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Posted on Sat, Nov. 26, 2005

## The lure of Black Friday

By Ellen Lee  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

**PLEASANT HILL** - So this is how a herd moves. I feel the shopping cart jam the back of my legs as the crowd propels me through the doors of Best Buy in Pleasant Hill.

Behind me, someone yells, "Go, go, go!" For good measure, I feel the shopping cart hit me again.

Obediently, I go. Quickly.

It is 5 in the morning on the day after Thanksgiving, and "Black Friday," one of the biggest shopping days of the year, has just begun. The night before, I had carefully sifted through the advertisements, circling the best deals, and had sketched out a shopping plan, employing my husband as my wingman. The retailers were luring us with promises of the Best Deals Ever, and we were willingly being lured.

In my case, I had heard Best Buy's siren call of a \$380 Toshiba laptop, about half the regular price. An Amazing Bargain!

But I hadn't been early enough to get it. In fine print, the ad cautioned that each store would carry just 10 discounted laptops; as I move in a daze to the line in the store's laptop corner, I see that other customers are already clutching numbered claim vouchers.

"We were here at 8 p.m. last night to get this," a customer tells me.

I am jarred awake as I realize that I have already missed out on a Huge Deal. But it spurs me into action. I return to the front of the store, grab a basket and frantically start throwing stuff in it. The store is packed with bins and tables full of Early Morning Specials, like \$3.99 DVDs and \$7.99 CDs I never knew I wanted, available for a Limited Time Only or While Supplies Last.

It doesn't matter that I hadn't planned on buying any of this, that I had come in originally for the laptop only. I just want to snag something before someone else beats me to it.

I've been sucked in.

"You've made a commitment to shopping by getting there at 5 in the morning. The chances of you leaving with nothing is almost none," said Kit Yarrow, a consumer psychologist at Golden Gate University in San



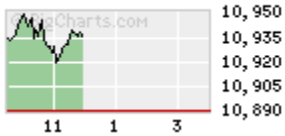
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HPQ	29.87	▼ -0.09
INTC	26.96	▲ 0.10
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Francisco. "The atmosphere is super-charged and you're surrounded by other competitive shoppers. It almost becomes a game, a sport."

I thought I had a plan, but I realize I made some crucial, newbie mistakes: I underestimated the holiday shopping frenzy, and people's determination, including my own, to get a good deal.

About 45 minutes and \$100 later, with a little bit of free sugar from one of the Best Buy employees, I get out of that store and head to the next stop, Staples. The doors open at 6 a.m. and I have my eye on a free paper shredder. Or as "free" as you can get. I have to pay \$19.99 for it, and then send in a rebate, which is always tricky. I take the risk anyway.

The shredders are sitting at the front of the store and I immediately tuck one under my arm. Then I grab a "free" surge protector, even though I don't need one. Free is free, right? And then, even though my husband and I had discussed how we didn't need one, I pick up a camera for our computer, and a wireless mouse. Make that two wireless mice for \$14.94 each.

And then as I am standing in line, I notice a handful of free shredders still available. Surely, someone I know would appreciate a shredder, given the fear of identity theft and all. I pick up another one. To cap it all off, I get free colored Post-It notes.

It's barely 7 a.m., and the sky has finally begun to lighten as I make my way to Target, the next store on the list. Here I am looking for a \$19.99 iDog, which hooks up to an MP3 player and bobs its head to the music.

The Walnut Creek Target is uncharacteristically subdued as I enter. The greeters don't seem to have much to do, and more than once, I'm asked if I need help finding something. I've never received that kind of service before at Target.

I quickly realize, though, the reason: The stampede already occurred earlier in the morning, taking the iDogs I had earmarked with it. While Supplies Last, and all that. Since I'm here, I pick up litter for my cat and cleaning supplies.

My last stop is Sunvalley mall in Concord. I take advantage of a parking spot reserved for the media -- this was, after all, work -- and I head straight to Express.

This story, in fact, originated after I received a postcard from Express last weekend. Free Clutch With Any Purchase! How could I resist?

In the store, I make a fast circle and pick up a \$10 camisole. I own several camisoles and really don't need another one, but I rationalize that I don't have one in blue, and this way I get a cute little purse, which has a retail price of \$29.50. How could I say no?

I notice a lot of women holding Victoria's Secret bags, so after a detour to buy a new pair of boots, I make my way there. It turns out, the store is offering a tote filled with goodies with every \$50 purchase. But Only Today! Fifty dollars is a lot to spend to get a goodie bag, but as I stroll around, I decide that it wouldn't hurt to pick up some perfume and lip gloss as gifts for my girlfriends. Plus, they're 25 percent off.

While we're waiting in the long, slow-moving line, a saleslady warns us that there aren't many tote bags left. What?! All of us grumble that we don't want to stand in line for more than a half-hour and not get something in return. Luckily, when I reach the counter, a handful of goodie bags remain. I get one worth \$75.

By 10:30 a.m., I'm exhausted and decide, after five hours of shopping, that I'm done for the day. My feet hurt, I'm thirsty and I'm sick of standing in line after line and elbowing past people to get a look at the merchandise. That I don't need.

Plus, my purchases have added up to a few hundred dollars. It's much more than I usually spend in one day, and certainly the most I've ever spent on the day after Thanksgiving.

I vow I won't do this again. Never, ever. Well, except maybe for the post-Christmas sale.

*Ellen Lee covers technology and telecommunications. Reach her at 925-952-2614 or [ellee@cctimes.com](mailto:ellee@cctimes.com). You can check out her blog at [blogs.contracostatimes.com/east\\_bay\\_living](http://blogs.contracostatimes.com/east_bay_living).*



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