



## Hour of truth is here for shoppers

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- Are purchasing in your pajamas, sipping Starbucks at 3 a.m. and watching movies while your spouse makes shopping rounds reasons enough to drag yourself out of bed and head to stores Friday?

Retailers hope so. From pre-dawn store hours to pajama lounges, retailers are doing what they can to woo customers to malls and stores starting Friday, the official kick-off day of the holiday shopping season.

A survey by the National Retail Federation shows more than 132 million Americans will be out shopping on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. While this weekend is expected to see heavy shopping, the NRF is forecasting a sluggish holiday for retailers, with sales anticipated to rise 4 percent this year, below the 10-year average 4.8 percent increase.

Not to be outdone by Black Friday is Cyber Monday. The Monday following Thanksgiving sees a swell of shoppers -- many of them during work hours -- flock online. If last year is any indication, e-tailers could see \$700 million or more in sales by the end of the day, but that boon to the economy may be partially offset by lost productivity, with many doing at least some of their online shopping at the office, according to outplacement consultant Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc. Challenger estimates productivity losses on Cyber Monday could amount to \$488.4 million based on the number of "working" online shoppers, their average salary and the average number of minutes spent surfing for the best deals on holiday gifts.

As it is, online retailers are expecting holiday sales to increase 21 percent to \$33 billion. In fact, Cyber Monday is far from the busiest online shopping day of the year, ranking a distant ninth, Bond said. The busiest online shopping day of the year is typically in mid-December, Bond said.

As giving is what the holidays are all about, there's a way to give a gift and help some nonprofit causes at the same time. The Web site [www.BiddingForGood.com](http://www.BiddingForGood.com) features more than 13,000 items that can be purchased, with proceeds going to causes from feeding hungry children to buying textbooks to saving the Earth.

Some of the items available online include: an autographed Red Sox baseball from World Series MVP Mike Lowell, tickets to a Hannah Montana concert, Tiffany jewelry, iPods and a trip to the Kentucky Derby.

The Web site's affiliated nonprofits include: United Way, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Catholic Charities, the American Red Cross and several public schools. Since Thanksgiving falls early this year, it makes this year the longest possible holiday

shopping season with five full shopping weekends. That gives holiday shoppers 32 days between Thanksgiving and Christmas to purchase gifts and other items related to the holidays.

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