



How to Know Your eCommerce Business Is Ready for the Holiday Season.

Getting ready for the holiday season is no small task. We all know that it is one of the busiest seasons of the year for almost everyone. From preparing for large meals, buying presents for friends and family, decorating, and not to mention all of the events that happen during the holiday season. We all say we are going to start preparing early, but honestly, who really does that?

For business owners, getting ready for the holidays isn't just about buying and wrapping presents for their loved ones. It's about getting your business, online or brick and mortar, ready for people to shop for the holidays. Holidays for eCommerce retailers are not for the faint of heart. There is a lot of hard work that goes into making sure that the busiest shopping time of the year goes smoothly for their eCommerce store. So, you are probably wondering:

1. Is it really worth the time and effort for me to prepare my eCommerce store for the holiday season?
2. What do I need to do to make sure my eCommerce business is ready for holiday shoppers?

Let's take a look at each question and give you some ideas and resources to make sure you are prepared for the upcoming holiday shopping season.

Is it really worth the time and effort for me to prepare my online store for the holiday season?



The simple answer to the first question is YES! It is worth the time and effort to prepare your eCommerce business for the holiday shopping season.

It is probably hard to imagine a time when we didn't have Black Friday and Cyber Monday. These shopping days along with their counterparts have mostly become popular in the last 30-40 years. [Black Friday](#) shopping didn't really become a nationwide shopping event until the late 1980s to early 1990s and [Cyber Monday](#) was born around 2005.

Online retail sales have grown exponentially over the past decade making it a major source of holiday shopping for consumers. Black Friday has now expanded not only into a whole shopping weekend, including Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday, but a whole month worth of special shopping days running through December.

Currently, in the USA, we participate in:

- **Black Friday** - The Friday after Thanksgiving.
- **Small Business Saturday** - The Saturday after Thanksgiving.
- **Cyber Monday** - The Monday after Thanksgiving.
- **Cyber Week** - The full week after Thanksgiving.
- **Free Shipping Day** - The date varies, but usually around mid-December.

- **Super Saturday** - The last full Saturday before Christmas.

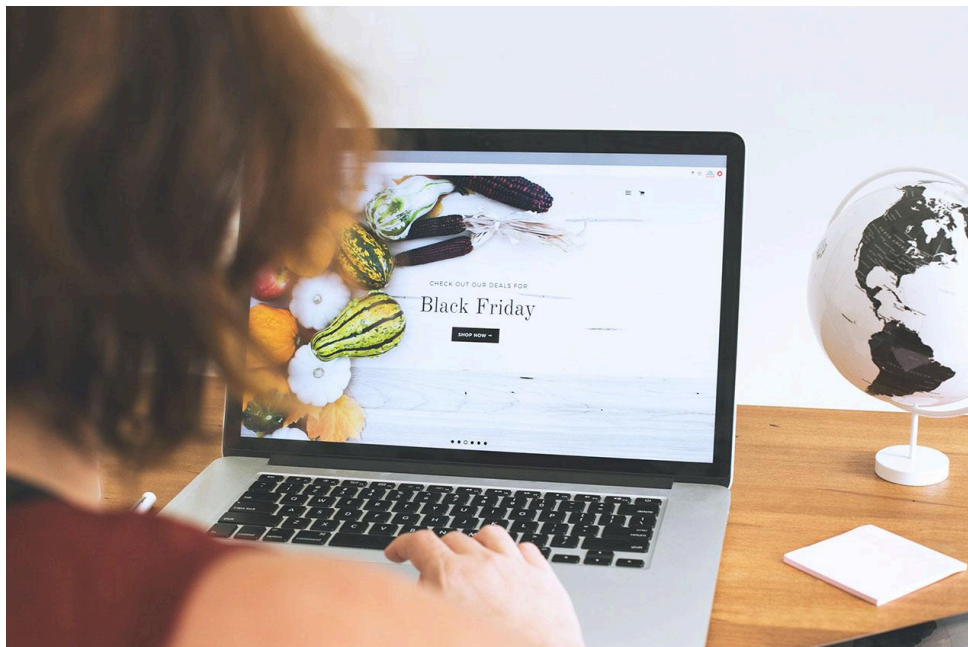
Each year the total amount in sales goes up and with that, the amount of money that was spent shopping via e-Commerce. Last year alone, Cyber Monday saw a record-breaking [\\$7.9 billion](#) in online sales. Of that, \$2.83 billion of that was from purchases made on mobile devices, with \$2.2 billion of that money coming from purchases made on smartphones. Black Friday and Small Business Saturday also had big sales days with online purchase sales coming in at \$6.2 billion and \$3.02 billion respectively.

As you can see, the numbers don't lie. It is definitely worth the time and effort to prepare your online business for the holiday shopping season.

What do I need to do to make sure my online business is ready for holiday shoppers?

For this question, we are going to break it down into four sections to make sure you are ready, not just online, but ready on the backend of your business too.

Making sure your website is ready for holiday shoppers.



- **Make sure your website and shopping cart are running smoothly.** Confirm all pages on your website are correctly functioning and not running slow. You want to ensure that

your website will be able to handle a higher than normal volume of customers without the website breaking. Also, don't plan any major upgrades to your site during the holiday shopping season. Make sure to do these either well ahead of the holiday shopping season or after.

- **Responsive design should not be overlooked.** With the increase of people using their mobile devices for shopping online, it is important to make sure you are using responsive design for your website. Customers want the ease of shopping when and where they want and that includes on their smartphones. Ensure that your website is easy for them to read and that they can check out from their mobile device of choice.
- **Have a clear and understandable return policy in place.** Making sure that your return policy is posted in a place that customers can easily locate it and is clearly stated for customers is going to save everyone a lot of time and hassle in the long run. Even if you don't accept returns for your merchandise, you want to make sure that it is stated clearly for your customers. [Google's](#) tips for return policies is a great place to start if you aren't sure how to word your return policy.
- **Help your customers by offering gift guides on your website.** This a great way to help your customers make a decision on what gifts to give. You can break it down by price, interest, age, or any creative topic you can think of that best fits your merchandise. [Etsy](#) has a great example of how you can offer some gift suggestions for that hard to shop for person.



Start planning your marketing early.



- **Have a solid marketing plan in place before the start of the holiday shopping season.** It is important to make sure you have a solid marketing plan in place for your holiday sales. This is an ideal time to retarget customers to bring them back to your store as well as attracting new customers with holiday promotions. Sending out [email campaigns](#) is a great way for you to advertise your products as well as discounts you will be running during the holiday season.
- **Get your designers working on your graphics early.** Honestly, you can't start this too early. Especially if you are having to photograph and design your ad campaigns and you don't want them to look like an afterthought. A lot of companies will begin creating their marketing ads in July or August to ensure they have enough time for creation and revision.
- **Don't forget about your social media.** People scroll through their Instagram feeds on a regular basis throughout the day. Showing them images of your products being used is a great way for them to envision themselves or someone they are shopping for with your merchandise. [Shoppable posts](#) are also a great way to boost your online sales while people are browsing through Instagram.
- **Google Shopping Ads will help people find your products.** With [Google Shopping ads](#), you don't have to start as early as preparing for an email campaign. That being said, you also don't want to try and start them a week before the holiday shopping

season. Starting them a month to two months before your holiday shopping season kicks in is best to give them time to gain traction.

Learn More About Starting Google Shopping Ads Today!

Don't forget to prepare the backend of your business.



- **Make sure your staffing needs are covered.** Communicate clearly and well in advance to your employees if you have blackout dates that they cannot take off and what you foresee that your staffing needs will be during the holiday season. This is a great time of year to also show some extra employee appreciation by offering to provide lunch on your busiest days or bringing in extra snacks to help them get through the busy season.
- **Don't run out of inventory.** If you have items you know are best sellers, it would be good to have extra quantities so you don't run out. If people are in a time crunch and you are out of stock of what they are looking for, odds are they will leave your online store and go to a competitor's store that has the same or similar item in stock and ready to ship.

Make sure you are prepared for extra shipping as well as shipping cutoff dates.



- **Know your shipping date cutoffs and communicate them to your customers.** The holiday season is the busiest time of year for shipping companies and you want to make sure that not only you and your team are aware of the cutoff dates for shipping, but that your customers are aware as well. Post them throughout your offices to keep them at the front of your staff's mind, but also make sure to post them clearly for your customers to see online as well. Create a special landing page for your customers so they have easy access to see the dates clearly and create a message that can be seen in their shopping cart when they check out.
- **Make sure you have enough shipping and packing supplies on hand.** Contact your vendors and set up extra delivery days with all the shipping and packing supplies you think you will need for the increase in shipping. Pre-assembling your shipping boxes is also a good way to help the flow of packing and shipping go smoothly on your busiest shipping days.
- **Look into additional shipping options during the holiday season.** Consider utilizing more than your standard shipping methods during the holiday season. If you only do standard shipping, consider including 2-3 day shipping or even next day shipping. Most customers are okay with paying extra for faster shipping during the holiday season. Contacting your shipping carrier and they will be able to help you with figuring out the best options for your business and your customers.

While this may seem like a lot of things to do in preparation for the holiday shopping season, know that you don't have to wait until November to start preparing. Set a timeline for you and your staff and start your prep early. Even as early as during the summer, so you can make sure your marketing is done and ready to go as soon as holiday advertisements start to drop in late October, early November.

Making sure everything is in place before the shopping season will make the experience not only more enjoyable for you and your employees, but for your customers as well. They will rest assured that their orders for their loved ones are in good hands and will give them more reason to shop with you in the future.