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2026 Holiday Shopping Report

What retailers need to know about this year’s holiday shopper

Survey of 1,405 U.S. adults | Fielded October 6–9, 2026

The 2026 holiday shopper at a glance

Shoppers are heading into the season with smaller budgets and less trust in the deals.

42%

of holiday shoppers expect to spend less than last year, up from 33% in 2025

64%

believe retailers raise prices before Black Friday so discounts aren’t genuine

71%

say Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals aren’t as good as they used to be

32%

feel pressured to spend more on gifts than they can comfortably afford

69%

plan to shop online on Black Friday, while 28% plan to shop in person

61%

plan to shop on Cyber Monday, down from 68% in 2024

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Base: holiday shoppers (n=1,364).

About the research

Drive Research surveyed 1,405 U.S. adults about their 2026 holiday shopping plans, including budgets, payment methods, Cyber Week shopping days, retailers and how they find deals.

We've tracked holiday shopping habits since 2020, so this report compares 2026 results with 2025 and, where available, 2024.

"Holiday shoppers" refers to the 1,364 respondents planning to spend on holiday shopping. Some questions were asked only of specific groups, such as Cyber Week shoppers (n=1,178) or in-person Black Friday shoppers (n=383), and each chart notes its base.

1,405

U.S. adults surveyed

Oct 6–9

Fieldwork dates, 2026

±3 pts

Margin of error at 95% confidence

2020

Tracking holiday shopping since

The trust gap: shoppers doubt the deals

Shoppers still show up for promotions. They just don’t fully trust the price tags anymore.

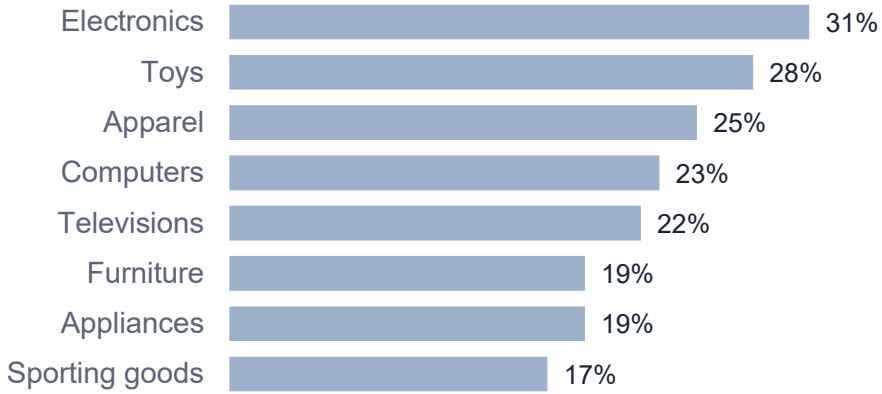
71%

say Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals aren’t as good as they used to be

64%

believe retailers raise prices beforehand, so discounts aren’t genuine

Peak online discounts by category, Cyber Monday 2025



Real discounts mostly peak at 20% to 30% off, well short of the 50%-off deals shoppers remember.

Sources: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey, holiday shoppers (n=1,364); Adobe Analytics, Cyber Monday 2025 recap.

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Shoppers still picture Black Friday as 50% off, but most categories now peak closer to 20% to 30% off. When the discount shrinks and two-thirds of shoppers already suspect the starting price was padded, a 20%-off banner doesn’t feel like an event. It feels like a regular Tuesday.

Emily Rodgers
Director of Marketing

More shoppers are tightening holiday budgets

Budgets are shifting toward lower spending ranges, and the $1,000+ group is shrinking.

42%

expect to spend less than last year, up from 33% in 2025

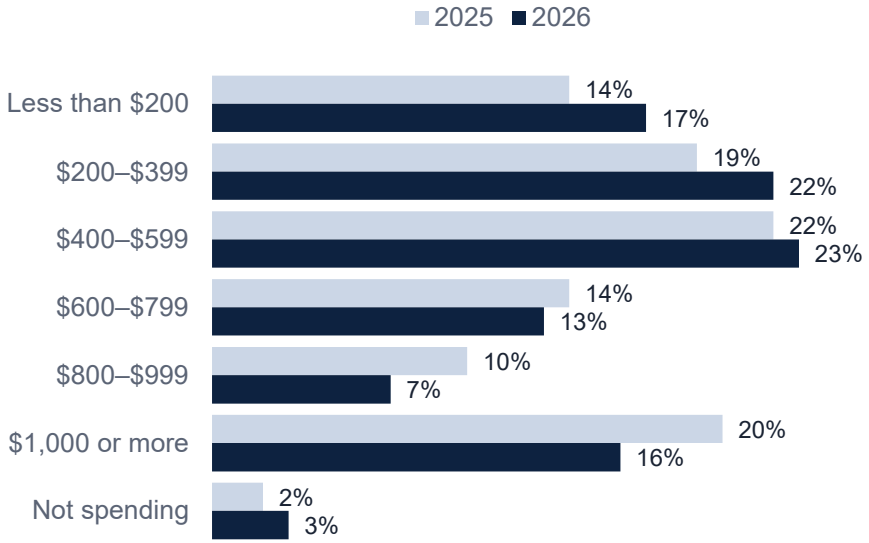
37%

expect to spend about the same

What this means for retailers

Build gift guides and bundles around lower price points.

Typical holiday spending, 2025 vs. 2026

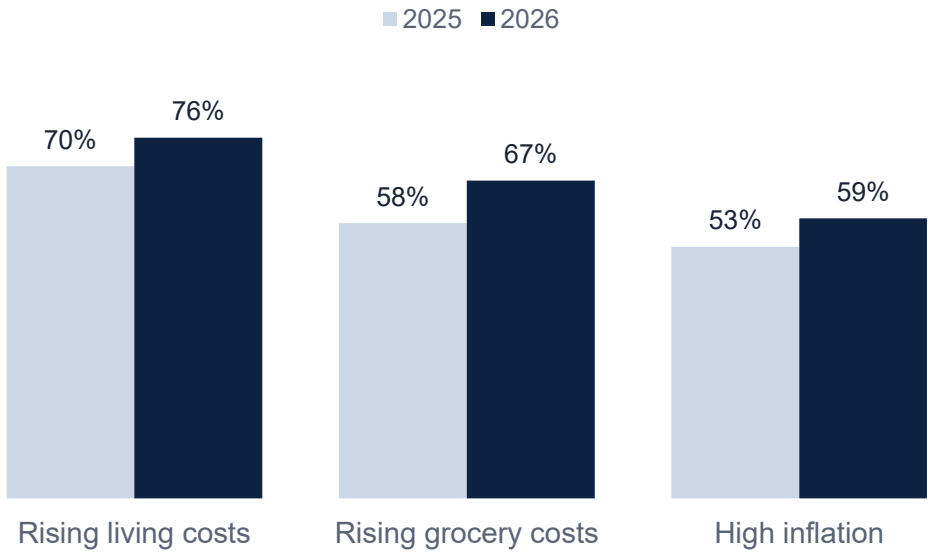


Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Bases: all respondents (n=1,405); holiday shoppers (n=1,364).

3 in 4 shoppers cutting back blame living costs

Everyday expenses are claiming more of the budget before gifts make the list.

Reasons for spending less, 2025 vs. 2026



+9 pts

Grocery costs saw the biggest jump, from 58% to 67%

26%

cite job uncertainty

What this means for retailers

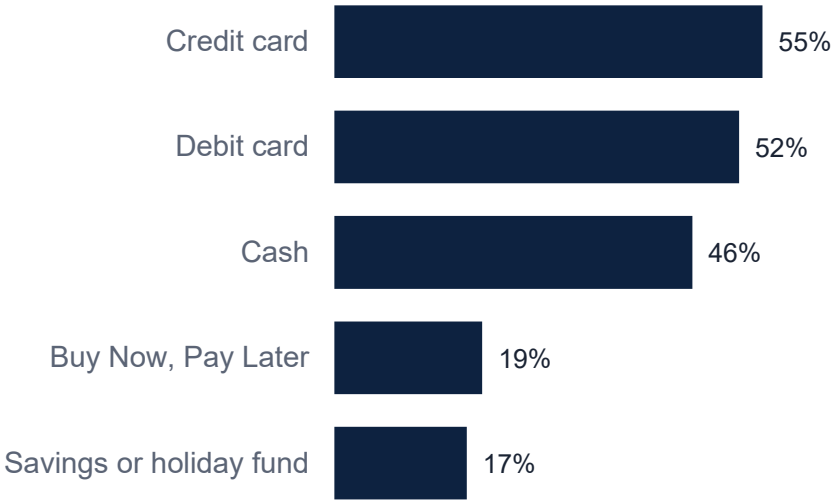
Show total cost up front. Value beats urgency for budget cutters.

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Base: holiday shoppers planning to spend less (n=576); multiple responses allowed.

How holiday shoppers plan to pay

Credit cards lead, and 1 in 5 shoppers plans to use Buy Now, Pay Later.

Planned payment methods



Among planned credit card users

47% expect to pay in full when the bill arrives

19% expect to need one to two months

14% expect to need three to five months

32%
feel pressured to overspend on gifts

18%
still feel last year's holiday bills

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Base: holiday shoppers (n=1,364); credit card users (n=750).

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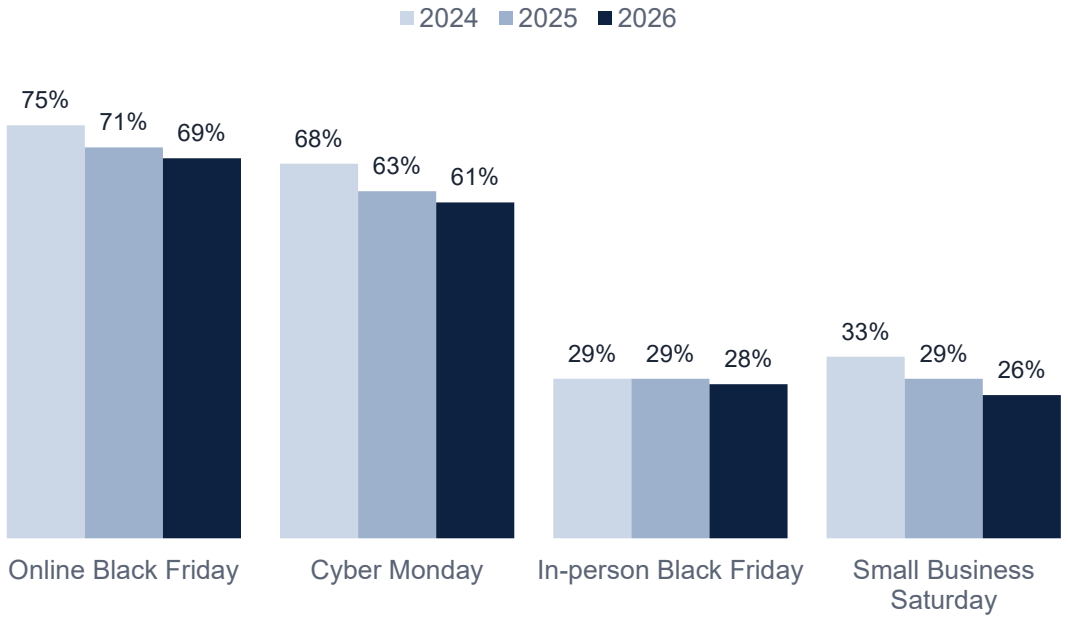
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One in five shoppers plans to use Buy Now, Pay Later, and nearly as many are still feeling last year’s holiday bills. Retailers offering installments should treat clear repayment terms as part of the customer experience, not the fine print.

Emily Rodgers
Director of Marketing, Drive Research

Online Black Friday leads as Cyber Week slips

Planned participation has fallen on every shopping day since 2024.



–7 pts

Cyber Monday and Small Business Saturday since 2024

86%

plan to shop at least one Cyber Week day, down from 88%

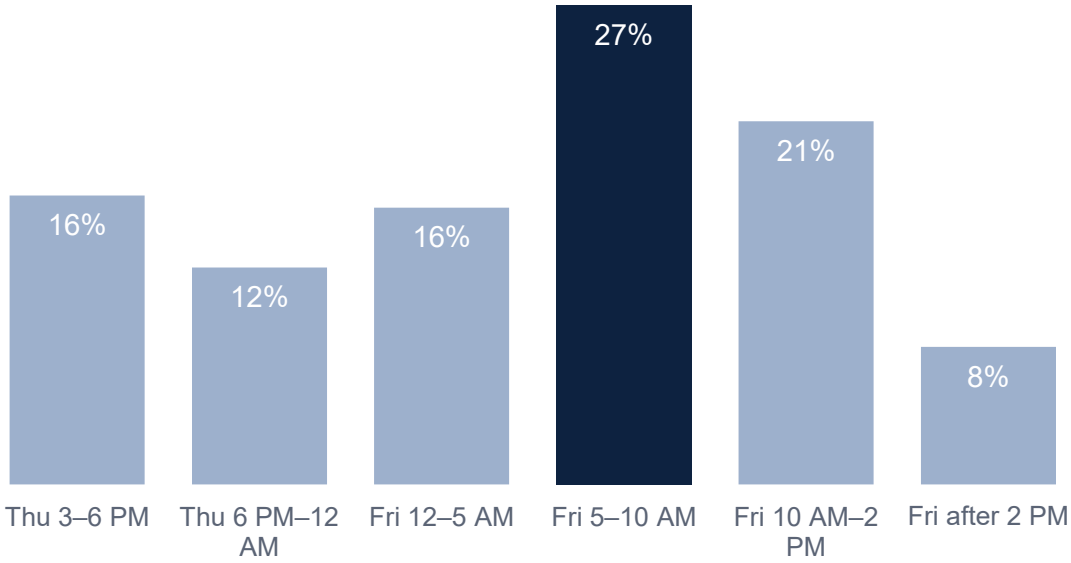
What this means for retailers

Plan Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday as one promotion.

Source: Drive Research Holiday Shopping Surveys, 2024–2026. Base: holiday shoppers (n=1,364 in 2026); multiple responses allowed.

The Black Friday shopping clock

When in-person Black Friday shoppers plan to start shopping



44%

start before 5 a.m. Friday

27%

start between 5 and 10 a.m. Friday, the peak window

What this means for retailers

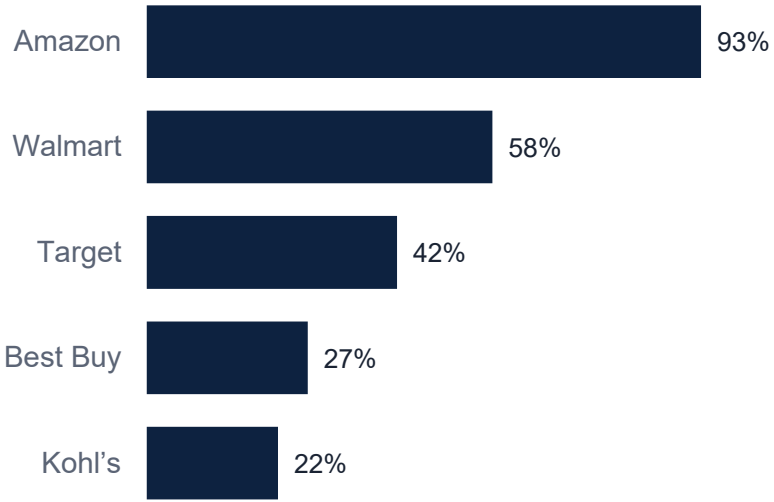
29% start on Thanksgiving. Staff and promote early.

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Base: in-person Black Friday shoppers (n=383).

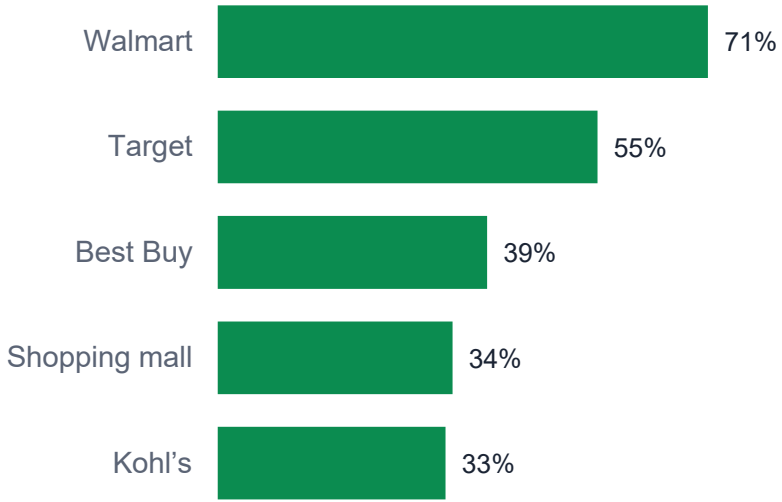
Amazon dominates online, Walmart wins in stores

Best Buy draws more shoppers in stores (39%) than online (27%).

Online Black Friday or Cyber Monday shoppers



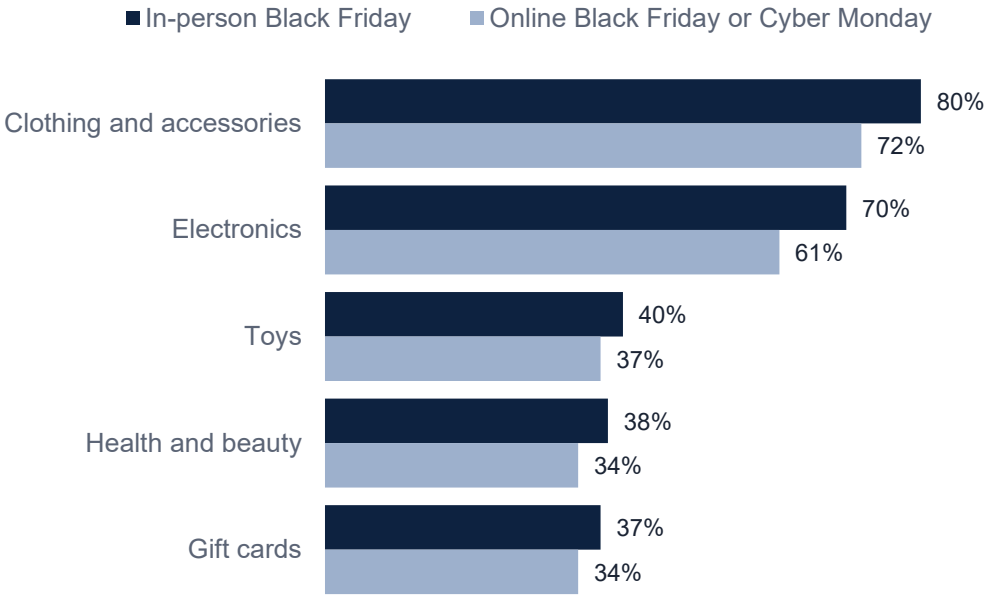
In-person Black Friday shoppers



Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Bases: online shoppers (n=1,088); in-person shoppers (n=383).

Clothing and electronics top shopping lists

In-store shoppers lean harder into electronics, often to see big-ticket tech in person.



Small Business Saturday shoppers plan to buy

54% Clothing and accessories

38% Arts and crafts

30% Books

28% Health and beauty

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Bases: in-person (n=383), online (n=1,088), Small Business Saturday (n=348).

Free shipping decides where shoppers buy

Shoppers want the deal, and they don’t want shipping fees eating into it.

Important factors when choosing a retailer



46% vs. 42%

Guaranteed holiday delivery now outranks fast shipping

52% vs. 37%

of online shoppers prefer phones over computers

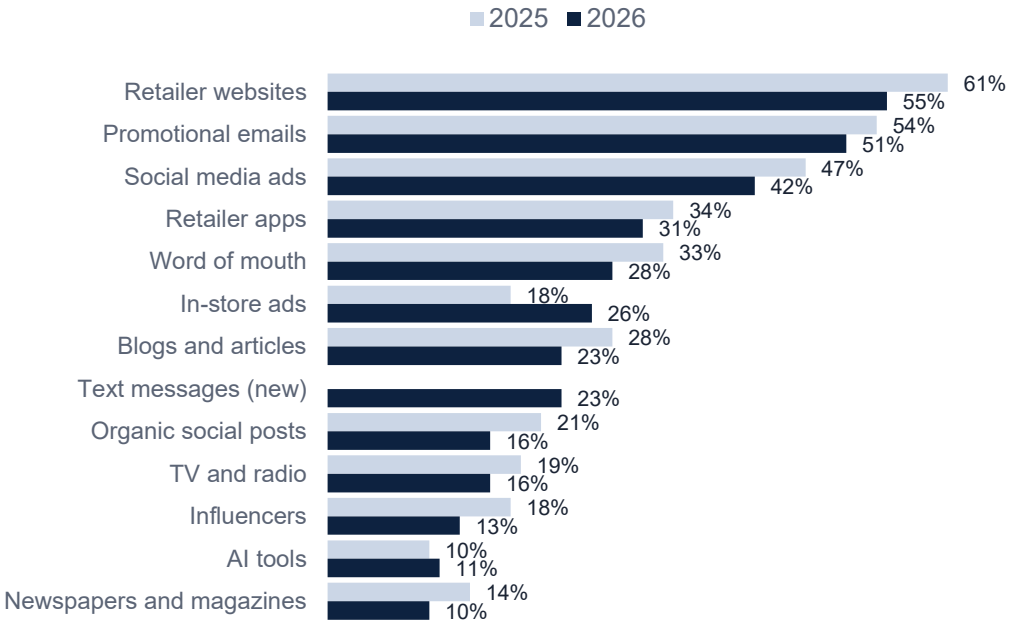
What this means for retailers

Show the “arrives by” date on the product page, not at checkout.

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey. Base: Cyber Week shoppers (n=1,178); devices: online shoppers (n=1,121).

How shoppers find Cyber Week deals

Nearly every channel slipped, while in-store ads jumped 8 points.



+8 pts

In-store ads rose from 18% to 26%, the biggest gain

23%

find deals through text messages, new in 2026

11%

use AI tools like ChatGPT, steady vs. 10%

Source: Drive Research 2025 and 2026 Holiday Shopping Surveys. Base: Cyber Week shoppers (n=1,178 in 2026).

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Only 4% of shoppers say AI assistance affects where they buy, but 11% already use AI to find deals. That tells me AI is acting as a search tool, not a salesperson. Retailers shouldn’t pull back on their websites, emails, texts or in-store signage to chase it.

Emily Rodgers
Director of Marketing, Drive Research

Holiday shopping looks different by generation

Budgets, devices and pressures vary sharply across audiences.

Typically spend $1,000 or more	**21%** Gen X	**8%** Gen Z
Expect to spend the same as last year	**46%** Boomers	**27%** Gen Z
Prefer shopping on a computer	**51%** Boomers	**29%** Millennials
Prefer retailer apps	**33%** Millennials	**18%** Boomers
Cutting back because of inflation	**69%** Men	**55%** Women

Source: Drive Research 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey, age and gender crosstabs; each group n≥144.

Five moves for the rest of the season

1 Prove your discounts are real

Show price history and savings in dollars, not just percentages.

2 Price for smaller budgets

Build gift guides and bundles around lower price points.

3 Run one long promotion

Treat Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday as a single event.

4 Lead with delivery

Free shipping plus a guaranteed “arrives by” date wins the sale.

5 Keep owned channels strong

Invest in web, email, texts and signage, and make offers easy for AI to read.

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Want this data for your audience?

Drive Research is a full-service market research company. We help retailers, ecommerce brands and agencies understand shoppers through surveys, focus groups and custom research, including custom cuts of this holiday data by generation or gender.

Emily Rodgers, Director of Marketing
driveresearch.com | erodgers@driveresearch.com