



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Black Friday shoppers search for bargains at Haywood Mall in Greenville.

Holiday sales offer retailers ray of hope

500 merchants report 19.4 percent hike in online purchases on Cyber Monday

By Jayne O'Donnell
USA TODAY

Online shoppers flooded retail websites Monday, taxing Web servers and stressing mobile websites.

Sales at 500 retail websites were up about 19.4 percent over Cyber Monday 2009 as of 3 a.m. ET Tuesday, says IBM Coremetrics, which monitors the performance of retail sites. That fueled hopes that Web sales would offset lukewarm sales in stores over the long holiday weekend.

ShopperTrak, which monitors traffic in stores and malls, said Monday that sales Friday through Sunday were flat compared with the same period last year.

But the National Retail Federation said when overall online sales and a huge up-

tick in sales on Thanksgiving Day in stores and online were considered, the picture is much brighter.

The number of people who shopped online on Thanksgiving through Sunday rose 15 percent, according to NRF.

There were no major retail website crashes or slowdowns reported, but problems late Sunday with Comcast's Internet service left many in the Northeast without Web access as Cyber Monday promotions began to be posted.

"Internet outages are to online retailers what the weather is to stores: unpredictable, uncontrollable and frustrating," says NRF spokeswoman Ellen Davis.

Just as twice as many consumers told NRF that they plan to use their smart-

phones to shop this year, retailers' mobile websites are having their own problems, says Compuware's Gomez unit, which reviews sites' speed and availability.

The performance of mobile websites for the largest 15 retailers over the holiday weekend was only "tolerable" when compared with the performance of retail websites overall, Gomez says.

"Mobile websites are reminiscent of where the overall Web was 10 years ago, performance-wise," says Matt Poepsel, vice president of performance strategies for Gomez.

A Gomez survey found 58 percent of people expect mobile sites to be as good as or better than websites on their computers. And 52 percent of users say they are unlikely to return to a site they had trouble accessing on their phone.