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## Back to Work: A Fall Business Preview

A Look at Issues Facing Various Industries



Summer is now in the rearview mirror, and it's time to get back to work. What's down the road for businesses this fall?

Consumers continue to be cautious spenders, which could spell holiday trouble for retailers, even as tech companies have high hopes for new gadgets. Seismic changes are in store

for health insurers, and the airline industry is waiting to see how the competitive landscape may, or may not, change with American Airlines. Below, The Wall Street Journal runs down some of the issues facing businesses in the coming months.

### Search for CEOs

"Who's in Charge?" That is one of the big questions a number of companies will have to answer this fall.

While there are always some companies looking for new chief executives, the pace of CEO changes is picking up again. Nearly 20 major companies are now looking for a new leader.

They include Microsoft Corp., MSFT +0.45% J.C. Penney Co., JCP +3.56% Toys 'R' Us Inc., Pandora Media Inc., P +3.57% VeriFone Systems Inc., PAY +0.57% Electronic Arts Inc. EA -0.32% and Juniper Networks, according to a Wall Street Journal tally.

Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer, a central figure at the software giant for decades, said Aug. 23 that he would retire within the next 12 months. The surprise announcement followed years of criticism about Microsoft's failure to keep pace with new technology.

**The shift to mobile and cloud computing is affecting other tech companies, too, according to Dora Vell, managing partner of technology recruiters Vell Executive Search. "You're seeing a lot of turmoil in the executive ranks," Ms. Vell said "You need a new mind-set for a new way of doing business."**

Some businesses have been looking for a new CEO for months. Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia Inc. has sought a successor for CEO Lisa Gersh since late last year.

"Our CEO search process is continuing," Dan Taitz, interim principal executive officer, said during a July 30 earnings call. But the timing of the search's completion remains unclear, a person close to the matter said.

In some cases, stronger economic conditions are driving the rebound in CEO replacements. "Boards are much more prone to move on questionable CEOs during an up cycle," explains Peter Crist, chairman of executive recruiter Crist/Kolder Associates. "Blame for poor performance can no longer be placed on the economy."

—Joann S. Lublin

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