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Now the 'cyber' sales: Retailers hope for enthusiastic shopping season

BY ABBEY BROWN • ABROWN@THETOWNTALK.COM • DECEMBER 2, 2008

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Although many retailers were concerned the slumping economy would mean less turnout for the year's biggest shopping weekend after the Thanksgiving holiday, spending was up 7.2 percent from a year ago, according to the National Retail Federation.

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And retailers hope that trend continues through the holiday season with even more promotions than normal like "cyber week" instead of just "Cyber Monday" -- the Monday after Thanksgiving as people return to their office computers and shop online.

Retail Web sites began offering special Cyber Monday promotions a few years ago and some this year are offering deals every day this week to entice shoppers even more.

Eighty-four percent of retailers said they'd be offering special promotions Monday, up from 72 percent last year. And a BIGresearch survey conducted for Shop.org found about 58 percent of workers with Internet access, or 72.8 million

people, were expected to shop while at work, up from about 45 percent in 2005.

That number is troubling for some local employers, although CLECO said it isn't concerned.

"CLECO is not worried about our employees shopping while at work," company spokeswoman Robbyn Cooper said. "We do have policies and procedures against that. And as with any policy and procedure, from time to time we remind our employees about various policies including this one. We feel our employees for the most part do adhere to those policies and procedures."

Retailers hope that shoppers' enthusiasm continued Monday, one of the biggest online shopping days of the holiday season. Cyber Monday was dubbed that in 2005 when the NRF observed a major spike in online sales the Monday following Thanksgiving.

Many retailers suspect the shoppers on that day are those who want a good deal but don't want to fight Black Friday crowds and have a less chaotic shopping option just three days later.

The NRF described the online shopping day as the ceremonial kickoff to the online holiday shopping season, noting that online retailers will debut thousands of promotions to show what Web sites have to offer this holiday season.

A danger of heavy early promotions, however, is that retailers can run out of stock. More shoppers also can create Web site problems, which at the extreme could prevent consumers from completing their purchases, adding to retailers' woes, says Evan Schuman, editor of StorefrontBacktalk.com, which tracks retail technology.

A survey by market tracker TNS Retail Forward estimates online retail sales will be up 9 percent overall this



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After a better than expected shopping weekend, many retailers are hoping that consumers will keep buying this week, including at Web sites, which generally see large gains on the Monday after Thanksgiving. (Tia Owens-Powers/tpowers@thetowntalk.com)

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