

E-gadgets are the must-have gift for Father's Day

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Updated: 11:55 p.m. Wednesday, June 15, 2011

Posted: 9:14 p.m. Wednesday, June 15, 2011

Dad's latest toy is pushing Father's Day spending up this year, pumping more than \$1 billion more into the economy than last year and bringing the holiday closer to rivaling powerhouse Mother's Day.

Brand Keys, a New York-based research firm that tracks consumers' brand loyalty, expects spending to reach nearly \$11 billion for the holiday, narrowing the gap between it and Mother's Day, which has \$15.7 billion in sales.

Why the boost?

The gifts of choice this year are tablets and e-readers, says Brand Keys President Robert Passikoff. Electronics catapulted into one of the top spots, and 35 percent of those buying electronics told surveyors it would be a tablet or e-reader.

Despite retail sales dropping slightly in May from the previous month and other signs that the economy is struggling, a significant holiday brings out buyers in a dependable way, Passikoff said.

In fact, a National Retail Federation survey recently determined that Americans plan to spend \$12 more on average for a Father's Day present, or \$106.49. About 75 percent of those surveyed planned to celebrate the holiday.

Alex De Chabert isn't getting that iPad2 he wanted for Father's Day, but that's because he got it for his birthday Sunday.

"Men's stuff is expensive," Heather De Chabert said as she watched son Tristen at The Mall at Wellington Green play area. "He (husband Alex) likes expensive electronics and cars."

Of course, she figures women's stuff can be, too. And it's an expensive week around their Acreage home, since both she and Tristen, who will be 2, have birthdays Sunday.

Electronics gifts might give technology spending a slight boost, considering the category has been "soft," said Stephen Baker, vice president of industry analysis at market researcher The NPD Group.

"I think we'll see a very slight increase" in electronics spending, Baker said. "There's obviously a big surge toward tablets and e-readers."

A survey of purchasing habits by Totsy, a website for moms, found that 74 percent of those surveyed said the family usually buys a gift for Dad. Not only do people buy for their father or stepfather, the National Retail Federation discovered, they give gifts to their husbands, grandfathers, sons and even friends.

Electronic gadgets have replaced tools as the big buy for Father's Day, said Eddie Carrasquillo, digital life manager at Best Buy in West Palm Beach. Retailers like Best Buy attract customers with special sales, and people are spending more. For fathers, they're buying tablets, he said.

"That's usually how dads are - they like the latest and greatest in electronic toys," Carrasquillo said.

Carrasquillo is right about the shift, Passikoff said. Clothing and tools were among the top three gifts five and

10 years ago, but now it's gift cards and electronics.

John Currier of Royal Palm Beach, a father and a son, said he isn't much of an electronics guy. Last year, he got a gift certificate for a massage. This year, he'll take his father to dinner as usual, which is "the deal."

Passikoff said 43 percent of those surveyed are taking Dad out to eat Sunday, though that was down from the previous year. Gift cards are No. 1 with 35 percent of the Father's Day market. But the tablet and e-reader craze is changing the spending numbers .

"What's driving up the spending is the fact they're spending more on electronics," Passikoff said. "There's the big jump."

Upstairs at the Apple store, Rebecca Wisnicki and son Justin, 13, of Wellington, were indulging their high-tech urges. But Dad will probably get clothes for an upcoming cruise.

"He has everything," Rebecca Wisnicki said, adding that her husband buys the latest gadgets without waiting to get them as gifts.

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