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Macy's name is a turn-off for many, survey finds

Nearly 20 percent of Twin Cities shoppers would shop less at Macy's than at Field's, a St. Thomas survey says.

Chris Serres, Star Tribune

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No one seriously expects Federated Department Stores Inc. to reverse its plans to dump the Marshall Field's name in favor of Macy's.

But one recent poll suggests that might be a smart move.

Nearly one in five people in the Twin Cities metro area said they expect to shop less at the department store once its name is changed to Macy's in the fall of 2006, according to a survey released Wednesday by the Institute for Retailing Excellence at the University of St. Thomas.

Of 339 households surveyed, 19.5 percent said they plan to moderately or substantially decrease shopping at the store after the name change. Another 45 percent said the name change would not affect their plans at the store, while 31.5 percent said they never shop there anyway.

Just 3.6 percent of those surveyed said they would increase their shopping at the department store.

"The message here is: [Federated] shouldn't mess with Marshall Field's much," said David Brennan, a professor of marketing at the University of St. Thomas. "There are many, many people who still regard Marshall Field's as Dayton's. ... Some of these people may have seen Macy's, and what they've seen is not something they particularly care for."

The results seemed at odds with a survey that Cincinnati-based Federated conducted this summer, before the name change was announced. The company said it talked to shoppers in all the major cities where Marshall Field's does business, including Minneapolis, Chicago and Detroit, and found that 89 percent said they saw Macy's as "more fashionable" than Field's or at least saw "no

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difference." Some 66 percent said their overall feeling was "positive or neutral" about the name change.

"Our research showed that, while Marshall Field's is well-known and respected, what's most important is what they expect to find in the store," said Sharon Bateman, a spokeswoman at Federated.

But it's the merchandise at Macy's that bothers Nick Potts, an architectural intern from Minneapolis who launched a website, www.keepitfields.org. Potts considers Macy's too mainstream and says Marshall Field's has a broader selection of merchandise across all price categories and styles.

More than 44,000 people have signed a petition on Potts' site opposing the name change and pledging to boycott the retailer after it occurs.

"What if they got the message and actually kept the Marshall Field's name?" Potts asked. "I don't think it's going to happen, but I'm an optimist and, until the name goes away, there's always hope."

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