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Thanks to MNB
for this selection of
articles.

Thanksgiving Weekend Shopping Shows Promise For Holiday Season

The National Retail Federation (NRF) is saying that the unofficial start of the end-of-the-year holiday shopping season over the weekend commenced with a bang, and that “traffic and spending were up both online and in stores, reaching historic highs.”

According to an NRF survey, “a record 226 million shoppers visited stores and websites over Black Friday weekend, up from 212 million last year. Digging deep into their holiday budgets, the average holiday shopper spent \$398.62 this weekend, up from \$365.34 last year. Total spending reached an estimated \$52.4 billion. Additionally, shoppers also checked out retailers’ deals online, spending an average of \$150.53 on the web – 37.8 percent of their total weekend spending.”

At the same time, research service ShopperTrak said that in-store sales on Black Friday were up by 6.6 percent compared to a year ago, to \$11.4 billion.

And the *Associated Press* writes that “research firm comScore reported on Sunday that e-commerce spending jumped 26 percent on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, compared with the same day a year ago. ComScore reported \$816 million in online sales for the day, up from \$648 million.”

Still, the *New York Times* reports this morning that “there were signs the gains might not last. Analysts said that traffic to stores seemed to slow through the weekend, suggesting that the big start to the holiday season might peter out over time. And shoppers were using credit cards in large numbers, mall owners and analysts said, signaling that consumers were willing to sacrifice savings more than last year, when they paid with cash more frequently.”

Private Brand Growth Continues As Retailers Are Emboldened

Bloomberg BusinessWeek has a piece about private brand growth, reporting that “as of mid-November, store brands accounted for 31.4 percent of the 14,400 new food and beverage items introduced in the U.S. this year, according to market researcher Packaged Facts, based on data from Datamonitor’s Product Launch Analytics. That’s double the share logged in 2010 and up from just 8.7 percent in 2009.” The story notes that “emboldened by success in the frozen food aisle and in pasta, grocers are moving into categories—salty snacks, beer, pet food—they’d previously shunned because the big brands were so entrenched.”

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In order to help them “fuel sales of their in-house lines,” the story says, “retailers are recruiting veteran marketers to help out-innovate traditional packaged goods companies.”

According to *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, expectations are that private brands will continue to grow - driven by retailer strategies, heightened expectations whetted by recent successes, and fueled by an economy that continues to be in malaise and customers more open than even to trying private brand products.

Sansolo Speaks: Black Birds and Fridays *by Michael Sansolo*

There are countless reasons why history might remember 2011 as a momentous year. Technological advances, the economy, the Arab Spring and the on-going European financial meltdown are likely to influence events for years or decades to come. So here's hoping history quickly forgets “The Friday Song.”

If somehow you managed to miss “The Friday Song” phenomenon, I apologize in advance for bringing it to you. Go to YouTube, look up the original song and hit play. Then prepare to spend endless time trying to get the awful song out of your head. There's a simple reason why I can be so certain you'll hate it. Since the song, performed by California teenager Rebecca Black, appeared on line in March it has been played nearly 180 million times and is one of the most disliked videos in the history of YouTube. It is simply that bad.

So imagine my surprise when Kohl's unleashed a version of the song as its Black Friday ad. Although it's a clever play on words how could Kohl's pick such a horrible song to pump such an important day of shopping? Apparently, because Kohl's is far smarter than I am.

The ad was one more way for Kohl's to stand out from the crowd. Whatever you feel about Kohl's, this much is beyond argument: the chain knows how to sell stuff. Everything there seems to be on a 45% off sale every day of the year (or 60% off with coupons) and that plays perfectly with Kohl's shoppers. Sales are up solidly this year and the buzz from Black Friday was excellent. Yet the ad did even more.

As Sarah, my daughter and cultural advisor on Gen Y issues, explained to me, the ad shows how Kohl's gets it. It showed a sense of humor and a connection to current popular culture. Yahoo's *Shine* magazine and countless other media observers agreed with Sarah saying the Kohl's ad was irritating, yet it remained the only truly memorable ad from the entire pre-Thanksgiving blitz.

The discussion with Sarah reminded me of a challenge I give audiences frequently in speeches: the need to listen to those different than us. Because of her age (24), Sarah's perspective on so many things in life is very different than mine. Sometimes we differ significantly, sometimes slightly, but because I respect my daughter's intelligence, I try to listen. And because of that, my perspective on Kohl's Black Friday song changed.

Yet what makes Thanksgiving great (beyond stuffing, gravy and pecan pie) is family time. After Sarah educated us on Kohl's, my wife and I were able to provide our own pop culture lesson. Sarah joined us for a Beatles' tribute concert, performed in a creative way by a group that literally recreates cherished old record albums. Luckily Sarah actually knows what an album is and who The Beatles were.

What she didn't know was the breadth of their work and it shocked her to learn that specific songs she knew were written and performed by the Fab Four. For instance, Sarah knew the beautiful song “Blackbird” from two sources: it was once performed on “Glee” and was featured in a computer game called “Kingdom of Loathing.” Now she knows it was originally a Beatles song.

With that the lesson came full circle. No matter who we are, we have so much to learn from other generations and other ethnic and racial groups. All of that learning will help us understand so much about the modern world and help us be current and relevant. Yet there is also so much we have to teach them and when we do that we make our families, our teams and our companies stronger. It all starts with listening and sharing,

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which is something we need to do more both at work and at home.

One last thing: when you go to YouTube, search for "Blackbird" instead of "The Friday Song." You'll thank me.

Michael Sansolo can be reached via email at msansolo@morningnewsbeat.com. His book, "THE BIG PICTURE: Essential Business Lessons From The Movies," co-authored with Kevin Coupe, is available [by clicking here](#).

Retail Giants Push For Frustration-Free Packaging

Bloomberg reports that "Amazon.com Inc. and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. are prodding more manufacturers to change their packaging to cut waste and alleviate 'wrap rage,' the frustration felt when a product is difficult to open. The nation's largest online store and the world's biggest retailer have been pushing vendors, including Procter & Gamble Co. and Bluetooth headset maker Plantronics Inc., to eliminate excessive and cumbersome packing materials, such as hard plastic clamshell casings that enclose electronics and wire ties used to secure toys to cardboard backings."

The story notes that "as much as a third of all consumer trash sent to landfills is estimated to be packaging, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. That translates to more than 800 pounds of packaging waste each year per U.S. consumer."

Consumer Confidence Rises. Really.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports on how the Conference Board's October Consumer Confidence Index "jumped to 56.0 after slumping to 40.9 in October, which was the lowest level since the depths of the recession in early 2009.

"A reading of 56.0 still is very depressed, and is down from the 2011 high of 72.0 reached in February. A typical reading in the mid-2000s was between 100 and 110."

The *Times* notes that this may not be as surprising as it would seem on first blush:

"Any increase in confidence is a good thing. And the board's report showed that confidence rose this month among all income groups, so it wasn't just the well-heeled who turned more upbeat.

"But should people really be feeling better about things?

"Maybe it's just a coincidence, but many of the U.S. economic reports over the last month have shown improvement, further belying the idea that the economy was at risk of sliding back into recession."

Save-A-Lot Opens New N.C. Warehouse To Support Area Growth

Supervalu-owned Save-A-Lot today will open its new 330,000-square-foot food distribution center in Lexington, N.C. According to the announcement, the new Save-A-Lot distribution center represents a \$24 million investment and will employ 35 employees initially with the potential for hiring additional employees once the facility reaches full capacity.

The company says that "currently, there are nearly 30 Save-A-Lot stores in North Carolina, including one in Lexington. The company plans to open an additional three stores in the state by March 2012. The new distribution center will help support the company's growth plans in North Carolina and surrounding states, which the company has identified as a key region for its growth. Initially, it will service more than 70 stores within a 150-mile radius."

Surge In Credit Card Usage Could Presage Broader Trend

USA Today reports that on Black Friday, "payments made with credit cards rose 7.4% from a year earlier, vs. an increase of 3.4% for payments with signature debit cards, according to First Data, a payments processing firm. An analysis by Javelin Strategy & Research forecasts that credit card payments

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for online purchases will increase 63% from 2011 to 2016, vs. 2% for debit cards.

“During the recession, the use of credit cards declined as cost-conscious consumers switched to debit cards and cash for their purchases. Now, though, the pendulum is swinging back, analysts say. While overall consumer debt continued to decline in the third quarter, the number of applications for credit rose for the second consecutive quarter.”

According to the story, there are a number of reasons for the swing toward greater credit card usage.

For one thing, federal limits on debit card transaction fees mean that banks are cutting back on debit card incentives, and switching their attention to credit cards - and consumers are biting. There's also a gradual loosening of consumer credit by the banks, as well as a growing desire for personal indulgence.

Walmart Unveils Shopycat, New Social Media Application

Reuters reports that Walmart has “unveiled its first social-networking application late on Wednesday, in a move to latch onto one of the hottest trends in e commerce.

“WalMart launched Shopycat, which uses Facebook data to recommend gifts to consumers, on the company's Facebook page. This is one of the first products to roll out of @Walmartlabs, a unit of the company based just south of San Francisco that is developing social-networking and mobile technologies for the retailer.”

According to the story, “Shopycat uses data from Facebook pages to estimate a person's top 10 friends. It then recommends suitable gifts for those friends, based on their interests, again based on information shared via Facebook. Consumers can also search for a topic or theme, and Shopycat will show which Facebook friends are interested in those things, along with related gifts.”

Walgreens Offers 300,000 Free Flu Shots

The *Chicago Tribune* reports that Walgreens is offering 300,000 vouchers for free flu shots for “people whose health insurance doesn't cover flu shots and those who can't afford the inoculation.” This represents \$10 million worth of flu shots, available on a first come-first served basis to those who get the vouchers from local public health departments and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Loblaws Takes To The Ice With New Toronto Store

The *Huffington Post* reports that Loblaws has opened a new 85,000 square foot supermarket at Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, the arena where the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team played until moving to the Air Canada Arena in 1999.

According to the story, the “store has an impressive array of offerings, such as chef made meals and select counters specifically for tea and cupcakes. If you've thought of it, it's probably there; it's like visiting a food market with one huge cashout area.

“The environment includes a 2,000-square-foot kitchen that creates everything for the ready-made counters while overlooking the produce sections below. Ace Bakery, which was purchased by Loblaws last year, has a full factory within the space that will function as a testing ground for new products intended to roll out to other stores.”

Perhaps most important, “Monuments to the Gardens' history can be found throughout the space, including repurposed blue stadium chairs placed in the shape of a maple leaf at the entrance, a circle designating where centre ice once was found, and columns in the midst of the store depicting historic moments.”

Bottom Dollar Good For Delhaize Bottom Line

Reuters reports that Delhaize Group says that “the encouraging results of Bottom Dollar Food in the Philadelphia market support plans for expansion in

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additional markets that present the same growth profile. This will include hundreds of new Bottom Dollar Food stores over the next five years.

"The Group expects to open approximately 450 stores in its high growth newer operations in the three year period 2012-2014 which represents a significant step up from past years. As a result of this important step up in store openings and the encouraging results in the rest of our network, Delhaize Group expects to generate revenue growth of 5 to 7% annually within three years."

Mobile Commerce Gaining Momentum

Online Media Daily reports on new projections suggesting that mobile commerce "will nearly double to \$6.7 billion this year -- fueled by rising smartphone adoption and growing mobile Web use, according to a new eMarketer forecast. The market research firm estimates m-commerce sales will leap another 73% in 2012 to \$11.6 billion."

According to the story, "The figures include sales of physical goods as well as travel and event tickets purchased via mobile, but not digital downloads or point-of-sale transactions through mobile devices. The estimates, which exclude purchases made from tablets, are based on meta-analysis of data from third-party research firms and overall trends in mobile ownership and use."

Supervalu Joins Better Buildings Challenge

Supervalu announced that it has joined the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings Challenge, which aims to engage building operators nationwide in improving energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2020.

"Reducing our energy footprint and creating a more thoughtful and sustainable operation are important priorities, and we will continue to test innovative ways to build our stores with future generations in mind," said Supervalu CEO Craig Herkert. "These projects are good for the environment, improve our operating efficiency and create jobs -- ultimately benefiting the communities we serve."

Herkert made his comments at a Washington, DC, conference also attended by President Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton.

Supervalu said that it has invested \$20 million in energy efficiency initiatives this year alone resulting in over 1,300 projects across its enterprise, and that it has been working over the past five years to reduce total carbon emissions by 10 percent and landfill waste by 50 percent and is on track to reach those milestones by the end of 2012.

FastNewsBeat

- The *Associated Press* reports this morning that an organization called the Consortium for the Barcode of Life is working with seafood suppliers and restaurants around the world to develop a standardized labeling process that will certify that seafood served is genuine, based on DNA barcoding and tracking.

According to the story, "the Barcode of Life Database so far includes more than 167,000 species.

"Mislabeling is widespread in the seafood industry and usually involves cheaper types of fish being sold as more expensive varieties. A pair of New York high school students using DNA barcoding of food stocked in their own kitchens found in a 2009 study that caviar labeled as sturgeon was actually Mississippi paddlefish.

"In a published study a year earlier, another pair of students from the high school found that one-fourth of fish samples they had collected around New York were incorrectly labeled as higher-priced fish."

- The *Wall Street Journal* reports that ConAgra Foods has spent \$10 million to boost its stake in Agro Tech Foods, an Indian food company that markets ingredients to consumers and institutional companies there.

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"Expanding our international business is a key part of our strategic plan, and India represents an attractive growth market for ConAgra Foods. We will continue to work with Agro Tech's management team to expand its business and our investment in this important region," said ConAgra CEO Gary Rodkin.

The MNB Wal-Mart Watch

- *Advertising Age* reports that while "Walmart isn't owning up to any blanket campaign to better leverage employees as brand ambassadors," the retailer seems to be moving in that direction by "revamping its internal employee social network and switching publishers as a prelude to beefing up its in-house magazine, Walmart World, with both more content and outside advertising. The latter could prove an even greater magnet for brand marketers trying to sway Walmart's in-house influencers, particularly now that the chain is allowing local managers more ability to green-light items and is encouraging employees to promote specific items in their stores."

- As part of its Chicago urban small-store strategy, Walmart has opened its newest Walmart Express store just a few blocks from Wrigley Field on the city's North Side.

The first one opened on the city's South Side in June.