



Is Black Friday Dead? Jersey Shore Stores Open on Thanksgiving Day

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[Black Friday](#) now starts on Thursday.

The holiday shopping season begins this year as early as 6 a.m. Thanksgiving Day, when many Jersey Shore retailers will offer deep discounts to keep up with the competition and generate sales that will put them into the black.

The early kickoff comes as retailers are faced with a late-in-the-calendar Thanksgiving and consumers who continue to be stretched thin. But experts said it threatens to dismantle the power behind Black Friday, a marketing message few can match. And if consumers decide Thanksgiving should be shielded from the commercialism of daily life, it could backfire on retailers who ask their employees to work overnight shifts.

“If that one extra day helps them improve their financials, it’s a sad day in America,” said Gregg Richard, president and chief executive officer of [P.C. Richard & Son](#), an electronics retailer whose advertising campaign this week has focused on the reasons the store will be closed Thanksgiving Day.

The mere thought of shopping on Thanksgiving Day strikes some as a pain in the neck — not so much because it’s a holiday, but because they want to avoid the crowds.

Michael Schneider, 34, of Oceanport, did one better; he shopped at Toys R Us in Eatontown on Tuesday, searching for presents for his 21-month-old twins, Mia and Ethan. (Spoiler alert: Mia is getting Disney’s Sofia the First; Ethan is getting Thomas the Tank Engine.)

“We try to get everything done early for the kids,” Schneider said. “We hear horror stories of when our parents were shopping for us and they’d be waiting in lines hours and hours. We do a lot early and online so we don’t get stuck in the mad rush.”

Varied outlooks

The outlook for this holiday shopping season varies widely. The [National Retail Federation](#), a trade group, expects sales to rise 3.9 percent from last year. Morgan Stanley expects sales to increase just 1.7 percent.

Consumers are trying to make sense of a confusing set of data. They may feel wealthier because the Dow Jones industrial average is up 24 percent from last year. And they may have more disposable income because gasoline prices in New Jersey are down 7.4 percent from last year, AAA said.

But consumer confidence plunged in October, when the federal government shut down, and declined again in November, The Conference Board reported Tuesday. And wages have declined 8 percent since 2005, said Scott Mahoney, senior vice president at Morgan Stanley in Morristown.

Added to the mix: For the first time since 2002, Thanksgiving falls on the latest date that it can, leaving six fewer shopping days than last year.

“Retailers are scrambling for less dollars in a shorter time,” Mahoney said.

The Friday after Thanksgiving traditionally has been one of the busiest shopping days of the year. In the 1920s, Macy’s started its Thanksgiving Day parade with Santa Claus appearing at the end as a not-so-subtle reminder that Christmas — and your local Macy’s — wasn’t far away.

It became known as “Black Friday” first in the 1960s when Philadelphia police reportedly used the phrase to describe the traffic that accompanied the shopping. But retailers refer to it in a more positive light — the time of the year when their losses (red) turn to profits (black).

In recent years, the bellwether retailers, competing not only with each other, but also with websites that are open around the clock, have made the day an event. They have opened earlier and earlier and offered deals upon deals, hoping that consumers who

visit the stores will buy more than the items on sale. It has been a display of one-upmanship; in 2011, retailers such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Kmart first started opening on Thanksgiving itself.

This year, it is conceivable for consumers to shop all day, provided it is within their budget. Kmart opens at 6 a.m. Corningware Corelle Revere opens at the Jackson Premium Outlets at 11 p.m., just under the wire.

More shoppers expected Friday

The National Retail Federation said it expects nearly a quarter of consumers to shop on Thanksgiving Day, a far cry from the 69.1 percent who plan to shop on Friday.

But Jeff Green, a Phoenix-based consultant, said retailers that opened at midnight last year got a wave of shoppers who arrived for the best deals and then slowed to a crawl overnight.

“It begs the question, why are they doing it?” Green said. “They’re doing it because their competition is doing it. There’s a lot of herd mentality. I’m not sure they’ve thought through whether it’s profitable to open” on Thanksgiving.

Moreover, experts said, those retailers may dilute the experience of Christmas shopping. Time was, holiday shopping wasn’t merely about buying products. It included gazing at elaborately decorated windows and listening to carols.

Consumers “want the retail experience,” said David Johnson, chief executive officer of Strategic Vision, a branding company based in Atlanta. “For retailers opening on Thanksgiving, it’s more about the sales than the holiday experience.”

P.C. Richard, based in Farmingdale, N.Y., has decided to remain closed on Thanksgiving Day, and it doesn’t hesitate to defend its decision. The message on its Facebook page reads, “Save Thanksgiving” and “Keep Families First!”

In an interview, Gregg Richard said it isn’t fair to ask the company’s 3,000 employees to work on a day he considers the one national holiday that cuts across religion and ethnicity. And he said he is sad to see images of customers, racing, pushing, shoving to get their hands on a particularly low-priced item.

His company will open at 6 a.m. Friday.

“Customers are going to decide whether Thanksgiving becomes a national shopping day or remains a national holiday,” Richard said. “If customers go out in droves and shop at those establishments, I guess their decision will be to open earlier and earlier. But our decision, being a privately owned company, is to stay closed on Thanksgiving.”

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