



..... Ecommerce .....

# Holiday Planning

Getting Your Ecommerce Store Ready for the Holidays



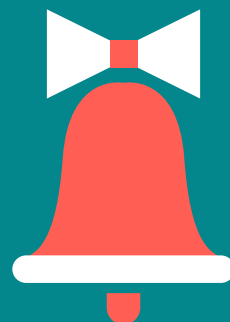
# 'Tis (Almost) The Season To Be Selling

The holidays may still be months away, but in ecommerce, it's never too early to start planning for the most wonderful time of the year.

Take advantage of the opportunity to increase sales and profit by getting your website retail ready now, with help from this eBook.

Here, we've compiled all the info you need for seasonal success — from design and promotions to marketing strategies and tools.

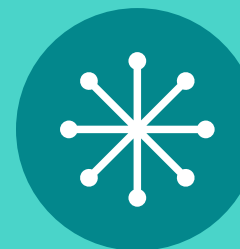
By reaching and connecting with shoppers in meaningful (and profitable) ways, you can hit your year-end goals and set your store up for a very happy new year.



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# Deck The Halls: Holiday Design



Brick-and-mortar stores, like Macy's, are notorious for their holiday window displays and decor. But why should they have all the fun?

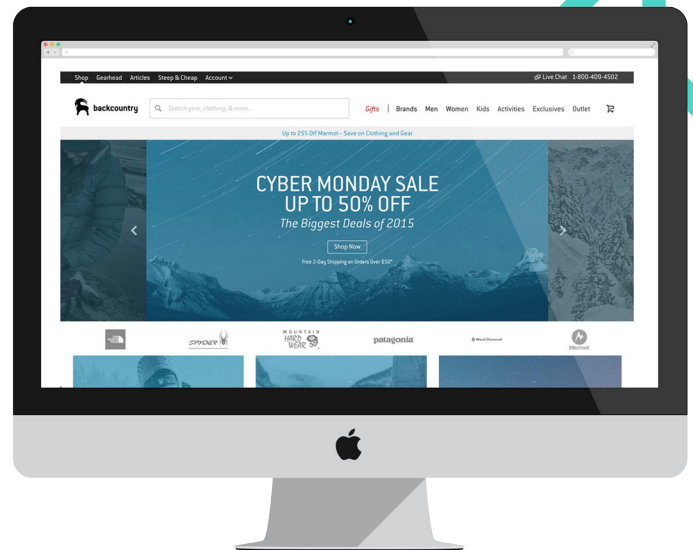
Adding holiday cheer to your website is a great way to welcome shoppers, and remind them to put down their eggnog and pick up their wallets.

Here are a few simple suggestions to give your store festive flair, get customers in the holiday-shopping spirit and convert first-time seasonal buyers into loyal, year-round patrons.

## Add Some Holiday Color

Add splashes of red and green and/or a seasonal background image. Keep your brand in mind and think about what's appropriate for your products and customers.

You can stay true to your brand by toning down or "cooling" your color scheme for the holiday season. Tones such as blues, greens and purples convey a "wintery" feeling without screaming "Christmas." You can then sparingly add more traditional holiday reds and greens for buttons or to highlight special details.



*Backcountry chose some great winter-themed images to set the tone of their site. They also gave their images a "cool" blue color filter to tie the theme together.*

## Swap In Winter Shots

Winter images are an effective and popular way for online retailers to exude holiday spirit without redesigning their entire site or changing their color scheme.

Choose from a wide variety of scenic winter and holiday-inspired photos in our [Resource Library](#). We also offer custom design packages starting at just \$150 for [one image](#) or \$500 for a [5-pack](#). from. Images of snow-capped mountains or a family frolicking in the snow can create a majestic or joyful mood, and inspire shoppers.

Winter-themed images work for most, if not all, types of industries and products. And because they reflect the season, not the holidays, they transition perfectly into the new year.



*The Home Depot adjusted their holiday colors from their traditional orange and grey color scheme to make their site more festive.*

## Incorporate Holiday Graphics

Graphics are a great way to spread holiday cheer onsite and highlight special sales. Consider adding illustrations to your slideshow and banners, or a subtle pattern to your background.

Change your icons to make them more thematic. For example, your shipping icon may appear as a gift box for the season, or your shopping cart could be displayed as a stocking.

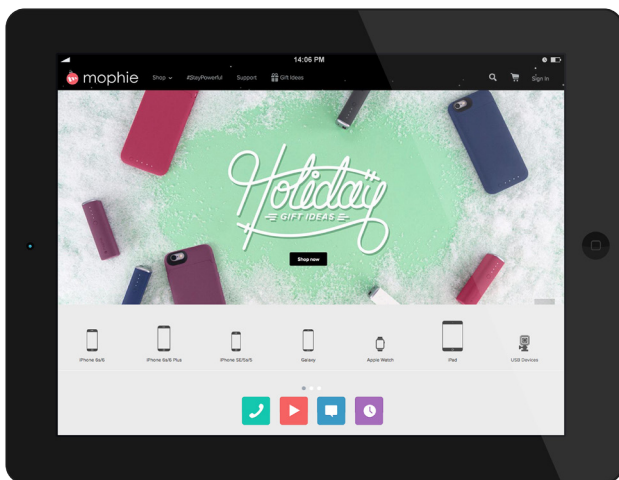
Try altering your logo temporarily to include a string of lights, or place it atop a mound of snow.

Before making any graphic changes, consider your brand and your target audience. Then keep it simple. Just a few graphic changes can have a big impact.

## Use A Festive Font

Some fonts are more festive than others. Choosing just one decorative font can help tie everything together cohesively (with a nice red bow).

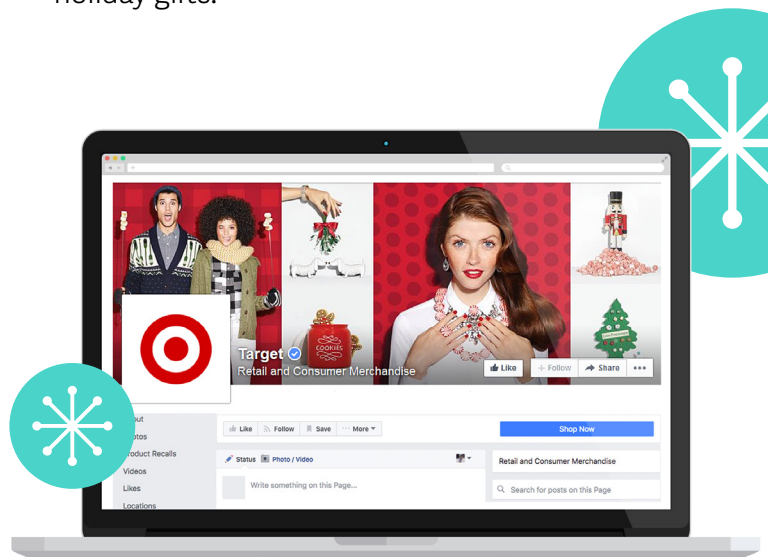
*In addition to some fun holiday graphics and wintry images, Mophie chose a friendly, festive font to create a unique holiday style.*



## Make Merry On Social Media

Updating your store's social media accounts for the holidays is an easy way to engage your followers. To create a consistent, branded look and feel, we recommend using the same **holiday** or **winter-themed images** and **graphics** from your website as your cover photo and profile pictures on all social media accounts.

For image-based social media (Instagram and Pinterest), post pictures of your **products in holiday settings**, such as under a tree or next to a snowy window. Be sure to include a **cheerful holiday message** to remind users to shop your store for great holiday gifts.



*Target combined their holiday-themed product photos with some other holiday-themed images and graphics for their Facebook cover photo to create a consistent holiday style.*

Here are some **free festive fonts** you can use. Just click on the images below :

Old Standard

Cookie

Katibeh

Redressed

Berkshire Swash

# Seasonal SEO

## Plan Ahead

When shoppers are searching online for holiday gifts, make sure your store outranks the competition. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a long game, meaning it takes time before your store will start showing up in search results. So if you want to drive in the holiday traffic, begin planning your SEO strategy at least a few months in advance.

## Create Holiday Landing Pages

We recommend creating landing pages for different holidays to maximize your ability to organically drive in shopper traffic. This way, not only will consumers find you when searching for terms that describe your products, but also when they search for terms specific to that holiday.

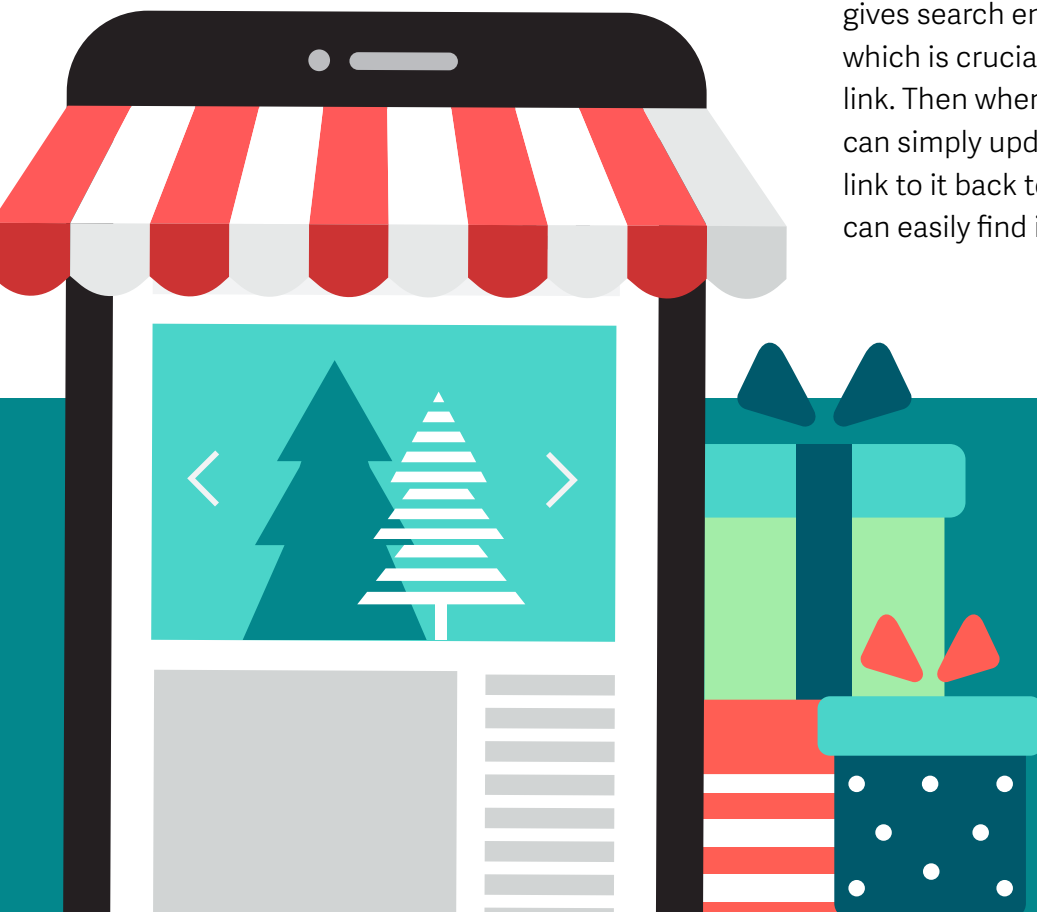
## Think Long Term

Build a landing page for the long term. Choose a **generic, year-agnostic url** so that it can be used year after year, such as [www.yourstore.com/holidays](http://www.yourstore.com/holidays) instead of [www.yourstore.com/holiday2016](http://www.yourstore.com/holiday2016).

After the holidays are over, it's a good idea to **keep your page live** rather than deleting or hiding it. Search engines prioritize established websites and pages, so deleting and relaunching your holiday page each year will undermine your efforts.

In the **off-season**, be sure to indicate that the page is a placeholder and remove any products or discounts from it. Remove the page from your main navigation, but consider adding a link in the footer of your site that indicates, "past offers," "holiday offers" or "seasonal savings."

Though shoppers are unlikely to click on these, it gives search engines the ability to access the page, which is crucial for **maintaining the power** of that link. Then when the holidays roll around again, you can simply update the page's content and move the link to it back to your main navigation, where users can easily find it.



## Capitalize On Customer Reviews

92%<sup>1</sup> of consumers now read online reviews before purchasing, so be sure to solicit these from your shoppers long before Black Friday rolls around.

Consider launching an **email campaign** asking satisfied customers for product feedback, or even offering an **incentive**, like a small discount, in exchange for their thoughts.

Sacrificing a bit of revenue in the short term can lead to a bigger long-term gain if these reviews help drive in new sales.

## Get Blogging

Blogging is a great way to drive in new business, especially around the holidays. Be sure to choose topics based on what is of interest to shoppers, such as **gift guides** that target specific audiences.

Not only will this aid your **SEO efforts**, but it will lead to more engaged and satisfied customers who come to rely upon and trust your opinion.

You can also use your blog to network with other content-creators and industry influencers. Asking them to write about your store and its products (and to link back to your site) is a great way to introduce their followers and fans to your store.

Be sure to drive traffic to your blog from your various **social media** accounts to maximize reach. And encourage your followers to **share posts** with their networks of friends.



# Holiday Sales & Special Offers

Holiday shoppers love getting great deals. Make it easy for them to choose your store over a competitor by offering **attractive incentives** like free holiday shipping, seasonal coupons or a limited-time discount. The secret to a successful strategy is to properly **plan** and **promote** your incentives.

## Crunch the Numbers

Discounting can be tricky. Though you may sacrifice profit on individual products and sales, it could potentially earn you more revenue overall if it drives in more business and/or if customers also purchase non-discounted items that they might not otherwise.

Before offering a discount, carefully consider your **revenue, inventory and shipping** costs. Run plenty of “what if” scenarios, and crunch the numbers to see what is feasible for both your **budget** and your **fulfillment capabilities**.

## Size Up the Competition

Take a look at similar online stores. Take note of **best practices** you should borrow and ways that you can differentiate your strategy and surpass theirs. Make sure that whatever incentives you adopt fit within your budget, and that you have the inventory to support them.

## Decide on a Deal

There are many ways to incentivize shoppers: Free or discounted shipping, percent or money off, buy-one-get-one-free, discounted or free gift with purchase. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

When deciding on a strategy, consider your **goals** and what will appeal most to your shoppers to help you reach those goals. If you have insights about

what special offers have worked well in the past, use them to your advantage and think about ways to **optimize** your results.

**Free or discounted shipping** is a great way to “reward” shoppers when they reach a certain cart value. Or, if you’re concerned about covering the shipping cost of bulky or heavy items, you can opt to offer free shipping on individual (standard-sized) products. You may also consider excluding international shipping from this offer.

**Percent or money off** coupons are effective ways to both attract new customers and reward loyal, long-term ones. They are also ideal for flash sales, though they work best when applied site-wide (without restrictions on specific products).

**BOGO** offers are most appropriate when you sell similar (but slightly different) items, and need to move stock quickly. For example, if you sell knit beanies, the color and style may vary, but they likely cost the same to produce. Therefore, you can still meet your margins if you incentivize purchase on one by offering another (of equal or lesser value) for free or for a discounted price.



**Free gifts** are a great way to liquidate inventory that is being discontinued and that you are having difficulty selling, even at a discounted price. You can offer free gifts with the purchase of a specific product or when a customer reaches a certain cart value. This ensures you’re not operating at too much of a loss per item. You can also use free gifts to incentivize newsletter signups or to promote new product lines.



## Sell the Benefit

A great deal should jump off the page and **grab your shoppers' attention**. Keep your messaging **clear** and **concise**, and lead with the key benefit (the free or savings component). For example "Take 20% off with coupon code!" is punchier than "Use this coupon code to save 20% off your entire order!," which makes the reader work to get to the benefit. Don't forget to **include an expiration date** for every coupon or promo code.

## Spread the Word

Special offers only drive in business if customers know they exist. Think about your **target customers**. Where and when would they be most receptive to your message?

If you've run marketing or advertising campaigns in the past, **leverage your learnings** to decide where and when to allocate your resources.

If you haven't, we recommend trying to reach and engage customers across **multiple marketing channels** (reviewed below and in greater detail later in this guide), and in different areas of the purchase funnel. You can then optimize your strategy based on what works.

No matter what strategy you land on, be sure to drive your traffic to the holiday landing page(s) you've created using a **clear** and **compelling call-to-action**.



- **Email marketing/newsletters:** A great way to reach your existing customers and offer small percentage- or dollar-off promotions.
- **Blogs:** Team up with bloggers and influencers and have them introduce your brand to a new (and hopefully large) audience of potential shoppers. You can offer giveaways or special promotions to their readers, but be sure to plan ahead.
- **Social media** (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram): Organic posts are great ways to connect <https://www.facebook.com/> with your existing fans and followers. They work particularly well for flash sales if you have an engaged and active following. Tag or tweet at influencers with large followings, or use Facebook's (paid) ad platform, to drive non-followers and new customers to your store.
- **Paid advertising:** Pay-per-click (PPC) ads are an excellent way to position your special offer at the top of search engine results and win customer consideration directly against your competition.
- **On-site:** Advertise promotions and special offers in a banner at the top of your website, or in a homepage slider. Messaging and imagery should align with and reinforce your offsite marketing efforts, and can also help capture anyone else who has not seen your ads.
- **Affiliate Marketing:** Place ads on partner (affiliate) websites and drive their traffic to your store in exchange for a fee for each referral.
- **Discount sites** (Coupons.com, RetailMeNot, Groupon): An effective channel for driving buy-now traffic (shoppers in the lower purchase funnel), so long as they know your brand. Running promotions on these sites requires you to pay fees for the referral traffic.
- **Remarketing:** This is especially useful for shoppers who visited your site and left, or those who added items to their shopping cart but didn't check out. Incentivize them to come back and reconsider their purchase by offering a discount specifically for them.

## Chapter 4

# Season's Greetings: Email Marketing

Email marketing is like sending your customers a paperless Christmas card. You can simply say, "Happy Holidays" or offer a **special discount** or other **promotion** to drive them back to your store.

When done well, email marketing is a **highly-effective, low-cost** way to reach customers when they're already in the holiday spirit.

Aside from adding to your bottom line, it can help you **establish a rapport** with customers that will last long after January 1.

There are a number of free and paid email service providers (ESPs) that make it simple to message your customers, including [Constant Contact](#), [MailChimp](#), [Benchmark](#) and [Vertical Response](#).

Just follow our tips below, and you'll be more than ready to wish your customers a Merry Everything.

### Set Seasonal Goals

Your holiday email-marketing goals should differ from the goals you set for the rest of the year. They should focus on **driving sales**.

When shoppers are in spending mode, you'll want to capture their attention with messages that speak directly to their intention. That's not to say that every email has to advertise a sale; but every email should **promote your products** in some fashion.

Setting your goals is the first step to deciding on a number of other important factors, including target audience, design, messaging and call-to-action.



## Capture Email Addresses

Hopefully you've been collecting email addresses long before shopping season, and you will likely continue to aggregate new users as holidays approach.

The best way to capture a shopper's email address is to **invite them to sign-up** for emails at certain touch-points on your site, such as at the **point of sale**.

Other opportunities to encourage shoppers to opt-in to email is in customer surveys, when they're signing up for loyalty programs, and when you're providing engaging and shareable content.

## Track Your Results & Optimize

How successful your holiday campaign is will depend on a few key performance indicators (KPIs):

**Open rate** – the percentage of addressable users who opened and viewed your message

**Click-through rate (CTR)** – the percentage of email recipients who clicked on a button/link to arrive at your landing page

**Conversion rate** – the percentage of people who arrived at your landing page and completed an action (to become a "lead," make a purchase, etc.)

Once you've tracked these metrics and established a baseline, you can test different elements of your email to see how it affects your campaign's success. Just be sure to only test one element at a time so you can isolate what contributed to your success or set you back:

- Subject line
- Style, voice and narrative of messaging
- Calls to action
- Images
- Design layout

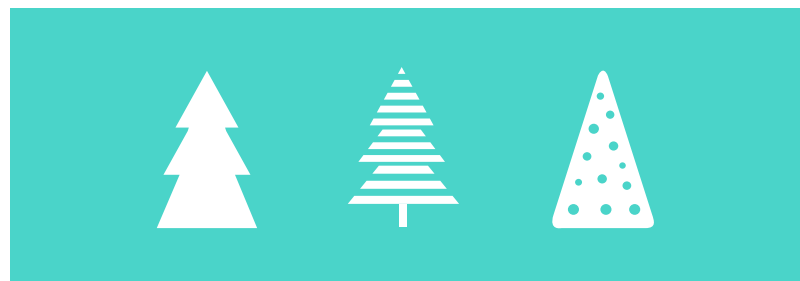
## Segment Your Shoppers

Unless all of your shoppers are exactly alike (they're not), a one-size-fits-all email marketing strategy won't do.

By creating different segments for your addressable users, you can tailor messaging and design to be most relevant to them. The results: better open rates, click-through rates and conversion (and lower opt-out percentages).

Here are a few very basic segmentation techniques that you can use for email marketing campaigns:

- **Demographics:** Target your users with specific products (and even email messaging or design elements) based on their gender, age and location.
- **Psychographics:** Target users based upon their lifestyle choices, attitudes, aspirations and interests. This information is usually a bit harder to obtain, unless the customer self-expresses it.
- **Past Purchases:** Knowing what your customers have previously purchased can help you provide upsell recommendations and cross-sell related products.
- **Abandoned Shopping Carts:** More than two-thirds of shoppers abandon their carts<sup>2</sup>. That represents a huge opportunity to target customers who were close to purchasing, and incentivize them to come back and close the deal.



## Chapter 5

# Spreading Holiday Cheer: Social Media

Social media has become one of the most influential players in **advertising** and **customer-relationship management** (CRM).

Shoppers use this channel to get product suggestions and feedback from friends, especially during the gift-giving season.

By joining the conversation, you can get to know customers' needs and challenges, earn their trust, suggest products they'll like and encourage them to **spread the word**.

Before you get started, think about the **goals** you want to achieve. A few key opportunities may include increasing engagement with "likes" and "shares," earning new followers or generating more e-newsletter signups. Be sure to track and measure your results with the right tools, like Google Analytics, Twitter Analytics and the Facebook Pixel.



## Connect Over Content

Think about your brand's values and interests, and about what makes it different from competitor brands. Use this to **tell your story** on social and shape your content.

**Develop a voice** that reflects your brand's unique personality and resonates with your target audience. Don't just try to sell your customers products; **connect with them**. Show you value them beyond the sale and give them reason to want to engage with you.

Create an **editorial calendar** that outlines when you will post certain thematic content and promotions. Make sure to leave room for posts about timely events or trending pop-culture content.

Keep your content consistent across all of your social media channels. Include photos and videos, which are more engaging and aid to the "shareability" of your content. In fact, [Hubspot](#) reports that content with relevant images receives 94% more views, and shoppers who view video are nearly 2x more likely to purchase than non-viewers.

## Keep It (Consistently) Festive

**Carry over any holiday design** you've implemented on your site to your social accounts (fonts, winter imagery, etc.).

This will help put your followers in the holiday spirit, remind them that it's gift-giving season and enable them to have a **consistent brand experience** when they visit your site to shop.

*For more on this, revisit chapter 2 on holiday design.*

## Prevent (and Prepare for) Firestorms

While social media is a great place for customers to spread holiday cheer for your brand, it can also be a breeding ground for backlash.

Prevent any social firestorms by making sure your website is working properly and that you're ready to **accommodate the holiday rush** (including increased traffic, shipping and returns).

Create a professional and polite **templated response** that you can use to address any negative comments and/or important questions that may arise in a timely manner.

## Extend Your Reach with Paid Ads

Outside of the your social posts, you can extend your audience reach by paying to "boost" featured content or promos, or by purchasing ad space on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Ads that perform best in the social space use content that is **relevant, high-quality** and **creatively compelling**. Social networks offer advertising options and guidelines to help you achieve all three of these goals.

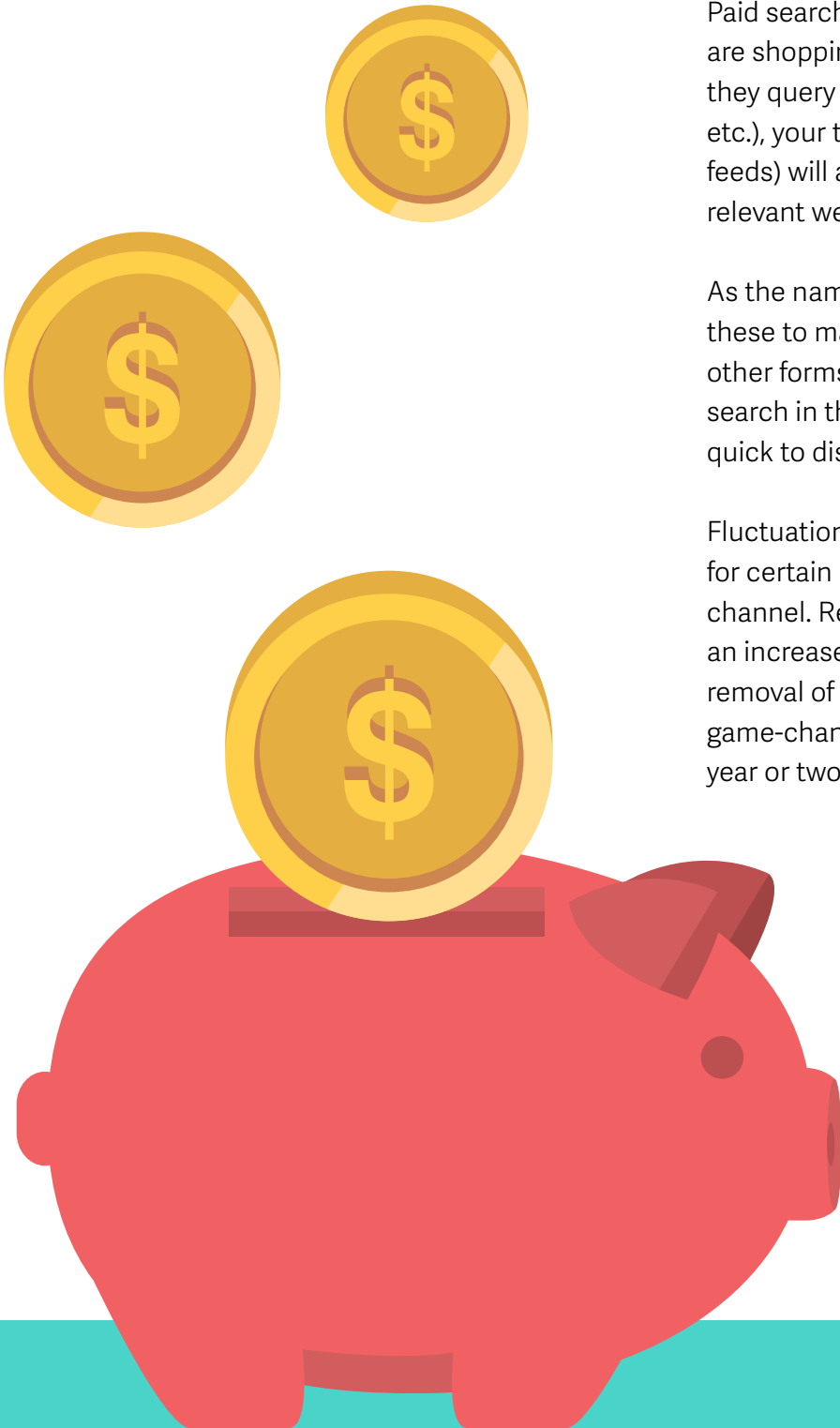


# 9 tips for creating click-worthy seasonal ads for social:



1. Make the most of **mobile ad placements**; almost 80% of social media time is now spent on mobile<sup>3</sup>, and users are 2x more likely to share content via mobile than on desktop<sup>4</sup>.
2. Boost the shareability factor by tapping into the **emotional benefit** of your business and/or telling a story through a particular aspect of the holiday, like [Banana Republic](#) did.
3. Tell a visually driven story to maximize engagement and minimize conversion. **Video ads** are **5x more engaging**<sup>5</sup> than banner ads and carousel ads<sup>6</sup>, using multiple images, get a **10x more clicks**.
4. Use **highly engaging** images to grab attention.
5. Keep your messaging **clear, concise** and **consistent** across all social media; follow guidelines for character count for each individual channel.
6. Listen to your audience and design a campaign tailored to **specific shopper needs**.
7. Consider co-creating a campaign with a **relevant charity** to demonstrate the goodwill of your brand, while increasing social media buzz.
8. Implement your own **unique hashtags** for each seasonal social media campaign.
9. Include **call-to-action buttons**.

# Paid Search: Help Shoppers Find What's on Their Wish Lists



Paid search ads are a great way to direct those who are shopping for what you offer to your store. When they query specific keywords (on Google, Bing, etc.), your text ads or product listings (aka shopping feeds) will appear on the search results page and on relevant websites.

As the name implies, you have to spend money on these to make money (just as you do with many other forms of advertising). But if you've tried paid search in the past without great results, don't be too quick to dismiss it.

Fluctuations in both search volume and competition for certain keywords makes it an ever-changing channel. Recent tweaks to Google Adwords (like an increase in the character count of ads and the removal of ads from the right-hand rail) are also game-changers. As such, campaigns from even a year or two ago may yield different results today.

## Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Text Ads

If you're thinking about implementing paid search ads for the holidays, now's the time to start planning your campaign (roughly **two months before** buying season).

The biggest resource you'll use for this is [Google AdWords](#). It's where you'll create the ad, and define when and where you'd like it to appear, as well as how frequently.

Your ads will appear on searches relevant to your business' keywords. And you'll only pay for the results it generates. If a shopper clicks your ad to visit your site, a small fee (a bid of what you're willing to pay for your ad to show up) is sent to Google.

[Volusion blogs](#), Google and YouTube are great sources of in-depth info on these ads. But here are a few quick-start tips:

### **Choose 5-10 relevant landing pages.**

This is where shoppers will arrive after clicking on your ad. They can include your homepage, category pages or top-performing product pages.

By selecting 5-10 different pages, you can create different sets of keywords that target each of these pages distinctly. This may seem like a small amount to start with, but consider the fact that 20% of your products will contribute to 80% of your clicks and sales. If you become confident working with ads, you can always expand later.

### **Write an enticing ad.**

Google has fixed guidelines (regarding the character count) for the ad, but it will generally include an attention-grabbing headline and two lines of support text.

The two lines of text should include your enticing value-adds like "wide selection," "free shipping" and

"easy returns." They should also highlight why a customer should shop your site instead of anywhere else and remove as many pain points as possible.

### **Develop a list of keywords.**

PPC text ads are triggered by individual searches. Within your AdWords account, you'll create a list of keywords for your ad that tells Google "I want my ad to appear when a user searches for X."

Your keywords will target and characterize the landing pages you have selected. Great keywords and phrases include product titles, brands and descriptions about the specific items on that page. For example, if someone queries "necklaces," you don't want to send them to a page with earrings. Avoid overtly vague keywords like "best" and "cheapest."

### **Set a bid.**

With paid search, you are competing against other stores for a limited number of searches. This is where your bid comes in. A bid tells Google how much you're willing to pay for your ad to appear, and will normally range from \$.05 to a few dollars.

Use the [AdWords bid simulator](#) to gain an understanding of what the going rates are for certain keywords, then set your bids accordingly. You only want to appear in searches that are relevant to your business, and you want to be mindful of your budget and focus on the keywords that will make you profitable.

### **Launch your campaign.**

If this is your first campaign, we recommend launching it in late October to early November. This gives you time to monitor the results, especially during your peak shopping hours, and make adjustments to optimize your ad performance before the holiday rush.



## Shopping Feeds

Shopping feeds are the image-based equivalent of PPC text ads. However with shopping feeds, Google pairs shoppers' searches with the info that you provide about your product (the title and description).

When thinking about using shopping feeds during the holidays, there are a few factors to be aware of:

### **Start early.**

It takes time to learn all of the ins-and-outs of the [Google Merchant Center](#) — the mission control center for shopping feeds. We recommend getting started sooner than later to make sure everything is in place for an on-time and successful campaign launch.

### **Follow the rules.**

The Google Merchant Center has strict but [clear requirements](#) that you must adhere to when submitting your campaign for approval, including product descriptions, weights and stock. Failure to provide a required or recommended attribute may prevent your item from showing up in Google Shopping results or may result in the item showing up less frequently.

### **Be competitive.**

Bidding for shopping feeds is different than for PPC text ads. Instead of bidding on keywords, you have options to bid by sku, brand, category and other product attributes. As such, the product info you submit needs to be descriptive.

Additionally, as four ads appear at once (rather than two or three text ads), competition is stiff. Make sure your products have excellent product images and that your bid is competitive.

For more info on how to get started with shopping feeds, go straight to the source: [Google](#).



# Jingle All The Way: Converting Holiday Sales

Now that you know how to attract holiday shoppers to your store, next you have to convert your traffic into sales. The key is help your shoppers easily find what they're looking and make checking out as painless as possible. Read on to learn how.

## Feliz Navigation

Make it easy for shoppers to navigate your store. Keep your pages **well organized** and make sure there's a **similar look and feel** from page to page. Check your fonts and sizes, and use [consistent product page images](#), which have been shown to increase average revenue per visitor by **17%**.

## Pre-Holiday Test Run

Ask a friend or someone in your target market to shop on your site. Are they having difficulties somewhere? Are they asking a lot of questions? Chances are, if they're having trouble, others are, too. Remove any barriers to purchase by making sure that your site answers all potential questions about your products, shipping and payment options.

## Know Before You Ho-Ho

Take a look at how your customers use your website before the holidays begin. **Google Analytics** can tell you a lot about the people visiting your website, from demographic information to how they're navigating your website. [These Google Analytics](#) reports can help you find actionable ways to improve your conversion rate.

We especially recommend reviewing the **User Flow Report** to see which steps in the conversion process are losing the most users. You may be able to find

an easy way to get more visitors to purchase, such as adding more product information or providing a different view in your product images.

## Dashing Through The Sale

Some customers bail at the point of sale because they don't want to create a new account or type in lengthy shipping and billing info. To improve your conversion rate, it's essential to offer them **quick and convenient checkout**.

Review your checkout flow and look for ways to reduce it to as few steps as necessary. One way is to offer your customers the option to quickly access stored billing and shipping info, like with **PayPal checkout**, which is available through Volusion.

This convenience is one reason that merchants who offer both PayPal and credit-card checkout see **70% higher conversion rates** than those who offer only credit-card payment options.

### PayPal = KaChing

- Merchants with PayPal as a payment option have a **26% higher** conversion rate. (Nielsen's Buyer Insights Research)
- Conversion rate with PayPal checkout (**87.5%**) is nearly **double** the conversion rate of competing payment types online. (ComScore 2016)
- PayPal processes **36% more** online transactions than competing wallets. (ComScore 2015)

## Make It Mobile Friendly

We know people like the convenience of shopping via mobile. According to PayPal's data from Black Friday 2015, **36%** of online transactions were made on a smartphone or tablet.

But, remarkably, only 3% of products viewed on mobile are actually purchased. This may be because customers are deterred by having to enter shipping and billing details on small screens.

Make it easy for customers to convert by offering a better mobile checkout experience, such as through PayPal's new [OneTouch](#) feature. This allows them to skip logging in and entering their personal info at the point of purchase.

### Mobile Madness

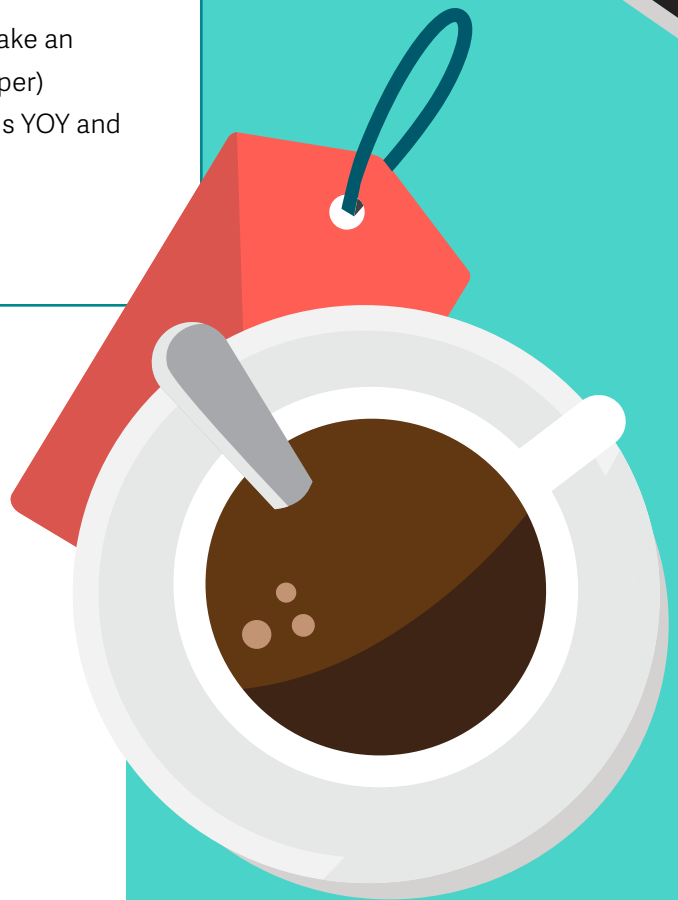
- Mobile commerce grew **40%** YOY and nearly **1/2** of all digital commerce was mobile. (ComScore, 2016)
- Four in ten mobile users have used their device to make an online purchase. (2016 UPS Pulse of the Online Shopper)
- PayPal has seen a 41% increase in mobile transactions YOY and 1/2 of all PayPal transactions are mobile. (PayPal)

## Offer A Credit Option

Once the domain of large retailers, financing is now being offered by small- and mid-sized businesses, too, through PayPal Credit.

By offering credit, you give shoppers **payment flexibility** and the freedom to spend more than they might otherwise.

Small businesses that advertise financing with PayPal Credit banners on their sites have reported sales increases up to **18%**.



# Countdown To Black Friday: Your Checklist

Any good idea requires proper planning to go off without a hitch and give you the best chance at success. Before springing into action, take a second to plan out your holiday season from every angle.

We've made a list. You check it (twice). Hopefully your sales will be nothing but nice.

## September - October

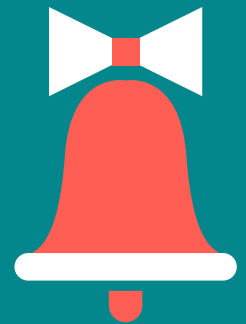
- Review budget expectations** – What revenue does your site require during the holiday season to cover costs for the year and turn a profit? What sort of extra costs can be incurred to offer discounts for customers and move discontinued stock? Does there need to be a budget for contracted professionals and seasonal support staff? What does your holiday advertising budget look like? These are a few things to consider as you plan to budget for the holiday push.
- Create a marketing calendar** – Prepping for the s-bowl of shopping requires a carefully crafted marketing plan that takes into account your store's inventory and budget. Develop a calendar that maps out when your sale(s) will start being promoted, when product stock will need to be cleared out, etc.
- Stock up top-sellers** – You're likely to see a large portion of your holiday revenue come a few popular products that sell well year-round. Have them well stocked to anticipate the seasonal surge.
- Build some buzz** – Newsletters, blogs and social media posts are great ways to drum up interest in your store, especially around select product lines or during sales. Contests that award access to "premium" products, exclusive promo codes or free gifts can help incentivize early adopters and get them to spread the word.

# November

- Work out the kinks** – The last thing you need during a holiday rush is for any aspect of your store to not operate smoothly. Make sure your shipping and return policies are clear and easy to understand. Run through the checkout process from start to finish to ensure every step functions as it should. Experiment with different payment types and test shipping calculations. In short: Test everything!
- Haul out the homepage holly** – Holiday homepage graphics and banners promoting certain product lines or sales are highly effective ways to put shoppers in the holiday spirit. Use this tactic for social media flash-sale promotions as well.
- Help shoppers find what they want** – Create clear category labels so shoppers can find exactly what they're looking for. Consider building easy pathways to products for specific audience segments. For example, "Gifts for Her," "Gifts for Every Budget" and "Last Minute Gifts" categories.
- Don't alienate anyone** – Christmas may be the most hyped holiday of the season, but not everyone celebrates it. Be mindful of this when considering your site's holiday design and promos. If you're concerned about alienating anyone, opt for winter imagery and general "happy holiday" or "season's greetings" messages.
- Showcase the small stuff and related items** – Shoppers often add on smaller-ticket items to complement a larger gift. Make sure they are easily visible as customers move through the shopping process, as this will help move inventory and increase average order volumes.

# Black Friday & Beyond

- Be extra social** – These days, customers turn to social media more than the phone or email to ask questions about products, resolve shipping issues or voice concerns over their shopping experience. Be active, attentive and alert on social media throughout the shopping season.
- Amplify the customer voice** – Enable customers to easily share their thoughts on products and the shopping experience overall. Their effect can turn skeptics into believers and browsers into buyers. It can also benefit your SEO efforts.
- Keep promoting** – Take advantage of shopping's greatest season. Send relevant messages and promotions across multiple marketing channels and optimize what works. You may lure prospects away from competitors, gain new customers and win repeat business that results in sales even after the holiday hoopla.



Sources:

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