

BUSINESS

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Black Friday preview starts now

Jaclyn Trop / The Detroit News

If retailers had their holiday wish, it would be Christmas year-round.

Black Friday sales that are usually reserved for the Friday after Thanksgiving will start at big box retailers today, with Sears' "Black Friday Now" specials on items from diamond rings to power tools. Door-buster deals begin at Toys R Us and Kohl's next week.

Retailers hope to give shoppers an incentive to extend the holiday shopping season while boosting their own sales and profit margins by offering early, rather than deep, discounts.

The jumpstart essentially doubles the traditional holiday shopping season — the 29 days between Thanksgiving and Christmas — by starting a month earlier.

Although Black Friday sales have started earlier in recent years to combat the recession, this year's range of merchandise and discounts is wider, with more retailers vying for shopper dollars before their wallets thin out.

Borders started the holiday season with a \$30 discount on two of its electronic readers — the Velocity Micro Cruz Reader with Wi-Fi and the Kobo eReader — through Oct. 31.

Starting today, Amazon will feature deals on electronics, including Blu-ray players, high-definition television sets and video games, every Friday through Thanksgiving.

"Customers don't want to wait until after Thanksgiving for those door-buster prices," said Tom Aiello, spokesman for Sears Holding Corp., which owns Sears and Kmart. Early sales "give more power to the customers."



Sears kicked off its Black Friday sales over Halloween week-end last year, but this year the retailer extended the sale to two days and will hold two-day door-buster promotions weekly through November.

Kmart, whose Halloween business is robust, will begin its Black Friday sales in November.

Starting the holiday shopping season earlier gives retailers the chance to do higher volumes with better margins since they likely won't have to discount as deeply toward the end of the season, said Farmington Hills-based retail consultant Ken Dalto.

Retailers "feel that a lot of people will come in earlier for the best things," Dalto said.

Merchants would rather offer discounts of 10 percent to 30 percent earlier in the season than be stuck with a glut of merchandise marked down at 50 percent to 70 percent at the end of the holidays, analysts said.

Still, shoppers should beware that the deals advertised sometimes are not discounts, said Barry Boone, founder and chief executive of CurrentCodes.com, which aggregates store promotions.

"Most of the time they are actual discounts," Boone said, "but as with all things you should do your due diligence and check online to determine how good the price really is. Also beware of merchants who mix nondiscounted items with discounted ones in their ads."