Sales offer small gift to retailers



CHARLIE RIEDEL / The Associated Press

With the holiday shopping season just under way, analysts are mixed as to whether retailers will fare better this season than last year.

Shoppers loosen up on tight spending

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — New weekend shopping figures offered more evidence Wednesday confirming stores' modest start to the holiday shopping season. Online sales held up more strongly.

Retail sales for the three-day holiday weekend rose 1.6 percent compared with a year earlier, ShopperTrak said Wednesday, even though slightly fewer people shopped, with traffic down 1.1 percent.

ShopperTrak, which measures traffic and sales at more than 50,000 outlets, said that sales for the three-day weekend totaled $20.5 billion. That compares with $20.1 billion a year ago when sales and traffic fell dramatically after a decent performance on Black Friday.

The 1.1 percent decline in customer traffic for the three-day weekend compares with an 18.7 percent drop a year ago.

Meanwhile, comScore Inc., an Internet research firm, reported that online sales rose 5 percent on the Monday after Christmas, a marketing blitz the industry calls "Cyber Monday."

Sales totaled $887 million, matching the heaviest online shopping day on record, Dec. 9 of last year, according to comScore.

For the holiday season to date, online sales rose 3 percent to $12.26 billion.

"Retailers' aggressive and early marketing efforts have so far succeeded in persuading consumers to open their wallets online," ComScore Chairman Gian Fulgoni said.

This year, retailers spread out online deals throughout the holiday and Fulgoni said Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday were busier than they have been in years past.

About half of the dollars spent online at U.S. Web sites on Cyber Monday originated from work computers.