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## Shopping binge continues online

By JACLYN TROP, of The Detroit News

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**Savvy savers expected to log on to score Cyber Monday deals; some skeptical of trend:** Bargain hunters are expected to return to their desks today, fire up their computers and begin trolling the Internet for holiday sales.

Promises of free shipping and online discounts will make today a lucrative one for online retailers, according to several analysts. Despite national reports predicting that shoppers will be spending less in this year's recession-laden economy, many analysts expect online sales to increase.

According to a poll by Maritz Research, 26 percent of respondents will shop on what's called Cyber Monday, up from 20 percent last year.

Web-savvy shoppers who scoured shelves on Black Friday and during the weekend will log on to sites like [cybermonday.com](http://cybermonday.com) and [bestcybermondaysales.com](http://bestcybermondaysales.com) to kick off the official e-commerce holiday shopping season. These consumers are expected to extend the post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping weekend by logging on en masse to compare prices and order merchandise, said Michael Bernacchi, University of Detroit-Mercy marketing professor.

"It's an opportunity to take their business from brick-and-mortar shops," Bernacchi said, "whereas the day after Thanksgiving belongs to the stores."

The Monday following Thanksgiving was coined "Cyber Monday" after 77 percent of online retailers reported a significant increase in sales on that day in 2004, said Scott Silverman, head of [Shop.org](http://Shop.org). An affiliate Web site, [cybermonday.com](http://cybermonday.com), run by the National Retail Federation, compiles lists of hundreds of merchants nationwide with hourly online specials.

Nearly one-quarter of retailers listed on [cybermonday.com](http://cybermonday.com) will offer free shipping on all purchases. Almost 40 percent will offer specific deals, while 32 percent are planning e-mail campaigns; one-in-four will hold one-day sales.

Online sales are expected to increase 9 percent this holiday season, compared with 1.5 percent growth in brick-and-mortar stores, according to a report by market researcher TNS Global. Online sales are expected to reach \$42.5 billion in the fourth quarter, up \$3.5 billion from last year. A survey published by Deloitte suggests that online purchases will account for 24 percent of total shopping dollars this holiday season, up from 22 percent last year.

However, some are skeptical of the purported Cyber Monday phenomenon.

"I don't know that it's any different from Tuesday or Sunday," said Charles Ballard, an economics professor at Michigan State University.

The Monday after Thanksgiving last year posted \$733 million in sales and tied for ninth-busiest online shopping day with the following Thursday, according to ComScore data.

The biggest online shopping day was Dec. 10, with \$881 million in sales.

In 2005, the busiest online shopping day wasn't Cyber Monday but actually December 12, according to a survey by [Shop.org](http://Shop.org). Data released by MasterCard shows that the day with the highest amount of Web transactions processed was Dec. 5.

"Let's face it," U-D's Bernacchi said of Cyber Monday. "This came out of nowhere."

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But the faux holiday could catch on later, he said, if enough merchants are willing to participate and attract a following with exceptional post-Thanksgiving discounts.

"It could become a part of pop culture just like Valentine's Day or Sweetheart's Day with time, if there are bargains to be had," Bernacchi said.

The savings come at a steep price for employers. Online holiday shopping costs \$3,000 per employee in lost productivity, according to a study by ISACA, an association for IT professionals. About 55 percent of companies permit employees to shop online.

More than half of workers with Internet access are expected to shop for holiday gifts from work, compared to 44 percent in 2005, according to a BIGresearch survey conducted for [Shop.org](#).

You can reach Jaclyn Trop at (313) 222-2300 or [jtrop@detnews.com](mailto:jtrop@detnews.com).

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