

“Spirit” of American Malls Come Alive During Spooky Season

It's never a pretty sight, the visible markings of an old JC Penney's that once occupied a mall front being non-operational for over a decade, reminiscing the glory days of waiting for Mom as she tries on her 10th outfit.

The average American mall, which was once the staple of commerce, tends to struggle year-round due to the rise of e-commerce businesses such as Amazon coming to fruition. However, a stimulus package arrives once a year to boost the economy of malls across America. What is it? Spirit Halloween.

Every Halloween season, Spirit brings life into abandoned stores and rakes in a total of \$1.1 billion in revenue, as of 2023. Its revenue is also part of a larger trend in Halloween spending, which amounts to \$12 billion. The impact that Spirit brings to malls are a blessing to small business owners as avid Halloween-goers trickle into their stores after purchasing their costume for the year.

Let's be honest with ourselves, we usually avoid the mall when we can. As a fellow creature of convenience, I ask, why go there when your shopping can be done online? It's become all too easy to skip the hassle of scouring various retailers for one specific item that can be found on Google's search engine in seconds. Yet, when Fall comes around the corner, an attitude shifts. A quiver comes down your spine as the urge to visit your local shopping mall comes to mind, goosebumps arise when the realization hits you – Spirit is in town.

Spirit Halloween isn't just selling costumes; it's selling nostalgia. For a few glorious weeks, people actually *want* to go to the mall again. It's not about picking up a last-minute costume, it's the experience of trying on different masks and remembering what it felt like when malls were the community centers for suburban life. Amazon can ship you a costume in 48 hours or less, but can it give you the thrill of trying on a full-body hot dog suit in a makeshift dressing room? I think not.

The amount that Americans spend on Halloween is simply good for business. In fact, 72% of Americans plan to celebrate Halloween with a planned spending budget of \$104 per person, that's an estimated \$11.6 billion in spending! To add, 52% of people plan to decorate and 49% will be in costume; two things that Spirit provides. The result? A flood of foot traffic into malls that have been ghost towns for the latter part of the year. It's poetic that the thing breathing new life into malls is because of a holiday about the undead.

In the end, Spirit is perfectly at home in these retail graveyards, maybe that's why it does so well. It doesn't just haunt the empty malls, it revives them. And for those of us who spent way too much of our youth hanging out at the mall, it's a bittersweet reminder of what the place used to be.