

BLACK FRIDAY SHOPPING RUSH STARTS EARLY BUT NUMBERS MAY BE DOWN

Hundreds of stores kick off Christmas trading period early as retail federation predicts 5 million fewer shoppers than last year.

The annual US shopping extravaganza of Black Friday started early this year with hundreds of stores opening late on Thursday night to offer their heavily discounted wares kicking off the Christmas trading period.

Walmart and Toys R Us opened at 8pm on Thursday with some products in their Black Friday deals, while electronics retailer Best Buy opened at midnight in the traditional sales that follow Thanksgiving.

The sales also stretched across the Atlantic, with Apple, Currys, PC World, Asda and Amazon offering discounts to coincide with the US Holiday.

Sales are expected to increase 4.1% over the festive period, according to the National Retail Federation in America, down on the 5.6% increase seen in 2011.

However, the organisation believes the number of shoppers drawn in by the week end long sales could be down - with 147 million shoppers, compared with 152 million a year earlier.

Charles O'Shea, a senior analyst at Moody's, told Reuters the reason for early store openings could be to challenge online retailers.

He said: « It's a recognition that retailers need to be more aggressive and want to show their physical stores are important .It's a finite pie; if you can get a bit more by being open, then do it. ».....

In the UK, Apple is offering between 5-10% off some of its products in store and online, although it is being branded as a « shopping event » rather than Black Friday.

Amazon, which introduced Black Friday to the UK market in 2010, has been running deals on its website all week and will continue until Monday - known as Cyber Monday.....

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