

A GUIDE TO

**BLACK
FRIDAY**

The Phenomenon

We used to give thanks. Now we give our cash. The phenomenon of Black Friday shopping has filtered into Thanksgiving Day, with many stores opening their doors to get a head start.

However you define Black Friday now, its origin traces back decades and was created as a way to drive more consumer traffic for holiday shopping. The event has gradually grown over the years — to more than 92 million shoppers last year on Black Friday.

WHEN IT STARTED

According to consumer reports, the term Black Friday was created in the 1960s to mark the kickoff to the Christmas shopping season. “Black” refers to stores indicating a profit, back when accounting records were more commonly kept by hand and color coded.

But the event of shopping on the heels of a big Thanksgiving Day feast stretches back even farther. Since the start of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in 1924, the Friday after Thanksgiving has been known as the unofficial start to the busiest shopping season of the year.

THE DIGITAL IMPACT

For many Black Friday participants, shopping means staying in their pajamas. Many stores advertise special deals on their websites, allowing for convenient shopping without having to battle the



© FOTOLIA

crowds. Online sales increased 19.7% on Thanksgiving Day 2013 compared to 2012, according to an IBM Benchmark report. A similar increase was reported for the rest of the Black Friday weekend, culminating in the Cyber Monday holiday.

Many shopping conglomer-

ates have developed mobile applications to help track deals and new products. Check out your phone’s app store to see what’s out there. You will likely find interactive store maps, item descriptions and customizable shopping lists that you can edit and share.

BLACK THURSDAY?

The recent trend of stores opening their doors late Thursday night to kick off the Super Bowl of the shopping season has led to a sales wind-fall. Twenty percent more people shopped after Thanksgiving dinner in 2013 compared to

2012, according to the National Retail Federation.

And the Turkey Day total doesn’t appear to be slowing down anytime soon. One of the main reasons, according to NRF research, is the preference of younger shoppers for late-night sales rather than early-morning ones.

Stay Safe Out There

With your eye on the prize, it can be hard to keep focused on your own personal safety. Especially if that prize is an 80-inch flat-screen television marked at an incredible price.

But Black Friday safety is a major issue, especially considering that many other shoppers probably have their eyes on the same prizes as you. Being prepared and vigilant of your surroundings can make the difference between staying safe and ending up with some Black Friday bruises.

Whether you're going by yourself or shopping in a group, be sure to let loved ones and friends know where you will be and how long you expect to be gone. This will keep them from worrying if you cannot be reached by phone while you're shopping due to noise or distractions.

SERIOUS INCIDENTS

Several major altercations have occurred across the United States on Black Friday. In 2011, a woman pepper sprayed her fellow shoppers in an effort to purchase video games in a Los Angeles-area Walmart.

In 2008, a Long Island Walmart worker was trampled to death by shoppers who broke down the store's doors. Many other reports of physical and verbal incidents have been reported on Black Friday, proving the importance of shopping safety.

IN THE STORE

While you're shopping, consider carrying a small bag containing your wallet and keep it close to your body. Large groups make it easier for thieves to pick your pockets or reach into a purse left in the shopping cart.

If possible, carry only credit cards with you and make photocopies of them before you leave home. Doing so will make it easier to report to authorities if your wallet is lost or stolen.

Make sure your cell phone is powered on, fully charged and accessible. Keep your phone in places where you can feel it vibrate, such as a pocket. Before you go into a store with a group, make sure everyone has everyone else's phone number in case someone gets lost.



Divide and Conquer

When it comes to effective Black Friday strategies, the most powerful one is to shop in numbers.

Your friends and family members can be helpful in many ways when it comes to getting you the best deals – both before and on Black Friday.

PLAN & EXECUTE

If you have been Black Friday shopping before, you know that the experience is not for the faint of heart. Shoppers looking for a chance to casually peruse items will not find that opportunity on Black Friday.

Bringing home a great haul requires careful planning and preparation for big crowds, long lines and limited inventory. When you put together your shopping group, take the time to talk about what each person hopes to purchase and from where. Once your plan is in place, focus on how the group will make it happen.

Will you split up the group in an effort to hit more stores at the same time? Or are most of your target items in one store, allowing you to conquer your shopping lists together?

MAKE IT FUN

Shopping is fun in itself, but you should try to make an experience out of it. Black Friday deals have traditionally kicked off around 5 or 6 a.m., so grab an early breakfast or coffee with your group members to get hyped up for the day.

With all the energy you will be expending during your shopping excursion, it will be important to stay hydrated and fuel your body with the right food choices. The last thing you need is to feel sluggish, tired or light-headed while you're trying to find the best deals. Stay on top of your food and water intake to make sure you're at full strength.

DON'T GET LOST

If shopping variety and opportunities are limited, many shoppers may decide to try a location a few hours from their home. This can obviously make for a challenge with Black Friday's large groups and hectic shopping atmosphere.

If you will be separating from your fellow shoppers at some point of the day or night, be sure to plan a designated meet-up time and place. Set alarms on your smart phones and stay in touch by texting reminders as the meet-up time nears.





© FOTOLIA

Price Matching

The art of price matching is just that — an art. If you wait until Black Friday to perfect it, you may be left seeing red. The first step to becoming a price matching pro is finding out if your favorite stores offer it.

Many will have an as-is policy when it comes to their prices, while others – especially local stores – may be more flexible when it comes to moving their prices.

WHEN TO START

Start price matching now. Do some research on what each store offers, and be sure to ask if their policies are the same during the Black Friday shopping weekend. Pay special attention to policies relat-

ed to big-ticket items such as televisions, computers or phones, as these are the items most likely to vary between stores.

When Black Friday offers are announced, you should immediately start mapping out a strategy. Make a list of what you want and how much you want to spend, and then find out which stores are offering your wish list items at the best prices. If you prefer to go to another store, see if they'll match the

competitor's price.

KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS

With a growing number of big box stores offering price matching with certain online rivals, you may be able to find better deals later. So keep your receipts to return expensive items when you see them listed at a competitor store at a cheaper price.

Many stores will give you

an immediate discount for pointing out the pricing discrepancy, while others will have a policy in place that restricts after-purchase price matching. Again, check in with your stores well ahead of Black Friday to make sure you understand what they offer.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA

If you're not already, you should follow your favorite

stores' Twitter feeds and click the "Like" button on their Facebook pages. Many businesses use their social networks to update shoppers on new deals, store hours and special savings programs.

Those who sign up to get email, download the store's app or "Like" its Facebook page will likely be among the first to get early access to special Black Friday store items to buy online or via the mobile app.

Loyalty Programs

If you're a loyal shopper all year, then you should be rewarded come Black Friday.

This is the thought process driving many retailers' programs aimed at sharing the holiday spirit with their consumers.

You should consider being an insider at a store ahead of Black Friday because many retailers offer their followers ahead-of-schedule deals or products.

THE PERKS

Coupons, invitations to closed-door events or even cash prizes for Black Friday shopping sprees can be some of the perks related to signing up for loyalty programs.

Check with the stores in your area for their policies on these types of programs. They are usually free and can be customized so your email account isn't constantly barraged with offers.

CREDIT CARDS

You may be able to find loyalty programs outside the store, as well. Your credit card company may offer cash back or special interest rates during the holiday shopping season.

Check whether you qualify, and make sure to read the fine print. What's the point of signing up for a perk if you end up spending more money than you intended?

DON'T FORGET LOCAL

We all know local businesses put more money back into their communities, but what about Black Friday deals? Do they offer them? Are they better deals than can be found at giant retailers? Yes and yes! Local shops may be focused less on the mega deals throughout the year, but they will often roll out special deals on Black Friday to keep you closer to home.

Some local businesses have established price-matching programs. Ask your local owners if they are willing to match deals you find at other businesses. This strategy can help save you some serious money, especially considering that some small business owners will sweeten their prices even more to strike a great deal with you.



Black Friday Campouts

Smartphones, sidewalks and bright security lights. This is the 21st-century version of camping.

For days and sometimes weeks before Black Friday comes around, shoppers take to the curb to camp outside of their favorite retailer. Deals on electronics or the latest kitchen gadgets offer all the extra motivation shoppers need to turn shopping into a full-blown experience.

But is it really worth it? Your safety, sleeping arrangements and the weather are all factors to consider.

SAFETY

Your personal safety should be your number one priority when it comes to deciding whether or not to camp out. Choose a store that is well lit and in a safe neighborhood.

Many stores will hire contract security guards for Black Friday weekend to add extra protection for shoppers and employees. This will give you peace of mind when sitting outside for long hours, but you should still consider your safety to be your own personal responsibility.



© FOTOLIA

SLEEPING

ARRANGEMENTS

If the store you're shopping outside of allows it, you should plan on bringing a small tent with you for your campout. A tent can help keep the wind, rain or snow off of you and

your shopping counterparts.

And don't forget the sleeping bag. Black Friday's average temperatures can drop to around freezing in many parts of the country, so find a sleeping bag with thick insulation to keep you from getting the

shopping shivers. Be ultra-prepared with a pair of thick snow pants or several layers of clothes.

PASS THE TIME

Maybe you haven't had enough time before the big

day to create your shopping list or maybe you're not sure of all of the deals, but bringing some extra store advertisements will help get you prepared while you're camping out. Bring markers and a notepad to put together your

wish list while you wait for the doors to open.

Other ways to pass the time include books, games, DVD players or your smart phone. Playing cards also can be a great way to have fun with your fellow shoppers.

By the Numbers

One look at the numbers shows just how popular Black Friday – and Thanksgiving Day – shopping has become.

- In 2013, shoppers shelled out \$57.4 billion during the four days beginning with Thanksgiving Day, according to the National Retail Federation. While that number was down 2 percent from 2012, traffic was up and excitement abounds for a big rebound year in 2014.

Recent studies have given insights into the state of Black Friday shopping, including:

- Seventy percent of the purchases made by individual consumers on Black Friday 2013 were made at the first two stores they visited on that day, according to MasterCard Advisors

- According to NRF estimates based on its consumer survey, more than 92 million people did some type of retail shopping on Thanksgiving Day 2013, an increase over the 89 million it estimated from survey results in 2012.

- Twenty-five percent of Thanksgiving Day shoppers say they arrived at a physical retail store by 8 p.m., and 37.3% of Thanksgiving Day shoppers said they arrived at a store before midnight, according to the NRF.

- Shopper traffic to physical retail stores fell 11.4%, and retail sales decreased by 13.2% on Black Friday 2013 compared to Black Friday 2012, according to ShopperTrak.

- Approximately 77% of American shoppers did some Christmas holiday shopping by Black Friday, compared to 81% according to a poll conducted by research pollsters, Ipsos.

