

## **Eight Tips for a Safe and Profitable Black Friday Retail Checkout Line**

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The unofficial start to the holiday shopping season—Black Friday weekend—is right around the corner. Retailers are planning now to deal with the oncoming consumer-oriented buying frenzy, by working on the details of staffing, stocking, security, crowd management, and safety.

The considerations are far-reaching and include managing the predictably long and winding checkout line. Here are eight tips for retailers on preparing a checkout line for the crowds and the excitement of an event filled with great opportunity—and great risk.

### **1. Put safety first**

Plan checkout-line logistics in advance, and set up before the shoppers descend. Invest in magnetic or permanent, drilled-in stanchions to accommodate pushing crowds, establish clear boundaries, and improve customer flow. Test reinforced barriers to ensure that they won't be easily toppled by the unintended bumps of the crowd.

### **2. Expand the checkout line area**

Black Friday means longer checkout lines, so retailers would be wise to set a predetermined path for those lines.

Left to their own devices, customers will overflow into valuable retail floor space in a way only they can imagine: lining up right in front of the most valuable retail display, extending the line through the dressing room area... anything is possible!

And since there is likely no other option than to extend the checkout line beyond its typical comfort zone, the best a retailer can do is to strategically plan for where and how those long lines will weave and flow through the store.

### **3. Prepare for the unexpected**

Retailers must plan for the expected increase in crowds, but they must also prepare for the unexpected. Experts recommend extra signage, stanchions, and belts at the ready to redirect a line in case of emergency (a customer falls ill, something breaks, a fight breaks out, a flashmob ensues... these things happen).

The [National Retail Federation](#) and [OSHA](#) recommend clear methods of communication among all staff members, designated point people, evacuation route maps, and a clearly defined chain of events in cases of emergency.

#### **4. Opt for a single line**

A catch-all solution to reduce wait times, boost employee productivity, enhance the customer experience, and reduce renegeing, balking, and [sweethearting](#), the single-line queue is the recommended choice of many queuing experts. Even if the single line configuration isn't the norm, in the case of Black Friday it might be wise for retailers to consider exchanging their multiple-line queue for a single-line queue.

A single-line queue boosts service efficiency and has been proven to decrease average wait times compared with a multi-line queue. Not to mention that one line means every customer is "in it together," and the inherent first-come first-served nature of a single line instills a sense of fairness that help settle the nerves of any anxious Black Friday shopper.

#### **5. Implement electronic queuing**

Electronic queuing—allowing for audible and visual electronic cues—can boost productivity up to 35% while also streamlining the way cashiers hail customers; that's an obvious benefit amid the cacophony of a Black Friday shopping experience.

Those electronic cues let customers know who is next in line, but one of the biggest perks of electronic queuing is its ability to keep people entertained while they wait. Promotional slides, how-to videos, even holiday cartoons can all be displayed, keeping people distracted and busy, reducing perceived wait times.

Plug-and-play systems are easy to install and can be up and running in a matter of hours, which means even last-minute retailers can have a system up and running in time for Black Friday.

#### **6. Capitalize with in-line merchandising**

An expanded Black Friday waiting line means more opportunity for in-line merchandising. An extra-long wait time gives people an extra-long time to be entertained and preoccupied—or to renege and decide this just isn't worth the wait.

That's why in-line merchandising is the queuing "triple-threat": It can boost profits, reduce perceived wait times, and, as a result, increase customer satisfaction.

During Black Friday, retailers may need extra in-line merchandising racks to serve the dual purpose of marking the queue and offering a necessary distraction.

#### **7. Provide a clear clue to the queue**

The last thing a retailer wants is to lose a customer who has an armload of merchandise but can't find where the back of the checkout line is and therefore quits out of frustration and impatience. Yet it happens quite frequently, especially when the stress factor is

high. Post-top signage—or, better yet, tall directional banners—can serve as an ideal Black Friday solution to the "where's the line?" dilemma.

## **8. Designate exit points**

The true end of a queue is not when a customer reaches a service agent: It's when a customer reaches the exit door. During Black Friday especially, retailers are advised to keep those stanchions and signage going to clearly mark the pathways to the exit and keep the waiting line experience flowing to its very end.

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The checkout line is just one element of a successful Black Friday experience for retailers and customers alike. Devise a plan now to stay in control of your retail environment from open to close.



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