

# What Is Black Friday – History of the Holiday Shopping Phenomenon

By Miranda Marquit

In November, many bargain hunters' thoughts turn to the day following Thanksgiving. On the fourth Friday of the month, shoppers across the United States take advantage of widespread bargains and scramble for Black Friday doorbuster deals, deeply discounted products available in limited quantities.

Black Friday is the biggest shopping day of the year and the official kick-off to the Christmas shopping season.

So where did this tradition come from, and is Black Friday really *that* big of a deal?



## History of Black Friday

### Black Friday's Origins

Many people believe that the parades featuring Santa Claus held on Thanksgiving first heralded the beginning of the holiday shopping season. Department stores like Macy's in New York, the now-defunct Eaton's in Toronto, and other department stores frequently sponsored the holiday parades throughout the 20th century. Sponsoring Christmas parades gave stores an opportunity to begin advertising holiday sales.

Over time, it became an unwritten rule that Christmas advertising didn't start until after the parades. For decades, retailers adhered to the rule, waiting until the day after Thanksgiving to advertise holiday deals.

Abraham Lincoln made Thanksgiving an official national holiday during the Civil War, establishing it as the final Thursday in November – a designation that lasted for 70 years. But in 1939, for the second time in six years, the last Thursday in November fell on the 30th. Distraught over a shorter Christmas shopping season, retailers approached President Franklin D. Roosevelt and asked him to change the date.

Though retailers wanted a holiday shopping season that lasted longer than 24 days before Christmas, none wanted to break the tradition of waiting until after Thanksgiving to advertise their reduced holiday prices. FDR, trying to end the country's depression by stimulating spending, agreed to the idea and changed the date of the holiday. On December 26, 1941, Congress passed a law setting the fourth Thursday in November as the official date of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Today, many people continue to regard the day after Thanksgiving as the official start of the holiday shopping season.

## Black Friday is "Black"

Why to popular belief, Black Friday didn't derive its name from the idea that the holiday shopping moves retailers from being "in the red" (experiencing losses) to being "in the black" (showing profits) from 1966 reveal that police officers in Philadelphia first referred to the day after shopping as "Black Friday" because of the increased traffic jams and large amounts of pedestrian in the city's shopping district. For Philadelphia police, bus drivers, cab drivers, and others who control and navigate the shopping hordes, the day was bleak – and, therefore, "black." If, retailers didn't like the negative connotations surrounding such an important shopping day, five stories about Black Friday began to emerge in the 1980s. Today, shoppers believe that the balance sheets move into the black on the day after Thanksgiving and accept the idea that Friday is a retail holiday.

## Friday's Popularity Growth

Originally, the day after Thanksgiving has only recently become the biggest shopping day of the year. In 1993 and 2001, it ranked between fifth and tenth on the list of the busiest shopping days. In years, the busiest shopping day was usually the Saturday before Christmas. Things changed in 2002. That was the year Black Friday took the lead, and it has remained the shopping day of the year ever since, with the exception of 2004 when it was second. Experts believe that shopping on the day after Thanksgiving has become more popular because many people a day off, stores offer extended hours, and almost every store seems to have a sale on the day after Thanksgiving.

## Friday Today

### Urgency of Black Friday

Urgency is an ingrained part of our collective shopping culture, and as such, there is a great deal of shopping on the day after Thanksgiving. Shoppers are willing to pay a premium for a great deal of shopping on the day after Thanksgiving, which can offer up to 80% off retail prices. Shoppers can take advantage of these special deals at the very beginning of the sales, right when the doors open. Moreover, retailers create a sense of urgency by offering special deals to draw the crowds into stores even if doorbusters have sold out.

These additional methods that stores employ to create urgency include:

- Advertising ridiculously low prices on certain items
- Offering special sales for limited hours during the day
- Limiting the number of items available for purchase at the special price
- Featuring additional loss leaders, merchandise priced lower than actual cost
- Using these methods to encourage consumers who hope to find once-in-a-lifetime deals to visit the stores. The stores hope that shoppers will stick around and buy full-priced items in addition to their discounted merchandise.
- Stores open at midnight on Thanksgiving night, while others open between 2AM and 5AM. Black Friday shopping has become popular as shoppers line up for doorbusters up to a day in advance of stores opening.

With the advent of the Internet, stores have begun to release their flyers online as a way to create excitement and urgency well in advance of Black Friday. Fortunately, these pre-releases to the customer and sale information has also allowed enthusiastic consumers to determine the best deals and fully plan shopping routes before the big day arrives.

## The Consequences of Black Friday

Unfortunately, Black Friday has also come to represent the consumer excesses of our society and addition to consumer electronics. News reports on the day after Thanksgiving feature hordes of crazed shoppers, desperate for deals. While in the vast majority of stores volatile behavior is usually limited to shouting and rude comments, there have been more serious incidents reported, including trampling and deaths.

In 2008, the first death attributed to Black Friday fanaticism was recorded at a Walmart in Valley Stream, New York. Stomping shoppers trampled an employee to death. Consumers refused to stop their rush when store employees tried to help their coworker, ultimately contributing to the man's demise. Shoppers also buffeted the police officers who arrived to help. The incident illustrates how ugly ordinary people can become when frenzied by consumerism and materialism. Shoppers who do not exercise caution could find themselves in danger. Reports of fist fights, stabbings, and gun threats have all occurred at stores on the retail holiday. Safe shopping on Black Friday is important – be sure to exercise caution.

## Final Word

Some people enjoy the Black Friday experience. Getting up early or eschewing bedtime altogether to stand in line at a store to get a good bargain can be exciting. Plus, the savings can make standing in line and missing a few hours of shut-eye worthwhile. Many bargain hunters accomplish their Christmas shopping in one day and save a bundle. These days, however, you have other shopping options to avoid the turmoil. Many retailers begin offering deals on Thanksgiving Day or earlier. Forget braving the cold and crowds; you can get spectacular shopping deals online without having to get dressed or stressed, especially on Cyber Monday. In addition to the reduced retail rates, you can often receive free shipping when you shop online during the holiday season. Before you head to the malls on the day after Thanksgiving, consider your options. Will you really get a good deal? How much time do you want to spend in traffic, in line outside the store, and waiting for your turn at the check-out stand? In addition, make sure to carefully consider whether you can find a better bargain online. This year, you may not have to leave home at all to get the best deals on Christmas gifts. Do you participate in Black Friday shopping? What deals are you looking forward to?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## Black Friday Print Advertisement Rubric

Product (word) being "sold:" \_\_\_\_\_

Points earned: \_\_\_\_\_/25 possible points

	<b>5 points</b>	<b>4.25 points</b>	<b>3.75 points</b>	<b>3.25 points</b>
<b>Slogan (Word Choice)</b>	Slogan uses fewer than 10 words and a clever literary technique to effectively convey the message of the product. Exceptional word choices.	Slogan uses exactly 10 words and a literary technique to effectively convey the message. Appropriate word choices.	Slogan uses 10-12 words to convey the message. The literary technique was not used effectively. Message may be confusing.	Slogan uses more than 12 words and/or the message is confusing and ineffective. Slogan may be inappropriate for school.
<b>Design and/or Illustration</b>	The design of the ad is exceptionally attention getting and enhances the message.	The design of the ad is attention getting and appropriate. The design fits into the message.	The design of the ad lacks attention-getting quality. It doesn't really fit the message being sent.	The design of the ad has little or no illustration or design element.
<b>Voice (Tone)</b>	The ad is perfectly targeted to LMS students. The tone is positive and motivational.	The ad is appealing to LMS students. It has a positive tone.	The ad may not appeal to many LMS students. The tone may not be very positive.	The ad's tone and/or message is not appropriate for middle school students.
<b>Presentation</b>	The ad is extraordinarily neat and easy to read. It looks like the creator took great pride in his/her work.	The ad is neat and easy to read. It looks like the creator took care in his/her work.	The ad is a bit messy or hard to read. It looks like the creator should have been more careful.	The ad is hard to understand because it is very messy or hard to read.
<b>Conventions</b>	There are no misspelled words in the ad.	There is one misspelled word in the ad.	There are many misspelled words in the ad.	<b>X</b>

Comments: