

SHOPPING

Continued from page 5

cause of that.

In reality, analysts say, it's all about stealing share in a market that isn't growing that much.

For department stores, the competition is fierce. Last year, J.C. Penney opened at 3 p.m. for the first time, three hours earlier than its rivals Kohl's and Macy's. That may have hurt Macy's, which had a weak holiday season and aims to reverse a sales slump. This year, Macy's decided to open an hour earlier at 5 p.m. on Thanksgiving. Penney is sticking to 3 p.m., while Kohl's will be opening again at 6 p.m. Most Sears stores will be open on Thanksgiving for the fourth year in a row, starting at 6 p.m. — the same as a year ago.

Best Buy, the nation's largest consumer electronics chain, suffered over Thanksgiving weekend in 2012 because it didn't open until midnight, while stores like Wal-Mart and Target

began their sales earlier in the evening. Wal-Mart, Target and Best Buy have not announced their plans for this Thanksgiving weekend. But all indications are they'll start the doorbuster sales on the holiday.

For many big retailers, covering expenses like paying employees holiday pay is not that costly, said Joel Bines, a managing director at retail consulting group AlixPartners. But for small stores or those with specialized merchandise, it may make more sense to close.

AlixPartners also found for that some retailers who did open on Thanksgiving were simply pulling Friday sales a day earlier and their profit margins took a hit. Bob Riesbeck, president and CEO of hhgregg, says business on Thanksgiving actually declined over the previous two years when it opened at 4 p.m.

CBL's Lebovitz says when he surveyed stores in the

See THANKSGIVING, 15



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Thanksgiving Day shopping isn't going away, but some stores are rethinking their strategies on whether it makes sense to be open. Many major mall operators and big retailers such as Toys R Us, J.C. Penney and Macy's are sticking with being open. Others, including the Mall of America, are closing for Thanksgiving.

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