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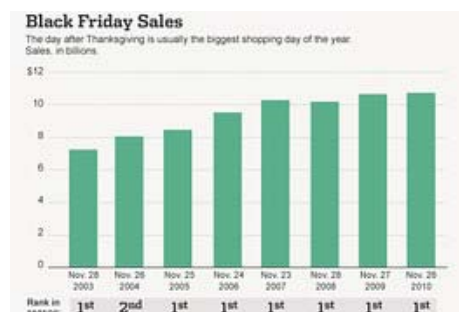
BUSINESS | NOVEMBER 26, 2011

# Early Hours Yield a Promising Start

By MIGUEL BUSTILLO And KAREN TALLEY



Consumers made their way to kick off the holiday season, giving retailers some hope for a cheery season, Ann Zimmerman reports on Markets Hub. Plus, Occupy Wall Street protesters take aim on the busiest shopping day of the year. Photo: AFP / Getty Images.



See historical Black Friday sales.

### Adding Up Holiday Spending

Answer a handful of questions about your holiday shopping and see how you compare with the national average and with other Wall Street Journal readers.

American shoppers in search of cheap toys and televisions raced to stores in high numbers after Thanksgiving dinner, signaling that a gambit by big store chains to open at midnight succeeded in drawing more customers.

But it's too early to tell whether the day's traffic spike will mean stronger holiday sales. It's possible stores merely pulled forward sales that would have happened anyway. And economic strains clearly prompted many shoppers to brave the midnight crowds in return for deep discounts.

From New York to Los Angeles, retailers such as [Macy's Inc.](#) and Toys "R" Us Inc. reported strong customer visits, especially at stores that opened at midnight or earlier for the first time.

"The response last night was overwhelming," [Best Buy Co.](#) Chief Executive Brian Dunn said in an interview Friday morning after stores opened at midnight. "The customer liked going out after Thanksgiving dinner," he said.

**Journal Community**

**Do you shop on Thanksgiving or Black Friday?**

- Yes, on Thanksgiving
- Yes, on Black Friday
- Yes, on both days
- No
- Maybe

SUBMIT VOTE View Results »

Do you agree with the statement "I am watching my spending very closely?"  Yes  No

How much do you expect to spend in total on gifts this holiday season? \$0.00

How much did you spend yesterday on your holiday preparations? \$0.00

How do you plan to pay for your holiday shopping most often?  Debit card  Cash  Credit card  Check



Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal  
Macy's Herald Square in New York

**Tops in 2010**

Black Friday ranked No. 1 for foot traffic and sales during the 2010 holiday shopping season.

Rank	Top 10 Retail Traffic Days	Top 10 Retail Sales Days
1	Nov. 26, Fri.	Nov. 26, Fri.
2	Dec. 18, Sat.	Dec. 23, Thurs.
3	Dec. 11, Sat.	Dec. 18, Sat.
4	Dec. 23, Thurs.	Dec. 22, Wed.
5	Dec. 26, Sun.	Dec. 21, Tues.
6	Dec. 22, Wed.	Nov. 27, Sat.
7	Dec. 21, Tues.	Dec. 11, Sat.
8	Nov. 27, Sat.	Dec. 19, Sun.
9	Dec. 20, Mon.	Dec. 24, Fri.
10	Dec. 19, Sun.	Dec. 26, Sun.

Source: ShopperTrak

[Gerald Storch](#), CEO of Toys "R" Us, which opened even earlier at 9 p.m. Thursday, agreed that the new opening times were likely here to stay, because consumers responded. "Customers told us they'd rather go out Thursday night," he said in an interview after monitoring sales from his landmark location in New York's Times Square. "Some people had jobs they had to get to in the morning."

Yet while store executives crowed about the crowds, early data suggested the real growth was happening online, as people using computers, tablets and mobile phones gobbled up Internet specials without the hassle of waiting outside stores.

Coremetrics, a research division of International Business Machines Corp., estimated that online sales on Thanksgiving rose 39% from 2010, even more than the optimistic projections, and that the number of shoppers using a tablet or phone to reach retail sites more than doubled to 15%.

Online sales on Black Friday itself were up 20% over the year before as of Friday afternoon, Coremetrics said.

For now, though, Black Friday remains a pop culture phenomenon. As many as 152 million Americans are expected to shop this weekend, according to the National Retail Federation, up from the 138 million who said they planned to do so based on surveys last year.

The trade group estimates sales this holiday season will rise just 2.8%, one of many predictions projecting slower growth than 2010, as 9% unemployment and financial market volatility continue weighing down consumer sentiment.

"I'm not sure the consumer feels any better about the job market, their financial situation—whether it's the housing market or debt or the government's role in taxes," [J. C. Penney Co.](#) Executive Vice President Michael Theilmann said in an interview.

Economic worries rather than optimism were what prompted many shoppers' trips. Angelina Cazares, a Houston waitress, was among the first to camp outside a Best Buy this week in hopes of scoring a \$299 laptop.

"Online, there are thousands of people tapping away on their keyboards trying to get deals like these," she said. "Here, not everyone is willing to go through this trouble, so I know I am going to get it."

Shoppers displayed caution online too. At online-jewelry store [Blue Nile Inc.](#), high-end items that cost more than \$25,000 were selling well, said company Chairman Mark Vadon. But engagement rings in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range weren't doing as well. "In that part of the market, people are trading down or delaying their purchase," Mr. Vadon said. "It's like a bifurcated market."



John Gress/Reuters

Shoppers rode an escalator at a Target Store in Chicago early Friday morning.



The day after Thanksgiving sales, where people line up outside stores to get an early start on their holiday shopping, are leading to a variety of violent encounters across the country. (Video: Fox News)

### Holiday Retail Sales

Track spending and retail trends during the holiday shopping season.



Overall discounts were comparable to last year, though some retailers cut deeper. [Gap](#) Inc. temporarily offered 60% off on everything in the store, up from 50% the year before.

The sales generally went off without tragedies similar to the one that marred Black Friday in 2008, when a worker at a [Wal-Mart Stores](#) Inc. store on Long Island was trampled to death by an unruly mob.

But there were some problems, including an episode in a Los Angeles Wal-Mart, where a woman tried to gain an advantage over fellow customers scouting out discounted Xbox consoles by dousing them with pepper spray.

Ten people were treated for burning eyes, bruising and other injuries, said Sgt. J. Valle of the Los Angeles Police Department. "This was an unfortunate situation," said a Wal-Mart spokesman.

The retailer was also responding to an early morning shooting at one of its parking lots in San Leandro, Calif. Wal-Mart called the apparent robbery attempt a "senseless." act. The victim was in critical but stable condition, police said.

Rudy and Linda Gomez normally would have been among those watching every penny, but this year they were staggering through a J.C. Penney outside Chicago, after a timely \$600 casino jackpot the night before triggered an unexpected orgy of eating and shopping. At about 7 a.m., Mr. Gomez, 40, said, "We haven't slept yet, and we're not planning to."

—Ann Zimmerman, Stu Woo and Jack Nicas contributed to this article.

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