US HALLOWEEN 2015

WHAT WE SEE IN STORES FOR HALLOWEEN

- **The National Retail Federation (NRF) forecasts that Americans will spend $6.9 billion on Halloween this year, down from $7.4 billion last year.**
- **Halloween falls on a Saturday this year, which gives consumers additional opportunities for shopping for costumes, decorations and candy before the evening festivities.**
- **Princess costumes remain the most popular children's costumes for the 11th year in a row; other popular choices include *Star Wars, Frozen* and *Minions* characters.**

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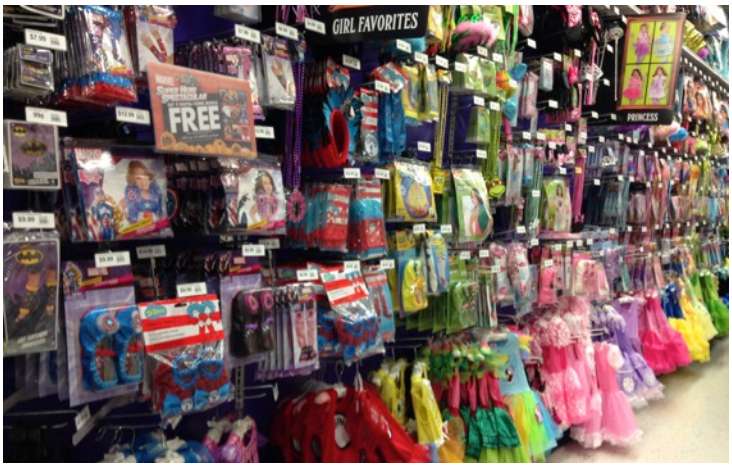
Halloween is quickly approaching and this is the time to get creative. While Halloween pop-up stores are popping up all around New York City, almost every retailer is taking advantage of the holiday and offering Halloween-related items ranging from accessories to apparel to home decor. The biggest seasonal players, Spirit Halloween and Halloween Express, were together reported to operate nearly 1,400 pop-up franchises throughout North America in 2014.

Since the lines are getting longer and merchandise is disappearing from the shelves so fast that it looks as if it were being given away free, we started our search for the perfect costume two weeks ahead of Halloween evening.



POP-UP HALLOWEEN STORES

Pop-up Halloween stores open their doors at the beginning of fall and are a great option for early shoppers who would rather be prepared way ahead of time than wait in what might turn into a hour-long line outside the store in chilly weather. The all-costume pop-up stores offer classic and trendy costumes along with matching accessories at reasonable prices. We spotted many superhero items for the whole family, assorted movie icon complete looks, and a wide range of animal ears and tails that are the easy costume solution year after year. Most of the pop-up stores stay open the week after Halloween, selling leftover merchandise at significant discounts.

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HALLOWEEN ADVENTURE

A must-visit shop was Halloween Adventure, New York's biggest year-round costume store, which is located in the East Village. Whether you are looking for a costume in April or in October, there is no doubt you will find it here! With the largest retail selection of costumes, wigs, masks, props and decor in the city, the store also offers costume and prop rentals, as well as a magic section, and the variety is overwhelming. Spooky displays can be seen all around the two-floor space, and fully costumed sales assistants will definitely get you into the Halloween spirit. Prices start at $2.99 for accessories and run to more than $139.99 for a full clouds suit rental.

RICKY'S NYC

Our next stop was Ricky's NYC, a veritable one-stop shop for everything beauty. Once a year, Ricky's covers its shelves in spider webs and becomes a Halloween superstore. Operating since 1989, as of October 2015 Ricky's has 30 stores in New York and 10 stores that operate as Halloween costume locations only, so it is not surprising that we stumbled upon three Ricky's stores within just a few blocks of each other. Each storefront looks completely different. However, the merchandise is similar in most of the locations, so if you are looking for a certain item, you will probably find it in one store or another.

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The retailer is offering complete costumes for both kids and adults as well as separate pieces such as capes, wings, hats, animal ears and colorful wigs. One of the store's everyday items that becomes a best seller throughout Halloween is hair color, and Ricky's sells it in every possible shade. Navigating throughout the store might be a challenge, as none of the narrow costume aisles is organized by theme, and unpacked boxes are scattered on the floor. In all the stores we visited, many items were tagged with multiple price tags, and those tags did not all have the same price on them, even though they were stuck on the same box. One item was priced significantly higher than the exact same item sitting next to it. However, the Halloween stores' clutter is understandable under the circumstances, and Ricky's is still a great solution for holiday costume finds.

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H&M

H&M, the affordable fast-fashion brand, is offering great solutions for Halloween this year. Among funky everyday clothing that can be used as part of a costume, shoppers can also find a wide range of ready-made costumes with matching shoes and accessories for kids and a limited selection of items for adults.

In the kids' section, merchandise included superhero body suits, hats and shoes, Batman masks and apparel for both boys and girls, and other character items from movies such as Minions, Star Wars, Frozen and My Little Pony. General Halloween items such as masks, hair accessories, purses, jewelry, wings and stickers are available, too. All items are reasonably priced (masks are $3.99, dresses are $14.99), allowing parents to buy one-season trendy items that might not be relevant next year.

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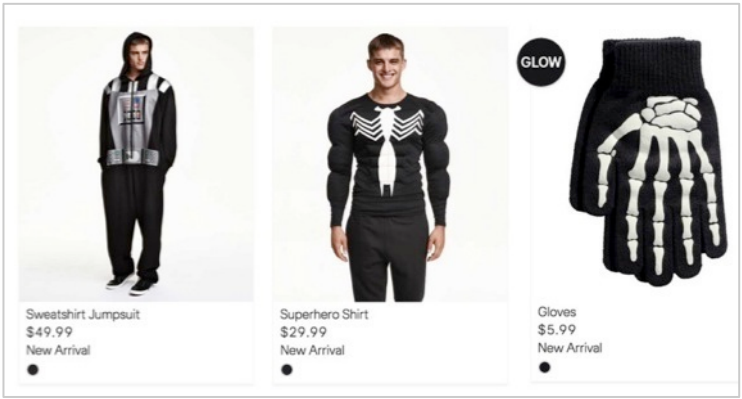
In the women's department, glitter is the key word. Featured items include sequined tops and bottoms, a shimmering dress with butterfly wings attached to the back and sleeves, glitter skeleton dresses, leopard-print bodysuits and even glow-in-the-dark sweaters. Many of the items have Halloween-related slogans printed on them in bright neon colors. Prices vary from $34.99 for a full-body animal costume to $24.99 for dresses and bodysuits to $5.99–$24.99 for makeup and accessories.

H&M is offering fewer options, and higher prices, in the men's section. Online customers are offered only three men's items in the special holiday section: a sweatshirt jumpsuit that is priced at $49.99, a superhero shirt for $29.99 and skeleton gloves for $5.99. The retailer is also featuring monochromatic everyday apparel and shoes for men.



Although H&M's website shows only a few Halloween-related pieces, we saw a significantly wider range of items at the flagship store in Herald Square, the retailer's largest location in the world, which opened in May 2015. The second and third floors feature many Halloween displays to inspire customers in their search for the perfect spooky outfit.

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