



Challenger, Gray & Christmas

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2026 Seasonal Retail Hiring Report

SEASONAL HIRING ANNOUNCEMENTS REMAIN THIN AS RETAILERS WAIT AND SEE HOW CONSUMERS SPEND

CHICAGO, September 22, 2026 — Public seasonal hiring commitments from U.S. Retailers remain thin heading into the fourth quarter, with only a handful of companies publicizing 2026 headcount plans so far. Challenger predicts seasonal retail hiring will fall below last year's level to 450,000 Retail jobs added during the fourth quarter of the year.

Retailers added 461,500 jobs in the final quarter of 2025, the smallest seasonal gain since 2008 and 15% below the 543,100 added in Q4 2024, according to the firm's analysis of non-seasonally adjusted Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Even as consumers appear to be spending despite high prices - August retail sales jumped 1.2% and back-to-school shoppers held up - the pattern of quieter announcements suggests Retailers are again planning to lean on existing staff and on-demand pools rather than committing to large seasonal waves this early.

"The deepening pain from high energy costs may continue into the holiday season, and consumers may contract spending. That said, August retail sales jumped 1.2%, and there's no sign of a major spending pullback. But that resilience is not translating into large, early hiring commitments from the biggest Retailers," said Andy Challenger, workplace expert and Chief Revenue Officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

"Prices are still high, tariffs continue to work through supply chains, and Retailers are leaning on automation, existing associates, and on-demand pools before hiring net-new seasonal workers. It's more about restocking staffing plans surgically than a return to the 900,000-plus seasonal hiring years we saw in 2020 and 2021," he added.

Spirit Halloween announced the largest seasonal hiring push in its history with **52,000 associates** to staff a record 1,575 stores across the U.S. and Canada. Michaels announced plans on September 10th to hire more than **10,000 seasonal Team Members**, noting nearly half of last year's seasonal in-store roles converted to regular positions. Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's are holding a National Hiring Event on October 7 & 8th at locations across the U.S. and Canada. The company announced 4,000 hiring plans in 2024.

Several major Retailers that have historically issued early hiring targets have again gone quiet. Amazon has hit 250,000 seasonal hires in each of the last three years and typically announces in mid-October. Bath & Body Works has committed to 30,000+ associates in each of the last three seasons and normally announces in early September. Target has held its number of hires at 100,000 for the past several years, and Kohl's hired roughly 90,000 for most of the past decade. So far, none have publicly disclosed 2026 headcount figures, a continuation of the trend that emerged in 2024 as Retailers shifted toward flexible, on-demand staffing models.

Preliminary figures from the BLS show Retail employed 15.47 million workers in August 2026, up by just over 63,000 jobs from a year ago. Employment typically dips in September as teens and college-aged workers return to school, then rebuilds in the final quarter.

"Consumers are stretched but they are still showing up. Back-to-school spending held up, and the August surge in retail sales tells us households are not yet in retreat," said Challenger.

"But almost every hiring announcement we've seen in the last three years is smaller and more surgical than the pre-pandemic playbook. Even if the big names come in at last year's numbers, the total will likely fall well short of the 2019–2021 peaks."

Transportation & Warehousing

Seasonal hiring in Transportation and Warehousing followed a similar downward path. Employers in this sector added 266,500 positions in Q4 2025, down 12% from 2024 and the lowest Q4 total since 2018, when 259,500 jobs were added. Challenger forecasts a similar total in 2026 as e-commerce firms and logistics providers continue to lean on automation, robotics, flexible scheduling, and year-round staff to meet fluctuating demand. UPS, FedEx, and USPS have not yet released 2026 headcount targets; GEODIS and Radial announced modest plans last year in the 4,000–7,000 range.

"AI, robotics, and automation continue to reshape the peak-season labor profile in warehousing. The traditional seasonal spike in shipping jobs has been dulled, and every year that shift looks a little more permanent," said Challenger.

JOBS ADDED IN RETAIL TRADE — October, November, December

	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL	% Change
2005	122,300	392,700	196,600	711,600	0.20%
2006	150,600	427,300	169,000	746,900	5.00%
2007	87,900	465,400	167,600	720,900	-3.50%
2008	38,600	213,600	72,700	324,900	-54.90%
2009	45,100	317,100	133,600	495,800	52.60%
2010	149,800	339,200	158,600	647,600	30.60%
2011	134,200	390,600	154,500	679,300	4.90%
2012	138,700	485,400	99,600	723,700	6.50%
2013	159,600	443,100	184,100	786,800	8.70%
2014	182,800	412,200	154,100	749,100	-4.80%
2015	183,300	399,300	125,700	708,800	-5.38%
2016	149,400	359,400	132,200	641,000	-9.57%
2017	146,400	462,700	59,300	668,400	4.27%
2018	115,900	494,800	14,900	625,600	-6.40%
2019	160,900	431,900	79,500	672,300	7.47%
2020	239,200	356,800	140,300	736,300	9.52%
2021	224,400	348,600	128,400	701,400	-4.74%
2022	143,700	263,200	102,400	509,300	-27.39%
2023	149,600	294,900	119,700	564,200	10.78%
2024	123,700	277,400	142,000	543,100	-3.74%
2025	98,900	244,600	118,000	461,500	-15.02%
Average*	140,238	372,390	126,324	638,976	

*Since 2005

JOBS ADDED IN TRANSPORTATION & WAREHOUSING — October, November, December

	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL	% Change
2011	11,200	25,900	62,200	99,300	-2.93%
2012	14,000	28,300	103,900	146,200	47.20%

	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL	% Change
2013	11,300	57,500	96,300	165,100	12.39%
2014	39,100	56,800	135,800	231,700	40.34%
2015	13,900	70,600	144,000	228,500	-1.38%
2016	28,000	85,500	152,800	266,300	16.54%
2017	41,400	88,600	135,200	265,200	-0.41%
2018	52,900	111,200	95,400	259,500	-2.15%
2019	36,300	119,400	139,300	295,000	13.68%
2020	117,900	254,200	121,700	493,800	67.39%
2021	121,600	239,800	190,900	552,300	11.85%
2022	86,800	166,900	122,700	376,400	-31.84%
2023	64,400	140,300	131,700	368,500	-10.63%
2024	42,800	154,700	171,000	303,700	-2.10%
2025	44,800	94,700	127,000	266,500	-12.25%
Average*	48,427	112,960	128,660		

*Since 2011

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. with non-seasonally adjusted data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Table 2: ANNOUNCED SEASONAL HIRING PLANS

Company	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Amazon	120,000	120,000	100,000	200,000	100,000	150,000	150,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	
Spirit Halloween									50,000	50,000	52,000
Bath & Body Works								32,500	32,700	32,000	
Michaels		15,000	15,000	15,000	16,000	20,000	15,000			10,000	10,000
Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's				7,000	7,000				4,000		
JCPenney/Sparc/Catalyst	40,000	40,000	39,000	37,000	1,700			10,000	10,000	13,000	
Radial	20,000	23,000	20,000	12,581	25,000	7,700	1,700	10,500	7,000	6,500	
GEODIS							5,000	3,000		4,600	
Target	77,500	100,000	120,000	133,000	130,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	4,200	
Cavender's										1,500	
Kings Dominion					4,000					500	
American Christmas									300	220	
UPS	95,000	95,000	100,000	95,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	125,000		
Macy's	83,000	87,000	80,000	80,000	25,000	76,000	41,000	38,000	31,500		
Burlington Stores		12,000							24,500		
Aldi						20,000			13,000		
1-800-FLOWERS.COM Inc.		8,000	8,000	8,000	10,000	10,000	8,000	8,000	8,000		
Dick's Sporting Goods					9,000	10,000	9,000	8,600	8,000		
JW Marriott San Antonio						1,000			150		
USPS						40,000	28,000	10,000			
Kohl's	69,000		90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	2,700			
DHL Supply Chain					7,000						
Walmart					20,000	150,000	40,000				
See's Candies							5,000				
Boscov's						1,000	2,000				
Kroger		14,000	10,000		20,000	20,000	1,500				
Williams-Sonoma		2,000			2,500		1,000				
Legoland					150		400				
Opryland	300	400									
FedEx	50,000	50,000	55,000	55,000	70,000	90,000					
Dollar Tree				25,000	25,000	35,000					
Party City	35,000			25,000	20,000	17,000					

Company	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Shipt					100,000						
Lowe's					20,000						
Cherry Hill Programs					11,000						
Gap			65,000	30,000	10,000						
Hy-Vee					10,000						
L Brands	4,000		4,000		4,000						
Office Depot					3,000						
Sheetz					3,000						
Omaha Steaks					3,000						
Fresh Market					1,500						
Giant Eagle					1,300						
Meijer					200						
Nordstrom	11,400	13,650				28,600					
Toys"R"Us		12,500									
The Bon-Ton Stores	13,500	10,000									
McDonald's		3,179									
Fanatics		2,000									
Plow & Hearth		400									
Versant Supply Chain	2,000										
XPO Logistics		6,000	8,000								
Alter'd State				1,200							
Under Armour						1,000					
TOTAL	620,700	614,129	714,000	813,781	849,350	967,300	597,600	573,300	664,150	372,520	62,000

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas. 2026 column highlighted in maroon reflects newly announced plans.