

One billion Black Friday presents challenges for retailers and logistics industry

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With market analysts predicting online retail sales to top £1 billion on what's become known as Black Friday, a UK leader in the materials handling industry is urging supply chain businesses to ensure they're equipped to cope with an unprecedented seasonal rush.

Whilst the run up to Christmas has always been the busiest time of year for most retailers, Black Friday is a relatively new phenomenon, first recognised in the US and driven by the increasing global popularity of online shopping.

Last year, sales on the last Friday in November topped £800 million and Briggs Equipment is at the forefront of helping firms prepare well in advance so they have the equipment needed to fulfil an even bigger peak in orders.

Allan Parsons, National Rental Manager for Briggs Equipment, explained: "The latest predictions from global digital commerce consultancy Salmon suggest that online orders in the UK will top £1 billion on November 27.

"Although many retailers, distributors and logistics firms will be preparing for Christmas anyway, the Black Friday phenomenon creates its own challenges as millions of people order Christmas presents for delivery ahead of the big day.

"Warehouse equipment and electric counterbalance trucks are heavily in demand and booking early is critical at this time. However, just ordering up a few more rental trucks is only part of the solution if firms want to deal effectively with the seasonal rush whilst avoiding unexpected costs."

Allan offers five top tips for ensuring businesses are prepared for Black Friday and the wider season rush:

- 1) Ensure you have the right equipment for the busy period - Make sure you have the right materials handling equipment not only to meet seasonal demand, but also to be able to perform efficiently outdoors in winter weather. Seek support from your materials handling provider who will be able to advise on the best solution.
- 2) Safeguard your site – The UK can be hit by bad weather at any time, and from early-November onwards snow could be a factor as well as ice, rain and gales. Ensure you have gritters and snow ploughs to remove

snow and ice from areas where equipment will be working and any other necessary attachments or accessories to help reduce downtime and minimise accidents.

3) Ensure your staff are prepared – Increased pressure can cause operators to rush, which increases the risk of accidents and damage. Ensure they are fully trained on the latest health and safety regulations. This is particularly true of agency or temporary staff.

4) Have a plan – Spend time making a realistic assessment of expected demand, and make a detailed plan to cope with it. It's important when drawing up the plan to make contingencies for over or underestimates on demand and, once the plan has been agreed, ensure that everyone in the organisation knows about it and the role they will need to play!

5) Work closely with your materials handling provider – You may need to reconsider your service and maintenance contracts to safeguard your business against breakdowns and repairs. It will be imperative to keep your machines working efficiently to maintain high productivity levels.

Allan continued: "It is easy to lose sight of just how the festive peak will impact, particularly as businesses get busier. However, taking the time to plan ahead will reap benefits in the long run. As well as reducing the risk of accidents and additional costs, it will ensure customers are happy come Christmas morning!"

Source: Briggs Equipment UK Ltd