

RETAIL

## Black Friday will not be the same this year, calling for early marketing

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*Placer.ai explores the role of Black Friday in a pandemic year. Image credit: Placer.ai*

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Black Friday the day after Thanksgiving Day in late November has always been an important day for retailers as exclusive sales drive record foot traffic into stores and companies earn massive profits, pushing them into the black.

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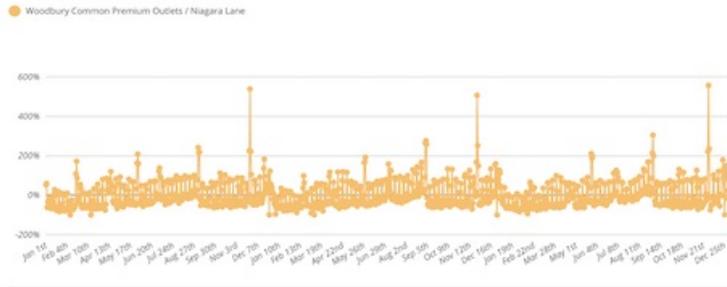
However, as retailers begin their fourth-quarter planning, the COVID-19 crisis continues to plague consumers worldwide. Not surprisingly, most shoppers are still avoiding bricks-and-mortar retail stores in favor of online shopping.

"This year has been filled with uncertainty and Black Friday will likely be no different," said Ethan Chernofsky, vice president of marketing at Placer.ai, Los Altos, CA. "The status of COVID cases and retail re-openings is nearly impossible to predict, and that means that brands are going to need to utilize more diversified strategies this holiday season.

"Should the world return to normalcy by that point, the day could be bigger than ever, enjoying the benefits of pent-up demand," he said.

"However, there is also the possibility that the winter brings with it a resurgence in COVID, in which case strategies for driving holiday sales will move to other channels and time periods."

And the same held true for Woodbury Common in NY, one of the top outdoor centers in the country. Black Friday was by far biggest day for visits in 2017, 2018, and 2019.



Woodbury Common saw record traffic on Black Friday during the last three years. Image credit: Placer.ai

### Extend the season

Woodbury Common in New York, one of the largest luxury malls in the country, had its biggest days in 2017, 2018 and 2019 on Black Friday, according to new metrics from [Placer.ai](#).

Aventura Mall in Florida also saw record Black Friday sales during the last three years.

This year, the idea of being in a crowded mall is scary for consumers.

But losing the Thanksgiving Weekend Thanksgiving Day on Nov. 26 and Black Friday on Nov. 27 would be dire for retailers after a prolonged period of store closures and poor sales.

Retailers and malls this year will have to be creative to drive traffic, be it through online sales or curbside pickup to entice consumers back to stores. This means marketing early.

"Incentivize activity during less intense periods and leverage offline advantages pre-Black Friday," Mr. Chernofsky said. "There is a high potential that more sales and promotional events take place earlier on in the season with late October and early November seeing an uptick in shopping.

"Additionally, retailers can utilize the coming months to prepare," he said.

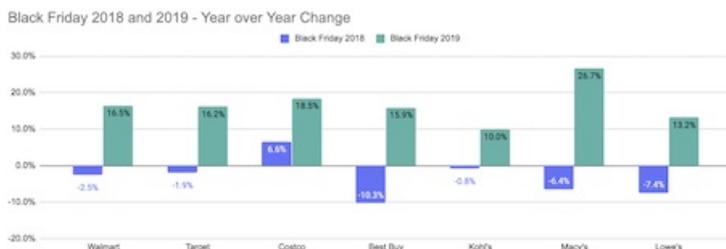
"One of the biggest challenges in online apparel is poor fitting clothes, returns and the associated expenses. Expect more brands to try and drive in-store visits to check sizing and fit, leveraging that experience to help optimize online shopping should it be necessary."

Retailers should think about how to spread traffic out throughout the season to avoid the crowds.

Earlier promotions could help extend the shopping season and could lead to fewer consumers showing up on each shopping day. This would give consumers the space they need to feel comfortable shopping.

"Marketing efforts that spread the Black Friday traffic earlier and later in the season are going to help disperse crowds and help offset the impact that the loss of the normal visit surge should that take place," Mr. Chernofsky said.

"While this sacrifices the urgency that comes from Black Friday, by increasing accessibility to deals, they could be positioned to mitigate the loss of such a critical day for apparel retail," he said.



And Black Friday clearly ranked as among the most important days for top shopping centers as well. For Aventura Mall in Florida, Black Friday was the highest day for overall visits in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Aventura Mall in Florida saw record Black Friday sales during the last three years. Image credit: Placer.ai

Desire to return

The report suggests that consumers are looking forward to going shopping in physical stores again. However, many consumers are avoiding non-essential stores as the pandemic continues to spread.

Retailers should keep this in mind when creating marketing campaigns for the holidays.

"Early data from the recovery shows that people want to go shopping again, but they are certainly concerned by COVID cases," Mr. Chernofsky said.

"In regions where cases have declined, retail traffic has risen steadily, but in areas where there is a resurgence in cases, traffic dips back down," he said.

"Clearly, ecommerce is an important part of mitigating losses, but it is not a replacement for the in-store experience, nor is it as efficient for the retailers themselves."

Luxury brands with retail stores and department store chains such as Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue have had a rough time since the COVID-19 lockdowns.

However, sales could pick up as affluent consumers look to spoil themselves and their loved ones during the holiday, spending money on luxury items instead of travel and restaurants this year.

"High-end retailers tend to target audiences that have more disposable income and are less likely to have been directly impacted by the economic uncertainty COVID has caused," Mr. Chernofsky said.

"So there is a real opportunity for these brands to position their offerings as an alternative to the other splurges travel, restaurants, experiences that have become off-limits.

"Additionally, finding ways to utilize excess stock that may have accumulated early in the year could present an off-price opportunity that creates the type of deals that drive real excitement and urgency for newer audiences."