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CompUSA to reopen on Thanksgiving night

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DALLAS - The heck with that pumpkin pie, electronics retailer CompUSA is opening its doors on Thanksgiving night to give holiday shoppers a head-start on Black Friday madness.

Most of the chain's stores plans to open from 9 p.m. until midnight, then send shoppers home for a quick nap before the doors reopen at 5 a.m. on Friday.

"Some customers aren't interested in waking up at the crack of dawn to go shopping at 5 a.m.," said Brian Woods, CompUSA Inc.'s executive vice president of merchandising. "We're giving them more options."

Woods said he's not worried about overlapping with Thanksgiving celebrations. He figures that by 9 p.m., most people are done eating turkey and would welcome a shopping trip as their entertainment for the evening.

Last year, CompUSA opened its doors at midnight, and Woods said the crowds outside averaged 600 to 700, and sales were strong. But after the initial rush, he said, traffic thinned out until about 5 a.m., which seems to when consumers expect stores to open on Black Friday. It's also when rival Best Buy plans to open its stores, a spokesman said.

Woods said local CompUSA managers will decide how to staff stores on Thanksgiving.

The privately owned Dallas chain figures 216 of its roughly 230 stores will be open. Some stores in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, South Carolina and Puerto Rico are covered by local blue laws that forbid them from opening on the holiday.

Like other retailers, CompUSA plans to offer door-buster specials, including a notebook computer, a television and a desktop PC all below the chain's normal lowest price. Specials will be advertised in inserts in Wednesday's newspapers.

Joy Weaver, who has written a book on etiquette and teaches social-manners courses for corporate clients, was appalled that any store would open on Thanksgiving evening.

"The holidays are overcommercialized as it is," Weaver said. "To take us away from our families and away from giving thanks just so they can make another dollar is wrong."

The ever-earlier store openings on Black Friday seem like a fact of life. Holiday decorations and gifts have been showing up earlier for several years.

Retailers have a strong motive for so-called Christmas Creep. The holidays account for 25 to 40 percent of their annual sales, and many of them believe that they can sell more goods at full price early in the season, leaving fewer items to unload at clearance prices later on.

But to open on Thanksgiving night?

"It will be old hat in a few years," Weaver said. "We'll all say, 'Remember when the stores used to close for Thanksgiving?'"