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5 things I learned at Walmart's media day



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You chase flat-screen TV offers, we chase interview opportunities.

Walmart on Monday held a “media open house” at its West Sacramento store. The event caught our newsroom’s interest because the company has long barred reporters from conducting interviews inside Walmart stores.

When I arrived at the local store Monday, a representative from the retail chain’s corporate office in Arkansas agreed this year’s media push is unusual.

“I think this is a bigger effort this year,” said **Randy Hargrove**, Walmart’s director of national media relations.



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Furbies are back at Walmart, where store officials have taken extra steps this year to make sure shoppers don't miss out on sought-after items.

What gives?

“I think it’s an opportunity to promote Black Friday and the specials we are having to our customers,” Hargrove said.

But Hargrove also touched on employee relations during our interview, emphasizing that Walmart employees who work on the holiday will get a hot Thanksgiving meal, along with holiday pay and a one-time discount of 25 percent on a Walmart shopping trip.

His assurances come amid talk of strikes and protests, many of which are coordinated by Organization United for Respect at Walmart, which describes itself as “an independent, not-for-profit organization for hourly associates.” On top of that, there’s criticism surrounding recent news that an Ohio Walmart held a food drive for its own workers.

Here are five things I learned during Walmart’s media open house.

“Black Friday” is now a “Black Friday event.” For better or worse, the term “Black Friday” now includes Thursday at many major national retailers, including Walmart.

Among the chain’s major draws this year? A “one-hour guarantee.” Show up within a designated time period and Walmart guarantees you’ll get your desired item “either that night or before Christmas.” Those one-hour guarantees will be held 6-7 p.m. and 8-9 p.m. local time on Thanksgiving. There are 21 one-hour guarantee items, including a 32-inch Funai LED HDTV for \$98. Forget the mad dash. Maybe. Remember those images of long lines of people outside, waiting for the magic moment when store doors open? You probably won’t see that at the West Sacramento Walmart, a 24/7 store. [ABC News reports](#) “most of the 4,000 Walmarts in the U.S. are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week anyway, and so have been open on Thanksgiving for years.”

Walmart is trying to cut down on the chaotic mad dash moments by offering wristbands for some items prior to designated sale times on Thanksgiving. “Customers who receive a wristband will have reserved that item and can continue to shop,” according to a Walmart news release.

Unsurprisingly, store executives maintain Walmart is a good place to work. Hargrove countered recent criticism by saying 75 percent of the store’s managers begin as hourly employees. “If you’re looking for an opportunity for a career, that’s what we can provide you,” he said. Nationally, 160,000 associates are promoted every year, Hargrove said. On average, Walmart store managers earn \$170,000 a year. Assistant managers can earn \$40,000 or more, Hargrove said.

Furbies are back. The hamster-like toys, which saw intense popularity in the late 1990s, are on Walmart’s top toy list. Never underestimate the power of Furbish.

Finally, some random trivia: “We will sell enough pajama wear during the holiday season to circle the globe,” Hargrove said. So, there’s that.

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/news/2013/11/26/5-things-i-learned-at-walmarts-media.html?page=all>