



Thrifs and thrills - As budgets tighten, consignment shops see upswing

*Written by Sara Hamilton
Sunday, 15 February 2009*

While many tri-county retail stores are closing because of plummeting sales, regional consignment stores are seeing the silver lining of the economic recession as consumers look for creative ways to stick to their budgets.

The area's secondhand stores have thrived in recent months as savvy shoppers have caught the consignment bug.

"My theory is that people are much more budget-conscious now, and in the past they might not have considered buying something that was pre-owned," said Mike Pegler, owner of The Consignment Warehouse in Westlake Village. "So, if they come in to take a look, they realize they're not really settling — they're just being smart with their money. Just because they're on a budget, doesn't mean that they've lost their taste."

Pegler is confident that upscale consignment stores like his will not only withstand the economic slump, but also will experience unprecedented growth because of it. And he's got the numbers to back it up.

At the end of the fourth quarter, sales at The Consignment Warehouse were up 20 percent. Pegler said he's doing so well that he's actually planning to expand, adding five to seven new locations.

"Southern California is underserved with this type of concept. There is no shortage of items to get on consignment, and the customers love the bargains," Pegler said. "Now that commercial real estate is softening up and rents are more affordable, it's a good time to open more stores."

Pegler doesn't seem fazed by the Craigslist craze either. He maintains that the ease of consignment stores will see them through the tough times.

"Many times people have already tried to sell their items online before they come to us," Pegler said. "Selling items on your own is time-consuming, and you still have to take the phone calls and meet strangers in your home. We're providing a service to the consignor; we handle all of the details. Most of the time, they will net about the same as if they sold the items on their own, but with none of the hassle."

Note: Story has been edited to highlight Consignment Warehouse information and quotes.

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