

BUSINESS

Walmart Rushes Out Holiday Deals—a Week Before Halloween

Discounts creep earlier into October as retailers prepare for shorter gift-shopping season



Black Friday falls on Nov. 29 this year, a week closer to Christmas Day than last year. A Walmart Supercenter in Natrona Heights, Pa. PHOTO: ROSS MANTLE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Sarah Nassauer

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Walmart Inc. [WMT -0.19% ▼](#) will start advertising holiday discounts online this week, moving up the competition to attract holiday shoppers as retailers brace for a shorter shopping season between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year.

Walmart.com will offer discounts on toys, electronics and other holiday gifts this Friday at midnight—nearly a week before Halloween. Stores will still have a Halloween feel until after Oct. 31, said Steve Bratspies, chief merchandising officer for Walmart U.S., but on walmart.com it will start to feel like Christmas sooner.

Black Friday falls on Nov. 29 this year, a week closer to Christmas Day than last year. That leaves Walmart and other retail chains with a smaller window to get shoppers to stores or to place orders online.

As more shopping moves online, many chains no longer wait for Black Friday to begin advertising discounts and what are known as doorbuster deals. In previous years, Walmart, along with Amazon.com Inc., [AMZN -0.20% ▼](#) Best Buy Co. [BBY -0.46% ▼](#), Target Corp. [TGT -1.62% ▼](#) and others, have pushed holiday discounts on their websites for weeks before Thanksgiving.

Target intends to wait until November to start highlighting holiday deals, Chief Executive Brian Cornell said at a media event in New York.

“Every day is going to count,” said Mr. Cornell, who predicted a steadier pace of shopping during the shorter season. In a more typical year, he said, “there is this very strong start and then there is this period of time the consumer almost takes a breath, takes a break knowing they’ve got a couple of additional weekends to shop.”

Walmart is shifting how it flows inventory to stores and manages staffing amid the intensity of a buying period that is shorter by six days, Mr. Bratspies said on a conference call Wednesday. “It certainly will be a more intense time in stores and online because customers don’t necessarily think about these six days. We plan for them. It tends to sneak up on them.”

The initial offers Walmart is highlighting this Friday aren’t the deepest discounts or hottest holiday items. For example, the company is touting a \$100 discount on a Vizio 55-inch television and a \$30 savings on a Faberware oil-less fryer.

Walmart is working to grab more market share in the toy and electronics categories this season and has allocated more space to toys in stores in the past year and a half, said Mr. Bratspies. Last year Toys “R” Us Inc. closed all its stores ahead of the holiday season, leaving those sales to Walmart, Target and others.

Target plans to spend more to staff stores this year than in previous years to attract shoppers with improved customer service and extra staff for its online delivery and store-pickup options, the company said. It plans to hire 130,000 seasonal workers this year, up from 120,000 in 2018.

Walmart and Target have been posting strong sales in their U.S. stores in recent quarters, boosted by the strong U.S. economy and store closures by some competitors. Overall, retailers expect a strong holiday shopping season, despite concerns about trade disputes and tariffs on Chinese imports.

The National Retail Federation, which represents retailers including Walmart and Amazon, is forecasting holiday sales will rise in a range of 3.8% to 4.2%—to about \$730 billion.

The NRF’s figures, which cover sales online and in stores from Nov. 1 to Dec. 31 and exclude auto, gasoline and restaurant sales, are in line with those of retail consulting firms. Sales came in lower than the NRF’s forecast last year, hurt by a federal government shutdown.

Write to Sarah Nassauer at sarah.nassauer@wsj.com

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