crazyegg™

Hard-Boiled Guide to Holiday eCommerce

KATHRYN ARAGON &
SHERICE JACOB

crazyegg™

Contents

Introduction

Have you ever wished you could have a direct, easy-to-follow guide to improve your site and increase conversion rates over the holidays? The race to grab the attention of your best customers is on, and by starting early, you can reap the financial rewards of holiday shopping readiness.

Thankfully, we can help.

Our conversion and content marketing elves have been hard at work creating a detailed map of how to boost your holiday e-commerce efforts this season. In these seven chapters, you'll get valuable insights, actionable steps and real resources.

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS GUIDE?

The holiday season isn't just the season to be merry. It's also the season to build relationships, help one another... and shop till you drop. So if you do e-commerce on any level, you can easily bank some holiday cheer by leveraging people's holiday spirit – if you know how.

With this guide, we aren't trying to give you comprehensive instructions on doing e-commerce in the holidays. First, there's no real need: The same tactics that work year-round also work in

the holidays. And let's be honest, a complete holiday strategy should have been put into motion months ago.

Perhaps you did create a holiday marketing strategy and you've already pulled the trigger to execute. Now, you simply need a checklist to be sure you didn't forget anything.

Or perhaps you didn't have time to create a multi-channel plan and now you're scrambling to find some quick holiday marketing ideas you can easily put into motion.

Either way, this guide is for you. We share simple, easy-to-execute ideas to reach more customers and sell more throughout the season.

What will you learn? Take a look...

Chapter 1... What's Ahead for the 2013 Holiday Shopping Season?

Holiday profits don't just happen. You need to gear up for the holiday season. From outfitting your site with a festive new look, to learning where to concentrate your efforts in the coming months, this chapter will help you create a smart holiday marketing plan that engages customers.

Chapter 2... Connecting with Customers throughout the Holiday Season

You need to connect with your customers on a lot of different levels: visually and through holiday-themed messaging. This chapter shares tips for sprucing up your website and social

media channels. It also helps you develop an email marketing strategy that cuts through the clutter and gets read – even during the busy holiday season. See what we recommend and how to turn your messages into something your customers can't wait to read!

Chapter 3… Create a Holiday-Themed Gift Guide

Everyone wants the perfect gift for each person on their list, and now you can make it easy with these gift-guide suggestions. Make sure customers can find everything they need – right when they need it – with these helpful tips.

Chapter 4… Leveraging Social Media over the Holidays

Although social media hasn't always be the best strategy for holiday promotions, knowing how to use it effectively will separate your brand from the noise and untargeted promotions cluttering up timelines and newsfeeds. See what social media campaigns really perform in this chapter.

Chapter 5… The Power of Crowdsourcing

No one ever said you had to do everything alone. Sometimes your customers can be the best advocates for your brand! Learn how companies large and small are using the power of people to create memorable holiday campaigns that make money well into the new year.

Chapter 6... Improving the Checkout Process

All the sales and strategies in the world won't make any difference if your checkout process lets customers slip through the cracks. Learn how you can help shoppers get when they need quickly and easily and greatly increase the odds that they'll be back for more!

Chapter 7... After the Sale

This is the area most businesses (and even large companies) forget about in their holiday planning – but it could be the difference between a horde of angry shoppers or a group of fanatical fans. Learn the little tricks top companies use to springboard off of customers' anticipation and excitement over the holiday season.

Each chapter also provides a helpful checklist to walk you through each step and make sure that your site presents a holiday experience that your shoppers won't soon forget!

Ready to start?

1

What's Ahead for the 2013 Holiday Shopping Season?

This chapter focuses on findings from last year and forecasts for the upcoming holiday season. You'll learn some surprising insights on social media and how mobile commerce is playing a pivotal role for busy shoppers.

Many places in the U.S. haven't yet had their first frost, and we're already talking about the holidays! As much as consumers begrudge the shopping season coming earlier and earlier every year – retailers and online sellers know the truth...

THE EARLIER YOU START, THE EARLIER YOU CAPTURE FRONT-OF-MIND SHARE

This lucrative front-of-mind "currency" stays with people throughout the holiday shopping season, from brainstorming gift ideas to finding the *perfect* item that's sure to make any recipient overflow with gratitude. It's a marketing strategy that pays dividends for both the consumer and the brand – and the race is on to be the first to capture the lion's share of that awareness.

SOCIAL GETS SHELVED IN FAVOR OF MOBILE COMMERCE

According to a joint study conducted by the E-Tailing group and personalization service Baynote, Inc., 60% of retailers expected their holiday sales to grow more than 10% this year. Unlike in previous years, 53% of those surveyed believed that mobile would pay a significant role in their holiday sales.

But what was surprising about this study is that over 80% of retailers surveyed felt that social media would play little to no role in holiday sales, with over 60% only making limited investments in social media.

Not surprisingly, over 75% are making adjustments and improvements to their site search, as well as their e-commerce platform – showing that tried and true is trumping likes and shares this holiday season.

The big focus is on mobile, with eMarketer predicting a **16% projected increase in m-commerce**, translating to over $40 billion of the estimated $260+ billion to be spent over the holidays. Of all the mobile-enabled devices on the market, most bets are on tablets, which account for 62.5% of m-commerce sales, but is expected to reach 73% by 2017.

If you already have a mobile website, congratulations! You're ready to profit from this trend. If not, you need a fast and easy way to make your website easily accessible from any device. A few options:

- WPtouch Pro – This easy-to-install plugin by BraveNewCode converts your website into a branded mobile site. There is a free option, but it only displays your home page and blog. For a fully functioning mobile site, go pro.

- Responsive Select Menu – Navigation can be visually challenging on a mobile device. This plugin converts WordPress menus into responsive select boxes, so they take up less room on the page.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR ONLINE RETAILERS AND SAAS PROVIDERS?

It means you'd better start decking the digital halls — customers are armed with more information, deals and offers than ever, and they're looking for reasons to choose you over your competitors.

Short on time and your design team is busy with other work? No problem – there are a variety of themes, designs and Photoshop files that can act as a starting point for your holiday landing pages and emails:

- Auspicious Christmas Gifts – Mailchimp and Interspire-ready email and HTML templates with various modules and layout options.

- Christmas Landing Page Template – HTML and CSS3 landing page with a built-in e-card sender

- Christmas Season Landing Page – A snowy design with several call-to-action buttons – great for apps or digital products.

- Holiday-Themed OpenCart Template – Supports several versions of the popular OpenCart shopping cart ecommerce package

- Seasons Greetings Email Postcard – A simple, easy-to-use email newsletter template to get customers into the spirit of the season

- Gift Box Email Template – Several layouts for holiday and New Year email newsletters or special offers

That should get you started with your holiday marketing. Now let's look at ways to get shoppers in the holiday spirit...

What's next?

In the Chapter 2, we'll show you simple ways to make sure you're top of mind this holiday season: creating feelings of joy, warmth, and the urge to find that perfect gift.

Consider this guide your holiday e-commerce "battle plan," a start-to-finish walkthrough that will help you get more sales, higher conversions and more profits well into the holiday season – and beyond!

2

Connecting with Customers throughout the Holiday Season

Can you get customers into the holiday shopping spirit if they're sitting at their computer in their bathrobe or tapping away at their tablets while stuck in traffic?

As it turns out – yes, you can.

Especially if your website, email and social media posts contain visual cues that remind them the clock is ticking – and the hunt is on to find the perfect gift at the perfect price.

In this chapter, we'll talk about ways to beat the holiday rush and create a festive design that's still user-friendly and easy to navigate. We'll also review some email marketing strategies that will make sure people read and respond to your holiday messages.

IT'S TIME TO LEVERAGE THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

From the first trickle of snowflakes, an amazing transformation happens. People become more cheerful, more giving and more aware of the spirit of the season. And business owners, both online and offline, have always looked for ways to capitalize on that sensation – from playing Christmas carols in the store to offering free gift wrapping.

Online, things should be no different. Since your website is your showroom, now's your chance to give it a festive wintery glow by adding some traditional, quirky or fun graphics. Santa Claus, snowflakes, reindeer and wreaths all find their place among logos, but why not take things a step further?

FIND WAYS TO PUT VISUAL HOLIDAY CUES IN ALL YOUR MARKETING

1. Try switching out price seals for ornaments, navigation bars for scarves or any other number of festive ideas.

Hickory Farms' website uses a snowy backdrop and beautiful product photos to entice its customers

2. Make a holiday avatar. It's not just product-selling sites that can get in on the action. A holiday-themed avatar for your blog commenters or forum posters is a simple way to delight visitors.

3. Update your social media backgrounds with holiday graphics. (Feature your holiday specials while you're at it.)

MAKE SURE IT'S ACCESSIBLE FROM ANY DEVICE

No matter which selection of holiday elements you decide to incorporate into your website design, you definitely want that design to be responsive and mobile-friendly.

Many people will leave a site if it doesn't perform or load well on their mobile device. And with the myriad of responsive design options and flexible themes available, there's no excuse not to make sure your site works flawlessly on all major devices.

EMAIL FREQUENCY OVER THE HOLIDAYS

We've come to expect that our inboxes will be inundated with deals and offers over the holiday shopping season – but how many emails are too many?

That was the issue plaguing UncommonGoods, a unique gift website selling everything from handmade crafts to upcycled furniture. Previously, they sent as many as five emails a week throughout December – and got a lot of unsubscribes as a result. They're not looking to make the same mistake twice.

UncommonGoods' previous holiday email schedule was costing them customers

So this year, they teamed up with email analytics provider AgilOne to determine if they could boost their customer engagement without losing customers. By looking at their email marketing analytics, they were able to successfully segment customers based on their

previous level of email opens and click-through rates, and then dynamically adjust how many emails those subscribers received.

As a result of its testing, UncommonGoods learned that their most enthusiastic participants responded best to two emails per week, whereas the less engaged customers tended to prefer only one email per week. Using their email marketing provider SilverPop, UncommonGoods plans to further zero in on its email marketing capabilities by basing messages on what customers looked at previously when shopping. So, for example, if they looked at home décor, the next email they received might feature new home décor items.

Tip 1: Find the email frequency that works best for your customers, then plan an email marketing strategy that keeps them engaged throughout the holidays.

Tip 2: If possible, give subscribers a choice. Here at The Daily Egg, subscribers can pick a Daily Alert or Weekly Digest. Perry Marshall recently sent an email to subscribers offering to let them change email frequency: 2-3 per day for super-engaged followers or once per week for the less engaged.

POLISHING OFF THAT LIST

Can you get more sales with fewer subscribers? As it turns out, you don't have to wait until spring to get some cleaning done – on your mailing list. That's what online jewelry retailer Limoges did during one of its busiest shopping seasons:

Limoges' email list dazzled sales numbers and conversions when it trimmed unresponsive customers

According to an in-depth article on [Internet Retailer](#), Limoges first identified unresponsive customers as those who hadn't opened an email in six months. It then sent them a series of emails with three goals
in mind:

1. Encourage more interaction with emails
2. Trim back the number of emails the customer received
3. Remove the customer from the list entirely

Limoges started the campaign off by sending unresponsive subscribers a generous 25% off coupon via email. If the subscriber took the coupon bait, they were left on the typical engagement list (which sends out several emails each month).

For subscribers who clicked within a three-day time period, Limoges followed up with another email – but this one wasn't promotional. Instead, it asked them to choose which of two rings they preferred – a more traditional style, or a more "fashion-forward" look. No matter which style they clicked, these customers were also bumped back up to receiving email at regular intervals, since they had clearly demonstrated that they were interested in interacting with the company.

Customers who didn't respond were added to an email list that sent out mails with less frequency. Six months later, the campaign was re-launched in a similar way. Customers who

didn't interact with the messages were notified that they had been opted out of the email communications, although it also included instructions on how to sign back up again if they desired.

THE RESULTS

The results were pretty spectacular – trimming unresponsive subscribers and letting customers choose the frequency with which they received emails boosted clicks by 71% and conversion rates by an impressive 25%.

The bottom line is this: Particularly over the holidays, people's email inboxes are going to be full of competing offers. Why not let them decide how often they'd like to hear from you, or let them express their opinion on a new product in your store by clicking through an email?

Either way, you gain valuable data on what your subscribers really want – rather than just throwing a bunch of emails at them and hoping something sticks!

Helpful Holiday Checklist
✓ Have you added a dash of festive cheer to your site through holiday graphics, avatars and logo updates?
✓ Have you looked at your mailing list segments to determine ways that you can increase engagement without increasing email frequency?
✓ Have you asked your customers how often they'd prefer hearing from you – if they want to hear from you at all? Trimming the "dead weight" can boost response rates and get you more sales from the people who truly want to do business with you.

Now that you have a plan in place for getting customers into the holiday spirit, it's time to plan a unique shopping experience for them.

In the next chapter, we'll look at ways that you can make your customer's shopping hassle-free and convenient. Everyone has at least one person on their gift list that's a challenge to buy for – so following these next steps will eliminate frustration and turn your site into every shopper's favorite destination.

3

Create a Holiday-Themed Gift Guide

These days, people are busier than ever and don't have time to spend hours scrolling down price lists and navigating busy, overflowing menus. They need help, and a holiday-themed gift guide could be the perfect way to motivate them to get something for everyone on their list – right from your site.

In this chapter, you'll learn simple ways to make your site more user friendly, so people stay on your site rather than jumping to your competitions'.

IT'S A NEW YEAR FOR HOLIDAY MARKETING

Ideally, you should have been planning your holiday email campaign back in July, according to David Workman, operations manager for Delta Apparel. He claims that many retailers simply resort to last year's email campaign because the results worked so well – but a lot can change in a year.

Case in point: the pervasive use of mobile phones and tablets has only increased in a year's time – with much of the focus going toward designing a responsive site that understands and adapts dynamically to mobile users' needs.

Email is the same way – with as much as 47% of all emails being opened on mobile devices – and the number is only growing.
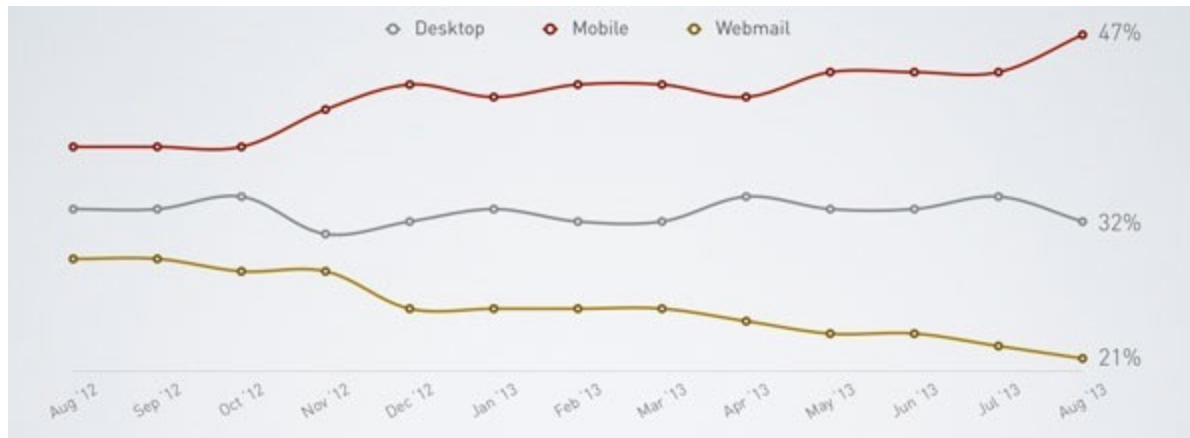
A study by Litmus learned that as much as 47% of all emails are opened on a mobile device

With this in mind, why not develop a campaign that can be opened and interacted with in a way that's responsive across all devices?

One such idea: a themed gift guide. By analyzing your email and customer behavior data, you can glean a great deal of information about your shoppers in the span of a year. Delta Apparel did this, and learned enough tidbits about its customers to segment them into tighter groups that focused more on relevancy than shopper's interests. A large portion of their marketing was also more geared toward personalization. As a result, in their words, "conversions went through the roof."

What are some ways that you can segment customers that go beyond the typical demographics? Can you offer up personalized items or a mobile-optimized tailored gift guide to take some of the stress out of shoppers' holiday headaches?

USER-FRIENDLY SITE SUGGESTIONS

Beyond responsive design, email marketing and festive pixels, there are several other elements of your site design that warrant a closer focus this holiday season.

1. **Site search**. Your site search is likely going to get some heavy usage as hurried customers search frantically down to the wire for the perfect last-minute gift. Does it give them the results they want?

2. **Personalized gift suggestions**. Many stores segment by demographic (gender, age-range), but what if you segmented suggestions by interest or price? If you have a large selection of products, it may well be worth investing in a product suggestion filtering system that allows customers to check specific boxes regarding their recipient, and then dynamically load the results in the same window.

One such tool, which can help you automate and personalize many of these customer channels, is ExactTarget, a cloud-based marketing software owned by Salesforce.com – so if you currently use Salesforce CRM, you'll find ExactTarget integrates perfectly.

ExactTarget integrates across key platforms including web, social, mobile and more

TAP INTO YOUR SOCIAL SPHERES

Beyond your website itself, there's also the burgeoning social media sphere that you can tap into. The holidays were made for sharing – so now's the time to dust off that Twitter account, connect with Facebook friends and fans, and start getting active on Pinterest.

If you'd like to add a little festive flair to your social media links, there are plenty of free holiday-themed social media icons out there, including a [frosty Facebook](#) (among others), and some [Santa-capped snowglobes](#).

Even though there's less emphasis on social media this year, there are still a variety of ways to keep customers engaged through the appropriate social channels. The next chapter will give you some great ideas on how to do just that – in a way that's easy, and most importantly, fun!

4

Leveraging Social Media over the Holidays

The best part about the holidays is the spirit of giving and sharing — and social media was built for it! You can get creative here and really look for ways to make your brand stand out in many different ways. Sometimes, however, the most tried-and-true approaches work best. In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at proven winners and unique angles that can springboard your social media efforts this season.

Here are a few ideas...

THE WISH LIST

Wish lists are a great way for busy shoppers to stay organized — but they also help keep your brand front-of-mind during the bustle of the season. And it's not just for major holidays — life events and special milestones like weddings, births, graduations and more can all benefit from wish lists. Even events that span several weeks on the calendar, like hunting season, can excite customers and encourage a higher order volume of items added to cart during checkout.

Back in 2009, beauty retailer Sephora encouraged customers to create wish lists. It then aggregated them into a feed and granted one wish a day for 30 days. Keep in mind, this was even before mobile shopping really took off — so a campaign like this could be built around location-based coupons and deals to mobile-browsing customers for even greater reach.

"PIN"SPIRATION

Around a year ago, Blue Nile, a retailer of fine jewelry, was noticing that a great deal of its traffic was coming from Pinterest. They discovered that people were pinning and sharing pictures of jewelry for events and to help organize different ideas and inspiration. Seizing on an opportunity, Blue Nile created its own Pinterest account to show off different themed ideas for a variety of events – from fall foliage to weddings and more.

As you might imagine, Valentine's Day is the holiday where jewelers stand to reap huge profits. So, Blue Nile started a contest wherein users had to follow them on Pinterest, then re-pin three diamond rings from the "Be My Valentine" board in order to be entered to win a $900 diamond ring.

The results: During the 8-day contest, Blue Nile netted 5,000 more followers (they typically got 1,500 new followers in the same time frame before the contest),
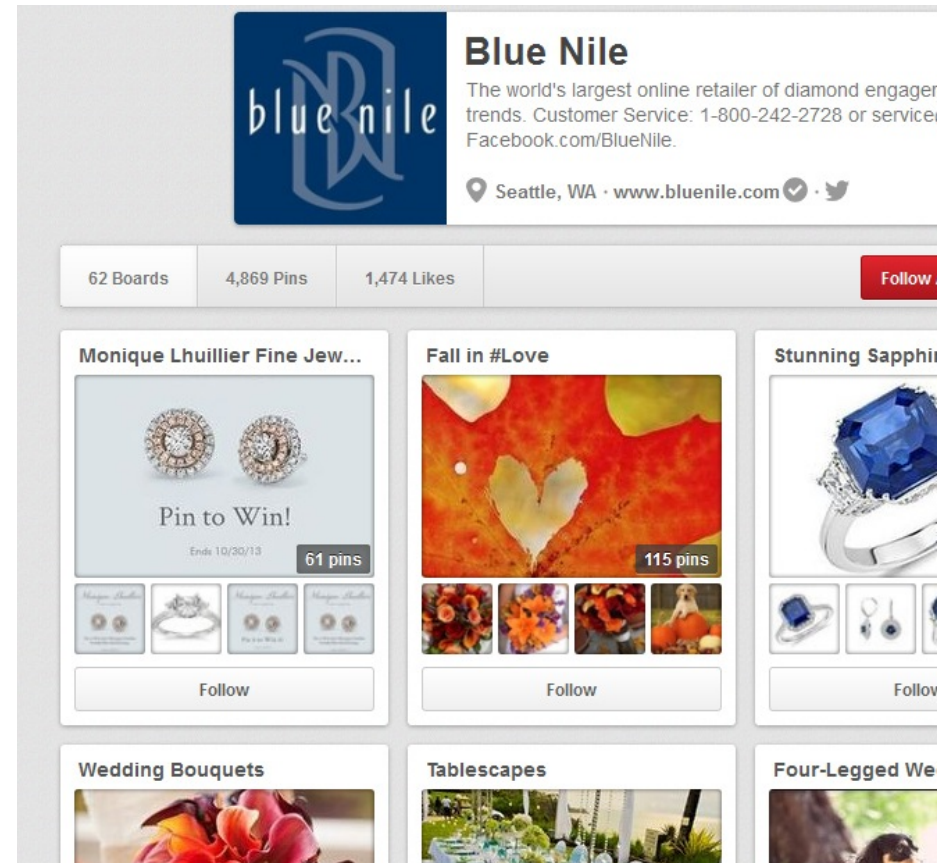
Blue Nile's Pinterest account

and their diamond rings were shared over 50,000 times. That represented 50,000 opportunities to showcase their brand in front of thousands of people.

You can use a Pinterest-based monitoring and analytics system like Piqora to determine the effectiveness of your campaigns. The system also works with Tumblr and Instagram.

COMMUNICATION IS A TWO-WAY STREET

It's vital to remember that now is *not* the time to bombard customers with messages. Their social media feeds and timelines are already blown up out of proportion. The key is to interact with the attention you get – and make participating in your holiday promotions fun and engaging.

Surprisingly, coupons that are doled out via social networks may not get the response you'd hope, especially if they don't have a traditional barcode to go


StarStar is an example of a coupon redemption + mobile outreach promotional program

along with them. Many stores won't accept printed coupons – which can lead to more blowback from frustrated customers. Plus, there's just too much chatter and a flood of deals that may make yours get lost in the crowd. Instead, consider looking at mobile-based coupons to reach out and connect with customers beyond the din of the social web.

Services like StarStar (in the US) enable brands to create a custom name that follows pressing the star (*) key twice. Once an ad is aired, placed in a newspaper, or delivered via SMS, the customer can type the coupon code to view the offer.

Case in point – Omaha Steaks delivered a 20% off coupon to customers who used the **OMAHA code on their mobile phones, and enjoyed a coupon conversion rate of over 35%.
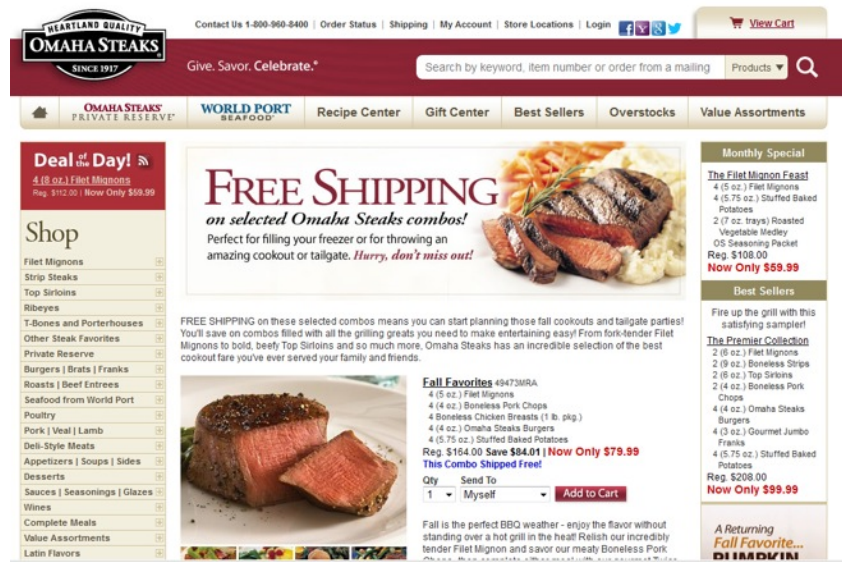
Omaha Steaks used mobile advertising to encourage coupon redemption to select customers

All major US wireless carriers including AT&T, Verizon, Sprint and T-Mobile are already enabled with * * functionality.

Beyond these points, make sure that your holiday advertising and promotions are appropriate for your core audience, rather than trying to make a blanket appeal to everyone. Sometimes companies try far too hard to make their message as innocuous and simple as possible in an attempt to be all things to all people.

But this can then backfire with your crowd of true fans and supporters, who will see right through the "smokescreen" and wonder what happened to the message of the brand they loved!

Helpful Holiday Checklist

✓ Have you created a holiday-themed gift guide or filtered search/suggestion tool that visitors can use to find the perfect gift?

✓ Have you integrated a wish list feature within your shopping cart? Many users add an item to their cart when they really want to save it for later – then wonder why it disappeared. Wish list functionality can remove this obstacle.

✓ Are you interacting with customers and responding to them (even the complaints!) on social media?

✓ Have you considered using mobile coupon redemption programs to encourage customer interaction through your responsive website?

Even though there are a lot of great suggestions here, sometimes the best way to build up "mindshare" over the holidays is to let your customers do the talking! In the next chapter, we'll look at crowdsourcing ideas from previous holiday campaigns of businesses both large and small to give you some great inspiration!

5

The Power of Crowdsourcing

Your customers, followers and fans can be the biggest voice of your holiday shopping campaign – which means crowdsourcing is ripe for picking out ideas, gathering suggestions and building community and creating goodwill. But how do you approach it to create something that will get people engaged and involved? That's what we'll review in this chapter.

LET PEOPLE GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR BRAND

In addition to focusing on new and innovative ways to reach out to your customers, don't forget that the customer wants to be a part of the brands they support and buy.

Heineken gives us the perfect example of how this can be done. They understood the need for customer engagement, so they called out to their fan base with one challenge: to design their own Heineken bottle.

The actual judging process took more than five months, and a winner was selected at an influential design show in Milan, Italy. With over 2,000 high-quality entries, it was a media smorgasbord. You can see a few of them in this image, with the winning entry showcased in the center.

While Heineken's example isn't a holiday campaign, per se, its upscale, classy content demanded attention. And it's a great example for even small businesses to follow. For example, you can:

- leverage short videos through Twitter's Vine app
- host a holiday themed Instagram photo party
- do a holiday-themed recipe swap on Pinterest

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL WAYS TO GIVE

But holiday marketing is about more than just the gifts. It's also about giving. When customers know that their purchase will not only mean something to the recipient, but also help to change and touch lives of people they don't even know, there's something special that warms the heart in knowing they're doing good with every dollar they spend this season.

You can probably think of lots of creative ways to give back with every order – whether it's a holiday-focused charity, a mission that's near and dear to you personally, or just for fun.

MasterCard did this masterfully themselves last year by partnering with StandUp2Cancer by having their very own Ugly Sweater campaign. According to the promotion

"Wearing an ugly sweater for a day is funny. Wearing it for weeks takes commitment. And that's the kind of commitment it takes to StandUp2Cancer."

They invited fans and followers to take and share pictures of themselves in an ugly sweater. Then, encourage friends to pledge money on whether or not their ugly-sweater-wearing pal followed through. The proceeds go toward funding potentially lifesaving cancer cures. As you can see, it's a win-win – friends and family get a good laugh while helping to spread the word and help save lives.

CREATE A COUNTDOWN TO A SPECIAL EVENT

There are plenty of creative countdown-style landing pages that allow you to countdown to a specific event, so if you're looking for a way to generate holiday buzz toward a more substantial campaign (such as a contest with some highly desired prizes), a countdown can be a great way to do just that.

THEN KEEP THE ENERGY GOING!

Beyond the landing page, many ecommerce sites simply drop the ball. They're often locked into old, outdated and cumbersome systems that practically hemorrhage customers at the most pivotal point: the checkout.

That being the case, how can you improve your checkout process to convince finicky holiday shoppers to stay put? Everyone wonders at the last minute if they could've paid less somewhere else – and the money pinch is particularly felt over the holidays. In the next chapter, we'll look at ways to make your checkout process easy, efficient and secure, so buyers are happy to let you fill their holiday shopping needs.

6

Improving the Checkout Process

Many sites looking to capitalize on the holiday season spending spree put a great deal of time and effort into getting traffic – but then visitors fall through the cracks during the checkout process. The key is to make check-out as easy and convenient as possible every step of the way. But how? This chapter will give you all the details.

REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES TO PURCHASE

Check-out is not the time to burden or distract users with "quick surveys" or other popup nonsense. Even nudging shoppers to sign up for your mailing list while they're in the middle of browsing could backfire on you. Likewise with forcing users to create an account before they can check out. All of these steps throw stumbling blocks in their way, however real your intentions might be to glean some more data from the interaction.

With that being said, here are some more steps that make checking out easy and flawless from start to finish.

GET FRIENDLY WITH MOBILE RESPONSIVE DESIGNS

We've covered mobile-responsive designs already, but mobile-friendly e-commerce themes and layouts are going to be in even greater focus for the 2013 shopping season. The fact is, customers are just a mere tap away from leaving your site. Enterprise business-level solutions like Mobify and Shopify include responsive mobile shopping carts, so that customers can order and checkout at the push of a button.

According to Shopify, mobile ecommerce has doubled from 2012 to 2013. Now is not the time to be left behind!

CEMENT TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

Two other concerns for your customers are security and safety. With so much money changing hands digitally around this time of year, hackers and scammers are looking for holes and vulnerabilities they can exploit to gain access to your money and your personal information.

It's more important than ever to put security first. Some of the most trusted security seals to sign up for include:

- [Norton Secure Site (Symantec SSL)](#) – The Norton Security seal also appears in search results, letting customers know at-a-glance that your site is secure against hackers and malware.

- [McAfee SECURE](#) (formerly HackerSafe)

While there may be other "trust seals" out there, both of these sites are household names because of their association with antivirus software, even though their services encompass much more today. By having these names on your site, you can leverage their trust-factor on your own site.

Beyond site security, customers also want to ensure their credit card information is safe. Both Visa and Mastercard have started their own initiatives to add an extra layer of security to online transactions:

- [V.me by Visa](#)
- [Mastercard Securecode](#)

Services like V.me from Visa and MasterCard SecureCode helps prevent unauthorized credit card use when customers checkout on your site

Most businesses are secure enough by using services like these to prevent credit card fraud and unauthorized access and hacking for sites, but businesses in ultra-competitive industries or those who sell high-end products may need to work a little harder to convince customers to shop with them.

Fortunately, there are customer service review sites that allow customers and "mystery shoppers" to rate and review how well your customer support team responds to inquiries, tickets and overall handling of issues. These sites include:

- BizRate Ratings
- StellaService

TEST CONSTANTLY!

Will making all these changes guarantee an increase in your conversion rate this holiday season? The only way to know with absolute certainty is to test.

Some sites experience phenomenal results with things like customer service and trust-related seals. Others may not. What works for one person as a best practice may not work for someone else. The only true way to know is to test for yourself and determine what connects best with your target audience.

That being said, it's important to have your measurement and analytics systems in place well before the holiday season. If you've put off the process because it seems too overwhelming and technical, you're in luck. There are plenty of robust and reliable analytics platforms that allow you to A/B split test, measure, track and optimize your pages from start to finish. These include:

* CrazyEgg Heatmap Tracking (yeah, we're biased!) – See a visual overview of where visitors are looking on your pages with affordable tracking. Beyond heatmaps, CrazyEgg will also show you who clicked what, and where scrollers' attention fades when reading your website.

- [KISSmetrics](#) – Track your visitors and where each one goes, what they click on, how long they stay and more. Uncover valuable customer information that Google Analytics won't (and can't) tell you.

- [Visual Website Optimizer](#) – Includes split testing and multivariate testing functionality as well as user testing to determine where customers are leaving (and what you can do about it).

MARKET EXCLUSIVES TO EXISTING CUSTOMERS

Customers want to know they're being taken care of, that their loyalty is being rewarded. One of the best ways to give back to the people who have gotten you where you are is to offer them some limited-time exclusives – deals or products that no one else gets. You can do this through your mailing list segments, adjusting customers by order amount or volume (or both!)

Few companies are truly attentive to their customers during the checkout process. By following these tips, you can be one of those companies that does an exemplary job of keeping the customer first. But what happens once the order is placed? Most ecommerce sites simply send out an order confirmation and, if you're lucky, a shipping confirmation with the tracking number.

You can go beyond the typical canned responses and turn every order into a lucrative opportunity to retarget customers to come back and shop again soon. In the next chapter, we'll

take a closer look at an often-forgotten area of sales where you can build up feelings of excitement and anticipation – the shipping and delivery process.

7

After the Sale

Once a sale is done, most companies figure the hard work is behind them. You've got a landing page that gets clicks and a checkout page with enviable conversions. But you're still not done! The after-sales service can often be a make-or-break point with the customer – no matter how great your ordering process was up until that point.

Here's how to keep customers coming back, long after the first sale.

RETARGETING MATTERS

Retargeting (also called remarketing or behavioral remarketing) involves targeting customers with images of the products they looked at (or an ad of your site) on other pages they visit once they've left your site. These retargeting initiatives can help keep your brand in mind even
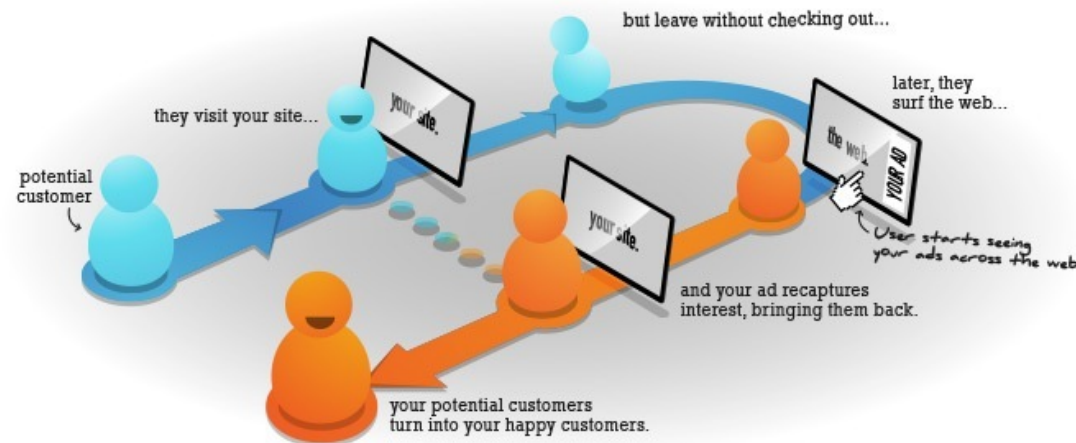
How Retargeting Works – Source: Retargeter

when potential customers are reading the news, laughing at funny pictures, or even getting a recipe for dinner.

Retargeting is a great way to bring customers back – whether they're just browsing or they've added items to their cart. More advanced retargeting capabilities can actually show them the pages and products they've browsed, reminding them that they left items in their cart that they were interested in.

There are several companies specializing in retargeting, including:

- [Retargeter](#)
- [AdRoll](#)
- [Chango](#)
- [Rocket Fuel](#)

All of these companies leverage retargeting technology, analytics and ad networks, with varying levels of pricing and features. With the particularly busy holiday season, customers may be browsing just to see what's out there on the market and who has the best deals – but getting them to come back may take some gentle nudging. Retargeting gives you that nudge to get them off the fence and back on your site to make that all-important purchasing decision.

AFTER-SALES EMAILS AND PRODUCT UPDATES

Want to truly stand out from the crowd this holiday e-commerce shopping season? Don't settle for "canned" response messages.

Instead of a generic "thanks for your order" note, what about a personalized-style email letting the customer know how much you appreciate their business, and that they've made a great choice by buying (insert product name here). You might even want to include a few last-minute "stocking stuffer" ideas to get them thinking about the "little things" that can make a big difference.

After the order confirmation email, you'll likely have an automated shipping email letting customers know that their item(s) are on the way. Again, personalization is key. Let them know the tracking code and how to use it so they can keep tabs on their order's progress. Some innovative companies make the shipping confirmation appear to actually come from the "product" itself, as if it had a personality all its own. Quirky – but it certainly gets noticed!

Finally, the product arrives. If it's a gift, you may want to send a non-descript email subject line, like "DO NOT OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS", inviting the customer to review their new purchase and share their thoughts about it. These reviews are crucial to boosting the confidence and buying decisions of other shoppers, so encouraging them to take a minute to share their comments (and making it easy for them to review) are worth their weight in gold!

DELIVERY AND SHIPPING

Although you often have little control over delayed shipments, lost packages and other delivery snafus, you can take steps to get it right. According to an eConsultancy survey, 59% of shoppers would completely abandon a retailer who failed to keeps their delivery promises. That means, if surprising demand for an item meant that it was going to be extremely delayed or backordered, keep customers in the loop every step of the way.

Case in point: November 15th marked the launch of the highly-anticipated PlayStation 4 console. Users who preordered theirs from Target to be bundled with a game called Watch Dogs were surprised when the release date for Watch Dogs was pushed back to spring 2014. Target jumped the gun and canceled all
PS4 pre-orders.

Amazon let its customers know that their console would still be shipped, minus the game. On realizing its mistake, Target did a 180 and agreed to ship/stock consoles that were pre-ordered, minus the games. Although they managed to save themselves a lot of headaches and embarrassment (not to mention the wrath of unhappy gamers), there were still a few soured experiences left to mend.

Helpful Holiday Checklist

✓ Have you integrated trust and security seals on your website to improve credibility and help those "fence-sitters" who are considering abandoning their shopping cart?

✓ Do you have retargeting strategies in place (both via email and/or ads) to encourage customers to come back?

✓ Are you properly testing, measuring and analyzing where customers are coming from, how long they're staying on your pages, and where their focus is?

✓ Do you follow up with the customer through branded, engaging them with order updates and shipping notices that go beyond the typical canned response and provide follow-up, review opportunities and helpful accessories?

Thanks for Reading the Hard-boiled Guide to Holiday eCommerce!

The bottom line, when it comes to e-commerce holiday sales, is that preparedness is key. For many online retailers, this is a make-or-break point that will generate enough profit to carry them well into next year. And every year, online competition becomes more and more fierce – with new retailers, new services and new products all vying for your ideal customer's attention.

By following the tips in this guide, you'll be able to make sure your site not only stands out and gets attention, but that it's easy and convenient for people to use no matter what device they're shopping on.

With a seamless checkout process and consistent follow-ups from the moment the product leaves the warehouse until it arrives at their door, you can be sure that you're offering the kind of service that people can't stop talking about.

Finally, don't forget to test – where people are going, how long they're staying, and what they're interested in – as these key metrics can help you start off the new year with even more profits.

Good luck, and happy holidays!

See What's Working... and What's Not

Serious about optimizing your holiday marketing? You need to know how people behave on your Web pages, so you can create the best possible messaging and design. For that, there's no better tool than Crazy Egg.

Crazy Egg gives you four visualizations that demystify user behavior: heatmap, scrollmap, overlay and confetti.

Once you "see" how your content is performing, it's easy to optimize your campaigns to give visitors what they want and need—so they buy more.

If you aren't already benefiting from Crazy Egg, why not try it now?

See for yourself the benefits of heat map technology... FREE, for 30 days.

Don't waste time guessing what works and what doesn't. With Crazy Egg, optimizing your site is a snap! Accept your free trial today.

crazyegg™