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All systems ready for Singles' Day buying spree

China's huge annual online shopping event a boon for businesses, from banks to couriers

SHANGHAI • Accountant Zhang Yuting had been filling her online shopping cart daily in the run-up to Singles' Day shopping festival which kicks off today. It was packed with goods such as nappies, tea, motor oil and a Japanese electronic toilet seat. "I've got loads of e-commerce apps on my phone," she said, listing apps from Alibaba, JD.com, Suning Commerce Group, Amazon.com and fresh produce retailer Beijing MissFresh Ecommerce. "For this year's Singles' Day, I'm going to spend at least 10,000 yuan (\$2,070)," the 28-year-old told Reuters. The shopping spree began at the stroke of midnight and Ms Zhang is among the hundreds of millions of shoppers worldwide who will help Alibaba Group break last year's sales record of US\$14.3 billion (\$\$20.1 billion).

Named after the "double elevens" (11-11) celebrating singlehood, the Singles' Day shopping extravaganza started by e-commerce company Alibaba in 2009 has morphed into the world's biggest online shopping event. Sales this year are expected to jump to US\$20 billion (\$\$28.1 billion), eclipsing the combined sales of Cyber Monday and Black Friday in the United States. "It's no longer just a one-day online shopping festival, with retailers introducing promotions that start before and end after Nov 11," said senior analyst Wang Xiaofeng at Forrester Research. "It is also going global, extending beyond China and Asia to include many international retailers who offer attractive discounts and more efficient cross-border shipping," she told China Daily. US department store giant



A light display for the Alibaba 11.11 Global Shopping Festival Countdown Gala outside the venue in Shenzhen yesterday. Alibaba organises a concert every year in the hours leading up to midnight, Nov 11. PHOTO: EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

Macy's has an outlet on Alibaba's shopping platform Tmall selling pillows, jackets, kitchenware and the like, Bloomberg reported. Other overseas businesses without brick-and-mortar stores in China are also taking advantage, from German shower nozzle makers to retailers of Italian coffee and French wine. Even banks are hitching a ride, reported South China Morning Post.

China Zheshang Bank said its loans to e-commerce platforms surged to 2.08 billion yuan in the third quarter, more than in the first half, as online retailers prepared for the event. "The impact goes well beyond the retail industry to the broader economy and the business operations in China," Mr Jason Yu, general manager of market research firm Kantar Worldpanel China, told the Post. Alibaba's Cainiao logistics net-

work forecast that the industry will handle 1.05 billion packages for Singles' Day this year, up 35 per cent year on year. Courier companies have had to add more vehicles and hire more staff to cope with the additional demand. Nearly all major delivery firms have put out recruitment notices, offering monthly salaries of between 5,000 yuan and 8,000 yuan. Chinese courier firm Yunda Ex-

\$20b

Alibaba's record sales last year, which it expects to top this year

\$28b

Expected sales for this year's Singles' Day shopping festival

1.05b

Number of packages that Alibaba's Cainiao logistics network forecast the industry will handle this year

press said it has added 10,000 delivery vehicles to its fleet, reported Xinhua news agency. China Railway has launched an "E-Commerce Golden Week" service to facilitate express services for couriers from Nov 11 to 20. The service reaches 505 cities. US pop star Katy Perry pulled out of a star-studded concert last night in Shenzhen to launch the online shopping festival, reported Bloomberg, citing a family emergency. She was to have headlined the concert as "global ambassador" alongside fellow recording artists One Republic and basketball legend Kobe Bryant. Sports celebrity David Beckham will take her place instead. Alibaba organises a concert every year in the hours leading up to midnight, Nov 11.

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