



Deck the Carts

# AI-driven strategies to engage holiday shoppers





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# Introduction: The new holiday reality



**You have two choices for peak-season shopping events:**



## 1. Wait for AI to crash the holiday party.

Be prepared to watch as millions of customers use AI agents to rapidly shop, compare, and purchase—SAP research found that 21% of consumers already use AI systems to help make decisions and purchases (and among Gen Z, it's 43%).

**21%** **of consumers** already use AI systems to help make decisions and purchases

Agent-driven shopping will expose organizational weaknesses, such as fragmented systems, delayed data, and siloed governance.

## 2. Invite AI to your party.

Make it a core part of your strategy for creating truly personalized omnichannel workflows. Pull from your ERP data so you can respond in real-time to buyer intent signals at scale. Show customers you understand their needs and respect their preferences.

As autonomous enterprise capabilities redefine how businesses run, customer patience is disappearing. Only those brands with connected data, business context, and execution can keep up with the pace of agentic commerce.



**Get ready to deck the carts!**



# Secure your holiday experience essentials

Wait just a second! Before you deck any carts or run any campaigns, make sure you've laid the foundation to make the marketing magic.



## **Context-aware, connected data**

Fragmented systems make it impossible to unlock real-time insights, personalization, governance, and, most importantly, the ability to power AI agents. Get all your data integrated, including both customer and operational data, so you have visibility into inventory, customer purchase history, permissions, and beyond.



## **AI that's built-in, not bolted-on**

Ground your fast-moving AI agents in unified data so they can autonomously turn insight into execution. AI shouldn't simply be an overlay across your solutions but instead be infused into ERP foundations. Context is shared, and your holiday campaigns stay aligned to real-time business conditions (like order management and fulfillment), leaving you with newfound confidence.



## **Scalable omnichannel personalization**

Customers expect brands to treat them like VIPs and recognize their preferences, behaviors, and history. To truly personalize customer engagement, marketers must lean into agentic AI to address any fragmented interactions in the customer journey, turning them into cohesive, relevant experiences across channels and at scale.



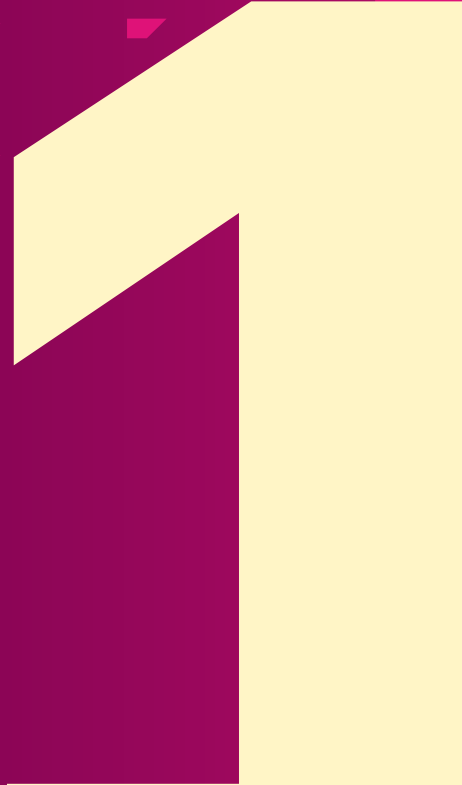
## **Results-driven loyalty management**

Measure customer lifetime value (CLV) ahead of the big event to inform your segmentation and messaging strategies. Surface the financial impact of your loyalty program at a moment's notice and grant visibility into campaign performance during the high peak event itself so you can optimize in real time. Your boss stays informed, and you stay cool under pressure.



# Phase 1:

## Pre-holiday preparation





# Use actionable data to strategize engagement

Connecting your operational and customer data and then activating it is your path to fostering continuous loyalty through the peak seasonal event and beyond.

## 1 Score customers by behavioral signals

Agentic AI can help you break down complex data at scale.

### Base your scoring rubric on key context-aware signals like:

- Customer lifetime value
- Purchase recency and frequency
- Loyalty program membership/tier
- Category affinity
- Price sensitivity
- Channel engagement

After the event, re-score contacts to measure impact.

## 2 Identify target segments

Segments will vary based on brand and business model. With an influx of engagement, seize the opportunity to capture data you didn't have before.

### Use this methodology as your guide:

- Identify the outcomes you want to achieve with each segment.
- Consider where you have customer data gaps and what channels can help you fill them.
- Use dynamic and predictive segments for agility.

Dig deeper: Refer to the table of segments on the next page.

## 3 Make informed predictions about customers' needs

Run segments through predictive AI models that reference ERP data (inventory levels, order status, payment history, or supply chain).

### Use AI to:

- Predict customers' next purchase category.
- Make predictions about responses to discounts—don't over-discount!
- Predict what different segments will shop for (and make sure it's in stock).

Use predictions to communicate internal needs around product stock, finance, staffing, etc.



# Segment your shoppers

Audience segmentation enables you to deliver highly personalized messages. Long before the holiday event arrives, determine who you intend to engage so you can serve their needs.

Segment	Identifying signals	How to engage
VIPs	High lifetime value, frequent purchasers	Provide early access, exclusives, and premium offers.
Repeat buyers (non-VIPs)	Multiple infrequent purchases but low lifetime value	Provide early access and bundled offers to increase cart value.
Loyalty program members	Includes active members ( <i>who claim points</i> ) and inactive ( <i>who don't claim</i> )	Give point bonuses and tier perks, and encourage inactive members to use points.
Advocates	Engaged in referral activity	Alert them in advance about holiday referral rewards and opportunities.
High intent to buy	Unified browsing, purchase, and engagement data showing strong interest in specific products or categories	Reach them quickly with real-time, personalized offers based on their latest signals.



Segment	Identifying signals	How to engage
Price-sensitive buyers	Responsive to offers, sales, and price drops	Clarify savings, demonstrate value, and create urgency around personalized offers.
First-time buyers	Purchased in the past 6–12 months without a second purchase	Nurture them with product tips and recommendations based on purchase.
Browsers	Browsing holiday categories or offers	Offer incentives such as free shipping and extended gift-return policies.
At-risk	Use predictive churn models to identify	Nurture them with win-back and reactivation offers.
Inactive subscribers	Email or app subscribers who haven't made a purchase	Deliver introductory offers and educate on brand value.



# Holiday hero: Now Optics

## Tactic

Now Optics planned an omnichannel back-to-school campaign across email, SMS, web, and digital.

**“We’re using AI for our segmentation, understanding who our customers are in each stage of the lifecycle.** We are also using it with dynamic content, which is reducing the amount of time that our creative team is spending building these assets. Every patient and customer has a unique email or SMS that's going out to them, and we’re seeing that not only they enjoy it, but we also enjoy it because we can then spend our time putting more effort into strategy and coming up with different ideas.”



**Chelsea Kramaritsch**  
Senior Manager, Customer Marketing, Now Optics



[Learn how](#)

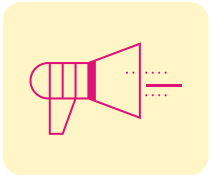
**5.8** million  
engagements from one multichannel  
back-to-school campaign

**65%**  
yoy increase  
in win back rate



# Optimize and test customer experiences

These best practices are essential for peak season prep, but they're also practical all year round:



## Warm up your audience

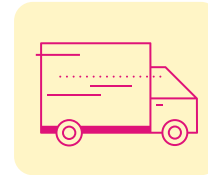
Do not wait until the last minute to email your entire customer base.

That's a great way to get flagged as spam and sink your deliverability. Instead, slowly ramp up your sending volume at least three months leading up to the event.



## Test your discounting

Learn which customers are price-sensitive and exactly how much discount is necessary. Try increasing personalization, using product recommendations, and using AI-optimized content in place of discounts. Avoid discounting products that will sell regardless of promotion. Plus, with a data foundation built on your ERP, you'll have real-time access to pricing, inventory, and promotion eligibility.



## Stress-test the journeys

Abandoned cart campaigns, checkout processes, shipping notifications—ensure everything is in order and address points of friction. Play the role of the customer, experience the journey, and don't just do it yourself. Get testers from outside your department and even outside your organization. Request feedback directly from customers, too. Bonus points if you can incentivize them.



# Pre-holiday calendar

Weeks out	Actions
13–16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Define</b> goals (revenue, ROAS, retention, etc.) and align cross-functional teams like finance and supply chain so you can monitor inventory levels and assess the impact of promotions on ROI.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Audit</b> historical performance to identify top segments, products, and channels.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Build</b> initial audience segments (refer to the earlier “Segment your shoppers” table).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Start warming up</b> audiences with high-value messages to protect deliverability.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Define</b> your dynamic content strategy and map the omnichannel journey.</li></ul>
10–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Finalize</b> campaign strategies by segment (offers, bundles, channels, early access).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Align</b> inventory and supply chain signals to avoid promoting low-stock items.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Implement</b> tracking for behavioral signals (browse, cart, affinity).</li></ul>
7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Develop</b> campaign creative and build automations (VIP, abandon flows, win-back).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conduct</b> A/B testing (timing, discounting, creative).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Deploy</b> dynamic personalization (behavior, location, history) across channels.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Drive</b> opt-ins with incentives.</li></ul>



# Pre-holiday calendar

Weeks out	Actions
5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Create</b> predictive segments (high-intent, deal seekers).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Activate</b> retargeting and lookalike audiences.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Build</b> predictive segments (high-intent, deal-seekers).</li></ul>
3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> teaser campaigns (sneak peeks, discovery, gift guides, influencers).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Drive</b> email and SMS signups by promising access to early offers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Promote</b> conveniences such as wish lists, pre-orders, and in-store pickup.</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> early access for VIP and loyalty segments.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Increase</b> ad retargeting and personalized offers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Finalize</b> real-time reporting dashboards.</li></ul>



# Phase 2:

## In-flight holiday





# Plan your real-time engagement strategy

When the big shopping event arrives, your campaign plan must shift from predictive planning to adaptive. The most successful brands don't just launch campaigns—they **react to customer intent signals in real time**, adjusting messaging, offers, and channels on the fly. Buyer intent signals can occur at any point along the purchase journey, from browsing to decision-making.

During peak shopping events, customer activity accelerates, so your ability to detect and respond in real time can often determine whether you convert demand or lose it.

## Scale your real-time engagement with AI

- Score customers in real time
- Predict conversion or churn likelihood
- Trigger next-best actions instantly
- Continuously optimize journeys



### Trigger faster

Your usual real-time triggers may be too slow during big events! Use event-driven automation to tighten your trigger timing, act on real-time business events, and monitor performance as it happens.

**Tighten that 3- or 4-hour cart abandonment trigger down to 15–20 minutes.**



# Understand and react to buyer intent signals

## High-intent browsing



### Signals

Repeat product views, time on page, category exploration

### Buyer mindset

Actively evaluating

### Engagement approach

- Trigger personalized recommendations
- Highlight reviews and bestsellers
- Send browse abandonment follow-ups

## Cart activity



### Signals

Add-to-cart, checkout starts, cart abandonment

### Buyer mindset

Strong intent mixed with hesitation

### Engagement approach

- Trigger cart recovery immediately
- Address friction (shipping, returns, delivery)
- Retarget with dynamic product ads

## Price sensitivity



### Signals

Engagement with discounts, price sort, deal browsing

### Buyer mindset




Hopeful for a bargain

### Engagement approach

- Personalize offers by segment
- Emphasize clear savings and urgency
- Balance price with value messaging



# Understand and react to buyer intent signals

<b>Drop-off</b> 	<b>Conversion</b> 	<b>High-value customer</b> 
<b>Signals</b> Declining engagement, inactivity mid-event	<b>Signals</b> Purchase completed	<b>Signals</b> High order value, multiple purchases, loyalty status
<b>Buyer mindset</b> Distracted, fatigued, high churn risk	<b>Buyer mindset</b> Satisfied, ready to move on	<b>Buyer mindset</b> Positive brand affinity
<b>Engagement approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refresh messaging with a different offer</li><li>• Introduce new urgency for the event ending</li><li>• Re-engage high-value customers with tailored offers</li></ul>	<b>Engagement approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suppress new offers temporarily, reactivating them when appropriate for your audience</li><li>• Invite to join your newsletter or loyalty program</li><li>• Prompt a review or social media post</li></ul>	<b>Engagement approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer loyalty points or other perks</li><li>• Avoid over-discounting for these customers</li><li>• Nurture this segment into loyalty or subscription programs</li></ul>



# In-flight holiday calendar

Days	Actions
<b>3–7 days out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> segmented countdown campaigns for (VIP, loyalty, high-intent).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Activate</b> dynamic product recommendations across channels.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Begin monitoring</b> your dashboards with AI assistants and agents to keep a close eye on hidden operational and engagement signals.</li></ul>
<b>1–2 days out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> early access for VIP and loyalty segments.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> “starts tomorrow” campaigns with urgency-driven reminders about the limited time window for the event.</li></ul>
<b>Event day 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Monitor</b> conversion rates, AOV, and channel performance in real time.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Optimize</b> campaigns based on early trends (offers, timing, and creative).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Adjust</b> browse/cart abandonment journeys to trigger within 10–15 minutes.</li></ul>



# In-flight holiday calendar

Days	Actions
<b>Event day 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Increase</b> retargeting activity for non-converters and high-intent browsers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Promote</b> trending and fast-selling products dynamically.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Apply</b> AI predictions to identify at-risk customers and target them with highly personalized offers or recommendations.</li></ul>
<b>Event day 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Extend</b> or adjust top-performing offers or bundles.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Recommend</b> digital gift cards for last-minute shoppers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Suppress</b> recent converters to reduce fatigue.</li></ul>
<b>Event day 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Focus</b> spending on the highest-performing segments and channels.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Deploy</b> “last chance” sales and hourly deals.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Capture</b> last-minute conversions with simplified offers and messaging.</li></ul>



# Holiday hero: Arezzo & Co

## Tactic

Arezzo & Co automated targeted product recommendations based on buyer intent signals.

“We need partners like **SAP Engagement Cloud** who help us understand this entire journey throughout the year so that on special days like Black Friday, we can reach the right customer at the right time and through the most appropriate channel.”



**Nadiele Serpa da Silva**  
CRM Coordinator, Arezzo

**AREZZO  
&CO**

[Learn how](#)

**37%**

**increase** in Black  
Friday revenue  
year over year



# Phase 3: Post-holiday





## Welcome new customers...

You survived the holiday! Congratulations, and take a moment to breathe. After that, it's time to take the piles of data from this short-term event and start building long-term growth.

### Goal

Turn first purchases into second purchases.

### Relationship building

- **Welcome sequence:** Introduce your brand, values, product ecosystem, and community.
- **Progressive profiling:** Learn customer preferences (categories, channels, and intent) over time.
- **Personalize:** Make product recommendations based on what they purchased or browsed. Use AI to surface recommendations you might not have considered.





## ...and reward the loyal

### **Goal**

Ensure loyal customers feel appreciated and rewarded.

### **Relationship building**

- **Acknowledge:** Personalize the follow-up messaging and deliver exclusive perks, like point bonuses.
- **Encourage loyalty engagement:** Invite loyalty members to exclusive brand experiences and send reminders to redeem points or track progress.
- **Upsell intelligently:** Use AI predictive models to predict and recommend the customer's next purchase or category.



# Win back lapsed customers

Some shoppers may have gotten distracted, while others compared options and chose differently. Don't be discouraged! They've already shown interest, so you have a head start on engagement.

**The next peak season is always closer than it feels, so turn your attention to winning back their hearts (and dollars).**

1.

## Use smart segmentation.

AI agents can help you identify the lapsed segments based on browsing, cart activity, and past purchases. Prioritize your high-value customers.

2.

## Trigger timely, behavior-based re-engagement.

Rather than reaching for discounts, focus on value. Deploy win-back journeys triggered by inactivity thresholds or site behavior (e.g., abandon browse/cart) and optimize the timing to send when customers are most likely to engage.

3.

## Retarget across channels.

Use social media retargeting ads to feature products the customer viewed or abandoned. Coordinate messages across email, SMS, and paid media to tell a consistent story of value and connection.

4.

## Re-engage and retain.

After a conversion, trigger post-conversion journeys or promote loyalty program enrollment. Capture preferences through progressive profiling to further improve future personalization.



### Pro tip:

A post-holiday clearance can be a premium win-back campaign. Give exhausted holiday shoppers perfect excuse to treat themselves!



# Post-holiday calendar

Days after the event	Actions
0–1 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> post-purchase journeys (thank you, follow-ups, and shipping updates).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Welcome</b> new customers with a soft onboarding series focused on brand story and value.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Score</b> customers based on engagement (purchases, browsing, and responsiveness).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> satisfaction surveys and request reviews while the experience is fresh.</li></ul>
2–3 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Segment</b> customers based on scoring results (VIP, repeat buyer, and lapsed).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Personalize</b> cross-sell and replenishment campaigns using purchase data.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Respond</b> to returns/exchanges with personalized recommendations.</li></ul>
4–6 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Launch</b> re-engagement campaigns for first-time buyers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Promote</b> loyalty benefits (point balances, tier progress, and exclusive perks).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Activate</b> referral campaigns to convert satisfied buyers into advocates.</li></ul>
7–10 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Deepen</b> customer understanding with progressive profiling (preferences, categories, channels).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Test</b> new messaging strategies (value vs. discount) for sustained engagement.</li></ul>
11–12 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Finalize</b> event analysis (revenue, retention, CLV impact, and channel performance).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Feed</b> insights back into segmentation and predictive models for the next event.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Optimize</b> lifecycle automations based on learnings.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Transition</b> customers to always-on nurture programs (content, loyalty, and subscriptions).</li></ul>



# Holiday hero: Home Depot

## Tactic

Home Depot serves personalized content during the brand's Hot Sale period, building its database of new and prospective buyers.

**“Most customers when they're going to shop online for a big season, they already know what they want.** They have that one big thing they're looking for. What we do in those situations is, on the landing pages and any other pages we have on our website, we ask them through a sign-up form, ‘hey, what category are you interested in on this event, and I'll send you the latest info on the deals on the day one.’ That's really worked for us.“



**Mauricio Gonzalez**

Online Experience  
Manager,  
The Home Depot



[Learn more](#)

**8%**

**conversion**  
during Hot Sale  
promotion



# Go deck those carts

The holiday season will always come with pressure, which is why laying the foundation for growth is the top holiday strategy. With your data connected, AI working autonomously alongside you, and campaigns centered around real customer and operational signals, you're positioned to lead the market.

**SAP Engagement Cloud** is built to power AI-enhanced segments, triggers, and journeys using trusted SAP and ERP data. By helping marketers combine a real-time understanding of customers (what they need and love) with core business processes (inventory, order status, etc.), Engagement Cloud gives brands the power to engage in meaningful ways, increasing trust and driving measurable business outcomes.

As you head into your next big shopping event, take a breath and remember: this is your moment to turn peak-season pressure into lasting growth.



**Discover SAP Engagement Cloud**  
 Our Product Hub offers 50+ walkthroughs,  
 deep dives, and use cases

[Learn more](#)



**SAP Engagement Cloud helps organizations power unique engagement by connecting real-time customer insights with the operational signals that run the business. As part of the SAP Customer Experience (CX) portfolio, Engagement Cloud enables personalized, AI-driven interactions across every channel—turning moments like orders, service events, and loyalty milestones into timely, relevant experiences that build trust, strengthen relationships, and drive growth. For more information, visit [emarsys.com](https://www.emarsys.com).**

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