shift in consumers' purchasing patterns, said Tracy Ogden, a company spokeswoman. People logging on to "buy their food for entertaining, and DVDs for their kids" are simultaneously picking up "bracelets as gifts, and even their holiday cocktail attire," she said.

At [Neimanmarcus.com](#), best-sellers include a leather hobo bag from Prada (\$1,495), Converse sequined sneakers with butterflies stamped on their rubber soles (\$140) and a Madame Alexander Doll tricked out in a veiled black pillbox, black coat and matching knickers (\$150). People "like to see a lot of product quickly," said Gerald Barnes, a senior vice president for Neiman Marcus Direct.

The fashion specialist [Net-a-porter.com](#) is experiencing a run on rarefied pieces, among them a Deco-style diamante bracelet (\$1,600), as well as a Phillip Lim shift (\$695 and Christian Louboutin gold-tone platform

evening pumps (\$1,375). Amazon customers are similarly drawn to all that glistens, their selections running from metallic mesh peep-toe sandals by Beverly Feldman (\$296), jaguar-print totes from Rafe (\$550) and a Cartier women's Roadster watch with a pink face (\$3,048). They are just as partial to offbeat variations on conventional stocking stuffers, like Amy Jo Gladstone cashmere mules trimmed in a cognac-colored velvet bow.

Ms. Lorenzotti of Vivre observed that her customers are favoring "the fun and the whimsical." She added, "Gifts that say something are more and more prominent," mentioning Carlos de Souza pendants inscribed "Madly in Love," and suspended from silk tasseled cords (\$550); diminutive diamond pendants by Marie Chantal in the shape of toddler boys and girls; and a 24-karat gold plate and diamond digital camera (\$2,400) for photographers more taken with extravagant looks than technology.

The cameras — all 50 — were sold almost at once, Ms. Lorenzotti recalled with amusement. "One person ordered them for almost everybody on her list."

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