

## Black Friday retail sales expected to be strong even without early-hours shopping

By George Avalos  
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As they anticipate the start of what should be a brisk holiday shopping season, some retailers have a radical idea for how shoppers should prepare for Black Friday: sleep.

A number of shopping centers in the Bay Area are planning to shut their doors some time between Thanksgiving dinner and Black Friday morning, breaking with their recent tradition of offering all-night shopping as a way to boost slow sales and propel the spending momentum.

"Merchants are easing up on being open all night," said Caran Fisher, a spokeswoman for Westfield Valley Fair mall in San Jose. "There is a bit of fatigue and disenchantment with that kind of frenzy now."

Most stores will still be open on Thanksgiving, and some will go late. But malls in the Bay Area intend to close at midnight on Thursday or 1 a.m. on Friday, then reopen about five hours later for Black Friday door-buster sales. Bay Area malls that will give consumers -- and employees -- a break this year include: Valley Fair in San Jose; Newpark Mall in Newark; Eastridge mall in San Jose; Stanford Shopping Center in Palo Alto; Hillsdale Mall in San Mateo; Southland Mall in Hayward; Stoneridge Mall in Pleasanton; Broadway Plaza in Walnut Creek; and Sunvalley Shopping Center in Concord.

"A lot of retailers realized that the extra effort they put into all of those extraordinary hours of sales really didn't pay off," said Mark Vitner, senior economist with Wells Fargo. "The employees weren't happy, the stores had increased costs, and they simply weren't gaining very much."

Black Friday, according to some lore, took on that name because it was the day when businesses went into the black -- or profitability -- for the year. The more they could sell from that day forward, the

*Image: 1) Shoppers walk through NewPark Mall on Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2015, in Newark, Calif. Analysts expect this to be a holiday season that produces sales that will be 3 to 4 percent higher than last year. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group) ( ARIC CRABB ) 2) Shoppers walk through NewPark Mall on Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2015, in Newark, Calif. Analysts expect this to be a holiday season that produces sales that will be 3 to 4 percent higher than last year. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group) ( ARIC CRABB )*

stronger their annual receipts. But with the Internet grabbing more sales and shoppers growing weary of the crowds, patterns have been shifting.



Those quiet hours between midnight and dawn do not appear to be affecting the Bay Area sales outlook for the season, which analysts think will be robust, thanks in large measure to the region's job boom. One survey from San Francisco-based Wells Fargo Bank suggests that holiday shopping in the Bay Area could jump 15 percent, outpacing national projections. "We are predicting 4 percent growth in holiday sales, which would be the best year for

holiday sales nationally since 2012," said Scott Anderson, chief economist with San Francisco-based Bank of the West. "California should be stronger than the nation, and the Bay Area will be stronger than the state."

Bay Area consumers are expected to spend an average of \$550 each this year on holiday gifts. That's up 6 percent from the approximately \$519 they spent during the 2014 holiday shopping season, according to a survey by Deloitte, a professional services firm.

Keeping doors open all night does not necessarily translate into extra dollars, retailers have found. "We noticed last year that crowds got strong at 8 p.m. on Thanksgiving night, but it got really quiet from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. Friday morning," said Kim Trupiano, a spokeswoman for Sunvalley. "People only have so much stamina."

Seattle-based Nordstrom, whose Bay Area stores are in San Jose, Palo Alto, San Mateo, Walnut Creek, Pleasanton, Corte Madera and two in San Francisco, won't be open at all on Thanksgiving, extending its custom.

"Our customers appreciate that approach of celebrating one holiday at a time," said Dan Evans, a spokesman for Nordstrom. "You won't see holiday decorations in our stores before Thanksgiving. The feedback we are getting from our customers to do it this way is phenomenal."

For Seattle-based REI, Saturday is the new Friday because the sporting and recreational goods and clothing store has decided to give its 12,000 employees the day off after Thanksgiving.

"Instead of reporting to work, the REI co-op is paying its 12,000 employees to do what they love most, be outside," REI said in comments emailed to this newspaper. "We are enabling and advocating for our employees and members to #OptOutside and reconnect with family and friends in the outdoors this Thanksgiving holiday."

It's the first time REI will be closed on Black Friday.

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A number of major retailers, though, will be open continuously through the night. Wal-Mart, Target, Kohl's, Macy's, JC Penney, Toys R' Us and Kmart will open by Thanksgiving evening and remain open all night into Black Friday.

"You will still see quite a few stores open on Thanksgiving and all night," Vitner said. "It's an effort to compete with online retailers."

Wal-Mart, which used to offer promotions Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, is altering its approach at the outset of the holiday shopping season.

"This year, we will be doing just one event for our Black Friday deals," said Bao Nguyen, a spokesman for the Arkansas-based retail giant. "We won't be holding a series of Thanksgiving and Black Friday events as we have done in the past."

Wal-Mart this year will offer its only Black Friday promotion starting at 6 p.m. in its stores on Thanksgiving night. Then right after midnight on Black Friday morning, all the discounts that are available in the stores will be available at the Wal-Mart online site.

"Consumers are relying less on Black Friday and Cyber Monday and are spreading out their shopping over a longer period of time," said Mike Johnson, a Deloitte partner and leader of the firm's retail industry practice in the Bay Area.

About 50 percent of those surveyed say they don't intend to rely on Black Friday promotions this year, up from 43 percent a year ago. An estimated 41 percent won't rely on Cyber Monday sales this year, compared with 36 percent in 2014.

"People are stretching out when they will shop," Johnson said. "They want to avoid the chaos and the long lines."

Contact George Avalos at 408-859-5167. Follow him at [Twitter.com/georgeavalos](https://twitter.com/georgeavalos).

MAJOR STORE HOURS Kmart: Open 6 a.m. Thanksgiving staying open through Black Friday.

JC Penney: Open 3 p.m. on Thanksgiving, staying open through Black Friday.

Toys R' Us: Open Thanksgiving 5 p.m., staying open through Black Friday.

Target: Open 6 p.m. Thanksgiving, staying open through Black Friday.

Walmart: Open 6 p.m. Thanksgiving, staying open through Black Friday.

Kohl's: Open Thanksgiving 6 p.m., staying open through Black Friday.

Sears: Open Thanksgiving 6 p.m., closing Friday 1 a.m., reopening Black Friday at 8 a.m.

Fry's Electronics: Closed Thanksgiving. Open Black Friday 8 a.m.

[http://www.contracostatimes.com/breaking-news/ci\\_29162367/holiday-retail-sales-expected-be-strong-even-without](http://www.contracostatimes.com/breaking-news/ci_29162367/holiday-retail-sales-expected-be-strong-even-without)

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