Retail sales rise 1.2%, offering fresh sign of consumer strength

Economists had expected weaker growth after July's pullback



U.S. retail sales increased 1.2% last month following a drop in July, according to the Census Bureau. (Getty Images)

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U.S. retail sales bumped up 1.2% last month following a drop in July, according to the Census Bureau, with the increase viewed as a sign of consumer confidence.

Sales for retail and food services in August rose to $773.9 billion, compared with a 0.5% decline in July to $764.5 billion. The June to July percent change was revised from down 0.6 percent, the Census Bureau said Wednesday. That drop was the first one in nine months.

In August, retail sales excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services were up 1.4% following a 0.4% decline in July.

The overall 1.2% sales increase last month was higher than economists had forecast. The increase partially reflected higher gasoline prices, which are driving sales at service stations.

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July's number suffered because Amazon Prime Day — and other sales and promotions related to it — moved from July to June this year, according to some analysts.

The Census Bureau is part of the U.S. Commerce Department.

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