

Last-minute shopping made a bit saner with new apps

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It's getting easier to be a procrastinator during the holidays.

From startups that will shop for your Christmas gifts and load them into your car outside the mall, to delivery services that will ferry [purchases](#) to your house within a couple of hours, new technology for the smartphone-wielding consumer is making the final dash of the [holiday season](#) a bit less insane. No longer must the last-minute shopper circle full parking lots in vain and max out credit cards paying for overnight shipping to get gifts by Dec. 25.

Now, there's an app for that.

Startups such as Curbside, a smartphone app launched in October that lets consumers make purchases on their mobile phone and pick them up outside the mall, and Deliv, started more than two years ago to deliver purchases from stores and malls using local drivers, have become assets for many [retailers](#). These apps help brick-and-mortar stores lure tech-savvy consumers who may otherwise do all their shopping online, retail analysts say. Big retailers such as Target, Macy's, Best Buy and Nordstrom are pushing more consumers to buy online and pick up in the store, or shop in the store and opt for home delivery - and Curbside and Deliv help these efforts.

"For the last-minute shoppers, the retailers that can thrive in both the online and brick-and-mortar environments will fare well," said Michele Dupre, vice president of retail and hospitality at Verizon Enterprise

Solutions.

Deliv, based in Menlo Park, partners with 250 retailers and six of the nation's largest mall operators - four of which are investors - to deliver purchases made in the store, over the phone or online, to the customer's front door during a two-hour window. Some retailers have offered Deliv for free this holiday season, hoping to attract the last-minute shopper who didn't want to brave the recent rainstorms but also doesn't want to rely on a gift shipped from a warehouse halfway across the country that could be held hostage by a winter storm.

"Last Christmas was a disaster," said founder and Chief Executive Daphne Carmeli, referring to the millions of packages delivered after Christmas after terrible weather paralyzed carriers already swamped with last-minute deliveries. "We don't have downed airplanes in Atlanta, and we're not going to. It's a lot less risky to get something a mile down the road delivered.

"There is only one person who gets deliveries done after us, and that's Santa," she said.

For Palo Alto resident Amber MacDonald, any service that lets her stay out of the pouring rain and avoid navigating busy malls with her 2-year-old daughter in tow is worth a few bucks. She ordered a last-minute gift on Friday, which a Deliv driver brought to her front door for \$10 the same day.

"This was the end of it - a last gift for my husband," she said. "There's always a certain amount of things that you realize last minute that you need."

More consumers are leaving their holiday purchases to the final days of the season, the result of a strengthening economy, confident shoppers

more likely to make purchases on a whim, retailers pushing out their sales to the eleventh hour and stores staying open around the clock until Christmas. As of a week ago, about 19 percent of holiday shoppers had not started their shopping, compared with 13 percent of consumers in the same week a year ago, according to the International Council of Shopping Centers.

"It looks like we're going to have a busy last few days and a busy Christmas Eve," said spokesman Jesse Tron. "Consumers aren't necessarily out there jumping at every single deal that they see or feeling the pressure to do so."

Sales on Saturday, also known as "Super Saturday," were projected to hit \$10 billion, exceeding Black Friday sales of \$9.1 billion and making the final weekend before Christmas the busiest for foot traffic and sales for the year, according to research from ShopperTrak, which tracks consumer behavior. Super Saturday is usually the third-busiest day of the year.

That could have made for a miserable time battling crowds and sorting through disheveled clearance bins, but customers using Curbside didn't have to step foot inside the mall.

"I should be able to order a gift, get it when I need it and pick it up on my way home," said Jaron Waldman, co-founder and Chief Executive of Curbside, based in Palo Alto. "I don't need to be stuck at home waiting for a package to arrive."

On the Curbside app, shoppers can order from 10 different Target stores in the Bay Area and 20 stores at Westfield Oakridge mall in South San Jose. Curbside employees collect the purchases, gift-wrap them and package them for the customer to pick up at the curb outside the mall within an hour.

Benjamin Hsu of San Jose pulled up to the curb outside Oakridge mall Monday to pick up his order: powdered sugar for cookies he was making at home.

"This way I can spend more time at home and pick out (on the app) what I want, and I don't have to look for parking," he said. "Holiday shopping and looking for parking, man, it's crazy."

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GETTING IT HOME

DELIV

Headquarters: Menlo Park, Calif.

Launched: 2012

What it is: A crowd-sourced, on-demand delivery app for brick-and-mortar retail. Shoppers make purchases directly from a store - inside the store, online or over the phone - and a Deliv driver will deliver it during a two-hour window the customer chooses.

Participating stores: 250 retailers including large national chains such as Macy's and Foot Locker and small local merchants. Available at about 30 malls.

Cost: Varies. Some retailers offer it for free, others charge about \$10.

How to get it: Choose the Deliv option after making purchase through retailer.

CURBSIDE

Headquarters: Palo Alto

Launched: October 2014

What it is: An app for making purchases on a smartphone that can be picked up outside big-box retailers and malls. Curbside employees collect the items from the store and package the customer's purchase, which is ready for pickup in about an hour.

Participating stores: 10 Target stores in the Bay Area and 20 stores at Westfield Oakridge mall in San Jose.

Cost: Free to customers,

How to get it: Download from Google Play or the Apple App Store.

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