Thanksgiving Weekend Continues to Loom Large for Consumers
Black Friday Alone is Expected to Account for 40% of Weekend Expenditures

Key Takeaways

- More adults in the U.S. plan to participate in Thanksgiving weekend shopping activities this year (85%) than in 2018 (83%).
- This year, shoppers plan to spend $470 on goods and services during the four-day Thanksgiving weekend.
- More than half of shoppers plan to spend more on goods than they did in 2018, while slightly less than that expect to increase their services-related expenditures.
- Roughly four-fifths (84%) of Thanksgiving weekend shoppers plan to make purchases in physical stores, a percentage that rises to 94% when those who will purchase online from retailers with stores are included.
- More than two-fifths (44%) of Thanksgiving weekend shoppers buying goods will use click-and-collect during that time. Among them, nearly three-quarters (72%) say they expect to make an additional purchase when picking up their items.
- Thanksgiving weekend shoppers intend to allocate 73% of the total dollars they spend on goods to retailers with brick-and-mortar locations (either in store or online).
- The largest shares of shoppers intend to purchase apparel/footwear, toys and electronics during the long holiday weekend.
- Discount department stores, supermarkets and traditional department stores will be the most popular retailer types for purchases during Thanksgiving weekend.
- Four-fifths (80%) of shoppers will visit shopping centers over the entire weekend. Roughly two-thirds (67%) of shoppers will visit a mall or other center on Black Friday alone.

The extended four-day Thanksgiving weekend, from Thanksgiving through Sunday, occurs toward the end of November. However, in recent years, beginning November 1, consumers have been inundated with reminders that the mega-deals associated with this period are coming and discounts are available beforehand. Despite all this, the November late-month festivities remain the “traditional” kickoff of the holiday shopping season. ICSC’s annual Pre-Thanksgiving Weekend consumer survey demonstrates once again that shoppers will be employing all available physical and digital channels at their disposal in 2019. They will also visit malls and open-air centers for purchases and participate in a host of non-shopping-related activities.¹

Big Spending Plans Among Thanksgiving Weekend Shoppers

More than eight of 10 (85%) consumers plan to spend during the Thanksgiving weekend (a slight increase from 83% in 2018). **Those shoppers intend to allocate an average of approximately $470 for goods and services.** (See Chart 1.) Roughly 71% (or $332) of overall spending will be on goods (including holiday gifts, other holiday-related items and non-holiday merchandise), while 29% (or $138) will be on services (such as dining, entertainment and personal services). For over half (54%) of shoppers, spending on goods will be more than last year and just over one-fifth (21%) plan to purchase about the same amount. Overall, those planning to spend more on goods will increase spending by 19% over 2018.

On services-related expenditures, 48% are intending to spend more over the four-day weekend—increasing their expenditures by 16% on average—while about one-quarter (26%) expect to spend the same amount.

Approximately 73% of planned spending on goods only will be holiday-related during Thanksgiving weekend, while the remaining 27% will be on non-holiday merchandise, confirming that **many shoppers use this time of the year to make purchases they may have delayed to take advantage of seasonal promotions.**

When asked about the amount of holiday-related spending during Thanksgiving weekend and the share of total holiday-related expenditures for the entire season it represents, only about one-quarter (28%) say more than half. This means a significant amount of shoppers must still make the majority of purchases at other times of the season, usually close to Christmas.

By generation, Gen Xers expect to spend the most ($538) during the weekend—11% more than Millennials ($484), but 46% more than Boomers ($369). Other noteworthy demographic differences include:

- **Males** expect to spend 14% more than females;
- **Shoppers in the Northeast,** who intend to buy the most, plan to spend 40% more than those in the Midwest, who expect to spend the least;
- **Top-income households** (earning $100K+) plan to spend 70% more than lowest income households (earning less than $50K); and
- **Households with children** will spend 47% more than those without children.

¹These results and others in this report are based on a representative poll of 1,003 adults in the U.S., conducted from November 4 to 6, 2019, by Engine Insights on behalf of ICSC.
Much of the spending during Thanksgiving weekend will occur on Black Friday, November 29. That day alone—which for over one-quarter (28%) of shoppers will begin between midnight and 6:00 a.m.—is expected to account for roughly 40% of total expenditures over the four days. This is followed by Saturday, November 30, at 24%; Sunday, December 1, at 19%; and Thanksgiving Day, November 28, at 17%.

The impact of pre-Black Friday promotions on sales during the actual holiday weekend is significant. Nearly half (47%) of shoppers say they plan to take advantage of deals they find earlier in November and as a result, shift spending away from Thanksgiving weekend. This is critical to remember, as spending during the four-day Thanksgiving weekend serves as a bellwether for sales during the entire holiday season.

**Shoppers Embrace Omnichannel Options for Purchases**

Consistent with previous consumer intention surveys conducted by ICSC and observed again in this one, shoppers are embracing integrated shopping experiences. For their goods-related purchases ($332), an overwhelming amount of shoppers (84%)—across all generations—intend to buy at brick-and-mortar locations during the four-day weekend. (See Table 1.) That share rises to 94% of Thanksgiving weekend shoppers making purchases from traditional brick-and-mortar retailers when taking into account the 59% of them who will buy online from those companies—slightly more than the share (58%) planning to purchase from online-only retailers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail format</th>
<th>Percent of shoppers</th>
<th>Percent of total expenditures on goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical stores</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online from retailers with stores</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship to home/office</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick up in store</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure online retailers</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other pure online retailers</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Over two-fifths (44%) of Thanksgiving weekend shoppers purchasing goods expect to buy online from a retailer with a physical presence and pick up their online orders in store—an increase from 40% in 2018—while a bit less (43%) will have the orders shipped to them. Picking up online orders in store is much more prevalent among Millennials (51%), Gen Xers (50%) and shoppers living in urban areas (51%) compared to Boomers and suburban and rural residents.

In addition, those planning to buy online but collect their items in store will continue shopping when picking up their purchases. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of click-and-collect shoppers expect to make an additional purchase at that store/tenant, an adjacent establishment or another unit within the same shopping center. Millennials (74%) and Gen Xers (79%) are once again more likely to demonstrate this shopping behavior than Baby Boomers (66%).

Also shown in Table 1, 73% of Thanksgiving weekend expenditures on goods will occur in physical stores/establishments or online from retailers that have a physical presence. Proof that traditional retailers are greatly expanding their online experience, shoppers plan to allocate the same share (25%) of their total dollars for goods online to retailers with stores as they will to pure online companies (25%).

**Brick-and-Mortar Dominant for Key Merchandise Categories**

Apparel/footwear (82%) is expected to be the most popular product category bought during the holiday weekend. Following that are electronics and toys (74% each), food-and-beverage (F&B) gifts (72%), home goods/housewares (69%) and health and beauty products (65%). (See Chart 2.)

For each product category, the largest shares of shoppers plan to buy them from retailers with physical stores (either in store or online) compared to pure online retailers. (See Chart 3.) There are slight differences by category, however. The largest shares of shoppers use physical stores for F&B gifts, health and beauty products and jewelry. More consumers are willing to use online channels to buy toys and electronics than other products.

When asked about all the purchases they plan to make during Thanksgiving weekend, shoppers say in-store promotions/displays (26%) and websites/mobile apps/email ads (19%) will have the most influence on what they buy. Store hours, catalogs, social media and TV ads are less impactful.

**Discounters Prevail as Shoppers Chase Deals**

More than nine of 10 (93%) Thanksgiving weekend shoppers buying goods expect to spend at discounters during that time, as shown in Chart 4. Also popular will be traditional department stores and supermarkets (73% each), electronics stores (67%), dollar/variety stores (66%) and off-price retailers (63%).
For each type of retailer, as shown in Chart 5, shopping in their physical locations during Thanksgiving weekend is significantly more popular among shoppers than shopping in store and online or solely online. This is particularly true for dollar/variety stores, supermarkets, chain drug stores, wholesale clubs, off-price retail stores and home improvement stores.

Though physical stores are still dominant, for electronics stores, sporting goods/hobby/toy stores, apparel stores, health and beauty stores and discount department stores, larger shares of consumers plan to use both in store and online channels or online only compared with the other retailer formats.

When it comes to choosing where to shop during Thanksgiving weekend, shoppers cite the following as key motivations:

- Store location and availability of parking (48%);
- Promotions/loyalty reward offers (41%);
- Hassle-free returns/exchanges (29%);
- Speedy pickup and shipping/delivery options (29%); and
- An online platform complementary to the retailer’s physical stores (23%).

Shopping Centers Continue Playing a Prominent Role

Four-fifths (80%) of shoppers intend to visit a shopping center/mall during the four-day holiday weekend for shopping and non-shopping activities. More specifically, as shown in Chart 6, over half (56%) of shoppers will go to a shopping center/mall on Thanksgiving, about two-thirds (67%) will visit on Black Friday and 70% will visit on Saturday and/or Sunday. Over the four days, higher shares of Millennials (87%) will go to these destinations compared to Gen Xers (83%) and Baby Boomers (69%).

While most will go to a shopping center to shop during these days, proportionally fewer will do so on Thanksgiving Day (58%) than on Black Friday (65%) or Saturday/Sunday (65%). On Thursday, greater proportions of shopping center visitors will go for non-shopping, experiential purposes such as seeing a movie, dining, attending holiday events, participating in philanthropic campaigns and having their child's picture taken with Santa than on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

Overall, 77% of shoppers who intend to visit a shopping center will shop during the long Thanksgiving weekend—and may also engage in other activities. However, the balance (23%) of shopping center visitors intend to do other non-shopping activities exclusively. This should be kept in mind when discussing store visits, as these alone do not account for all traffic to a shopping center or mall.

Promotions: The Main Attraction of Thanksgiving Weekend

In addition to starting off the holiday shopping season, Thanksgiving weekend is also about finding some of the year’s best deals on merchandise. Despite sales and other promotions now being offered in early November, more than half (53%) of shoppers say Thanksgiving weekend and particularly Black Friday promotions (e.g., "Doorbuster Deals") are just as or more important today as they were in the past.

Weekend shoppers are most interested in sales on electronics. About one-third (37%) of these shoppers are less likely to buy that type of product if they perceive the deals as inadequate. Shoppers are also less inclined to purchase toys (31%) and apparel (27%) if the promotions on those items are subpar.

Conclusion

As consumers prepare for the upcoming holidays, Thanksgiving weekend remains a critical shopping period for many as they seek discounts. Physical stores remain the hub of their journey. While buying for others remains the chief motivation for their visits, many will also use the opportunity to purchase items for themselves, while others enjoy the mix of additional activities available.