

## STUDENT LIFE

## Adults hone in on Halloween

By Jackie Cohen  
(KRT)

SAN FRANCISCO - Halloween isn't just for kids anymore.

Adult shoppers will spend \$3.12 billion on themed candy, costumes and decorations this year, the National Retail Federation says.

"Over the last decade, Halloween has become an adult holiday while children have become secondary for many retailers," said James Lowry, a retail analyst and marketing professor at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind. "Adults want to relive that time when they could pretend to be a superhero or monster."

The average consumer plans to spend \$43.57 on Halloween related merchandise, up from \$41.77 last year, the retail federation said. That will drive sales up from \$2.96 billion in 2003, although sales will likely remain below their 2001 peak of \$3.19 billion.

Lowry, though, says this year's holiday may be even stronger.

"I think we should see Halloween retail sales numbers increase slightly over last year," he said.

"The economy is stronger, and people have more discretionary income."

Costumes come first on most shopping lists, with the average expenditure at \$15.21, followed by candy at \$14.93, decorations at \$10.95 and greet-

ing cards at \$2.58, according to retail federation data.

At least 50 million American households, including 90 percent of families with children 12 or younger, celebrate Halloween, according to research by Hallmark. These figures may be on the low side, however.

"Total Halloween spending is highest among 25- to 34-year-olds," Hallmark promotional materials say. "Halloween has become one of the top reasons for Americans to throw a party - it's the third largest party day in the U.S. behind New Year's Eve and Super Bowl Sunday."

Parties are most popular among 18- to 24-year-olds surveyed by the retail federation: Just over half plan to either host or attend a Halloween party, compared with about one-third of those aged 25 to 44.

Dressing up is one of the big attractions of the parties: About one-third of the adults surveyed by the National Retail Federation said they planned to wear a costume.

Not surprisingly, Americans aged 18 to 24 show the most eagerness, with 54.1 percent planning to don disguises. The older crowd is less enthusiastic - only about 44 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and 34 percent of 35- to 44-year-olds will put on a costume.

Costume trends tend to be inspired by movies and television, so expect to see plenty of people dressed up like Catwoman, Harry Potter,

Spiderman, the Hulk and Scooby Doo come Oct. 31.

Political masks also sell like hotcakes during election years, and military getup should be equally hot this year, along with the standard fare of witches, vampires, werewolves, fairies, animals, pirates, cartoon characters and superheroes, surveys show.

There's a dark side to all the partying: The National Commission Against Drunk Driving now issues annual warnings prior to the holiday after observing that a higher percentage of alcohol-related deaths occurred on Halloween than on any other one-day holiday in 2002.

The group points out that such incidents rise when Halloween falls on a weekend, as it does this year, simply because there are more parties.

"Anytime Halloween falls on a weekend, there's a spike in all kinds of holiday activity," said Darryl Knox, president of Halloween Online LLC, which runs a network of 30 Web sites and coordinates advertising campaigns all aimed at the October holiday. "This year it falls on a Sunday, which is still good for parties." See the Web site: <http://www.halloween-online.net/>

While partying might be skewed toward the younger crowd, carving pumpkins, decorating the home and handing out candy are more equally enjoyed across all age groups. Numerous surveys say Halloween is the second-biggest holiday for deco-

rating the home, trailing only Christmas.

"The bulk of Halloween spending, a good 60 to 80 percent of it, is done at card and party shops," Lowry said. "The rest of it happens at mass-market retailers, especially places like Wal-Mart, which are all about impulse shopping."

Halloween still ranks just sixth overall for total holiday spending.

Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are expected to bring in \$219.9 billion this year. Valentine's Day generated \$12.79 billion in 2004; Easter rang up \$10.47 billion; Mother's Day, \$10.43 billion, and Father's Day, \$8.04 billion.

However, Halloween is No. 1 when it comes to candy sales, which are expected to surpass \$1 billion this year.

Candy conglomerate Hershey Foods commissioned a telephone survey of 1,034 Americans 18 years old and older and found 77 percent buy candy for Halloween and 68 percent give the sweets to trick-or-treaters.

Among those handing out goodies, the overwhelming favorite is chocolate; the Top 10 selling sweets last Halloween were Snickers, followed by Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Kit Kat, according to Information Resources, Inc.

Much less popular are lollipops, hard candy, bubble gum, gummy candy and sour candy, descending in that order.

## MTV's hit car show pumps up clunkers

By Rob Watson  
Knight Ridder Newspapers  
(KRT)

Teens were captivated by the first season of MTV's "Pimp My Ride." Kids who looked and lived just like them saw their busted-up cars transformed into chrome-laden chariots with enough gadgetry to make James Bond envious.

The show was a runaway hit, scoring top ratings with teenagers on Sunday nights and cruising easily past all the many car-makeover shows among viewers ages 12 to 34.

"It's not the typical 'reality' show for MTV's target audience," says Marc Berman, a columnist for the trade publication Mediaweek. "It puts cars and, more importantly, the kids in a positive light."

Sunday at 9 p.m. EDT, the second season will begin and another slew of ragtag vehicles will be put on the stroll.

Souping up cars on TV isn't an original concept, but "Pimp" wields a couple of heavy weapons. It focuses on young people who deserve something special in their lives, and they get to drive off with some of the wildest autos most of us have ever seen.

You just won't see in-car waterfalls, Internet access, or a yoga studio - yes, a complete, wood-lined yoga studio - on those other shows.

West Coast rapper Xzibit, the hilarious master of ceremonies, says: "We've got a brand-new, multimillion-dollar (auto body) facility, and it's just good to be involved in something so dope."

"Pimp My Ride" is the brainchild of Rick Hurvitz and Bruce Beresford-Redman, two high school chums who once had their own clunkers.

Says Hurvitz: "In high school, (Beresford-Redman) had a '68 Cadillac hearse and I had a '72 lime-green (Oldsmobile) Delta 88 convertible. For a high school kid, it's your first car, it has new meaning in your life, so we thought: Wouldn't it be great to give kids a chance to pimp that as opposed to getting something new?"

The two were involved with "Married by America" and "For Love or Money," among other reality shows. But "Pimp" wasn't going to be about the lengths contestants will go to. This time, it was the creators who needed to push the limits, and they needed help.

Hurvitz and Beresford-Redman found that help at West Coast Customs, one of the premier shops in Los Angeles.

"We could do the work, but (the show) needed a celebrity," says owner Ryan Friedlinghaus. "I knew Xzibit from working on his cars and was sure he would do it for me."

With a go-ahead from MTV, taping began. But the first car almost stalled everyone's efforts.

It was a Daihatsu minivan, which was in horrible shape.

"That was the worst (from Season 1) in my eyes. ... (T)he first car they bring me is that? I thought, whoa, what did I get myself into?"

However, Friedlinghaus and crew refused to put the brakes on. They turned that pile of rusted metal into a sweet cruiser with three TVs, a mini-fridge, and a built-in guitar amp for owner Wyatt, an 18-

year-old musician who could barely get to auditions in far-flung L.A.

Wyatt and his transportation predicament were just what MTV was looking for, says Beth Greenwald, senior director of development for MTV. They were the right combination of a rustbucket, a life struggle, and screen presence, or "pop," she says.

In addition to working their cosmetic and gadget magic, the customizers make sure the car's internal workings are up to snuff. The elaborate re-births, which run \$20,000 to \$50,000 for cars worth a fraction of that, combined with feel-good endings have made "Pimp" a hit all across the bubble.

"We're on in over 40 countries," Hurvitz says. "Now every day, it seems, someone from Brazil, England, or some other unexpected place is coming over and stopping at West Coast Customs to see the facility."

That level of fame forced Friedlinghaus to move "to a bigger place just to be able to handle all of this. ... We needed an area to do the show and an area for our regular work. We had a crew of about 15 guys to handle all of our business, and now we are up to around 28, 30."

For him, with the added beef comes added gravy, too: The show has brought the customizer deals for clothing, toys and video games, and he has attracted car biz from hip-hop's Cash Money crew and professional sports figures.

"Pimp's popularity put Xzibit, 30, through some changes as well. The well-versed rapper still doesn't know what to say to fans who approach him on the street, trying to get on the show or, worse, seeking auto advice.

"It's a madhouse, man. ... like I have some tools in my pocket, or some rims around my neck that I can throw on their ride," says the man who owns a tricked-out Mercedes and Hummer.

There is at least one luxury that Xzibit hasn't retooled his wheels with. Greenwald learned that it might be possible to fit a 40-inch flat-screen TV inside a car.

Luckily for fans, she and her casting staff found just the right vehicle and the right driver for Season 2.

"Pimp My Ride's" guys at West Coast Customs merge imagination with technical wizardry. Some of the coolest from the first season:

- One restored Mustang got even hotter when the crew added flame-shooting tailpipes. Too bad they were completely illegal.

- One lucky driver will always be the belle of the ball now that her Trans Am dome light has been replaced by a chandelier.

- A redone Maxima station wagon can't carry the groceries anymore, but it can carry a tune. Many tunes, in fact, as its cargo area now holds a complete DJ set, including two turntables and a mixer.

- Passengers in another Mustang must come to grips with the rhinestone-encrusted gear shifter and the machine that blows bubbles out of the convertible.

- The owner of a Toyota Land Cruiser can find inner peace amid L.A. traffic in the wood-lined yoga studio installed behind the front seats.

## Puppets doing dirty work



M.S. GORDON/KRT

Puppets, such as the Michael Moore puppet in "Team America," are filling the screens in new movies.

By Chris Vognar  
The Dallas Morning News  
(KRT)

Whether living on Avenue Q or working for "Team America," puppets are engaging in the kind of behavior that could get you evicted from Sesame Street.

Sure, they still walk and talk, sing and dance. They still act a little wooden. But they also vomit and have sex. And some of them say the damndest things.

Why the sudden surge in edgy puppetry? They can do and say the kinds of things largely forbidden to real people in this complicated, politically correct world. Hey, it wasn't me; it was the puppet.

"People don't expect to take puppets seriously, so there's basically no material that they can't do," says Rick Lyon, who conceived and designed the all-puppet cast for the Broadway smash "Avenue Q." The Tony-winning musical, which will set up shop in Las Vegas next year, spotlights a group of bawdy, multiethnic New York puppets who bear a suspicious resemblance to the Muppets. "But viewers do get the message, and they get it in a very profound way."

The word "profound" doesn't immediately come to mind when you watch "Team America: World Police," which hit movie screens Friday.

Created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the guys who built a potty-mouth, construction-paper empire out of "South Park," the movie's puppets blow one another away, throw up, give profane monologues and engage in some seriously compromising positions. That last part nearly got Team America the most restrictive movie rating - NC-17 - before the filmmakers made last-second cuts. Parker and Stone got the puppet bug while watching a rerun of "Thunderbirds," a futuristic '60s TV show from England with puppet heroes and model spaceships.

"It just looked cool, especially nowadays when everything is computer-generated," Stone said at last month's Toronto International Film Festival, where "Team America" footage was shown to critics. "Just watching the puppets say their lines and walk away was making us laugh. They had little model cars and they just threw them off a hill. They tried to do the detail so that it looked real. They couldn't, but even the attempt was visually interesting."

The filmmakers wanted to do a "Thunderbirds" movie with puppets and a bawdy "South Park" sensibility. But the rights had already been scooped up for a live-action version of "Thunderbirds," which tanked this summer.

Yet they still had the puppet itch. So they did something a little more topical. The puppets in "Team America" include an anti-terrorism strike force, a variety of terrorists, Kim Jong Il, Peter Jennings, Michael Moore (holding two hot dogs, wearing mustard on his face and ex-

plosives around his waist), Sean Penn and Tim Robbins. None, of course, voiced by the real-life models.

They get chopped off at the waist and decapitated. The Moore marionette blows himself up. Giant house cats tear the Penn puppet to bits.

Think poor behavior among our inanimate friends is a new phenomenon? Think again.

The original Punch and Judy marionette shows, which date to at least the 17th century, were grisly affairs. Punch, an obese hunchback, throws a crying baby out the window, kills his wife (that would be Judy) with a stick, hangs a hangman, murders a doctor and eventually even triumphs over the devil. The shows were enormously popular across Europe. When the logistics of traveling with a full marionette show grew less cost-effective, Punch was converted into a hand puppet.

After all, the puppet show must go on.

Some shows featured a human Punch, in costume. But, according to The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, "it was as a puppet that Punch gained his great success, for it was as a puppet his physical disfigurements could be exaggerated in a manner impossible to a living actor."

This only-with-a puppet approach was honed in the mid-20th century by Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, the courtly ventriloquist and his trash-talking dummy. And today, it's practiced by the likes of Robert Smigel, who took a crude doggie hand puppet, popped a cigar in his mouth and created the rudely hilarious Triumph, the Insult Comic Dog for "Late Night With Conan O'Brien." And don't forget the Comedy Central show "Crank Yankers," in which celebrities give voice to crank-calling puppets.

None of this is designed for children's consumption. Then again, Punch and Judy were no Bert and Ernie.

That pair and their Muppet compadres rose to fame on the kid-centric "Sesame Street" in the early 1970s. "What's interesting is that before 'Sesame Street,' Jim Henson's work was not in any way exclusively for kids," says Lyon, the Avenue Q puppet master. "His early stuff was definitely for an adult audience. It was very psychedelic, wacky, '60s way-out-there stuff."

Indeed, Henson's most popular post-Sesame creation, "The Muppet Show," was originally designed for late night - with the tongue-in-cheek subtitle "Sex and Violence."

Say it ain't so, Kermit.

"In this digital universe, where nothing is what it seems to be, there's this sort of nostalgic swing back to things that are real, that are tangible and three-dimensional and happen in real time," says Lyon. "Puppets fit that bill. But at the same time, they're odd and different and still behave like living things."

And living things, as we all know, are capable of behaving badly.