

Europe's retailers tempt shoppers with Black Friday deals

LONDON (Reuters) - Retailers across Europe chased shoppers on "Black Friday" in a test of consumer demand, particularly in Britain, where the spending spree imported from the U.S. looked set to outdo last year.

After last month suffering their biggest decline in sales volumes for four-and-a-half years, British retailers are pinning their hopes on discounts to get shoppers squeezed by inflation and subdued wage growth spending again.

In Britain, the annual promotional event, traditionally focused on electrical goods, has been mainly played out online since 2014, when in-store sales were marred by scuffles.

The jury remains out on whether retailers make money by cutting prices in an event that was imported to Britain from the United States by online retailer Amazon (AMZN.O) in 2010. By 3 p.m., Barclaycard, which processes nearly half of UK debit and credit card transactions, had seen an 8 percent increase in spending compared to last year, and a 32 percent increase in transactions.

"Consumers may be opting to buy more goods at a lower price rather than investing in a handful of higher-value items," said Barclaycard's Paullette Rowe.

Pedestrians walk past a sign in a store window on Oxford Street on 'Black Friday' in London, Britain November 24, 2017. REUTERS/Simon Dawson

Department store John Lewis [JLP.UL] said its busiest shopping hour had been 9-10 a.m., with an average 705 items ordered per minute. "It will be our busiest trading day of the year," John Rogers, chief executive of electricals-to-toys retailer Argos, owned by Britain's second biggest retailer Sainsbury's (SBRY.L), told Reuters.

The research firm GlobalData forecasts that UK spending in the period Nov. 20 to 27 - will be up

3.8 percent from last year at 10.1 billion pounds.

PROFITABLE OR DAMAGING?
Black Friday's advocates say carefully planned promotions with global suppliers boost sales while still maintaining margins.

Critics say the discounts drag forward sales that retailers would otherwise have made at full price at Christmas, and can dampen business in subsequent weeks.

Seb James, CEO of Dixons Carphone (DC.L), told BBC radio that his company gained market share from Black Friday.

As last year, retailers including Britain's biggest, Tesco (TSCO.L), and Amazon are stretching their promotions over up to two weeks, hoping to smooth out demand and reduce pressure on supply and distribution networks.

Slideshow (3 Images)

Clothing retailer Next (NXT.L) joined Black Friday for the first time with price cuts of up to 70 percent. A spokesman for the firm said it was an experiment to see what effect offering discounts on the previous season's stock, normally sold in the Boxing Day sale, would have on full-price sales.

"Categorically we have not got a stock problem," said the spokesman. Shares in Next fell up to 1.7 percent.

CONTINENTAL IMPACT

Black Friday, the day after the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, was so named because spending would surge and often push retailers into the black for the year.



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Its impact is also being felt across Europe.

In Germany, sales promotions on Black Friday and Cyber Monday (Nov. 27) are expected to add around 1.7 billion euros (\$2 billion) to retailers' revenues, roughly on a par with 2016, a survey by trade body HDE found.

About 8 million French consumers are expected to shop from Friday to Monday, yielding expected revenue of 945 million euros, according to a study by Kantar TNS for the U.S e-commerce firm eBay.

In Denmark, supermarket chains Bilka and Fotex said their websites had been taken down by cyber attacks at the launch of their Black Friday campaigns.

The sales promotion has also been growing in Italy, where all major retail chains were advertising discounts. The department store La Rinascente was opening until midnight on Friday and advertising discounts of up to 50 percent.

But Black Friday has had a slow pick-up amongst Spaniards, who traditionally exchange presents on Epiphany (Jan. 6). Just 22 percent intended to make a purchase on Black Friday or Cyber Monday, according to a survey by Metroscopia for the newspaper El Pais.

It was more subdued in Greece, where the economy contracted by more than a quarter between 2008 and 2016. "People don't have money to spend," said 32-year-old Athens shopper George Christopoulos. (\$1 = 0.7506 pounds)

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Editor's Choice



An air mask hangs on an altar during a vigil for the lives and community lost to the Camp Fire at the First Christian Church of Chico in Chico



Kim Widbey, 47, whose apartment in Paradise was destroyed by the Camp Fire, visits a free clothing donation site for evacuees in Chico



Justin Kraus, whose home in Paradise was destroyed by the Camp Fire, looks for toys for his sons, Liam, 5, (L) and Samuel, 3, at a donation site for evacuees in Chico



After their home in Paradise was destroyed by the Camp Fire, Orin and Sonya Butts shop for new clothing for their son, Landyn, 3, in Chico



President Donald Trump surveys homes destroyed by the Woolsey fire in Malibu California



Forensic anthropologist Kyra Stull looks up while recovering human remains from a trailer home destroyed by the Camp Fire in Paradise



A building marked by search crews is seen in the aftermath of the Camp Fire in Paradise



A man waves a Trump flag as the motorcade of U.S. President Donald Trump flies by after Trump visited a neighborhood recently destroyed by the Camp fire in Paradise, California, U.S.

HCC First Again In Enrolling International Students

HOUSTON (Nov. 16, 2018) – For the 17th consecutive year, Houston Community College ranks first in the nation among two-year institutions in enrolling international students.

According to the 2018 Open Doors report, 6,118 international students enrolled in HCC for the 2017-2018 academic year. Open Doors is supported by a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. State Department.

HCC attracts international students by providing an affordable education, responsive services and career development programs.

“This report demonstrates once again that HCC is committed to providing academic and workforce pathways to students from all over the globe,” said HCC Chancellor Cesar Maldonado. “We have a staff dedicated to hosting international students and ensuring their success at HCC.”

Houston is the most diverse city in the United States and HCC consistently ranks among the leaders in diverse student populations. In addition to its ranking regarding international students, HCC is first in awarding associate degrees to all minorities.

For more information on HCC’s international student services, go here: <https://www.hccs.edu/support-services/international-students/>

Related

Find Out What Leading Houstonians Are Saying About HCC

(To access these discussions, go here: <https://www.hccs.edu/departments/planning--institutional-effectiveness/strategic-plan/>)



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Additional News

HCC 3rd largest in the U.S. for online enrollments

HOUSTON (Sept. 25, 2018) – A regular ribbon and scissors just wouldn’t do for the new Houston Community College Online College. Instead, attendees held tablets and swiped their fingers across the screen for the ribbon cutting marking the launch of 32 fully online degrees and certificates. By the fall of 2019, the college will have a total of 71 fully online degrees and certificates.

“This is a defining moment in the history of HCC,” said Chancellor Cesar Maldonado. “The students who have registered for online courses this fall are the first to have the option of completing a fully online pathway to a certificate or associate degree at HCC.”

“HCC has offered remote learning options since the time they were referred to as distance learning, but the addition of a seventh college within the organization entirely dedicated to meeting the needs of online learners takes HCC’s commitment to a whole different level,” said Margaret Ford Fisher, president of HCC’s online college. “We are providing students the option of completing their coursework anywhere, anytime.”



With more than 21,000 students taking one or more online classes, HCC is the third largest community college in the U.S. for online enrollments. There are more than 60 areas of study and more than 5,000 individual courses available online.

“It is our goal at HCC to remove roadblocks that might get in the way of obtaining an associate degree or workforce certificate,” HCC Board Chair Carolyn Evans-Shabazz said. “The online college does just that for potential students who, for a variety of reasons, cannot

conveniently take traditional classes.” “The online college expands educational opportunities for stay-at-home moms and dads, students committed to caring for elderly loved ones at home and those already in the workforce who need additional education to move up in their careers or change their careers altogether,” said Norma Perez, HCC vice chancellor, instructional services, and chief



academic officer.

According to a study by the Boston Consulting Group, HCC retention rates for first-time freshmen students were 9 to 10 percentage points higher when they took at least one fully online or mixed modality course. BCG also reported that HCC students who take a combination of digital and face-to-face courses complete their degrees at a higher rate than those who take all of their classes face to face.

HCC’s Online College provides counselors, advisors and tutors for its online students. All HCC online classes are taught by credentialed faculty.

More information is available at hccs.edu/online.

About HCC

Houston Community College (HCC) is composed of 15 Centers of Excellence and numerous satellite centers that serve the diverse communities in the Greater Houston area by preparing individuals to live and work in an increasingly international and technological society. HCC is one of the country’s largest single-accredited, open-admission, community colleges offering associate degrees, certificates, workforce training, and lifelong learning opportunities. To learn more, visit www.hccs.edu.

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The wildfires in California have killed close to 80 people, and hundreds more are missing.

Even when you donate, there's a right way and a wrong way.

California is suffering the deadliest wildfire in state history, with more than 50 people dead and hundreds more missing. The wildfire, known as the Camp Fire, has scorched 135,000 acres in Northern California's Butte County, while a separate fire in the southern part of the state has burned Ventura and Los Angeles counties. President Donald Trump approved disaster aid for the state, where more than 7,000 structures have burned and another 15,000 are at risk. The fire was 35% contained as of Wednesday afternoon, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Americans are rushing to donate supplies, food and clothes to help victims. But organizations including the American Red Cross and the Humane Society say victims need cash more than anything else. "We all want to help the victims of the #CampFire, but please don't send supplies, as the evacuation centers say they have been inundated," Darrell Steinberg, mayor of Sacramento, tweeted. (Sacramento is 90 miles away from the fires.)

Darrell Steinberg
@Mayor_Steinberg
We all want to help the victims of the #CampFire, but please don't send supplies, as the evacuation centers say they have been inundated. Those working on the front lines say giving to the @RedCross or @Habitat_org is the best way to help. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/state/california/article221539745.html> ...



Volunteers at evacuation centers aiding

Some Charities Are Running Out Of Space For Donations From Good Samaritans

The Best Way To Donate To Victims Of The California Wildfires

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

people fleeing California wildfires say they're inundated by well-meaning, but useless donations of clothing and other supplies. They suggest sending money or a gift.

Though Good Samaritans may feel the impulse to help people replace the possessions they lost in the fire, cash is actually the most useful type of assistance, charities said.

"After a disaster hits, the American Red Cross witnesses the incredible generosity of people from across the country who want to help in any way they can with donations of items like clothes, shoes, food and household items, but the reality is, cash donations are best," the Red Cross said in a statement.

Officials in California say the victims of the fires would benefit from gift cards to Walmart, WMT, -2.41% Target, TGT, -9.68% gas stations or grocery stores, as well as other stores in the affected areas, including the grocery store Raley's, Food Maxx, Grocery Outlet, Rite-Aid, RAD, -4.24% CVS, CVS, -3.24% Walgreens, Dollar General, DG, -4.63% Dollar Tree, DLTR, -2.49% and Big Lots, BIG, -5.34%

In Southern California, where the Woolsey Fire has ravaged communities, the Humane Society of Ventura County said it was stocked with supplies, but will need more money for items like pet food. Actress Sandra Bullock donated \$100,000 to HSVC, which is caring for cats, dogs, donkeys, pigs, horses, chickens, ducks and other pets displaced by the fire. (The organization will care for these animals until the owners can reunite with them, it said.)



Krystin Harvey, left, comforts her daughter Araya Cipollini at the remains of their home burned in the Camp Fire, Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018, in Paradise, Calif. (Photo/AP)

The Chico, Calif.-based North Valley Community Foundation, which is supporting evacuation centers near the Camp Fire, said there wasn't enough storage space for donations of clothing or blankets. "If you have any ability to contribute financially to our fire relief fund, this is the time," Alexa Benson-Valavanis, president and chief executive officer of NVCF, said in a statement.

Butte County is still accepting material donations, but officials would prefer new items, said Holli Drobny, a member of the county's public information office. The county also asks that donors separate clothes by gender and size so they can be distributed faster to people who need them, Drobny said. Still, cash and Visa V, -1.31% gift cards are most helpful, she said.

"Our community has definitely pulled through to provide for evacuees, but it was taking too much time to get more organized and see what's feasible for people to actually utilize," she said. (Courtesy <https://www.marketwatch.com>)

Related

Generous but useless dona-

tions are flooding wildfire evacuation centers. Here's what to send.

November 12, 2018 11:01 AM - When evacuation centers aiding California residents fleeing the rapacious Camp Fire put out a call for donations, people responded. And responded, and responded, and responded.

Now center coordinators are asking donors to stop sending supplies, reported The Redding Record-Searchlight.

"We have buildings full of stuff," said Kathy Ingvaldsen at the Butte County Fairgrounds, according to the publication. "In four hours, we filled up a 5,000-square-foot building full of clothes. They're stacked up on tables five feet high."



Other well-meaning but misguided donors are inundating evacuation centers with used, unneeded or useless goods, reported The Redding Record-Searchlight.

"The impulse from people to help is incredible; it's very strong, but the best way to do so is by donating through the Habitat for Humanity fundraiser or through the Red Cross," said Chuck Smith, public information officer for Sutter County, which also has opened a shelter, reported The Marysville Appeal-Democrat.

"Cash donations and gift cards offer more flexibility," Smith said, according to the publication. "Gift cards to places like Target or Walmart can help someone buy clothes or other items they might have left out of their go-bags."

Gift cards for gas stations, supermarkets and pharmacies also can be useful for evacuees, said Stephanie Hayden, of Hope Center, which organizes donations in Oroville, California, reported The Redding Record-Searchlight.

Hayden said shelters do still need some specific items, such as new underclothes — particularly for women — backpacks, duffel bags and luggage, reported the publication.

The Camp Fire, which erupted Thursday in Butte County, has burned 113,000 acres, killed 29 people and destroyed 6,453 homes as of Monday morning, reported the California Department of Forestry and Fire protection.

The fire virtually wiped the foothill town of Paradise off the map, sending thousands of residents fleeing to evacuation centers. Relief workers call the all-but-inevitable avalanche of generous but useless donations following a fire, flood or hurricane "the second disaster," reported National Public Radio.

Meghan O'Hara with the American Red Cross recalls receiving a box of donated Frisbees from Germany as she oversaw relief efforts in earthquake-shattered Haiti in 2010, NPR reported.



"Wow. That \$60 or \$70 could have been sent to so many different organizations to help out in so many different ways, and now we have a box of Frisbees," O'Hara said, according to the station.

Writing on Medium, Karen Merzenich described volunteering at an evacuation center following the devastating 2017 fires in Napa and Santa Rosa, California.

"I spent a fulfilling day... boxing up literally thousands of surplus donations of deodorant and toothpaste," she wrote. "Around noon, I suggested to the organizers that they might want to start turning away donations. 'Did you know we've received at least 2,000 sticks of deodorant?' I asked. (Courtesy <https://www.sacbee.com>)

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