

Don't wait until it's too late: gear up for the holiday marketing rush now

[Art & Culture](#), [Holidays](#)



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We're in the midst of summer. Most of us can be found lounging at the beach, hitting up a music festival or sparking up the grill. So why would any retailer start thinking about the holiday season now?

Although there are impulse shoppers, the consumer has done all the necessary research, entering the store zeroed in on her destination. She knows what she wants. To become part of the equation, you need to get your brand message in front of her earlier than ever before.

Doing anything else could jeopardize your business. Just look at the numbers: Thanks to gift-giving, the fourth quarter will generally be your business's strongest. According to the National Retail Federation, the holiday season alone -- the months of November and December -- can comprise up to 20% of a retailer's yearly sales.

This year's U. S. ecommerce holiday retail sales alone are expected to reach \$1.2 trillion. Missing your window of opportunity could mean leaving a lot of money on the table.

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So to answer our original question, the holiday shopping season is *always* right around the corner.

Here are five tactics to best map out your digital-marketing strategy:

1. Maximize digital touchpoints.

The customer buying journey is often a linear one, often unique to the individual and marked by moments. Within these moments, you have the opportunity to grab an individual's attention, engage her and influence her.

Whether it's through reviews, opinions or pricing, she'll ultimately want to validate her purchase decision. This moment of validation will influence which brand she chooses, and it can happen both inside and outside the store.

In fact, as of 2015, a staggering of consumers use their smartphones in stores to help them make decisions.. Retailers need to maximize digital touchpoints -- as well as others -- to build engagement and drive traffic to their stores.

2. Make the experience personal and convenient.

More consumers are skipping the trek to the local mall, choosing instead to let a subscription service pick items based on their tastes. Savvy retailers see this as an opportunity to personalize the experience and provide greater convenience to shoppers.

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Consider connecting with consumers at the point of discovery. , for example, represents half of social referrals and 64 percent of social revenue, while Pinterest represents 16 percent of social revenue and gives users the power to buy right from the site when they integrate it with a commerce platform. Tapping into this form of social shopping can give you access to an entirely new revenue stream.

It's these moments of inspiration and validation that can disrupt the retail experience and create new opportunities for engagement and potential sales. Even something as simple as a triggered message when targets are within a certain distance from your store can stop someone in her tracks and prod her through your doors.

3. Make a list -- and check it twice.

Often, there's more to your target audience than meets the eye. Get to know potential customers beyond simple demographics by attempting to understand what they want in products *and* shopping experiences.

Baby Boomers, for instance, place a high value on customer service and would rather shop in store than online. Even when shopping online, of consumers between the ages of 55 and 64 choose to pick up their purchases from brick-and-mortar locations. Gen Xers, on the other hand, favor specialty stores over anything else. They use social media recommendations to inform their purchases, with seeing social media as a key learning tool when it comes to products and services.

Finally, although more than half of will use their smartphones to research products, look for coupons and track their shipments, they really want to be able to see and feel the merchandise in store before they make a purchase.

4. Target your messaging on a hyperlocal level.

Customizing experiences to consumers can drive traffic through your doors. According to research from Google, of consumers say they're more inclined to shop in local stores that provide coupons and offers tailored to them.

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Look for ways to use proximity to your advantage; people are more likely to engage with an ad when they're closer to a store. Mobile users who are shown a targeted message when they're one or two miles away from a store will interact with the ad 48 percent of the time. However, as they move further away, the interaction rate drops. At two to five miles away, the interaction rate is only 26 percent.

The bottom line: With nearly 80 percent of consumers visiting a store within a day of doing a "near me" search, ignoring hyperlocal opportunities could cause you to miss opportunities for sales.

5. Don't wait.

Consumers are doing less and less last-minute shopping. In fact, of them start before Halloween. You need to get into the fold early if you ever hope to compete. Consumers are constantly seeking out deals, and you must respond by modifying your "traditional" holiday promotion strategy.

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Over the past five years, of retailers say their holiday promotions have moved up by two weeks or more. And by the time your target consumers are basting their turkeys, 34 percent of retailers will have run most of their holiday season promotions. Start thinking about what you plan to offer today so you can stay ahead of the curve tomorrow.

Go beyond what customers expect, and use digital to enhance and personalize all the meaningful moments in the shopping experience, both in store and online. They'll return the favor with better engagement and greater loyalty-- not a bad way to start the holiday season.