

## Black Friday

*Crowd Management Planning and Products*



# BLACK FRIDAY



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# Black Friday

## Crowd Management Planning and Products

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## INTRODUCTION

Black Friday, and the extended Black Friday weekend, is the busiest shopping time of the year. Retailers capitalize on this by offering special promotions on exciting new products or hot-selling items. But a huge crowd, in an excited state, can lead to potential problems.

The death of a Wal-Mart employee due to a stampede by shoppers on Black Friday in November 2008 brought the subject of line management to the national headlines. Since then, planning and implementing Black Friday crowd management has become a necessary and important task for many stores.

## PRE-PLANNING

Planning for how to handle the Black Friday onslaught has to occur well in advance. Store management must strategize and implement a plan which, at its core, answers these questions:

- How do you want customers to line up outside your store (prior to the store's opening)?
- In what order will customers enter your store?
- How do you want customers to navigate to merchandise within the store?
- How do you want customers to line up in order to check out?
- How do you want customers to exit the store?



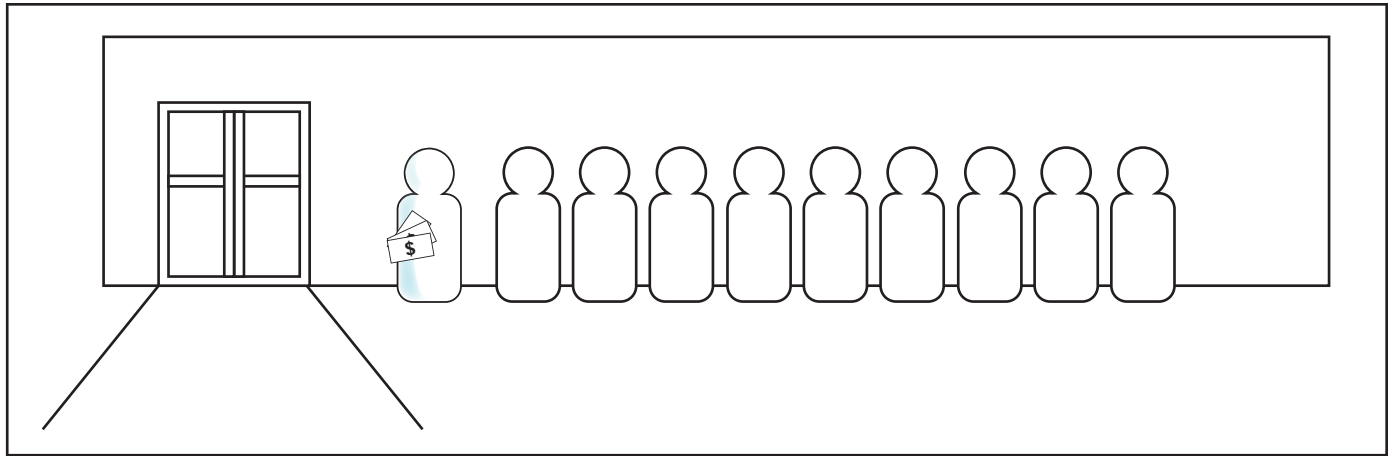
## PRE-ENTRANCE

If you're offering special deals or special products, anticipate that customers will arrive on the grounds around your store entrance well in advance of when you open the doors. If you're opening at 5 am, will some customers be there at 3 am, hoping to be the first to enter? Based on your past experience, and the experiences of similar stores, establish an expected arrival time for your customers. This – not when you open the doors – is when your crowd management strategy will actually begin.

Do you want your customers to begin lining up in a single file line? If so, set up crowd control barriers, or stanchions with belts to clearly establish the “borders” of the line.



*Crowd-control barricades are set-up prior to store opening in anticipation of large Black Friday crowds.*



There are also ways to discourage people from showing up too early. You could arrange to have customers sign up for a spot in the line in advance. You could issue numbers to customers, so that they know their spot in line is secure (and to prevent confrontations about “line cutting”). Some stores issue wristbands or tickets, with random entry numbers, to customers in order to discourage escalation of earlier arrival times.

Whichever method you decide upon, you should plan to have staff assigned to the outdoor waiting line area. That means that certain staff members must arrive very early. These staff members should remain in constant communication with the waiting customers – reiterating the details on how your entrance system will work, answering questions, and keeping an eye out for potential problems.

## STORE ENTRANCE

In addition to designating line space outside your store, you’ll need to establish an orderly line entering your store, in order to prevent any “mad rushes.” There should be no foot races – the first person in your line should be the first person entering the store, needing only to walk – not run – in. Make sure you have line management posts connected by belts that clearly establish the store entrance line space, and make sure that anything that might cause entrants to stop (such as merchandise that might be there on a typical day) is temporarily moved away.

## INSIDE THE STORE

For the most part, you know what your hot items will be. To mitigate the risk of dangerous crowd swells inside the store, spread out your featured merchandise. If you can avoid keeping big ticket items too close to each other, your large crowd will be dispersed into smaller sub-crowds, giving customers more room to navigate safely. It will also help to prepare customers by giving them a site map, so that they know where to go to get their most sought-after product.



## CHECKING OUT

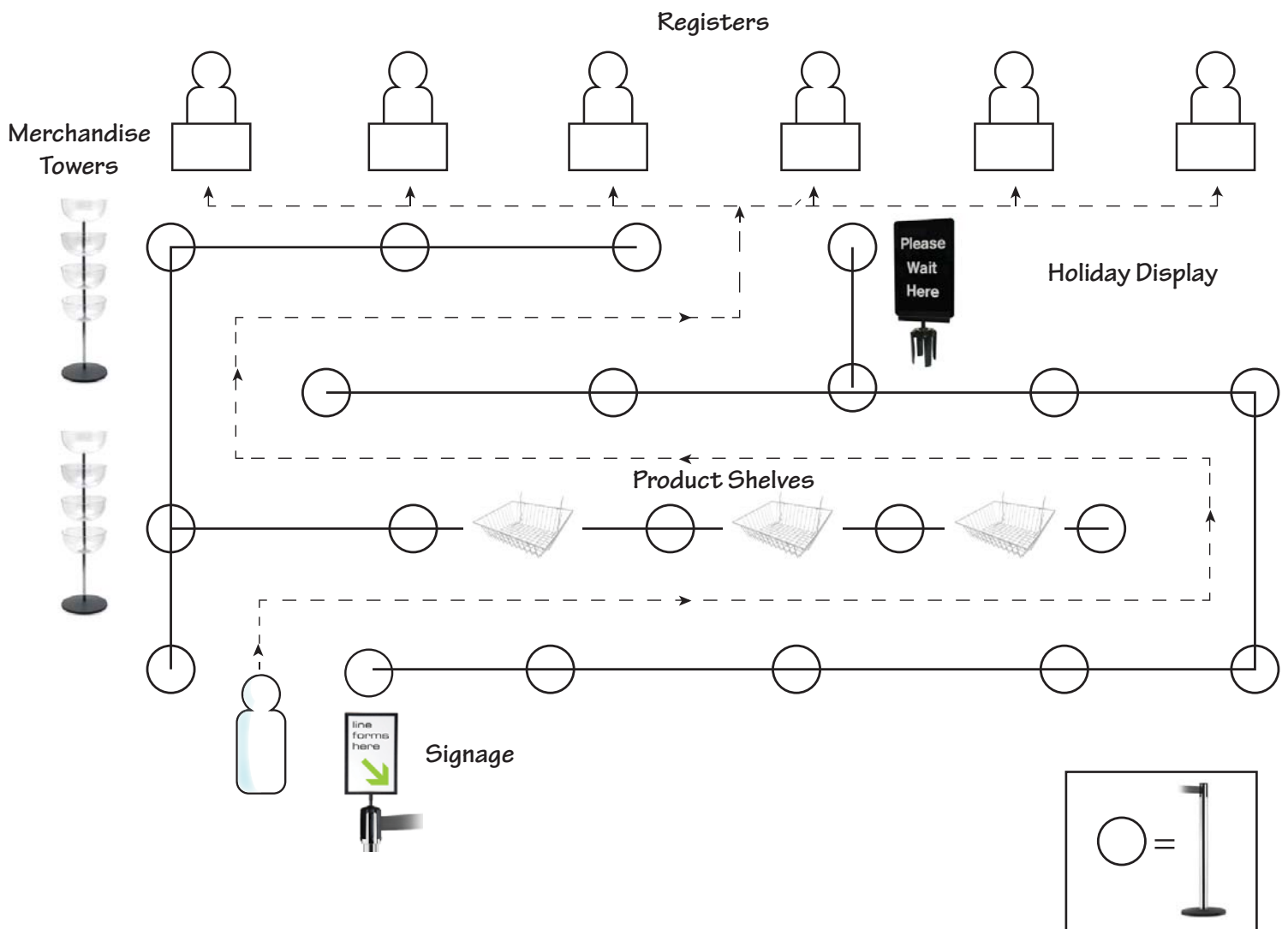
Of course, the number of people standing in your check-out lines will be greater on Black Friday than they are normally. Thus the lines will be physically longer. How will you handle this? You may need to do some physical reconfiguration to open up space. And you may need to implement a different checkout line system than you normally have.

If you don't have a single line queuing system normally, consider implementing it for the Black Friday weekend. Statistics show that single line queuing systems reduce customer wait times, when compared to multiple lines. Having a single line removes pressure on the customers

to "choose" the right line or to attempt to jockey between lines depending on how quickly they perceive any given line is moving. A single line system is objectively fairer, and psychologically easier on customers who may already be tired or frustrated.

Wherever it is physically possible, it is best to set up your line in a serpentine formation. Make sure your lines have breaks and turns to keep the line flowing smoothly.

If you are expecting massive (and potentially unruly) crowds, consider an upgrade from your normal line management stanchions. Heavy crowds could (unintentionally or intentionally) knock over or move standard stanchions. Many stanchion models can be drilled into the floor, while others have heavier magnetic bases.



## LEAVING THE STORE

Even when your customers have successfully acquired their desired product and navigated their way through your check out system, your work is not done. Don't forget to give them an orderly path out of your store. Avoid any chance of exiting customers bumping in to entering customers. Continue to guide customers with line management products as they leave.

## STAFF PLANNING AND TRAINING

In addition to the planning for handling the lines inside and outside your store, management should also plan ahead regarding staff needs and training.

Because of the business potential, and safety risks, that are present during the Black Friday weekend, communication among your staff is more important than ever. Almost like planning for a big game, you should have regular staff meetings leading up to Black Friday. All employees,

no matter where they will be stationed, need to know about your crowd management strategies and processes.

First, make sure you not only have adequate numbers of staff on hand, but also plan to have additional staff either on call, or physically present, in case the need arises. All staff members should know what the most popular items will be, and the exact places in the stores where they will be located. Everyone should be given proper instructions on how to handle emergencies and what to do if they witness potentially dangerous situations.

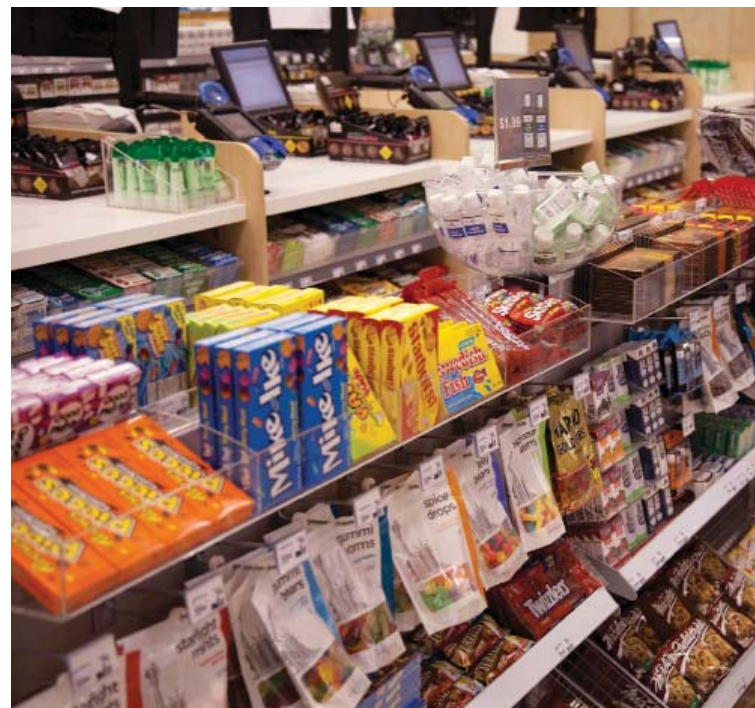
There should be employees designated to handle customer communication. And there should be a clear chain of command so that each employee knows who needs to be alerted in case of problems or questions. Some employees should also be given the responsibility for calling 911 or local police should such need arise. Make sure every employee knows what to do if they encounter shoppers who pose a risk of physical harm to other shoppers or to staff.

Management must also make sure there are contingency plans in case merchandise sells out, and that all staff members are in the know about this. You should have prepared signage explaining what customers can do in case of sellouts, and you should designate an appropriate number of customer service staff members to talk to customers about this in a calm and friendly manner.

## BLACK FRIDAY CROWD MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

In November 2010, Old Navy announced a Black Friday door-buster deal. With a \$25 purchase, customers received a free Xbox 360 Kinect "Dance Central" game for free. During the debut of this new game, stores also provided an opportunity for customers to try out the game in-store.

Portable posts with retractable belts were utilized in 400 Old Navy stores for line management and crowd control. These barriers kept crowds at a safe distance from the dancers, and provided a queuing system for customers purchasing merchandise.

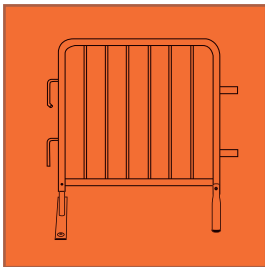




## Recommended Products for Black Friday Sales



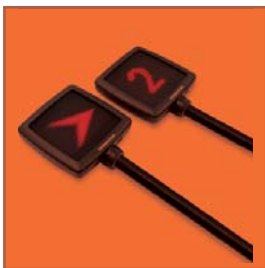
**Signage**



**Crowd Control Barriers  
(outside and at entrances)**



**Portable Posts with  
Retractable Posts  
(inside and at cashiers)**



**Electronic  
Queuing**



**In Line  
Merchandising**

## PRODUCTS

### Signage

Make sure you have plenty of visible signs informing customers about anything you think they need to know.

One of the most important things customers need to know where to get in line. Make sure signs informing patrons about where the lines (for store entrances or checkout) start. Line management stanchions are designed to accommodate signage.

#### Other signs that will be helpful:

- Maps of your store, especially showing the departments where heavily promoted items are located
- Store Hours
- Entrance Policies: Prior to your opening, inform those waiting outside what to expect about the order in which customers will be let in
- Stand-by signage in case certain products run out of stock



## Outside your store – Crowd control barriers

If significant numbers of customers will be waiting outside your store well in advance of its opening, setting up interlocking steel crowd control barriers is your best bet for ensuring order and safety. These barriers clearly establish the boundaries of a line and prevent people from cutting into a line from the side. They also clearly block off no-access areas of your location.

## At your entrance, and inside your store – Portable Posts with Retractable Belts

This line management system will be effective in guiding customers into your store, guiding them around your store, and establishing a check out line. The system is designed to identify a site's line space, organize lines of patrons, and keep those lines moving efficiently.

In addition to check out lines, stanchions can be set up in high foot-traffic areas (such as around your most popular products) to discourage customer crushes.

## Electronic Queuing

Electronic Queuing systems have proven to not only decrease customer wait times, but also increase staff efficiency. They also give retailers the opportunity to place promotional messages in front of the customer.

With an electronic queuing system, the cashier will push a button which provides both visual (lights) and audio (often a tone) clues for the customer to move forward to the checkout station. This is a much more efficient system than having cashiers yell, or having customers continually be on the lookout for an open station.

## In Line Merchandising

In-line merchandising techniques will almost certainly garner you additional sales on Black Friday, but your offerings should be minimal and targeted strategically. With line space at a premium during this weekend, huge merchandise displays should be avoided.

Place merchandising bowls on the tops of some of the posts which guide your checkout line. It will please customers and increase your bottom line if you fill these bowls with small, “stocking stuffer” items (such as batteries). Merchandising racks or shelves can also be used, but only if they will not take up too much space and leave customers in line feeling more claustrophobic. The key is to avoid making customers feel any additional pressure in line – distracting them with appealing items is good, but overwhelming them with potentially important decisions will not be welcome.

## RESOURCES

### OSHA

In 2010, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued *Crowd Management Safety Guidelines for Retailers*, a fact sheet to help employers and store owners avoid injuries during seasonal sales or promotional events. These OSHA crowd control recommendations include the proper use of barricades or rope lines to manage the entry and exit of customers and to create safety zones within the store.

[https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data\\_General\\_Facts/Crowd\\_Control.html](https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/Crowd_Control.html)

### National Retail Federation

The National Retail Federation (NRF) has issued guidelines for effective crowd management. *Effective Crowd Management: Guidelines on how to maintain the safety and security of your customers, employees and store* discussed the importance of setting up barriers and stanchions in key spots throughout the store.

<https://www.nrf.com/crowdmanagement>



## SUMMARY

From a crowd management standpoint, the keys to a successful Black Friday – which means a safe and orderly Black Friday – are pre-planning, intensive staff training, effective signage, and having crowd management products such as crowd control barriers and stanchions-with-retractable-belts in sufficient numbers and in the proper locations.

Retail stores should make sure that customers are safe and orderly before they enter your store, as they enter your store, in your checkout lines, and at your store exits. Meet these goals, and you will be well on your way to making Black Friday a memorable experience for your customers, and a profitable one for your store.



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