

ONLINE SALES ARE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN RETAIL SALES THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

FEATURED GEM: TANZANITE

Strong job growth in the U.S. created great optimism prior to holidays this year. Still, the initial analysis of Black Friday spending indicates that jewelers had fierce competition from other retail sectors such as electronics, travel and apparel. While retail sales were up less than 3% during Black Friday, Adobe reports roaring online sales of \$3.7 billion, which is 28% more than last year, on Thanksgiving Day. If the trend continues, we expect this season to be one of the strongest in recent years. Today, consumers are better informed about industry products and sourcing. To what extent this will influence buying decisions across the spectrum of jewelry consumers is not yet known. However, among the young professionals it is an increasingly important factor. As so often is the case in retail, the perception of value and quality of service will be critical to achieving positive results.

FEATURED GEM: TANZANITE

Tanzanite, the blue-purple variety of zoisite, has been a popular gemstone since its discovery in the Merelani Hills of Tanzania in the 1960s. To this day, Tanzania remains the only producer of gem quality tanzanite. It has also recently been declared as a December birthstone, along with turquoise and zircon.

Tanzanite has become very popular because of its ability to display attractive blue and violet colors with strong pleochroism, more precisely trichroism with added green or brown undertones. These colors are only comparable to fine quality blue sapphires. Although in its finest qualities, tanzanite can exhibit a blue color comparable to sapphire, it cannot compare to sapphire in durability.

There are plenty of simulants of tanzanite, yet no synthetic production has been successful so far. The majority of tanzanite are heat treated to obtain the more desirable blue-

violet color. In its natural state, the material often has a gray or brown color, although, naturally blue to violet color material is known. Such stones, when fine to extra fine quality (with no heat treatment), sell at a premium in the market. Gem professionals should also be aware of the coating of light-colored stones in order to pass them as better-quality material. Coated tanzanites have been detected in the last decade or so but not very commonly seen lately.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of tanzanite recognized as a newly discovered gemstone. Tanzanite is typically priced at much lower price points than sapphire. For many years, tanzanite had a steady price range but it appears that the new developments at the source might cause price increase. The Tanzanian government recently introduced new regulations to the mining sector which may dramatically decrease the illegal rough trading. Tightened supply will reflect in per carat prices sooner than later. ♦



*Tanzanite and diamond ring.
Courtesy of Philip Zahm Designs.*

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