

In some ways our American holiday season is a bit confusing. We start off with a national day of humility and thanksgiving, followed immediately (or if this year is to be the new model, *preceded*...) by frenzied selling and spending at levels unimaginable in the rest of the world. Companies marketing consumer goods literally live or die by virtue of their sales during the holidays. So the next few weeks will be...intense...and the success or failure of many businesses in meeting sales projections will impact all of us (as Exhibit A, see recent headlines: “*Stock Market Soars on Black Friday Sales*”).

Business credit management is somewhat like the holiday season. Good feelings prevail when, after our due diligence, we open new accounts and begin sales relationships we assume will be mutually profitable. You might say we “give thanks” for those new customers and the business they generate for our employers. The second act in this scenario, however, is often like the Black Friday/Cyber Monday sales madness we experience in the larger marketplace. We are under enormous pressure to collect every receivable dollar from those new customers as quickly as possible, by all means available (so long as there is no new cost involved...). Like the wholesalers and retailers of consumer goods pushing sales in December, those of us responsible for collections frantically dig and scrape for whatever we can get...but *all year long*.

Maybe it doesn't have to be that way. It may be that our binary approach to credit and collections – open arms on the front end, clenched fists on the back end – isn't the best way to manage business credit relationships. In 2012 this column will examine some other models of credit management, including examples from within the NACM Southwest membership, to see if there may be opportunities to improve on our current behavior – like the holidays, start with warmth and gratitude, but avoid the shift to desperate pushing and pulling. *Happy Holidays*, indeed!

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