



## Christmas shopping chaos looms

Call it "last chance Saturday" or just plain hell at the malls, Dec. 23 is shaping up to be a shopping disaster. According to Environics Communications, 2 p.m. on Dec. 23 will be the busiest time of the year for retailers, who are gearing up for the hit now. "It's going to be crazy because everybody will be off work," said Gap sales rep Lisa Wu yesterday, who advised people to get their shopping done before "the big hit" and come with lists of what they want to help speed up the process. Full Story

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**news**

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By ROBYN STUBBS, 24 HOURS



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There is, however, way to shop without hitting the mall: Hire a personal assistant.

While the concept is still a bit foreign to laid-back West-coasters, the idea of a personal assistant to help you with errands, hosting parties or doing your holiday shopping is growing in Vancouver, said Mary Ann Westendorf, president of The Bizzy Butler Concierge Services based in Maple Ridge.

When it comes to your Christmas list, personal assistants don't just do the shopping - they'll also brainstorm with you for the perfect gift idea.

"Once I get a bit of background, I'll go out and I'll hunt," said Westendorf. "But if somebody wants me to stand in line at Toys R Us to pick up little Joey's Tonka truck, I'll do that too."

Sounds tempting, doesn't it? But, if a personal assistant isn't in your budget, online shopping is another way to go - just be aware that scam websites tend to pop up during

this peak-shopping season, said Sheila Charneski, president of the Better Business Bureau of Mainland B.C.

"We know there are opportunists out there. Deal only with a site that you know and with merchants that you know, and if you don't, do your research," she suggested.

It's also a good idea to dedicate one credit card with a small limit to online shopping to reduce your losses if something goes wrong. More tips are posted at [www.bbbvan.org](http://www.bbbvan.org).