

The Omnichannel Marketer's Holiday Domination Guide

DATA-DRIVEN TIPS, TRICKS, AND HACKS



Contents

September's Too Late
– When to Start Planning
for 2018 Holidays

04

Yesteryear
Results and Insights

06

Personalization
Tools of the Trade

10

The Seamless
Brand Experience

14

Final
Thoughts

18

Introduction

If you're a marketer in e-commerce or retail, you have a busy summer ahead of you, and it's not just the warm weather campaigns you already have underway. You need to look ahead as well because far more critical than sales in the first three quarters of the year, the Q4 holiday season is only a few months away.

Considering how much revenue rides on the holidays, you can't phone it in. In the US, you have to devise a plan now for each of the holiday highpoints beginning the day after Thanksgiving with Black Friday (or for some brands, Thanksgiving Day itself), and it has to be amazing, predictive, and all-encompassing.

But where should you start? First you might look at the sales and discounts you've offered in past years, but all you get from that is a general picture of consumers reacting to discounts.

Maybe you should review the individual customer data you've amassed and try to detect a pattern, but you have thousands of customers. Each profile contains important data that should indicate the best approach, but it takes you a day or two to analyze just a handful of these customers.

While blindly generalizing your past interactions with customers is not the worst thing you could do, it leaves an enormous amount of room for improvement. You have to take a hard look at how your marketing team currently operates, specifically focusing on three proven objectives that lead to a successful holiday season:

- ▶ Compile a unified profile containing online and offline history for every customer.
- ▶ Leverage technology to create truly personal customer engagement.
- ▶ Take everything you've learned about customer engagement and establish a personalized, consistent brand experience across all channels.

Don't panic. You still have time. This guide covers what's at stake every Q4, how customers find brands and what motivates them to convert. We'll also point out the challenges you face as you struggle to analyze your data from a range of channels and translate it into an effective strategy that will engage customers and win their holiday business.

September's Too Late — When to Start Planning for 2018 Holidays

The Earlier You Plan, the Less You Have to Worry about in November

The digital age has taken the power from brands and given it to customers. They're the ones who decide when they want to purchase and through which channel. It's up to the brands to pay attention and meet customers wherever they are. For example, some industries consider Halloween to be the start of the Q4 holiday season, like toys and games which saw a 260% uptick in browsing around the end of October 2017.



According to a National Retail Federation report, 40% of consumers now begin browsing and researching before October 31 due in large part to the growth of mobile. This impacts every industry in a specific way, but the takeaway for all brands is that September is steadily no longer early enough to get going.

In the past, brands put planning off until the last minute – some even dragged into October, and a recent Search Engine Land survey shows that this is still the norm with almost 18% of respondents only buckling down to plan in September, barely 2 months ahead of Q4 holidays. Although 12% say they plan year-round, another 12% still start in October, 8% in November, and 9% say they have no time to plan whatsoever.

A study by BigCommerce shows that nearly 89% of the brands surveyed expected a YoY sales increase, with more than half of them anticipating that increase to be as high as 25%, and yet still 54% of

retailers did not accelerate their planning in any way in 2017. However, there is a growing movement to leave the status quo behind, with 31% of surveyed retailers kicking off their holiday planning one to two months earlier than they did in 2016, and a wise but small 4.5% started at least three months earlier than the previous year.

Your ultimate goal is to have your campaigns ready to launch in early October. That means you've got to start even earlier, as in late June or early July.

But timing is just one huge piece of the holiday-planning puzzle. Once you decide on when to start, you have to decide how you're going to actually put your strategy together.



Yesteryear Results and Insights

Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the 2017 Holiday Shopping Season

To fully prepare for the upcoming holidays this year, marketers should first review the results of the previous Q4, and 2017 was an interesting year where traditionally strong channels gave way to up-and-coming disruptors. But perhaps one of the greatest lessons is that the physical store is not only not dying, but a few brands are figuring out how to merge online and offline channels to give shoppers a consistent brand experience and as many browsing and purchasing options as possible.



The 2017 Holiday Shopping Season Overall

Effort matters during the Q4 holiday period running from November 1 through December 24. Many retailers stand to make between 30% and 40% of their annual sales between Black Friday and Christmas, and in some cases, starting promotions as early as November 1 boosted sales for the three weeks leading up to the Thanksgiving weekend.

Overall, most retailers and e-commerce did quite well. With 58 out of 61 days during the 2017 holiday season generating over \$1 billion, online shopping was up 14.7%. Total holiday retail sales rose \$32.8 billion, or 4.8% over the previous year to \$691.1 billion, including \$108.2 billion in online and other non-store sales. This was the largest YoY increase since 2011. In preparation for last year's holidays, many brands adjusted their advertising budgets and targeted channels based on data from the year before.

In a couple of surveys, respondents confirmed the following:

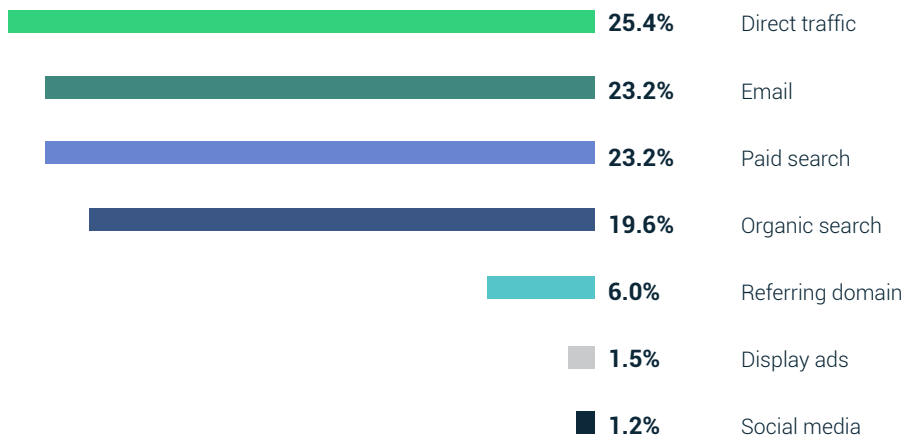
- ▶ 70% of respondents increased both search and social budgets.
- ▶ 56% bulked up display retargeting budgets.
- ▶ 65% used dynamic retargeting ads.
- ▶ 75% boosted their Google budgets with 25% of brands more than doubling their Google budgets.
- ▶ Nearly 40% spent more on Bing.
- ▶ 66% increased their Facebook ads budget.

As a result, search marketers enjoyed a 19.4% uptick in average order values (AOV). Conversions were up 15.6%, and impressions up 12.8%.

The Cyber 5: Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday

It's no surprise that over time Black Friday has been combined with Cyber Monday to produce a 5-day shopping weekend, or the Cyber 5 as it's referred to more and more. In 2017, the Cyber 5 weekend brought in \$19.6 billion in total online sales, up 10.1% from the previous year,

and customers spent \$335 on average. For the five-day event, mobile accounted for 52% of the browsing and 33% of the purchasing, and mobile sales grew 18% YoY. It's also worth noting how customers came to the brands:



As you might expect, direct and paid search are at the top, but email is up there too, showing that as a channel, email is still one of the best ways to engage customers. It's important to note that Black Friday and

the Cyber 5 weekend are not isolated to North America. UK retailers made 46% more for the weekend than they did in an average day online. Spain was up 35%, and South Africa was up 41%.

Thanksgiving Day

As a prelude to Black Friday, Thanksgiving Day had a great 2017 with \$2.87 billion in sales, up 18.3% YoY with 46% of online purchases coming from mobile devices. Mobile online revenue for the day grew 28%, and online purchases went up 35%. Retailers made more online, but they did it with promotions or items that were lower priced.

If you look at Thanksgiving and Black Friday together, US retailers made \$7.9 billion in online sales (up 17.9% from the previous year). Revenue grew by 23%, and in-store foot traffic was down 2%, in part because so many brick-and-mortar retailers didn't open their stores on Thanksgiving.

Black Friday

Black Friday experienced sales growth yet again with \$5.08 billion online, up 16.9% YoY, and second only to Cyber Monday in sales. Online revenue was up 21% YoY, and average order value grew 24% despite the fact that the number of items per order was actually down 3%. Foot traffic, however, was only down less than 1%.

Of the \$5 billion, mobile was responsible for \$2 billion, with a whopping 282% rise in mobile app sales and a 27% increase in mobile browser sales. Mobile purchases made up 36.9% of all sales and 54.3% of all website visits. Smartphones alone were responsible for 26% of revenue and 44.6% of visits.

Small Business Saturday

Out of the Cyber 5 holidays, Small Business Saturday is the one that aims the customer at the smaller regional businesses, and last year, a number of small retailers were able to outperform large retailers in terms of converting an online visit into a sale.

With a total of \$2.43 billion in sales, a 10.8% increase YoY, Small Business Saturday received 46.5% of smartphone share-of-visits, the highest of the season up to that point. There are even some platforms that have made that easier for small business owners, like Amazon, which helped sell 140 million items, and Shopify, which processed more than \$1 billion in sales. When you combine Small Business Saturday with the Thanksgiving weekend's Sunday (\$2.69 billion in sales), the two days delivered \$5.12 billion in online sales, which is +10% YoY.

Cyber Monday

The Monday after Thanksgiving is the biggest single day of online shopping, and Cyber Monday 2017 set a record for the largest US online shopping day ever with \$6.59 billion in sales, up 16.8% YoY. AOV was only up 0.1%, so it appears that the additional \$1 billion in sales came from a lot more people shopping that Monday.

E-commerce companies, in particular, saw their best Cyber Monday ever, bringing in over \$2 billion in sales, which included a 220% increase in sales through mobile apps, a 52% increase in mobile browser sales, and a 12% increase in desktop purchases.

Green Monday

In 2017, Green Monday (the second Monday in December) fell on December 11. Often this is the last chance for retailers to clear out their Christmas stock, and customers enjoy some big last-minute discounts up to 90%. For example, Target offered \$20 cash back for every \$100 spent on certain categories, while other brands like Saks advertised up to 80% off and free shipping. Again, mobile made some monstrous gains on Green Monday, driving mobile revenue up 51% and transactions up 44%.

Free Shipping Day

More and more brands are using Free Shipping Day, which fell on December 15, 2017, to entice customers to purchase a few more items. Total revenue was up 16%, and customer transactions were up 14% YoY, but mobile made the most notable gains with +52% in revenue and +44% in transactions.

Super Saturday

Super Saturday is the last Saturday before Christmas Eve — in 2017, this Saturday came the day before Christmas Eve — and it's consumers' last chance to purchase gifts and get them shipped home in time for Christmas Day. In fact, in 2017, the entire week leading up to Christmas saw higher spending than the Thanksgiving weekend, but Super Saturday 2017 was the second highest omnichannel shopping day of the year, just after Black Friday. Some industries, like jewelry, shot up 5.9% as customers made last-minute purchases.

Beyond Christmas

In 2017, Christmas Day saw the biggest increase in mobile shopping compared to the previous year, with 50% of all online purchases made on a mobile device. This proves that just because Christmas has come, customers are by no means done looking for a deal.

Brands are either trying to sell out Christmas stock or begin new sales to draw customers in to purchase at sizable discounts. The day after Christmas, December 26, saw a spending peak where customers took advantage of post-Christmas sales or used gift cards they'd just received the day before.

In some industries, like beauty and skin care, traffic remained brisk and high with a 41% increase for Dec. 26-30. Brands still need to engage

customers, and when they look at the data for lifecycles, a picture starts to come in focus. According to Rakuten data:

- ▶ 27% of first-time buyers purchase a second time.
- ▶ 45% of two-time buyers make repeat purchases.
- ▶ 66% of five-time buyers with a single brand make repeat purchases.

Staying on top of lifecycle stages is key during this period, and brands that extend their holiday season past Christmas stand to bring in 10% of their total holiday sales.

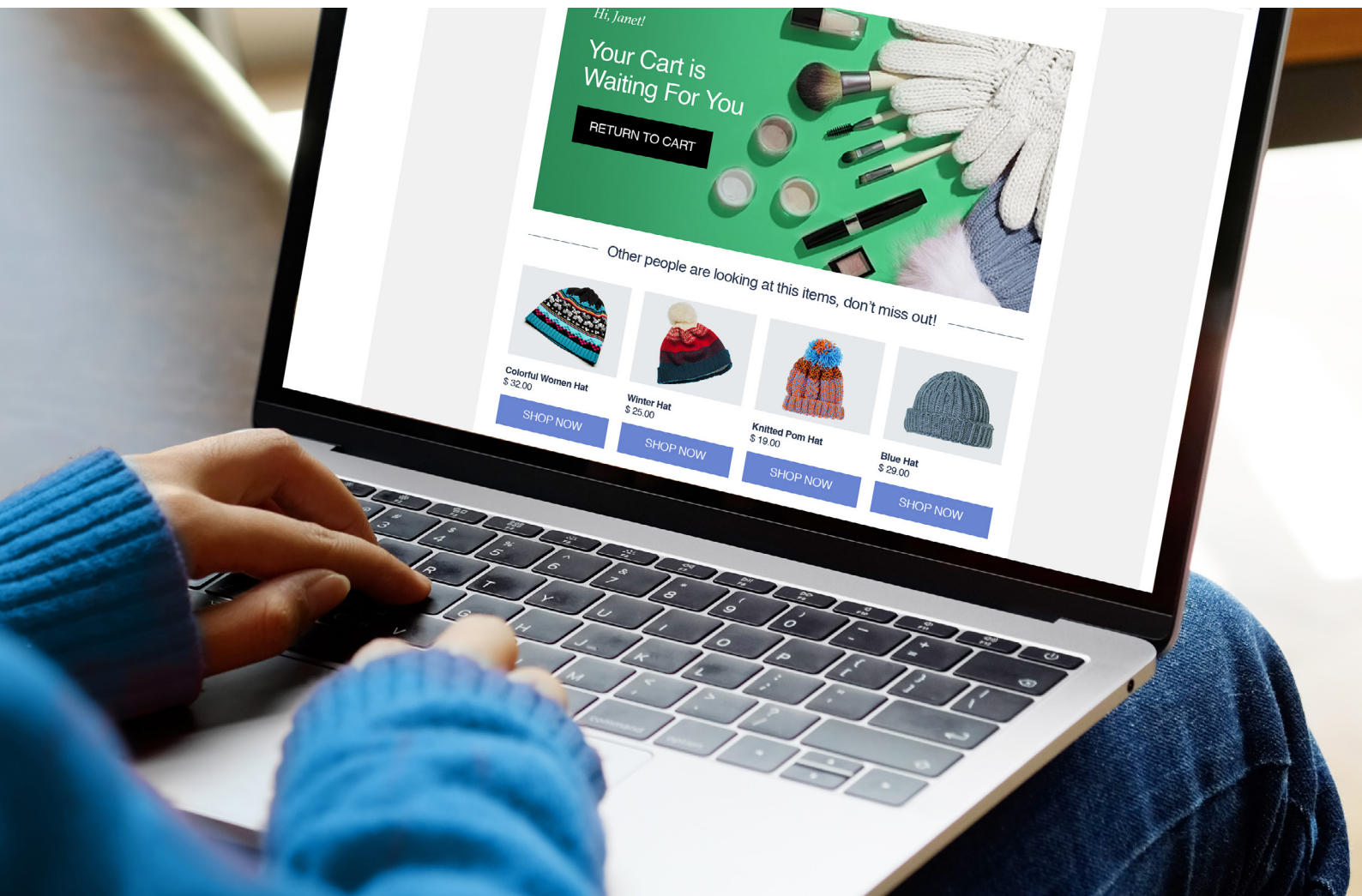
Retailers stand to make 30%-40% of their annual sales between Black Friday and Christmas, and brands that extend their holiday season past Christmas stand to make 10% of their total holiday sales.

Personalization Tools of the Trade

Strategize and Leverage Technology to Deliver Truly Personalized Interactions

Delivering truly personal customer interactions has been a long-time goal of marketing, but the problem has always been doing it at scale. With the holiday shopping season as the biggest scale-needy time of the year, panic can break out in the late summer months as marketers look ahead to craft their holiday strategies, but there are things that technology can help you with.

Using machine learning and data analysis, marketers can leverage their customer profile data to personalize all interactions with their customers, including seasonal offers and incentives tailored to the individual.



Scale Your Marketing with AI and Machine Learning

Now that artificial intelligence (AI) has matured in terms of the features it offers and the accuracy of the insights it derives, scaling is no longer a moonshot. AI's been around for a while; anyone who's ever gone on Amazon and seen the section "Product Recommendations for you" has witnessed a form of AI called machine learning, which uses pattern recognition to determine what customers have done in the past to predict what they might do in the future.

A marketer can then take this one step further and apply data science to the machine learning results and gain data-driven insights that they can then turn into actionable marketing opportunities. You can also use AI to both segment your customers into distinct, targeted groups and establish how much of an incentive each customer needs to convert.

Segment with Data-Driven Strategies

Data works best when you have all of it, but that's the chief problem for some marketing departments: Collecting all the data from both online and offline touchpoints and then putting it all in one place where everyone on your marketing team can access it.

The holiday season generates a huge amount of profile data that will tell you which channels and devices a customer prefers, as well as how frequently they buy from you, what sort of products they buy, and how they react to discounts, promotions, and other holiday messaging. With all your customers' information at your fingertips, you can build a

holiday campaign strategy well in advance of November and precisely target the customers most likely to buy from you (and you know how likely they are to buy based on their past purchasing data).

In addition to campaigns, you can leverage AI technology to decipher the best ways to personalize your customers' experiences with your brand, pinpoint abandoned carts, initiate customized win-back campaigns, and even reach out to customers who have opted-out of email.

Identify the Customer's Lifecycle Stage

The unified customer profile helps you determine the best action to take with particular customer lifecycle stages, such as when they might defect, what kinds of incentives might motivate them to come back, and whether they are one-time buyers, repeat customers, or VIP customers who regularly spend a good deal of money during the holiday season.

First, you'll look for patterns and chart your predictions based on cart values, the time between purchases, and total number of touchpoints used.




You can compare high-volume, lower-cost sales against low-volume, higher-cost sales, and see which one makes more sense. Or track the cost of customer acquisition vs. customer retention and compare it against the ROI you bring in. Then you can choose and launch the appropriate campaign, whether it's abandoned cart, browse abandon, or win-back.

Preferred Devices

Part of personalization is meeting your customers wherever they are, and if you've got good data on your customers, you should be able to target them on the devices they use the most.

A recent survey showed that 40% of all transactions now take place on multiple devices as people research a gift on one device, like a tablet, and then purchase it with their laptop, or browsing on mobile but going in-store to actually buy products.

That means you need to reach customers in the channels and on the devices they prefer, and that's been changing a lot over the past few years. From November 1 to December 31, 2017, the e-com pie was cut up like so:

		2016	2017	Growth Rate
	Desktops and laptops	69%	67% (\$72.3B)	-2.0%
	Smartphones	21%	23% (\$25B)	+2.0%
	Tablets	10%	10% (\$10.8B)	0%

Desktop will continue to lose out to mobile for the foreseeable future, and tablets seem to have plateaued. If you haven't already, it's time to fortify your mobile strategy and the way you use in-app and SMS messaging.

Smart Incentives

Sales are synonymous with holiday shopping. Black Friday and Cyber Monday alone promote some of the deepest discounts for the entire year, but this one-to-many approach to incentives creates problems for retailers and e-commerce, problems that they might not even be able to identify without AI.

A brand could bring in as much as 94% of its Black Friday revenue from new customers responding to discounts. However, the vast majority of these first-time buyers wander away, leaving some companies with a very sad 6% customer retention rate. The only way to combat this is to greatly personalize the interaction with customers.

Enormous discounts also affect your margins, and they're not always necessary to persuade people to buy. Some customers are happy with not having to pay for shipping. In these cases, you're just bleeding yourself dry by offering a discount on top of free shipping. However, if you invest in a little A/B testing, you can determine where the discount sweet spot is that leaves your margins in good shape but that also pleases the customer.

For example, in 2017, the number of sales and discounts maxed out the week before Thanksgiving where the average in-store discount was 20%. That number climbed up to 37% on Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday, and Small Business Saturday. However, online sales were better on Thanksgiving than Black Friday when the average discount was 24%, proving that giant discounts don't always win over the customer.

Leverage AI technology to decipher the best ways to personalize your customers' experiences with your brand, pinpoint abandoned carts, initiate customized win-back campaigns, and even reach out to customers who have opted-out of email.

The Seamless Brand Experience

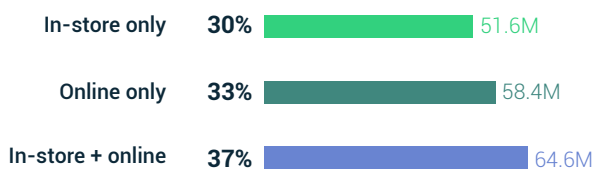
Establish a Personalized, Consistent Brand Experience Across All Channels

You've cleaned up your data, got it organized, maybe pruned your subscription list down to the customers who really value that communication, and you've implemented AI and machine learning to scale all the data decisions a marketer has to make to engage customers. Now it's time to take all this hard work to the next level and create a uniform experience across all channels for your brand.

Historically, apart from logos and tag lines, a company's channel presence was often so varied that a customer calling into a call center would have an experience completely different from what she might see in a brick-and-mortar store, which was also different than browsing the website or using a mobile app. It's not enough to simply have "some kind" of marketing presence in multiple channels. To achieve a true omnichannel approach, brands must also make sure that each channel matches what customers have come to expect from the brand.



Here's why: Consumers get to choose which channels they shop and purchase through, not the brands. Out of 174.6 million shoppers in the US during the 2017 holidays, customers broke down into three basic groups, each requiring its own holiday marketing strategy:



While the in-store + online crowd is the biggest, the three groups make up fairly equal thirds in the market. The most popular online-only day is Cyber Monday, followed by Black Friday, while the most popular in-store day is Black Friday, followed by Small Business Saturday. However, customers who do shop and purchase both online and off spend \$82 more than online-only and \$49 more than in-store only.

There is no time more important than the holiday shopping season when your omnichannel approach has to work. Therefore, you need to account for several key components this summer to ensure your holiday marketing plan is executed well.

Mobile and Push Notifications

Successful brands respect mobile for its continued growth as a channel that customers like to use for shopping and buying, and with good reason: Over the 2017 Thanksgiving weekend, mobile made gains again.

- ▶ Mobile had its first \$2B day on Cyber Monday.
- ▶ 47.4% of site visits (39.9% smartphones, 7.6% tablets).
- ▶ 37% of revenue came from mobile.
- ▶ +1.9% lift in AOV for mobile purchases.
- ▶ +14.2% YoY in conversions.
- ▶ 66% of Black Friday orders were made with mobile, pushing desktop down 8% from the previous year.

Over the past two years, mobile apps have become a critical way for customers to interact with brands, especially during late November and December. In addition to the helpful features built into the app, in-app

messaging is a powerful marketing tool. The retention rate for apps that don't use in-app messages is 13%, compared to 46% for apps that do.

Plus, you can automate in-app messaging for specific goals, such as cart abandonment. With the average online cart abandonment rate currently at 78%, one efficient way to mitigate this problem is to use automated triggers to deploy real-time messaging, such as sending a discount code within the app.

As part of your mobile channel, push notifications are a tremendous way to engage your customers and extend a meaningful omnichannel experience. Based on the analysis of the data that the pushes generate, you can optimize the frequency of sending notices and nail down the right times to deliver a price drop that the individual customer is likely to take advantage of. Push notifications are also a reliable delivery method for relevant, helpful content, such as feature updates, special holiday incentives, restocked item alerts, and other time-sensitive discounts and service-related benefits.

Perhaps most importantly, push messages provide the opportunity to personalize your messages and recommendations to suit the individual customer.

These efforts reap rewards. 50% of customers opt-in for push notifications and find them useful. Moreover, 65% of customers come back to the app within 30 days when push messaging is enabled, and push notifications boost app engagement by 88%. In some cases, push messages have achieved a fivefold revenue increase during promotions.

Email

A foundational component of omnichannel, email is still the killer app, the largest social network on earth, and the #1 ROI digital channel, doubling the revenue of the #2 digital channel pay-per-click (PPC). In Q4 2017, email was responsible for 20% of all website traffic.

All year long, you're building up your email list for the Q4 holiday shopping season. Take some time at the start of Q3 to review the list, and compare it against your AI-driven customer data. Then segment your list targeting customers who haven't bought from you in a while as well as those who don't respond well to a glut of emails. As you ramp up for Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and beyond, identify the content you want to promote through email, and set aside some giveaways and special promotions.

Another tip would be to whittle the uninterested out of your newsletter subscription. Send a message to the whole list and ask them to opt-in or opt-out. That way, you'll only be engaging the customers who are interested in your brand and your content. Open and click-through rates will go up, and perhaps conversions will too.

Web

Websites are a huge foundational part of an omnichannel strategy, so it should be no surprise that online continues to grow during the holidays. Not only did e-commerce set another Cyber Monday sales record in 2017, but overall, online sales went up 16% to \$453.5 billion for the entire 2017 Q4 holiday season and were responsible for 8.9% of total sales for the year.

Consider adding personalization to your website in the form of product recommendation widgets. As we mentioned before, these widgets use machine learning to pull in relevant products for each contact and can add a personalized touch to the customer experience and ensure customers are seeing similar products across channels.

SMS

Shoppers still respond to marketing text messages, which is great news for brands. From a purely financial perspective, a customer service call center costs several dollars per conversation, whereas a single text conversation costs a few cents. Since SMS messages are less intrusive than phone calls, most people read text messages within the first three seconds of receiving them. What's more, unlike email campaigns, SMS marketing messages have a staggering 98% open rate. While not every one of those opened texts results in a sale, 29% of targeted customers will respond to text messages, and 47% of those responders go on to make a purchase.

Add a CTA for SMS to your website and marketing emails in an attempt to get opt-ins prior to the holiday season. That way, you can reach customers across multiple channels come holiday time.

Social Media

Social media continues to be a big influencer on online and offline purchases, but it's also one of the public faces of your brand and goes a long way toward establishing a positive relationship with your audience. During Black Friday 2017, Best Buy stood out from the competition because of the overwhelmingly positive sentiment customers were expressing about the brand on social media.

Crafting holiday messaging is critical, but so is handling the negative and positive comments that customers can leave during the holiday season. Just make sure that your staff is properly briefed for monitoring social media networks and ready to respond in a way that's consistent with the other channels in your brand's wheelhouse.

Digital Advertising

Facebook isn't just a social network tool any more than Google is just a search engine. They're both prime marketing channels, and brands in 2017 allocated even more money to this kind of advertising for the holiday season. A Marketing Land survey of retailers found that:

- ▶ 70% of brands increased budgets for both Facebook and Google.
- ▶ 66% had bigger Facebook ad budgets than the previous year.
- ▶ Over 75% raised their Google budgets — with a quarter of those increasing the budgets by more than 50%.
- ▶ 56% increased display retargeting budgets over the previous year.
- ▶ 65% used dynamic retargeting ads during the holidays.

Looking ahead to the 2018 year-end holidays, a BigCommerce report found that 51.61% of retailers see Facebook as their most effective marketing channel, beating out the #1 revenue-generating channel of email by a hair with 51.2%.

Marketers can use digital ads to retarget customers with products they've previously browsed. This way, your brand will stay top of mind for customers throughout the holidays.

In-Store

Contrary to the blogosphere, retail brick-and-mortars are not dead. Not even close. 137 million people shopped in physical stores over the Black Friday weekend, which is up 35 million from 2015, and even though foot traffic was down 4% on Thanksgiving and Black Friday 2017, in-store sales grew 3.4%, the highest increase since 2012. In fact, in-store revenue growth (at \$152.7B) beat e-commerce growth (\$62.5B). Here's a few other notable 2017 physical store stats:

- ▶ 76% of consumers preferred to shop in-store for December holidays.
- ▶ Retail sales grew 4.9% YoY.
- ▶ On Super Saturday (the last Saturday before Christmas Eve), retailers saw a hefty 20% increase in in-store traffic.

Consumers continue to want to shop inside a real store even if they plan to buy online, but the converse is also true. A lot of people browse or even purchase online and then pick up their items in-store. Create a seamless experience for customers by offering an easy transition from online to in-store by offering in-store pickup and including store locations in your marketing messages.

Customer Service

One of the most important channels that customers judge a brand on is your customer service call center. You don't always sell anything through this channel, but you do have a great opportunity to leave customers with a feeling that they were served in a professional manner and their questions and concerns were addressed.

The stakes are high during Q4 which can make it very tough on your customer service reps, but there are things you can do to lower the pressure. Thoroughly test any offers or promotions to make sure there are no unanticipated technical problems that will leach valuable time from your call center.

For a consistent and shopper-friendly experience, your staff needs to be able to talk about several common issues. Besides fielding data security and promotions questions, your call center has to be prepared to discuss shipping and return policies. Specifically, you should offer free shipping or at the very least be very clear about how quickly products will be delivered to customers.

Q4 holiday shoppers who browse and purchase both online and offline spend \$82 more than online-only and \$49 more than in-store only.

Final Thoughts

A successful holiday season depends on careful planning long before the start of Q4. Advances in e-commerce tech have redefined existing channels and opened new ones. Now with AI, marketers can leverage customer profiles to appeal to the individual in whatever online and offline touchpoints they prefer.

Summer is the ideal time to plan for the holidays. Nail down your advertising budget, and create schedules for all your holiday campaigns and promotions. Then compare this year's plan against 2017's holiday data to ensure you're prioritizing the channels that are the most likely to deliver the most ROI.

Lastly, consider all the other holiday shopping days besides the big ones, and create reasons for shoppers to visit your site, app, or store throughout December and even into the weeks after Christmas when there are still shoppers looking to return or purchase at steep clearance discounts. Good luck, marketers. What will you do differently this holiday season?



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