

6 ways to ensure Black Friday is smooth for everyone involved

South African retailers and consumers are preparing for the country's largest sale day, Black Friday (29 November 2019). And while it may be glorious for bargain hunters and those hoping to make extra sales, the extra strain takes a toll on the staff who have to manage all of it.



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Last year's Black Friday saw retail sales shoot up [by 2571%](#) versus a normal Friday. Overall, the sale day grew by 19.52% in 2018 – and it's expected to considerably surpass that this year. South Africans are set to spend about 36% more in 2019, according to a PwC Strategy& survey, with average consumer spend of R3,812 per person.

While it's a day many look forward to, it can be a period of profound dread for others.

For those working in retail over the Black Friday period, stress can sky-rocket as workload increases exponentially. [The Guardian](#) and [NBC News](#) paint bleak pictures of conditions overseas, giving insight into the kind of strain unprecedented consumerism can wreak.

This kind of insight shows why retailers must prioritise people and project management over these periods, to keep staff sane and spirits high!

The Guardian and NBC raise a concern around the fact that low wages have become standard practice, especially for contract workers hired to handle the huge volumes of orders underway. While staff are expected to work long hours in some places, there's little in the way of overtime or paid vacation compensation.

Rather, unstable shift schedules prevail, with erratic conditions and income instability. Another consideration is that more people order bigger things, so there's lots of labour required to move around big-ticket equipment like fridges and TVs.

With so many extra hands and an influx of orders, it's also easy to see why workplaces get chaotic, quickly. Strong project and people management practices are required, especially for overseeing teams of newly hired contract workers.

On a day that's about making lots of money as fast as possible, it's vital that ethics and values are not overlooked. Leaders must make sure their internal teams feel supported, motivated and taken care of. Burn-out is a very real threat, especially as anxiety levels soar.

So, what can leaders do to ensure South Africa's sale day is smooth for everyone involved?

MC Botha, senior lecturer on project management at USB-ED, offers insight below:

1. Project management is crucial

Sales are a typical operational endeavour in the business domain. However, Black Friday is a project in its own right. Prior planning is required to ensure that customer experience is more than the "bargain" of the day. Black Friday should demonstrate excellence in planning and preparation. It requires a project manager with a clear plan who has been communicated to a well-briefed team.

Risk assessment of the day is a crucial prior requirement. Obviously, increased business activities will place an additional burden on staff and systems. It is good practice to ensure that prior engagement takes place in respect of the "what if" possibilities of Black Friday. Knee jerk responses with volumes of customers waiting to be serviced will have a negative reputational effect.

2. Resource allocation is crucial

Black Friday needs to be broken down into components, with execution times and goals defined for each phase. There must be sufficient staff to handle the expected traffic influx.

It's vital that schedules are drawn up far in advance, and that both staff and systems are in the loop when it comes to the plan – and how to execute it. It's worth undertaking stress-testing practice drills in the months leading up to the event. It's also essential to ensure humans and machines are collaborating efficiently across every level of the business.

3. People management is key

As a leader, acknowledge Black Friday is inevitably going to be a stressful time for your staff. Use scenario planning to forecast all the ways to mitigate risks in advance and create a safer, happier workplace for everyone involved. Hire the extra resources you need and get training in place to make sure everyone's up to speed. Motivate staff by giving them their own 'Black Friday' (weeks before the actual sales day) where they can shop items at significant discounts.

During Black Friday, recognise top performers and call out excellence whenever you see it. Give people regular breaks and make sure hours don't exceed what's contractually obligated. Above all, make sure pay is fair and competitive. And try to give contract employees similar benefits to full-time staff to make everyone feel equal.

After Black Friday, share the good news stories with the team, have an after-action review to assess what went well and what could have gone better, and then consider having a celebration of some kind. Another idea is to profit-share some of

the revenue earned on the day.

4. Make sure conditions are right

Ensure that work areas are well ventilated and safe for staff. During the chaos of big sales events, accidents can happen. Always have a doctor or nurse on-site and provide water and snacks to keep the team hydrated and energised.

5. Test the technology

It's going to be incredibly stressful if any of your systems go down on the day. Keep stress-testing your technology in the weeks preceding Black Friday to deal with any issues well in advance.

6. Keep communication flowing

This is crucial. When things speed up and anxiety levels rise, often problems creep in due to miscommunication. Finesse your internal comms and ensure the whole team is kept in the loop. On the day, blast regular reports of progress and have a clear chain of command with approachable managers always on-hand to assist with any queries.

Botha concludes, "It's a big day for everyone. Don't pursue profit to the detriment of your team. Put your people first and ensure your project and team management practices are tight. Ultimately, strong leadership is key to these kinds of occasions."

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