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## More than just retail

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Delivering discounted shoes by drone will not replace the old fashioned walk, talk, browse, and shopping of a downtown, neighborhood town center or a good mall, even at Christmas. These Xmas Internet retailers aggressively cut prices and promised free and rapid delivery dramatically cutting into the sales of brick and mortar giants. The online shopping trend seemed to please shoppers until the end when many of Santa's gifts were sadly not delivered on time. However, local brick and mortar retailers more than survived. By providing surprise and novelty, they enhanced the shopping experience, from pop-ups in empty stores to craft markets in churches and parking lots to traditional urban retail centers.

Local merchants in neighborhood town centers assembled and succeeded. Using old fashioned shopping promotions, they created an entertaining community experience to attract shoppers and boost sales.

Named the "Holiday Stroll," this promotional event enticed shoppers to retail centers across Mass. from the smallest Cape village to Boston neighborhoods. What was so appealing about the Stroll? In Newton Highlands stores offered something free or highly discounted, a glass of wine, warm cider or a 99¢ coffee. A local real estate agency offered free use of their usually private restrooms. There were discount coupons for future use from the dry cleaners, gift bags with discounts from the hair salon, and a free appraisal from the jewelry store. There was even a \$5 rack at the consignment store. But, what makes the Stroll work as an experience is the non-shopping, the entertaining Sing A Long, Santa, and the warm welcome of the participating merchants. Being on a "Stroll" transcends shopping. If malls and downtowns could recreate this special sense of place at other times, brick and mortar shopping would be fun. Shoppers cannot get that experience on the Internet, at least not yet.

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