

A Black Friday Survival Guide...Or Maybe Black Thursday

Written by Alexis Taylor

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Turkey lovers everywhere will have to shake off that after-dinner drowsiness a little sooner than usual if they plan to take advantage of some of the best Black Friday deals this year. For the first time ever, electronics, clothing, and other hot commodities will go on sale in some stores as early as 9 p.m. Thanksgiving night.

A reference to the opening day of the season where store owners traditionally make most of their profits and go from a “red,” or negative balance to a positive “black” one, Black Friday will essentially become Black Thursday in 2011. While maddening crowds are unavoidable, a few simple tips can go a long way in making shopping for the holidays a stress free event.

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“This time of the year people feel pressure from the advertisements to engage in shopping that, in many instances, they can’t even afford because of the recession,” said Dr. Terra Bowen-Ried, associate professor of psychology at Morgan State University. “It will be interesting to see the number of people who will succumb because this is the time of year people traditionally engage for pleasure.”

Make a List

To avoid being the customer that walks into a store looking for a toaster and walks out with two flat screen televisions, shoppers are encouraged to make a list before entering any stores. Having a list in hand will also expedite the shopping process because sales associates can readily help a customer who knows exactly what they are looking for. A list will also help curb overspending and help shoppers prioritize items worth standing hours in line for.

Research Return and Exchange Policies

Since a large part of shopping on Black Friday is done in preparation for the Christmas season, smart shoppers will familiarize themselves with the rules on returning and exchanging items for every store they plan to visit. Whether doing personal shopping or buying gifts for the family, once the rush from Black Friday subsides, some may find they need to swap items for a larger size, or request a refund. Knowing policies and procedures before purchasing an item in a chaotic store will eliminate surprises at the register two days or two weeks later.

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Shop in Pairs or Groups

Taking friends or family members to navigate the crowds of the holiday rush also provides savvy shoppers with better Black Friday experiences. Not only are peers able to honestly gage when one has overspent, but they can also help mitigate and ward off conflicts that might arise from interactions with other shoppers who exhibit rash and confrontational behavior over the last toy on the shelf.

“I had a TV in my hand and was walking down the aisle when a guy pushed me on the ground and took the television away from me,” said Jalissa Sample, a native of Baltimore City, who has been both a victim and a facilitator of the Black Friday insanity. Now working in Towson Town Center, Sample says stores are preparing for the crowds by stocking up on popular items and providing express lines for customers who are looking to make specific purchases.

Shop Online

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While it may seem like all of America will be stampeding the nearest Walmart or Target, shopping online is an option for those not looking to sleep in the parking lot of their favorite store to get twenty percent off a desired laptop. A spin off from Black Friday, Cyber Monday is an alternative for shoppers who are not physically able or willing to stand the crush of the crowd. Every year millions of dollars in profits are raked in by large companies who offer deals only available online the Monday after Thanksgiving.

Take Advertisements

To avoid haggling over prices at the register, shoppers will also be better off if printed advertisements and coupons are in hand when making purchases. By taking a printed copy of the store's advertised sales, shoppers can calculate exactly how much they will need to spend and avoid being scammed out of valuable deals.

Compare Prices and Shop Around

An avid shopper both on and off the Fort Meade military base where she lives with her husband and two children, Sharita Muhammad takes advantage of the discounts given to military families as well as stores where civilians traditionally shop. "I might camp out in the parking lot because if you get there at five o'clock, you'll be at a lost. If you can grab a toy that would normally run you \$60 for \$30, you want to be first to get inside," said Muhammad.

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Before making any purchases, consumers should also compare prices of their desired items online with websites like Shopping.com, PriceGrabber.com and Blackfriday.com. By comparing prices and looking at sales in a variety of stores prior to making a purchase, shoppers can ensure that they are getting the best deal for their money at the right store.{jcomments on}