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## **No holiday rush for Wal-Mart Vstore**

THE WORLD'S LARGEST RETAILER, Wal-Mart Stores Inc., typically chose the beat of a different drummer and announced at its October 5 annual meeting in Bentonville, Ark., that it's not going to rush its revised and expanded Vstore offering to the Web in time for this holiday season – after all.

The company told securities analysts and shareholders that instead it would put the newly revamped site through three months of testing by employees prior to a now-planned January 1 launch. "This is a journey for us, not a race," said Glenn Habern, senior vice president of new business development at Wal-Mart.

For some of the still-emerging pure dot-coms, the next 10 weeks will bring a mad dash for critical mass as they vie for holiday e-commerce traffic that is widely predicted to surge to several times that of a year ago. This is do-or-die time for some of the pure dot-coms. But for Wal-Mart, the decision to forego a potential online windfall from the upcoming holidays maybe wasn't so difficult: One might argue that it really doesn't have to "be virtual" this fall after all.

Wal-Mart built its dominance from old-fashioned bricks and mortar, and little of its shareholder value or brand equity has much to do with its soon-to-come Web site revamp. Besides, the old Wal-Mart.com Web site, homely as it might be, is still available to hard-core online shoppers.

When it does unveil the new site, Wal-Mart executives revealed, it'll include some interesting, if not exactly ground-breaking features. These include 19 general-merchandise departments, a photo center, travel services, and a feature called "My Wal-Mart" that will retain personal shopping lists and present users with related opportunities when they book an e-commerce transaction.

But the executives left some big, intriguing questions unanswered. One is what Wal-Mart could possibly include in the more than 600,000 individual products and services that it promises to offer by the end of the first quarter? Is its designated fulfillment partner, Fingerhut Business Services, going to warehouse and ship all these items from its own facilities? Does the company's Vstore vision include groceries, as more and more of its physical-world stores do?

No doubt, the boys from Bentonville will answer all, in their own time.

### **Web sites referenced in this edition:**

<http://www.wal-mart.com>

<http://www.fingerhut.com>

### **Best of the Press:**

MSNBC.com/WSJ.com Highlights (Oct. 1, 1999): "Wal-Mart Overhauls its Web Site"

<http://www.msnbc.com/news/317804.asp?cp1=1>

Wal-Mart Stores Press Release (Oct. 5, 1999): "Traditional Wal-Mart.com Ready For Holidays; Redesigned Wal-Mart.com Debuts Early Next Year."

[http://wal-mart.com/newsroom/105\\_newsite.htm](http://wal-mart.com/newsroom/105_newsite.htm)

CNET News.com/Bloomberg News (Oct. 5, 1999): "Wal-Mart shelves plans for revamped site"  
<http://news.cnet.com/news/0-1007-200-808685.html?tag=st.cn.1fd2>.

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