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Tips for shopping on Black Friday

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COPE

The one reality [Black Friday](#) shoppers must face is that the opening hours will be pure madness, retail experts say.

Many retailers registered disappointing back-to-school sales as well as poor results for September and October, so this Black Friday retailers will be doing just about everything to get people into their stores. And beleaguered consumers will be hungry for these deals. The combination should make for a more intense Black Friday than usual, experts say. Here's how to deal:

1 PLAN, AND MAKE A LIST

"It's going to be 100 times fiercer," said Howard Davidowitz, chairman of Davidowitz & Associates, a national retail consulting and investment banking firm headquartered in [Manhattan](#). "The main reason is that business is terrible ... What's really going on are doorbusters, slashing prices." The fury of lines and doorbusters and sales at every turn can be overwhelming, so experts advise prospective Black Friday customers to make a list of the people who will be receiving gifts, said Jonathan Samet, publisher of the Toy Insider, an annual consumer guide to toys.

2 SET A REALISTIC BUDGET

"This year, more than ever, you need to set a budget based on what you are capable of spending," Samet said. "And you have to figure out who you need to make your purchases for and their age and sex. To just walk up and down randomly in the stores is too hectic." This year the Toy Insider offered a lot more recommendations for toys under \$10 and under \$20, Samet said.

3 RESEARCH ON THE WEB

After that Thanksgiving celebration, shoppers should check the newspaper circulars as well as the Web sites for their preferred retailers. "Today, as retailers have gotten smarter about the fact that the Internet is influencing store shopping, you will see tremendous information online about shopping in the store," said Vikram Sharma, chief executive of ShopLocal, a multichannel marketing firm that

creates online versions of newspaper circulars. "They will tell you what's on sale in their store, what's available, and they will help you build shopping lists for your store."

4 GET ADVICE

Many retailers as well as Web sites like ShopWiki will present gift ideas. Some offer online toy catalogs, breaking down toys by age or gender. Shoppers also can get helpful ideas from consumer guides like Toy Insider or Toy Wishes Magazine, experts said. And they should also ask whether the child or adult has specific gift requests.

Consumers need to decide how to balance the goals of pricing and convenience and lay out their game plan, Samet said.

5 HAVE FUN

Most of all, shoppers should have a good time, said Britt Beemer, chief executive of America's Research Group. For those lining up outside stores two hours before opening, he suggests buying enough coffee and doughnuts to offer fellow shoppers on line. One lady followed his recommendation last year and met her fiance on line, he said. "Everybody is outside freezing to death, so someone thoughtful enough to bring doughnuts and coffee, they've got to be a good person," Beemer said. "It makes you a hero."

Merchants will have to make sweeter deals as the economy turns sour.

You're going to buy gifts eventually, so do it now when there are bargains.

Remember when you've experienced the joy of giving . . .

. . . and how that might put you into the holiday spirit sooner.

And finally, it's your own little chance to stimulate the economy.