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Many locations around our market draw local, regional, national and international consumers to our main streets and shopping districts

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The seasonality of New England is one of its many charms. However, it can be very difficult for retailers trying to survive in a feast or famine world with high seasons and low seasons.

Seasonal retail has been a part of New England for a long time. There has been an evolution and a maturation. These are not the trade areas of our youth.

There are many scenic and spectacular locals around our market along the coast and into the mountains that draw local, regional, national and even international consumers to their main streets and shopping districts. Newport (R.I.), Chatham, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and Falmouth (Mass.) are some of the best known in southeastern New England. These places all offer a plethora of activities, beautiful coastlines, and plenty of shopping and dining as well.

Retailers have taken notice and there has been a maturation of these trade areas over the last 20 years. Main St. used to be mainly local retailers, ice cream and candy shops, and necessity retailers, as well as bars and restaurants. Now, if you walk down these streets, you are as likely to see Banana Republic, Vineyard Vines, J.Crew, and Black Dog as you would a local retailer. These retailers have entered the seasonal seaside towns of New England looking to expand their footprint and take advantage of the strong summer season and the wealth these areas pull.

Many of these locals become a large part of the brand some of these retailers are presenting to the world. For example, Black Dog was an iconic restaurant and bakery in Vineyard Haven for many years. The brand was a launching pad for a dry goods retail concept that can be seen throughout the region now and the Black Dog is a very recognizable image.

Vineyard Vines is another retail entity launched in the idea of promoting the good life in Martha's Vineyard and selling that to a larger audience though the retail stores now located throughout the northeast.

The issue for these retailers is managing a limited sales season and surviving a slow off season. They need to be well stocked and well staffed when July 1st comes around and also pare down effectively, if not close, for the slow winters.

Many of these trade areas have been helped by the towns and cities they reside in. these municipalities have learned how to drive traffic to the market in the slower shoulder seasons particularly fall into the holidays. Many offer great rates and various festivals, holiday strolls, liquor and food based events, sporting events and other unique offerings that get a mostly local and regional visitors back to town. Many of these trade areas have had their year round populations grow as Generation Xer's move to these locales full time. Cape Cod has over 250,000 full time residents now, a significant increase from 20 years ago.

What has happened as a result of these traffic drawing events is retailers have been able to keep

sales volumes up through the fall and into the holiday season. They have been able to stretch the selling season and create a more consistent sales calendar.

The problem historically and today remains the January to April time period when it is most difficult to get tourists to the market. Some retailers close up and many others soldier through understanding this is the cost of doing business at the beach. This seems to be the last hurdle to securing a 12 month selling cycle.

The seasons can be short, the landlords are usually local and spaces can be small and non-prototypical. But there is money to be made and these are beautiful places to spend time and money which makes them intriguing locales for retailers if they can manage the seasons.

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