

## U.S. Holiday Shopping Starts With \$8 Billion Day

Sunday, November 28, 2004



NEW YORK — Americans spent more in stores at the start of holiday shopping than a year ago, according to figures released on Saturday, but retailers' hopes for the key season were curbed as titan Wal-Mart cut its November sales forecast.

Consumers lined up to grab early-bird specials as stores opened from 5 a.m. on the Friday after Thanksgiving, which is one of the year's biggest shopping days, known as Black Friday as it used to be the day retailers got into profit. Retailers now report profits throughout the year.

Early sales data from analyst Shopper-Trak showed Black Friday sales rose 10.8 percent from a year ago to \$8 billion, while Visa USA said spending on its cards rose 15.5 percent to \$4.1 billion with sales up but plastic also more widely used.

But enthusiasm over Black Friday sales was tempered as Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world's biggest retailer, said its November sales failed to meet expectations, signaling shoppers may not be as bullish as hoped this holiday.

Wal-Mart in a weekly call, said sales at U.S. stores open at least a year rose 0.7 percent from a year earlier, missing a forecast 2 to 4 percent rise, with high oil prices and fewer discounts curbing spending in the first week of the holiday.

Retail analysts are on average expecting sales growth this holiday to be lower than a year ago, with higher oil prices driving up heating bills and biting into lower income earners' budgets and with some caution about the U.S. economy.

The National Retail Federation has forecast sales rising 4.5 percent between Thanksgiving-to-Christmas to about \$220 billion, compared to an increase of 5.1 percent a year ago.

1. According to Shopper-Trak's data, how much money was made on Black Friday in the previous year?
2. How much was spent the previous year using a Visa credit card?
3. In accordance to forecast sales made by The National Retail Federation how much money was made in 2003 from Thanksgiving-to-Christmas?
4. Why are retail analysts on average expecting sales *growth* this holiday to be lower than a year ago?
5. In your personal opinion, do you feel the holiday season has lost any meaning and became too commercialized? **Explain.**