

Reading Time: 8 minutes

There is a reason why I stay away from shopping centres and supermarkets at this time of the year. One, having no family and dealing with sexual assault as a kid on Christmas Day means that Christmas, and the bullshit that goes with it in today's modern society just doesn't do it for me. The other is the fact that shops, from supermarkets to jewellery stores, and every other brand in between just want to shove *something* down your throat for you to buy.

Offers, Offers, With a Side of Offers

The arrival and subsequent cascading of Black Friday deals has only added to this, to the point that what was once a simple 'save your Christmas money, then go to the Boxing Day sales', has now become something akin to a series of panic buying activities, for things that you often don't need, which are then at the same price just a few days later. Let's take a typical 2020s year as an example:

- You now have 'Pre-Black Friday' deals, by retailers wanting to get in on the act before their competitors. This in effect means that Black Friday is now actually 'Black Friday Week'.
- What was Cyber Monday, once upon a time a place or the online retailers to get their own piece of the action is now in itself a week-long event, often with the same / deceptively similar deals to the above.
- By the first week of December, you get the 'extended Black Friday' deals, which is just retailers trying to get rid of whatever shit they overbought, whilst tempting you into the store for everything else they've temporarily returned to almost normal price.
- By second week of December, all the supermarkets, after charging a fortune for fresh fruit, veg, and meat, all of a sudden want to sell it to you for rock bottom prices, so you get tempted to buy all your shopping there (Which I'll be exploring in another article, another day; it's what I call the Aldi Shop Currency Conversion).
- By third week of December, desperate retailers will start the traditional boxing day sales early, to try and get people to buy something they otherwise wouldn't: Things like Christmas jumpers, which get lost in a wardrobe after two uses max.
- Then you have Christmas: Before the King has even reminded us that Christmas is a time to remember 'The little baby Jesus' etc etc, your phone, email, TV screens are filled with ads and spam, advertising online boxing day sales. If you have European companies, these can be from 24th December, which is when most Europeans celebrate Christmas 'properly'.
- Boxing Day sales then come along, complete with the reminder that you've eaten, drunk and done so much, that you need to think about Dry January, getting to a gym, getting 'beach ready', and all the new year's resolutions you'll likely break within a month.
- By 2nd week of January, companies like Park Christmas remind you to get saving for the following year, so they can charge you more than normal for stuff, or make you

Dear ASDA. This is a joke

stuff your wallet with gift cards for the following festivities.

Look. In the UK, we live in a capitalist democracy, despite what some diehard Labour voters may think now that Labour's in power. Money talks, saving money wins. I get it. The things that this breed though, from impulse spending, to potential debts, to forgetting that these companies know how to get you to divert from your budget and so on, can be painful. There's a number of reasons why people ultimately deal with deep depressive episodes around this time of year, and the feeling like you **HAVE** to spend money to keep up with everyone else is a part of it.

As a quick point of what I'm trying to get at, about 15 minutes into writing this, I had the following come through from EE, who I currently have as my mobile phone provider.

The image is a screenshot of a computer screen showing two windows. The left window is an email from EE, titled 'Wil, you can still get your hands on this Black Friday bundle'. It features a large yellow graphic that says 'ON EE TV AND BROADBAND'. The text in the email promotes a Black Friday bundle for EE TV and broadband at £43.99 a month, with a £144 saving on TV and an extra £2 a month saving on broadband. It also mentions blistering speeds with EE Broadband and a deadline of December 12th. The right window is a blog post editor titled 'Dear ASDA. This is a joke'. The title is 'Dear ASDA. This is a joke'. The tags are 'Christmas', 'ASDA', 'Alcohol', and 'XMAS Drinking'. The content of the blog post discusses the author's dislike of Christmas and shopping, and the arrival of Black Friday deals. It includes a list of points about Black Friday deals, such as 'Pre Black Friday' deals, Cyber Monday, and the 'extended Black Friday' deals. The editor also shows a 'Categories' list on the right, with 'Branding' and 'Life' selected.

Drink Like It's December

There's another reason why I hate going out and about in December though, and it's the fact that short of opening a can / bottle and chucking it down your gullet, alcohol is shoved directly and unashamedly down your throat. I am a person whom doesn't do pubs (because of people), and don't actually *enjoy* drinking, but when I'm depressed and trying to self-medicate (or worse), do the stupid thing and turn to the bottle or vodka / Jim Bean that's almost certainly on offer.

This ranges from work parties (One department where I worked once decided to just shun the meal element of this, and just get shitfaced), to the German Market in Birmingham, providing the opportunity for people whom would otherwise scorn at someone drinking at 11AM becoming merry over a stein of beer, mulled wine or alcohol infused hot chocolate 'because it's just nice at this time of year, isn't it?'. The worst of the lot though, again is the supermarkets.

In this desperate attempt to get you through the door and spending your cash with them over a rival,

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Dear ASDA. This is a joke

they like to reduce things to make you want to do your entire festive shop with them. I've already mentioned meat and veg, but booze is just another one of those tricks. In 2022 in a time when I forgot my headphones before going shopping, an ASDA near me had 16 alcohol commercials in a row on their 'shop radio station'. Yes. SIXTEEN.

This year, I've been to both of my local ASDA supermarkets, out of necessity rather than desire. In one, before you even got through those cute barriers to get into the store, there were bottles of spirits right by the front door, ironically, just below kids toy play sets. The kid looks at the toy, the adult compares the cost of the booze. In the other... I think the picture below sums it up.



Yes, that's a good 25 Meters of non stop, wall to wall booze lined up.

There used to be a time when BWS (Beers, Wines, Spirits) were located in one part of a shop. I remember one Christmas Eve at least having to wait until 8AM to get to this one tiny section, as you couldn't touch, let alone buy anything before then. These days, it's no longer the BWS Aisles. It's at the mid point of aisles in larger supermarkets, places that normally would stock cold goods, transformed into another BWS fridge. In the image above, the alcohol is lined up all the way down where the checkout line is, encouraging that last impulse buy. All your beer, getting to the hard stuff as you edge closer to your self scan marathon.

I will say that it's not only Christmas when this occurs. During the UK's famous 'Summer of Sport' period where we collectively realise how shit we are as a nation at sports, similar occurs. To the point that I once had a laugh swapping Russian vodka (Smirnoff) with a Ukrainian brand on the next aisle's corner display. The second stupidest alcohol planning after the Tesco where I used to live selling cut price packs of Corona in April / May 2020.

Thing is, we Know It's an Issue...

Alcohol consumption is a massive health problem in the UK. Just recently the [BBC did a great iPlayer episode on liver disease amongst women under 40](#), and just last week there was a report published on the impact of 'nights on the town', and how this causes more damage than people think. Knowing our local Alcohol Care Team and addiction support services, I understand their struggles in supporting those who are not classified as 'problem drinkers', but whom are putting their bodies at risk unknowingly. That's before you have those who may fall to temptation whom normally would avoid certain parts of a supermarket, the same way they would avoid going to a bar, and opt to meet a

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friend at a coffee shop.

There's only so much that you can encourage people to make positive decisions in relation to any addiction, without having to consider society as a whole. Gambling for example has been a hot topic over the past few years, resulting in bans on football shirts for gambling companies, alongside limiting 'spin bet' limits and ensuring people can set budgets when gambling online. In terms of smoking, cigarettes are in plain-branded packets, in a drawer / behind an opaque screen, and single use vapes are being outlawed in the UK next year, something other countries like Australia have already done.

In terms of booze, Scotland has a minimum price per unit of alcohol, and I believe there are now bans in place for multi-box offers on crates of lager etc. It doesn't take an accountant to realise though that unless there is a blanket minimum price per unit, shops will always find ways to tempt buyers. Like cutting the price of each crate by say... A third, instead of doing it in a multi-pack bundle in years previous? Especially at this time of the year, most supermarkets won't care if they are making pennies per sale. It's all about getting you to spend the rest of your budget on them, and other impulse buys.

And this...

Is at the same time when the Government are clamping down on the advertising of crumpets on TV before 9PM!!!

Final Thoughts

I get the junk food advertising ban, the same way I do agree on the sweet by checkout ban. I don't believe that it's full on 'nanny state', as you can still buy what you want. And yes, average Joe can argue that 'If people know they shouldn't drink', they can always show some willpower. But if smoking (Which will kill you, but slower than drinking too much alcohol) has the restrictions it has, and we had our OG Turkey Twizzlers taken away from us in the name of public health, why on earth hasn't someone taken a harder line on alcohol sales? Especially around times of group gatherings and the like.

The answer is two-fold and simple. One is tax money, and the other is wanting to keep brewers, and especially Whisky distillers happy. That, and the Daily Mail still needs to have some content to show on their website and newspaper pages of us Brits stumbling around in the name of fun and violence in the same breath.

And this, is why international perspectives of Brits and alcohol will never change. Because we're conditioned to panic buy, binge, and not, despite what the adverts may say, drink responsibly. And it gives doctors / other healthcare professionals something to label people with rather than dealing with something more than surface deep.

Peace & Love, through gritted teeth xx