creator™
by zmags®

'Tis The Season To Strategize:

2021 eCommerce Guide for the Holiday Season

The essential guide for online retailers with tips, tactics, examples, and expert advice for a successful holiday season.

Contents

creator

Introduction

In 2020 many online retailers experienced unprecedented growth due to the shift in how people shopped. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that a substantial amount of people who predominantly shopped in stores, switched to online shopping. Many were unable to travel to see family but could purchase and send gifts to loved ones thanks to the abundance of online retailers. And that trend won't be slowing down anytime soon, as 2021 holiday sales are estimated to rise by 11.3% due to post-pandemic opportunities.

We have drawn holiday shopping data from retailers across North America and the United Kingdom. But before we dive in, let's clarify what the holiday season is. The time between late-October and early-January is referred to as the Holiday Season in the U.S. While in the U.K. it's referred to as the Festive Season or Golden Quarter.

In this guide, we'll unwrap everything you need to succeed during the upcoming holiday season.

0.05
seconds

for people to form an opinion about your website.
(8 Ways Media)

creator

2021 Holiday Calendar

We've made a list and checked it twice.
This is the chronological calendar guide to help you
create a record-breaking holiday season strategy.

October 11

Thanksgiving

CAN

October 11

Indigenous Peoples Day

U.S.

October 15

Dussehra

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

October 18

Mawlid an-Nabī

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

October 31

Halloween

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 4

Diwali/Deepavali

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 5

Guy Fawkes Day

U.K.

November 11

Veteran's Day

U.S.

November 11

Remembrance Day

CAN | U.K.

November 25

Thanksgiving

U.S.

November 26

Black Friday

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 28

Small Business Saturday

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 29

Cyber Monday

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 29

First Day of Hanukkah

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

November 30

Giving Tuesday

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

December 6

Last Day of Hanukkah

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

December 14

Free Shipping Friday

U.S.

December 24

Christmas Eve

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

December 25

Christmas Day

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

December 26

Boxing Day

U.K.

December 26

Frist Day of Kwanzaa

U.S.

December 31

New Year's Eve

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

January 1

New Year's Day

CAN | U.S. | U.K.

creator

Holiday campaigns are a team effort. There needs to be coordination between the marketing, mechandising/buying departments, and the I.T./ development team. Many retailers stock exclusive holiday products, such as reindeer pajamas or seasonal ornaments. So there must be specific strategies to present these festive buying options to customers so that you don't end up with leftover stock in the New Year. Ultimately, almost anything can be a gift during the season of giving, so ensuring you have a robust platform is step one.

These are a few examples of marketing tactics that most eCommerce stores already utilize that are customizable to the season.

Easy to customize landing pages and product category pages.

Ability to make a personalized shopping experience such as quizzes to help them find the right gift.

Trigger emails based on customers' behavior on your site.

Interactive email blasts that reflect the same exciting experience customer receive on your website.

Updated holiday returns policy.

Promotional code functionality.

'How to' experiences to provide guided shopping with shorter paths-to-purchase.

creator

79%

of people say that user-generated content highly impacts their purchase decisions. (Stackla Data Report)
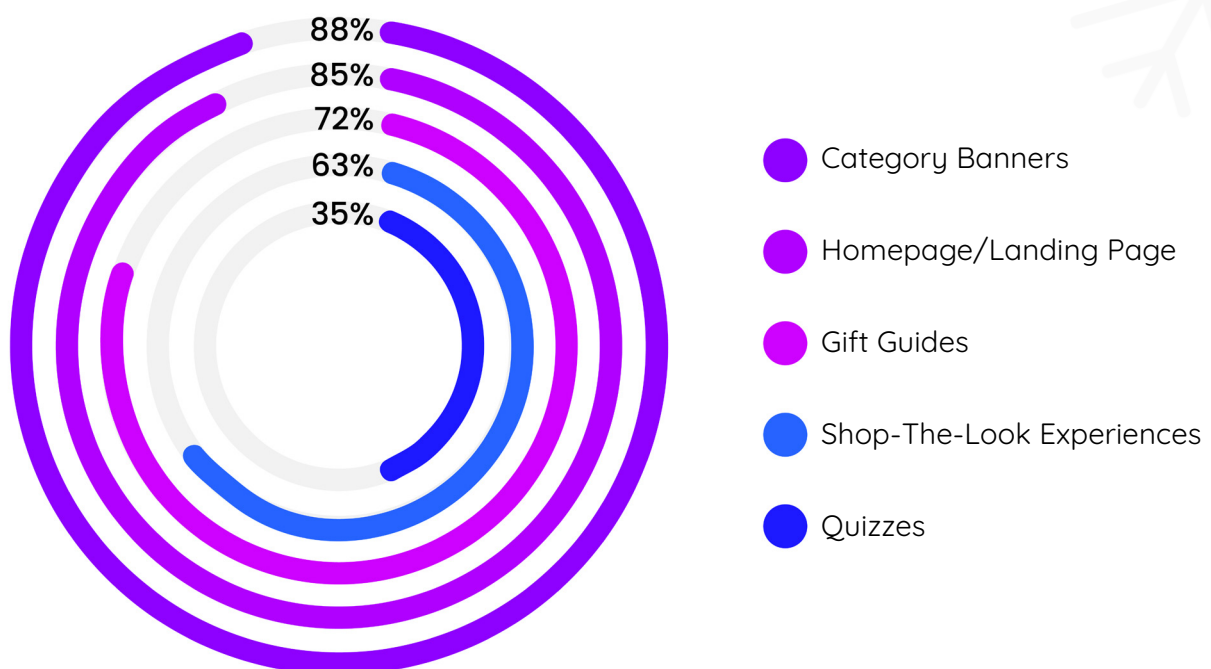
The Data

The eCommerce world was growing fast before COVID-19 hit. But the pandemic pushed even more U.S. consumers online, increasing sales by 32.4% in shopping online in 2020. This year eCommerce stores are scheduled to perform better than ever. The digital wor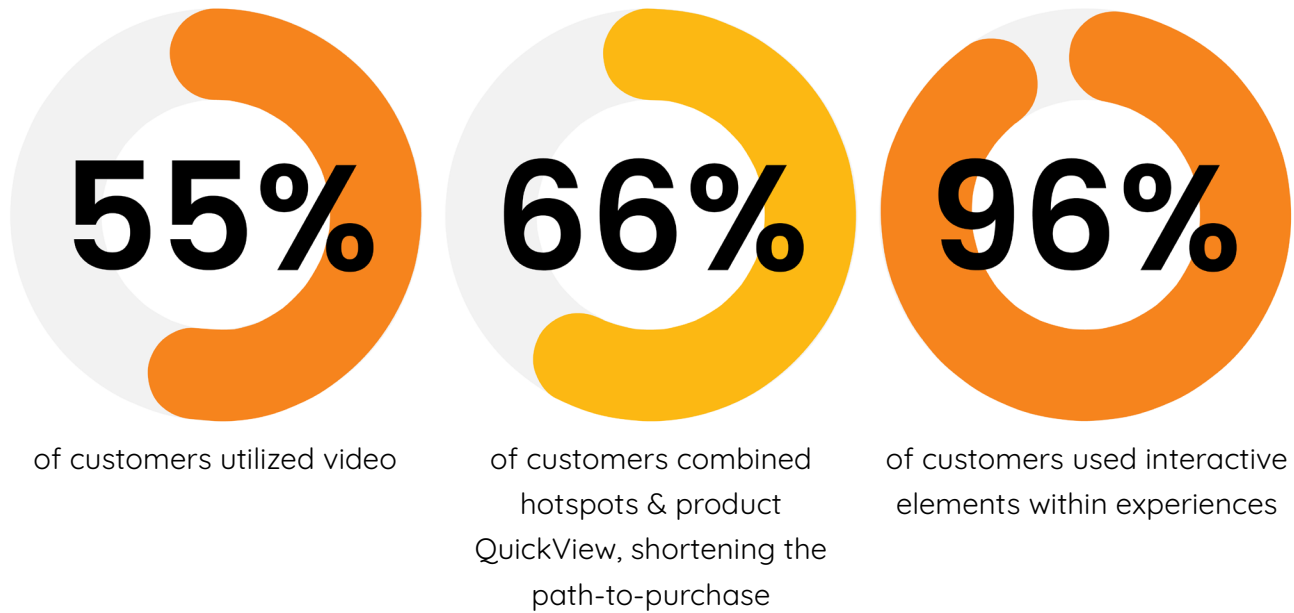ld is growing faster year over year. More people will be online looking for the types of services you offer, but it also means that you'll have more competition.

With thousands of users utilizing our platform to enhance and enrich their content strategies, we want to share some interesting data.

The types of experiences most used for last year's holiday season:

88%
85%
72%
63%
35%

● Category Banners

● Homepage/Landing Page

● Gift Guides

● Shop-The-Look Experiences

● Quizzes

creator

Some interesting metrics:

55%
of customers utilized video

66%
of customers combined hotspots & product QuickView, shortening the path-to-purchase

96%
of customers used interactive elements within experiences

On the day that a holiday campaign is launched, site traffic should significantly increase. We found that, on average, a well-executed holiday campaign drives over 110% increase in site traffic. Below shows the increase in site traffic for 3 of our customers' 2020 holiday campaigns.
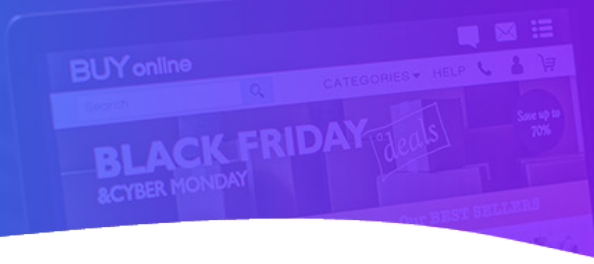
FOSTER GRANT.
161%

(AG)
103%

Buckle
111%

Make sure that your site and Google Analytics are set up correctly to measure the performance of your website, customer journeys, and what content/products are performing best. If something isn't performing like you expected, it's easy to change content around and republish using a tool such as Creator. Learn more about Creator and how it can transform your campagin strategy later in this guide.

creator

The promotional strategy

There are multiple options for creative promotional strategies. For example, you can go with a straightfoward 20% off for Black Friday, 30% off for Cyber Monday, and 15% off seasonal gifts.

A strategy like this is easy for consumers to understand and will get those conversions. However, this is an opportunity to be extra creative.

Here are 15 ideas:

1.
Partner with other brands

Partnering with a brand that your customer base would love is a great way to expand exposure.

2.
Refer a friend

Give a $10 off coupon or earn points to spend with you if customers refer a friend to your brand.

3.
Flash sale

Boost sales by hosting a 24-hour flash sale. You can either make this a surprise event or do a count down until the event.

4.
A tiered discount system

Customers can get a different monetary ($ or %) amount off when they spend within a particular price range. The more items shoppers purchase, the greater the discount.

5.
A gift with purchase

You can offer a free gift on purchases over a specific amount. Depending on your brand, a mystery gift is a great idea. This could be a tote bag, a make-up kit, or something more extravagant.

6.
Percentage discount

You can go with the standard percentage off between specified dates: 20% off for Black Friday or 25% off between December 1st and December 24th.

creator

7.

A mystery gift reveal

This works well for a 12 days of Christmas theme, and each day you reveal 1 item that's exclusively an offer that day.

8.

BOGO offers

This is a great way to encourage customers to purchase more volume. Buy 1 get 1 free, or Buy 1 get 1 40% off.

9.

Free shipping

This can be a flat offer on any order, or you can choose to do free shipping on orders over a specified amount.

10.

Competition to win something big

If you want to boost your mailing list subscribers and engage with our customers, offer an Enter To Win giveaway. Ensure that it's both high value and desirable to make people want to fill out a form.

11.

Donations

Choose a charity and hold a promotion that donates money when customers spend. It makes them feel like they are making a small difference, and your brand gets to support a worthy cause.

12.

Loyalty points

Earn double the loyalty points on all orders until December 25th. This will help with customer retention and help entice them back in the future.

13.

Exclusive deals

When a customer places an order, give them a coupon to be used at a later date. This also helps with customer retention. Make sure that you specify that it can not be applied to existing orders.

14.

Exclusive Sale

This is for product purchased exclusively for the season with the intention of discounting it deeply (like a tactful clearance sale).

15.

Bundles

Create gift bundles with complementary products to make it as easy as possible for customers to buy several items in one easy purchase.

creator

Because the holiday season spans several calendar events, you can change your promotion strategy so that your customers don't become bored and want to keep visiting your site to see the new deals. An example promo strategy could be:

24th – 31st October

Get a Spooktacular gift with every order over $50

7th – 14th November

Beat the holiday rush with Free Shipping

20th – 26th November

Black Friday has come early this year: Buy One, Get One 40% Off

November 29

Cyber Monday Flash Sale, 30% off

November 30

For Giving Tueday we're giving you a chance to win XYZ. 10 winners will be announced tomorrow morning

1st – 12th December

12 Days of Gifts: New exclusive incredible promotion revealed each day for one day only.

December 14

Last Chance to get your order for Christmas: Free Shipping Day

15th – 24th December

$10 off when you spend $50 pr more, $25 off when you spend $100 or more, and $55 off when you spend $200 or more.

December 26 – January 9

The holiday season can be hard work; treat yourself – marked down seasonal items that must go.

creator

While this strategy relies heavily on discount promotions, which works well for some retailers, it isn't necessary for everyone. Many retailers go through the holiday season with clever branding and a few light discounts. It solely depends on your type of business and your customer base. The most important thing for your promotional strategy is to find the right course of action for your business, your brand, and your customers.

Here are some pros and cons of discounting

Pros

1. Attract new customers by adding a layer of excitement and urgency.

2. Consumers love being rewarded, and providing an exclusive discount to your customer base will make them feel both excited and valued.

3. Discounts increase the volume of sales and often lower your cart abandonment rate.

Cons

1. Too many discounts can teach customers that your product isn't worth its full price.

2. People who want your products will usually purchase them. People who found you through coupons will wait for the next one.

3. Some retailers sacrifice margins for a tiny sales lift. The goal is not to maximize returns but to generate sales, customers, and profits you would not have been able to get otherwise.

> **It's much easier to double your business by doubling your conversion rate than doubling your traffic.**
>
> – Bryan Eisenberg, Co-founder Buyer Legends and NY Times bestselling author
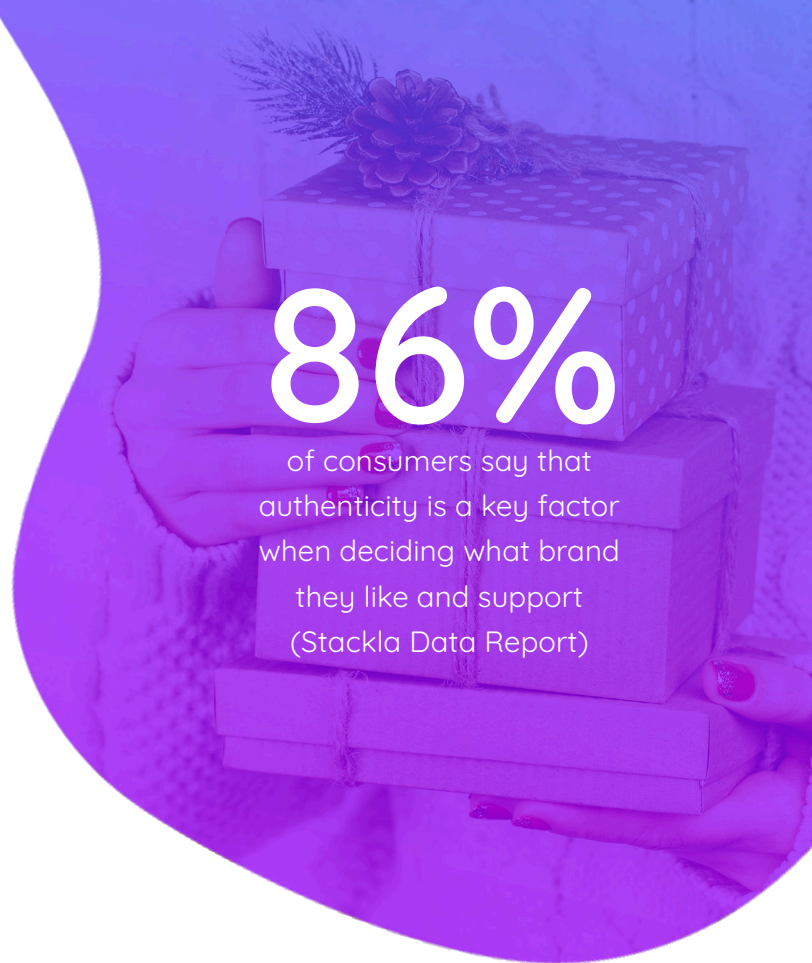
creator

Branding strategy

Your holiday branding will depend heavily on your existing branding. For example, a children's toy company may use bright and bold colors with playful fonts and whimsical characters. A bespoke jewelry company may go for a softer Winter Wonderland feel with subtle hints of the season within the photography. In contrast, an apparel company may go more classic with plaid and lifestyle photography in a traditional setting. Picking a theme, whether it's funky and quirky or sophisticated and timeless, will help guide the photography, copy, color schemes, and maybe even your promotional strategy.

When you choose your holiday branding theme, this is your chance to get creative with colors, copy, types of shopping experiences and graphics. Create interactive and inspiring content that provides an entertaining shopping experience.

These are some examples of experiences that you can include in your holiday campaign:

1. Gift Guides: Help people find the perfect gift in a curated collection of items.

2. Price Point Guides: Make shopping within budget easier for them with Gifts Under $20, Gifts Under $50, and Gifts Under $100.

3. How To Guide: This could be a 'How to survive the season', 'How to decorate for Christmas', 'How to impress with table settings', or 'How to buy gifts for everyone without breaking the bank'.

86%
of consumers say that authenticity is a key factor when deciding what brand they like and support (Stackla Data Report)

4. Occasion Dress Guide: An apparel company could show all the different occasions of the festive season and what to wear: work party, dinner with the in-laws, night out with the girls, shopping attire, cozy movie night gear, Christmas dinner outfit, and so on.

5. Influencer Picks: If you utilize influencers in your usual marketing strategy, this is an excellent opportunity to get them to highlight their favorite products.

6. On Trend Guide: If there's a trending TV show that your customer demographic is interested in, you can capitalize on that by creating a buying guide around it.

7. Tap Into Nostalgia: Retailers who sell various types of products for different age ranges can consider creating a timeline that taps into the memories of childhood and magic.

creator

8. Leverage your own staff: Highlight staff picks and recommendations. Like when people ask for advice on purchasing a gift in a brick and mortar store, you can preemptively recommend products on your website.

9. Don't Forget Self-Care: People are shopping for gifts for loved ones but also themselves. It's fashionable to look after yourself, and during the season of giving, it's important to remind your customers to give to themselves.

10. Personalized Quizzes: Help customers find what they are looking for with a quiz that results in a curated collection of items just for them.

11. Play With Puns: Think about how you can utilize seasonal songs, games, or activities to spice up your campaign. Some examples are:
- 12 days of gift-giving
- Defeat that resting Grinch face
- You sleigh me
- I'm pine-ing for you
- All the jingle ladies
- The snuggle is real
- Love you from head to mistletoe
- You snow the drill
- Best in snow
- Icy what you did there
- This is snow laughing matter
- Don't be elfish
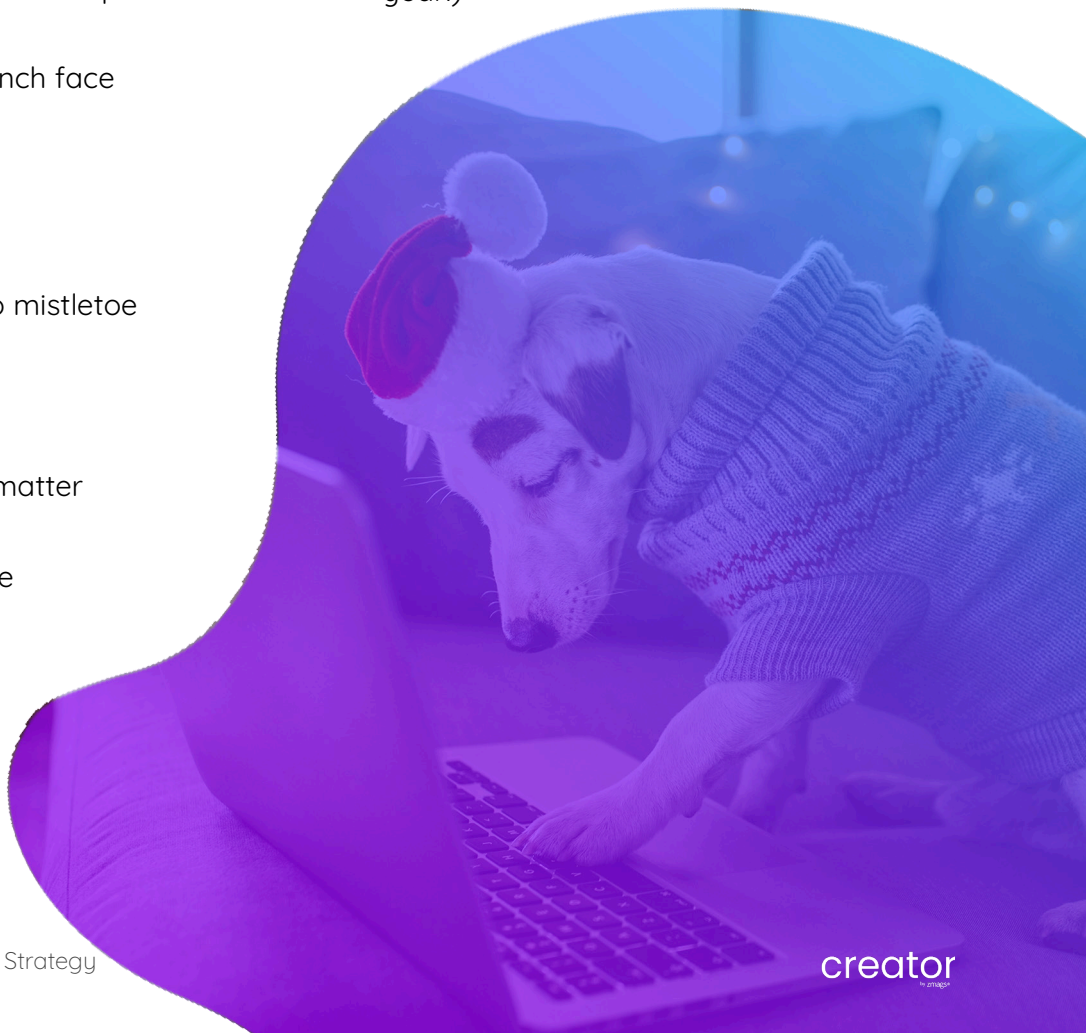- Feeling naughty or nice
- Believe in your elf

12. The To-Do List: Create a special to-do list that is tied to your products. A beauty and cosmetics brand could do something like this:

The naughty list
- ☑ Get nails done for the holiday party
- ☑ Treat myself to new makeup kit
- ☑ Get heel protection for fab new heels
- ☑ The most kissable lipstick I can find
- ☑ At home wax kit and body scrub

The nice list
- ☑ Buy mom that curling iron she always wanted
- ☑ Get dad new slippers to replace the ones the dog ate.
- ☑ Get a secret Santa gift for Sandy
- ☑ New moisturizer (winter isn't kind to the skin)
- ☑ Makeup remover (mustn't forget this year!)

creator

With Halloween, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Hanukkah, and Christmas, you have plenty of opportunities to design creative experiences to entice and enthrall your customers. You don't need to stick to just one gift guide. You could develop several types depending on what you anticipate your customers' needs to be and change the branding between each holiday event. The sky is the limit!

No matter what branding strategy you choose, the most important thing is consistency. Your digital branding should have a consistent look and feel through your social media, email, and website.

73%
of consumers cite customer experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions.
(PWC)

81%
of consumers said that they need to be able to trust the brand to buy from them.
(Edelman)

66%
of consumers think transparency is one of the most attractive qualities in a brand.
(Accenture Strategy)

93%
of consumer purchase decisions are influenced by images (both products and lifestyle).
(Digital Commerce 360)

Utilize tools that allow you to make content that distinguishes you from the competition. A carefully thought-out holiday season plan for your branding and content strategy will outperform your KPIs and exceed all sales goals.

creator
by zmags

Preparation Strategy

While holiday season campaigns and promotions go hand in hand, your discounts and deals are worth nothing if people don't know about them. Priming your target audience will get them revved up and ready to shop your promos or interact with your exciting new content. Create hype ahead of time and spread brand awareness through your emails and social platforms.

1.

Optimize your site so that search engines know what you're selling and show it to people looking for the type of things you sell. This is known as organic SEO (search engine optimization), and it won't happen overnight, so here are some things that you can do now to get started:

- All images should have Alt text and descriptions. Search engines can't read a flat image, but they can see what you name it. This will also help you with legal and best practice ADA website accessibility requiments.

- All text on your website should be live. Not embedded in an image, and text should be crawlable.

- Publish new content on your site regularly. Driving people to these landing pages via emails or social media will tell search engines that you are relevant.

- Use searchable keywords. It's all well and good using obscure descriptive words to create the brand image that you desire, but using phrases and keywords that your customers type into search engines will help them find you. You can find relevant keywords using different tools.

Consistent presentation of a brand has been seen to increase revenue by

33%

(Lucidpress)

creator

2.

Leverage your emails to entice your customers to visit your site. We're not talking about the regular weekly email blasts you send out about products. Instead, have some fun and send interactive emails that make them want to click through. They should reflect the seasonal theme that you have on your website for consistency. Here are some fun ideas:

- 24-hour count down to when the sale or campaign will be launched.

- Shoppable gift guide within the email.

- An interactive infographic that takes them on a spending spree.

- Selfcare guides personalized to that specific customer's shopping history.

- All your automated trigger emails should be updated to reflect the season. Adding new trigger holiday shopping guide emails based on customers' interaction with your site will give them the personalized touch that drives those conversions.

With the right emailing tool, you can use the same shoppable creative designs used on your website. Step away from conventional content and static designs, and make the shopping experience fun for your customers from step one.

creator

3.

Leverage social media and digital ads so that new and existing customers can get to know you. 73% of North American shoppers buy from brands that they're familiar with. Re-marketing and having a strong brand image will put you in good shape when you launch those new winter product lines and exciting campaigns.

- PPC (Pay Per Click) and social ads are a great way to get your brand in front of new people and re-marketing so that your brand becomes recognizable.

- Regular social posts and stories keep your audience engaged. Don't post for the sake of posting. Post relevant and entertaining content that your target customer base will enjoy - images of merchandise, relatable quotes, behind the scene footage, etc.

- Consider an influencer program or brand ambassadors to promote campaigns and products.

- Link social channels to your existing website and allow people to purchase while scrolling on their favorite app easily.

- SMS provides a special opportunity to connect with your customers. Brands leverage SMS marketing to execute pre-built sequences and conversations specific to customer behavior.

creator

Our recommendations

It's crucial to develop the right brand and promotional strategy for your business. It needs to make financial sense and be in line with what will resonate with your customer base. The content that you create should be engaging, interactive, and above all, shoppable.

It's essential to know your engineering team's freeze schedule for the website and if it will handle the holiday traffic while maintaining performance and load speed. Marketing plays a role in forecasting site traffic, and having your website crash during your big Black Friday sale could drastically affect sales and customer satisfaction. Planning your holiday season strategy early gives teams ample time to prepare for the influx of visitors to your website and the ease of scheduling content to publish ahead of time.

All of this can seem overwhelming for lean design and marketing teams, but it doesn't have to be. Creator by Zmags could be the answer to your eCommerce challenges. Not just for the upcoming holiday season but all digital marketing goals. Creator is designed for marketing and creative to create content easily without limits or coding. Thus, eliminating the worry of engineering freeze schedules. In addition, Creator seamlessly integrates within your current tech stack - removing any concern of tiresome re-platforming. The number one digital content and publishing platform that allows ultimate freedom of creativity.
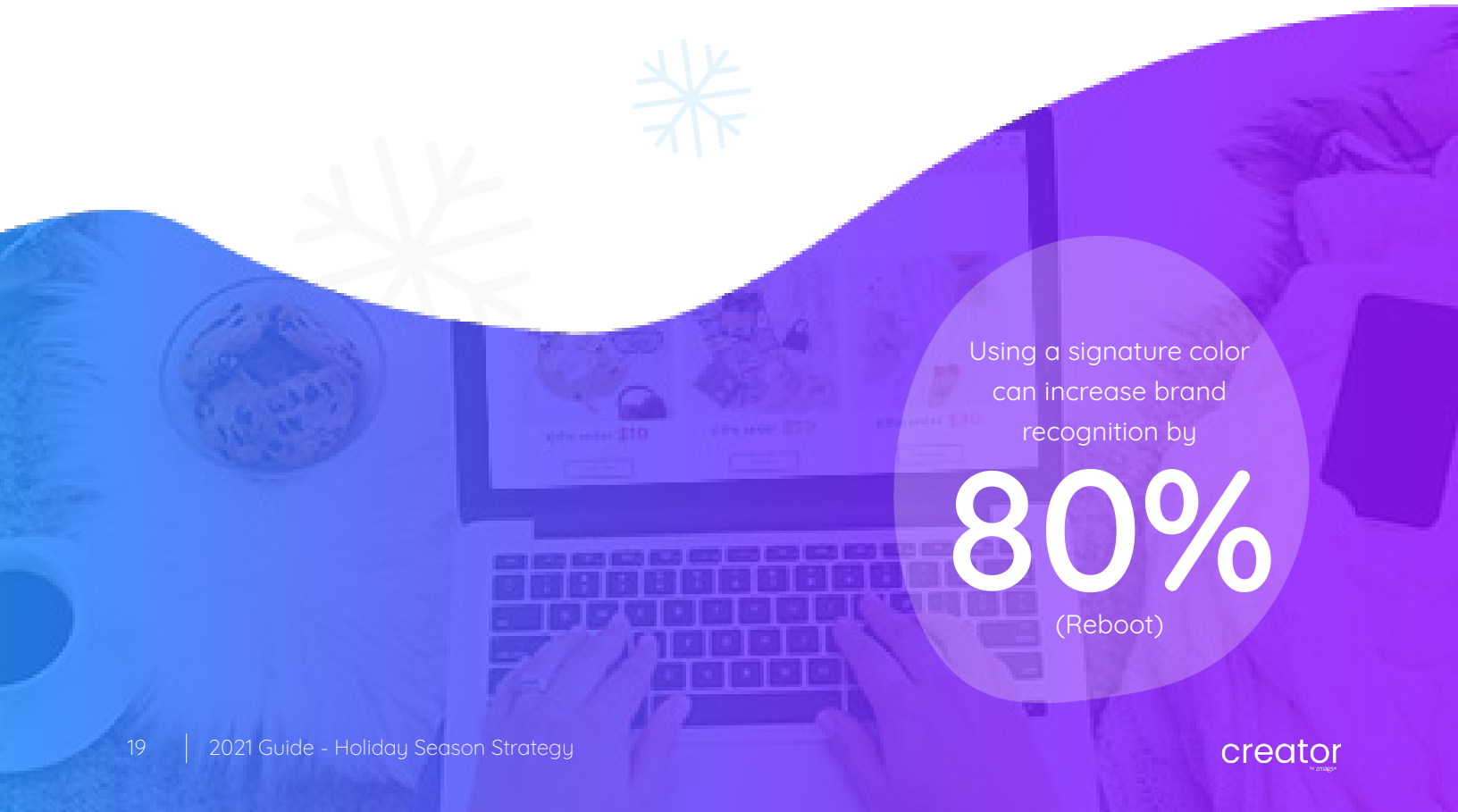
Here's a list of things our customers have built in Creator:

- Interactive and shoppable emails
- Trend and Influencer Pages
- Product Comparisons
- Page Headers & Category banners
- Homepages & Landing Pages
- Microsites
- Blogs
- Checklists
- Seasonal Campaigns
- User-Generated Content
- Guided selling: such as décor guides, lifestyle, and shop the room/look experiences
- Embedded forms
- Quizzes

creator

These are Creator's key attributes:

- SEO Compatible: With live text, hyperlinks, customer fonts, and the ability to add alt text to images, Creator will boost your organic SEO and ADA compatibility.

- Save Time & Money: Significantly reduce the time it takes to publish content because there's no coding necessary - freeing up your I.T./development team's time and no need to use external resources.

- Create Without Limits: Easy to use, free-form drag and drop tools allow you to design anything without using a template. Design in the platform or upload a design file (such as an Adobe PSD.).

- Reduce Path-To-Purchase: No need to slice up images or only apply one link. You can add as many hot spots and links to any image, making it easier for your customers to make that purchase.

- Creator Pros: We have design experts on staff ready to jump in and be an extension of your team. If you need guidance or an extra pair of design hands, we got your back.

- Increase Conversions and Engagement: Exciting and interactive content that allows you to optimize and accelerate your customer journey.

- Digitalize Catalogs: Save the cost of printing, instead upload your pdf lookbooks and catalogs to your site. Make them shoppable and interactive so that they take the customer experience to a whole new level.

A brand like Foster Grant has a 47% increase in revenue on their holiday Creator experience. With Creator, the possibilities for your branding and seasonal campaigns are unlimited.

Using a signature color can increase brand recognition by

80%

(Reboot)

creator

During the holiday madness it can be easy to forget the little things. Be sure your team is aligned on what metrics matter the most for your goals. Track those key KPIs to ensure you can measure the performance of your holiday campaigns and prove out ROI.

Here are a few eCommerce KPIs to consider:
- Sales
- AOV (Average Order Value)
- Conversion rate
- Shopping Cart Abandonment Rate
- Traffic (new vs. returning)
- Site Speed
- Bounce rate
- Traffic source
- Mobile site traffic

Marketing success KPIs to consider:
- CPC (Cost-Per-Click)
- CTR (Click-Through-Rate)
- Subscriber growth rate
- Email open rate
- Social followers
- Product reviews (quantity and quality)
- CTRs of banner and display advertising
- Blog traffic
- Affiliate program performance
- Average position (SEO)

General business metrics to consider:
- LTV (Customer lifetime value)
- CAC (Customer acquisition cost)
- Gross profit
- Average margin
- COGS (Cost of goods sold)
- Competitive pricing

Download our Marketing KPI Worksheet to help keep track of key performance metrics.
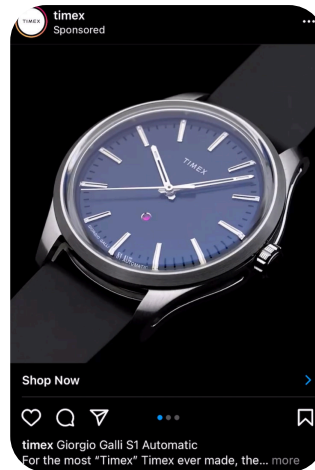
creator

Examples

Plan your holiday marketing campaign early across all channels - email, social, and website. A consistent design and voice will drive conversions. Timex demonstrates consistent branding by using Creator for the PDP (product detail page), homepage, and landing page.

To highlight the Giorgio Gilli watch, Timex Group had a video ad on Instagram that led to a designated landing page, leading to the PDP. Their homepage also has a banner image that leads to the landing page. The imagery and branding were consistent throughout the journey and informed customers on the many attributes of the product.
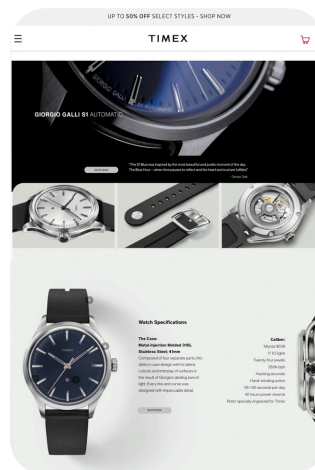
Our customers have built many amazing interactive experiences that engage customers.

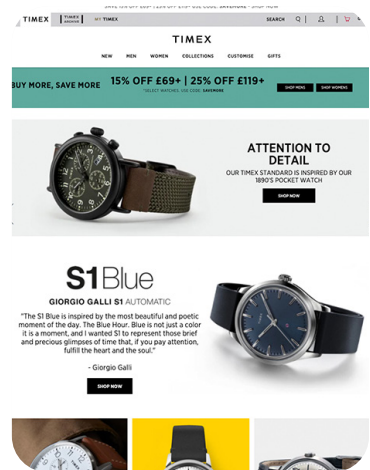To preview examples of holiday-themed quizzes, gift guides, and campaigns, [click here](#).
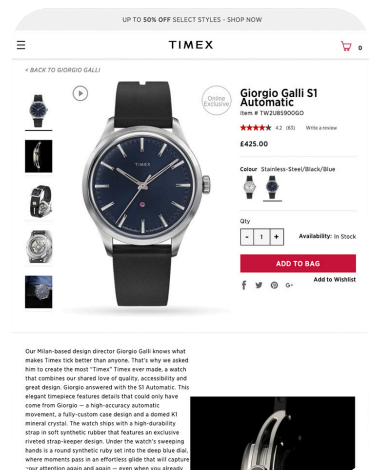
Instagram Post

Homepage

Landing Page

Product Detail Page

creator

Summary

With the help of these tips, tactics, and expert advice, you'll create an award-winning holiday strategy, grow your online presence through powerful storytelling and convert consumers into loyal customers through:

- Optimized site experience and UX
- A carefully planned promotional and branding strategy
- Pre-holiday marketing to prime customers
- Fully integrated marketing campaigns
- In-depth analytics and insights
- Interactive and engaging online experiences

And even more importantly, you'll have the tools to grow and scale your business into the New Year.

Schedule a 30-minute demo with our team so that you can see for yourself the true power of Creator. Click here to book a demo.

92%
of consumers in the U.S. used coupons when making a purchase in 2020
(Big Commerce)

creator

Resources

- ADWEEK: [How Can Brands and Retailers Prepare For The 2021 Holiday Season?](#)
- Insider Intelligence: [How retailers can start planning for the 2021 hoiday season](#)
- Digitial Commerce 360: [Coronavirus impact onine retail](#)
- Oberlo: [10 branding statistics you need to know](#)
- HubSpot: [19 Brilliant Examples of Holiday Marketing Campaigns](#)
- ShopifyPlus: [Win the eCommerce holidays with a strong customer acquisition strategy](#)
- Stable WP: [How to crush it this hoiday season with 12 creative eCommerce campaigns that work](#)
- Stackla: [The consumer content report: Influence in the digital age](#)
- Edelman: [Trust barometer special report: In brands we trust?](#)
- Reboot: [What is the importance of color in brand recognition?](#)
- 8 Ways Media: [Vision design: why first impressions matter](#)
- Lucidpress: [State of brand consistency](#)
- Accenture Strategy: [From me to we, the rise of the purpose-led brand](#)
- PWC: [Experience is everything: Here's how to get it right](#)
- Vivendi: [Meaningful brands](#)
- Stackla: [Consumer & marketer perspectives on content in the digital age](#)
- Big Commerce: [Boost your promotional strategy (+online sales) with customer discounts and free shipping](#)

creator