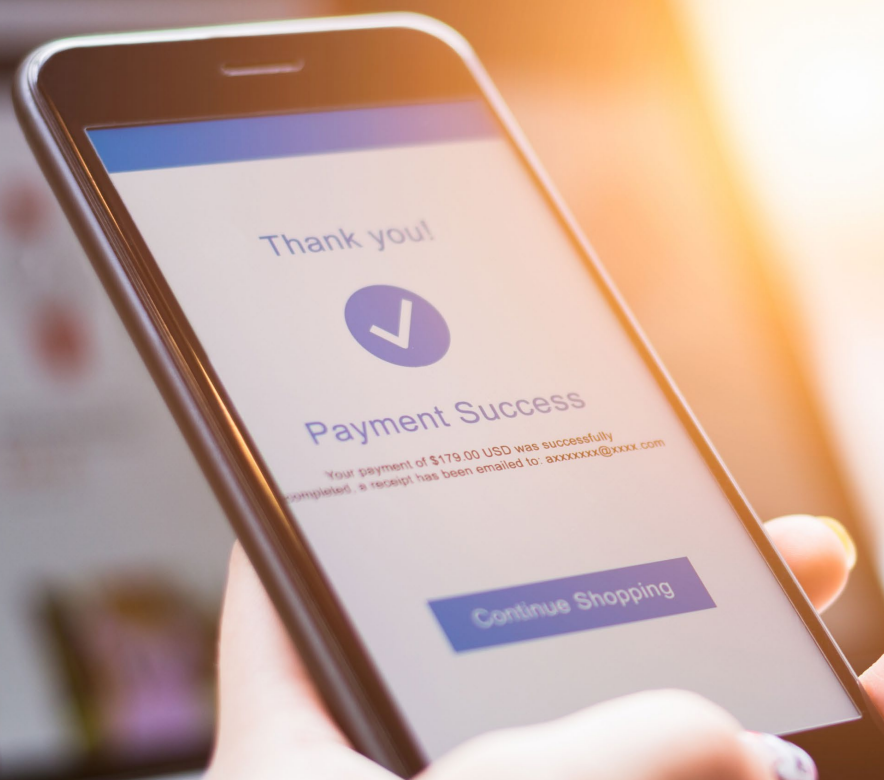


YOUR ROADMAP TO Peak Holiday 2019 E-Commerce Success



channeladvisor® 

The Peak Period shopping season is a competitive time, to say the least. So the sooner you can jumpstart your Q4 strategies, the better.

There's just one hurdle to overcome. With consumer expectations constantly evolving, how can you know where to focus efforts for the coming season?

Wonder no more. Thanks to longstanding relationships with industry leaders including Google, Amazon and Facebook, ChannelAdvisor's e-commerce experts understand what works — and what doesn't. They regularly assist more than 2,700 successful brands and retailers selling on hundreds of e-commerce channels during peak seasons. And they've combined their top insights into one convenient, step-by-step guide.

In this eBook, you'll learn the latest strategies for:

- 🕒 Extracting key trends and insights
- 🕒 Setting your budget for the entire season
- 🕒 Maximising digital marketing campaigns
- 🕒 Optimising listings on leading marketplaces
- 🕒 Keeping everything in sync

It's the insider knowledge you need to get a head start on holiday success.

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Getting Ready

Each year, the end-of-year holiday shopping season becomes a little more complicated — and a lot more competitive. The stronger your grip on the latest trends and consumer expectations, the better positioned you'll be to maximise every last opportunity.

Just think: You now have more than 100 established marketplaces to choose from, compared with a handful just a few years ago — each with its own advertising platform and fulfilment options. As if that weren't enough to think about, there are new search, shopping and social media marketing opportunities to consider at every turn.

Looking at these and other changes within the e-commerce landscape is just the start. There are seasonal changes to analyse, too. Before you dive into selling strategies for the upcoming season, first take a look at the current landscape and get answers to a handful of key questions:

- ⦿ What were the most notable trends from last year?
- ⦿ When were consumers most actively researching?
- ⦿ When were consumers most actively buying?
- ⦿ What role did mobile play in planning and purchases?
- ⦿ Which shopping days performed well?
- ⦿ What were the biggest surprises?
- ⦿ How much time will you have to fulfil orders this year?



For a quick and easy recap of seasonal trends, check the ChannelAdvisor [resource center](#) and [blog](#). Starting in August each year, you'll find webinars, posts and digital guides with the latest insights and recommended best practices.



BOTTOM LINE

The entire process of selling online has become highly fragmented and complex. But for all that's changed, one thing remains the same.

In every tactic you take and strategy you develop, your consumer needs to stay at the center of it all. As you read through the suggestions in this eBook, remember to look at them all through the eyes of your customer:

- › What do they expect from sellers?
- › How will you deliver on those demands?

Whether you're a manufacturer or a retailer, a small business or firmly established brand, the commandment is the same: know your consumers and connect with them on their terms.

Now, let's look at the tactics and tools guaranteed to help you do just that.

Seasonal Search and Shopping Strategies

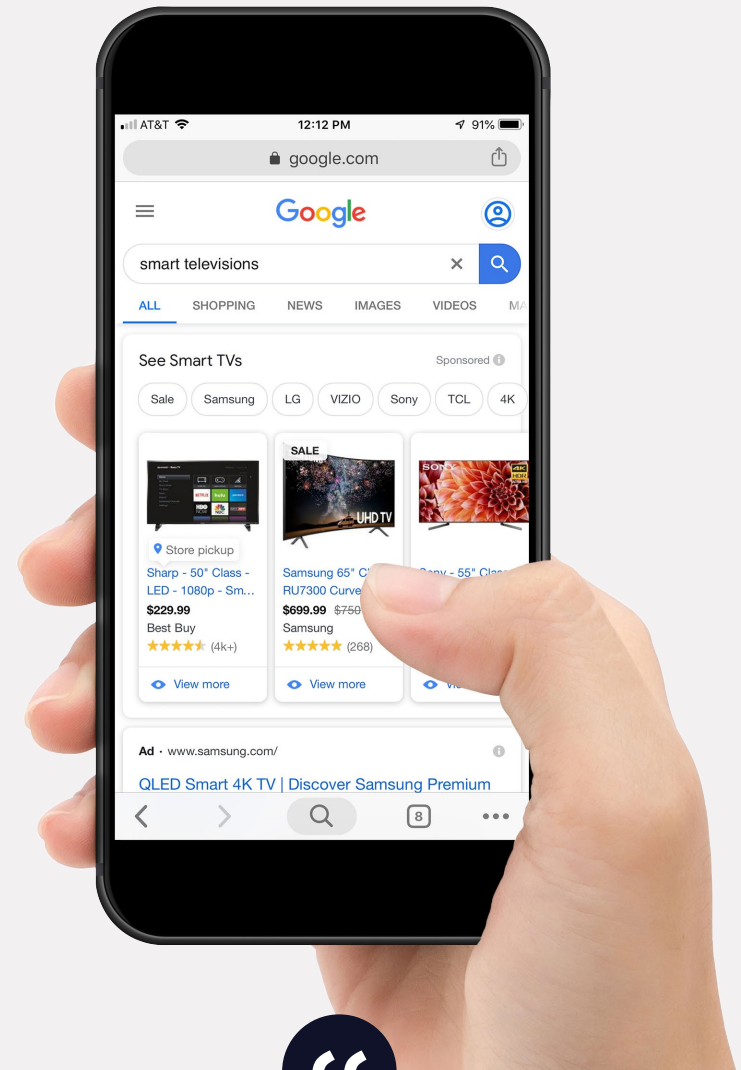
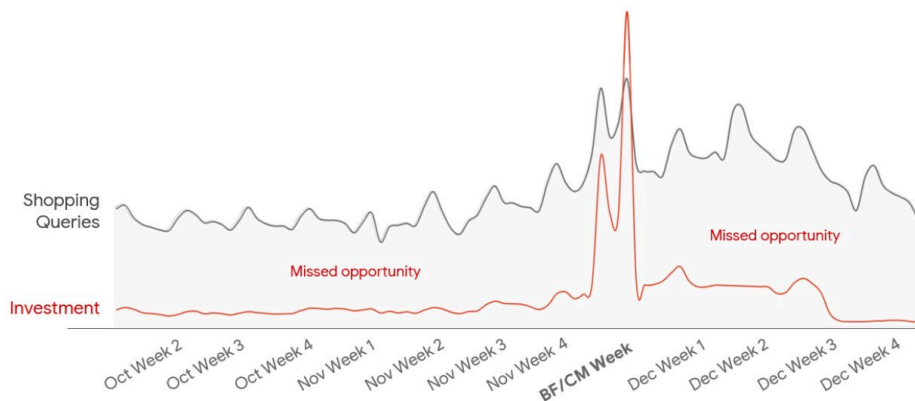
If there's one thing every seasoned seller knows, it's this: As soon as Halloween stock starts to dwindle, the countdown to Black Friday advertising begins. Here's what you need to do now to be ready:

Search Strategies

PLAN YOUR BUDGET

When preparing your digital marketing budget, it can be easy to assume you'll need to set aside a large chunk for the five-day period from Black Friday to Cyber Monday. We've seen online retailers allocate more than 30% of their entire Q4 budget to the Cyber 5.

But while this holiday shopping weekend is an important one, the opportunities extend far beyond it. In fact, according to Google, just 7% of all holiday product searches occur between Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Focus your advertising budget too heavily on these dates, and you'll miss the chance to reach early planners and procrastinators who are on the hunt for product ideas in October and December.



Many retailers significantly over-index on this weekend, driving up CPCs and diminishing Q4 efficiency.

KATJA HILDEBRANDT-CORRI
ChannelAdvisor Account Manager

That's why our number one piece of advice to all brands and retailers is this:

Plan your budget for the entire season. It may sound overly simplistic. But in 18+ years of working with thousands of brands and retailers, we see the same thing happen again and again. Sellers will over-index during peak shopping days like Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and then miss out on opportunities later in the season when demand may still be high.

Instead, start planning your budget early — late July to early August is ideal — to determine how your spend should be allocated throughout the season.



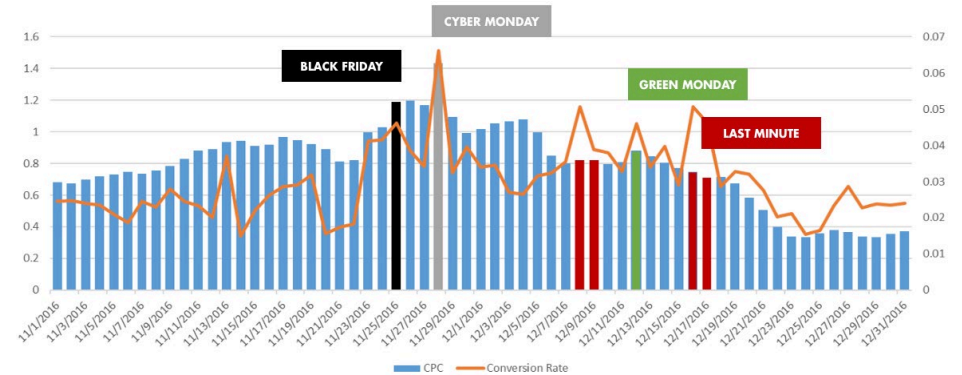
The CPCs dropped off significantly while conversion rates increased. So perhaps this retailer could have been more competitive during this time. There were also additional opportunities to maximize exposure with last-minute shoppers.

JENNIFER DOYLE

ChannelAdvisor Client Strategy Director

Best way to prepare? Analyse your data. Last year's search and sales history can serve as a strong "starter" guide on what you'll need to do to stay competitive during upcoming peaks. Just be sure to look beyond basic traffic and revenue patterns to consider other important factors such as cost per click (CPC) and conversion rate trends. These can be a great way to understand where you may have overspent — or if you could have been more aggressive.

Let's look at an example of how this might play out.



The data above paints a very clear picture of where to focus digital marketing efforts — as long as you know what to look for.

If you were to look at CPC alone, it would be easy to assume that mid-December is a time when this retailer will want to start pulling back. With a lower cost-per-click to indicate keywords have become less competitive, some sellers might take this to mean sales could drop off as well.

Except that this drop occurred right around Green Monday — the day shoppers start to realise they have just 10 shipping days before Christmas. When viewed in combination with conversion rates, it quickly becomes clear this timeframe represents a huge opportunity to potentially spend less to land more sales.

When reviewing your previous year's data, be on the lookout for similar trends and opportunities.

Advanced Search Strategies

Once you've analysed your data and planned your budget, it's time to move on to a few advanced strategies.

GOOGLE AUDIENCES

Google audiences allow you to target groups of consumers based on what interests them, what they're researching and how they've interacted with your business. And these days, there are more audience options than ever. We recommend taking advantage of some lesser-used audience options to get an edge over your competition.

First, ensure your core audiences are intact.

These are the essential audiences every advertiser should have in place.

- › Category viewers
- › Product viewers
- › Basket abandoners
- › Past purchasers
- › Customer match lists
- › Visitors to holiday-specific pages on your site

Next, target affinity audiences. Targeting these groups, which are placed into predefined buckets of general interests, can help drive awareness.

SHOPPER TYPE:

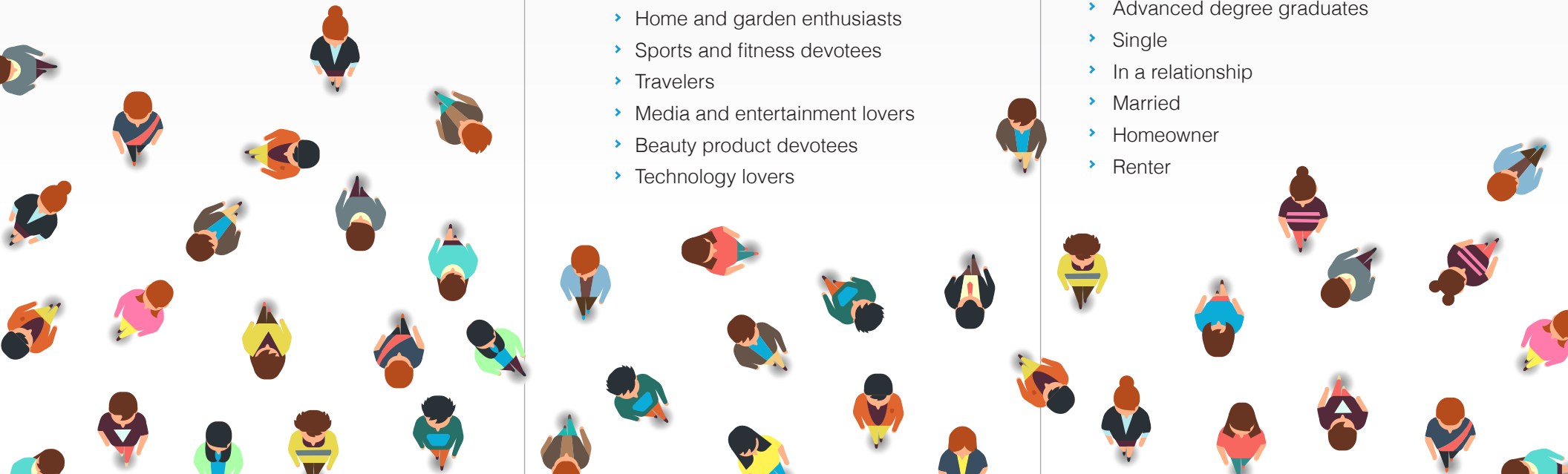
- › Department store shoppers
- › Superstore shoppers
- › Luxury shoppers
- › Bargain hunters

LIFESTYLE AND HOBBY TYPE:

- › Fashionistas
- › Outdoor enthusiasts
- › Home and garden enthusiasts
- › Sports and fitness devotees
- › Travelers
- › Media and entertainment lovers
- › Beauty product devotees
- › Technology lovers

Then refine your audiences with detailed demographics. This will help you to reach the most qualified shoppers possible.

- › Parents of infants
- › Parents of toddlers
- › Parents of preschoolers
- › Parents of grade schoolers
- › Parents of teens
- › College students
- › High school graduates
- › Bachelor's degree graduates
- › Advanced degree graduates
- › Single
- › In a relationship
- › Married
- › Homeowner
- › Renter



RESPONSIVE SEARCH ADS

Responsive search ads (RSAs) are a great way to ensure your ads get in front of the right consumer at the right time — and in the right format. These ads are designed to automatically adjust their size and appearance to fit available ad spaces. So a single responsive ad may appear as a small text ad in one place and a large image ad in another.

Best of all, Google uses machine learning to learn which of your ads are most relevant for each given query. That means RSAs are likely to compete in more auctions and match more search queries compared with non-responsive ads.

When creating RSAs:

- Provide five to 15 distinct headlines
- Provide at least two distinct descriptions
- Create headlines that don't repeat the same or similar phrases
- Ensure your headlines and descriptions make sense both individually and in combination

AD EXTENSIONS

Google ad extensions can be one of the most effective ways to increase conversions and sales throughout the holiday season. These snippets of information provide consumers with the details they need to make a buying decision, right from within the search engine results page. Two ad extension options in particular will really help your ads stand out in the peak Q4 holiday shopping season:

PRICE EXTENSIONS

Magnolia Pizza ⓘ

Ad www.magnoliapizza.com

Artisanal classic Italian pies, made fresh in our classic brick oven.

▼ View 3 prices from \$12.00

Pizzeria ⓘ

Ad www.Pizzeria.com

All the pizza you could eat, every kind and every flavour. Kids under 12 eat free on Tuesdays.

▼ View 5 prices from \$10.99

PROMOTION EXTENSIONS

The image shows a smartphone screen with a Google search for 'macy's deals'. The search results are displayed on a mobile device. The top result is for 'Macy's - Shop Fashion Clothing & Accessories - Official Site - Macys.com' with a price extension that says 'Save on Apparel, Home Items & More - Find Everything You Need at Macy's'. The search bar shows 'macy's deals' and the time is 12:30.

Better yet, use a countdown to increase the sense of urgency among purchase-ready shoppers:

Show Sales

Ad www.shoestore.com/pumps
Pumps 20% Off
Hurry Sale Ends In 2 Days!

Shopping Strategies

If you really want to get a headstart on the season — and your competition — it's time to get your Shopping campaigns ready for holiday action. Here's what the digital marketing experts recommend:

REVIEW YOUR FEEDS

First and foremost, audit your titles and feeds to ensure you're providing relevant attributes that match what your customers are searching. If you sell apparel, for example, you'll want to be sure your attributes include gender, size, color and even material. The more time you spend on this step, the more likely your product listing ads (PLAs) will be matched to relevant queries.

Category	Recommended structure	Example
Apparel	Brand + Gender + Product Type + Attributes (Color, Size, Material)	Ann Taylor Women's Sweater, Black (Size 6)
Consumable	Brand + Product Type + Attributes (Weight, Count)	TwinLab Mega CoQ10, 50 mg, 60 caps
Hard Goods	Brand + Product + Attributes (Size, Weight, Quantity)	Frontgate Wicker Patio Chair Set, Brown, 4-Piece
Electronics	Brand + Attribute + Product Type	Samsung 88" Smart LED TV with 4K 3D Curved Screen
Books	Title + Type + Format (Hardcover, eBook) + Author	1,000 Italian Recipe Cookbook, Hardcover by Michele Scicolone

PREPARE FOR SEASONAL SALES PROMOTIONS

Next, establish a process for submitting sales attributes for time-sensitive promotions. You should schedule which products are going to be on sale and ensure the correct prices are in your feed.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	id	title	description	price	sale_price	sale_price_effective_date	condition	availability
2	123	Basic Chicago G	>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.	59.99 USD	49.99 USD	2015-12-10T13:00-0800/20	new	in stock
3	456	Merry Wishes Ct	>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.	90.00 USD	70.00 USD	2015-12-10T13:00-0800/20	new	in stock
4	789	Luxury Goods Cl	>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.	140.00 USD	110.00 USD	2015-12-10T13:00-0800/20	new	in stock

EVALUATE YOUR STRUCTURE

Spend time reviewing your current Shopping campaign structure by taking advantage of Google's priority settings. This will allow you to get aggressive on high-priority products, while still prioritising other items:



Use high priority campaigns

to target your best sellers — whether they're featured sale items or top giftable products.



Use medium priority campaigns

to segment other products by brand or category.



Use low priority campaigns

to target 100% of your inventory at low bids. This will help ensure you still drive traffic should your other campaigns be limited by budget.

TARGET SEASONAL CATEGORIES

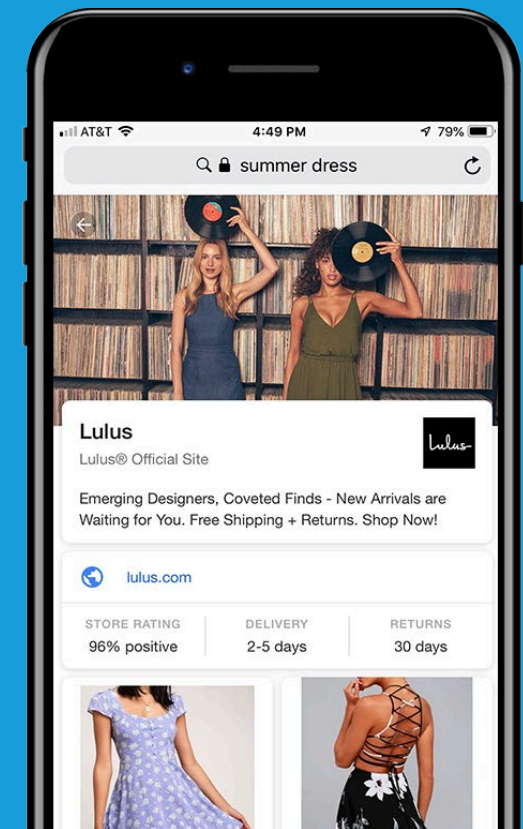
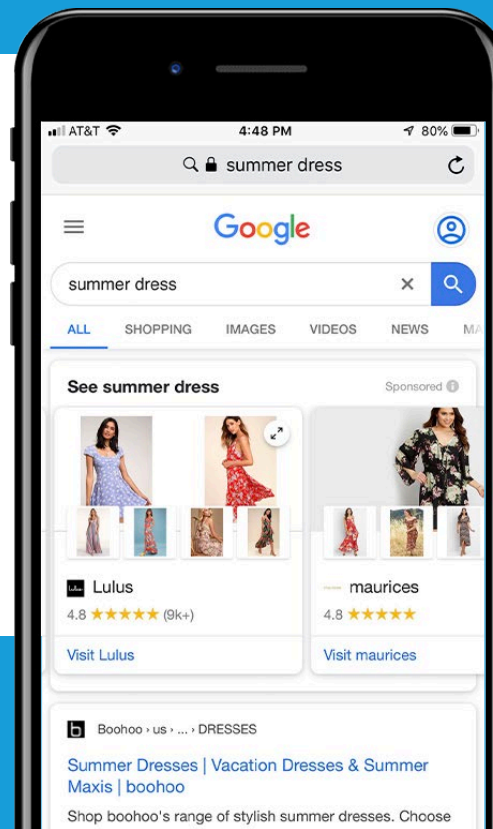
INSPIRE CUSTOMERS WITH DETAILED PRODUCT IMAGERY

Advanced Shopping Strategies

As soon as your feeds and promotions are in order, you can get further ahead of your competition with advanced strategies.

SHOWCASE ADS

Did you know that 40% of shopping-related queries on Google are broad? With Showcase ads, you can give shoppers a taste of your product selection even when they're not sure what it is they want to buy or where they want to buy it.



SMART BIDDING

By leveraging Google’s smart bidding options, you can set your ads to act instantly to changes in search volume, click volume and conversion rates. And if you use seasonality adjustments to notify Google when you have sales, smart bidding algorithms will automatically adjust to account for these promotions.

MAXIMISE CONVERSIONS	MAXIMISE CONVERSION VALUE	TARGET ROAS	TARGET CPA
For sellers that want to drive...			
as much revenue as possible within a set budget	as much conversion value as possible within a set budget	the highest conversion value possible while maintaining your target return on ad spend (ROAS)	as many conversions as possible while maintaining your target cost per acquisition (CPA)
Best for campaigns that are budget constrained		Best for campaigns that are not budget constrained	



Seasonal Marketplaces Strategies

Every year, online marketplaces play a more prominent role in peak shopping. And each season, consumers start to consult with these channels earlier and earlier. As much as **80% of shoppers** have been known to rely on Amazon for holiday-related purchases, and many consumers turn to resources like **eBay's "first minute"** deals and **Walmart's hottest toy list** as early as August.

It's never too early to get your products and promotions in the mix. The sooner you can launch on new marketplaces and test different strategies, the better positioned you'll be to maximise the flurry of holiday activity when it hits.

Start now by focusing on four key strategies to get ahead.

1

REPLENISH INVENTORY

It's an all-too common scenario: Sales are going strong and the business is on track for a record holiday season. And then... items start to sell out. Panic and scrambling ensue, but by the time those popular products are available again many consumers have moved on to other sellers or items. If you want to avoid the risk of overselling, it's imperative to have a plan in place for inventory replenishment — well before orders kick into high gear.

IF YOU USE FULFILMENT BY AMAZON (FBA):

Plan ahead. Arrange to have your shipments arrive at Amazon well in advance of key shopping dates. Consider how many items you're sending to FBA, as well as the sizes of those items and other factors that may impact how much time Amazon needs to get your inventory ready to sell.

Keep key dates in mind. Items should arrive at Amazon fulfilment centers no later than the first of November for Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and no later than the first of December for Christmas.

Prepare to restock. You'll need to be ready to replenish products that sell fast — as well as those that don't. Amazon has stringent policies on what it will keep on shelves during peak seasons, so products that start to pick up steam mid-way through the season may need to be restocked.

Use your inventory data. Amazon provides reporting you can use to decide what to restock and how to avoid fees for undersold items. And if you use a tool like **ChannelAdvisor Demand Forecaster**, you can accurately predict how much inventory you'll need 30, 60 and 90 days out.

IF YOU RELY ON SELLER-FULFILED WAREHOUSING:

Prepare timelines. Now's the time to ask: How long does it take your merchandising and replenishment teams to bring in new product and restock your warehouse? If you know it typically takes two to three weeks to manufacture or otherwise get items into your warehouse, you need to "bake" those factors into your timelines.

Adjust for new items. Will you be adding new product to your merchandise mix for the holiday season? Don't forget to account for these in your replenishment plans.

Forecast wherever possible. Running out of top-selling items is never a good thing, but during the peak holiday season it can be a major setback. Look at last year's data and forecast as much as possible to ensure warehouses will remain stocked with your most popular products at all times.

Have a "plan b." Have a plan in place that will allow you to expedite replenishment should a back-order situation arise.

2

OPTIMISE CONTENT

The better your product content is structured, the more likely a listing is to rise to the top of search results and drive more purchases. The is true at all times, but becomes especially critical during peak holiday seasons. When preparing your product content, several best practices and guidelines will help ensure your listings are optimised for each channel.

Streamline titles. Start by researching the allowed character count for titles, as these can vary from marketplace to marketplace. Then follow a formula for both parent titles and child or standard titles:

- ▶ Parent titles: {{Brand}} {{Gender}} {{Product Description}}
- ▶ Child or standard titles: {{Brand}} {{Gender}} {{Product Description}}
{{Size}}

Use accurate keywords. Consider how consumers will find your products on marketplaces — and not necessary how you refer to a product internally. Where appropriate, incorporate keywords that appear on your website and in product listing ads (PLAs) to help with search. Be sure to remove any trademark or copyright characters, since these aren't used by consumers and can take up valuable character count space.

Optimise descriptions. Be conscious of how many characters are permitted for descriptions on each marketplace, and adjust as needed. A couple of considerations to keep in mind:

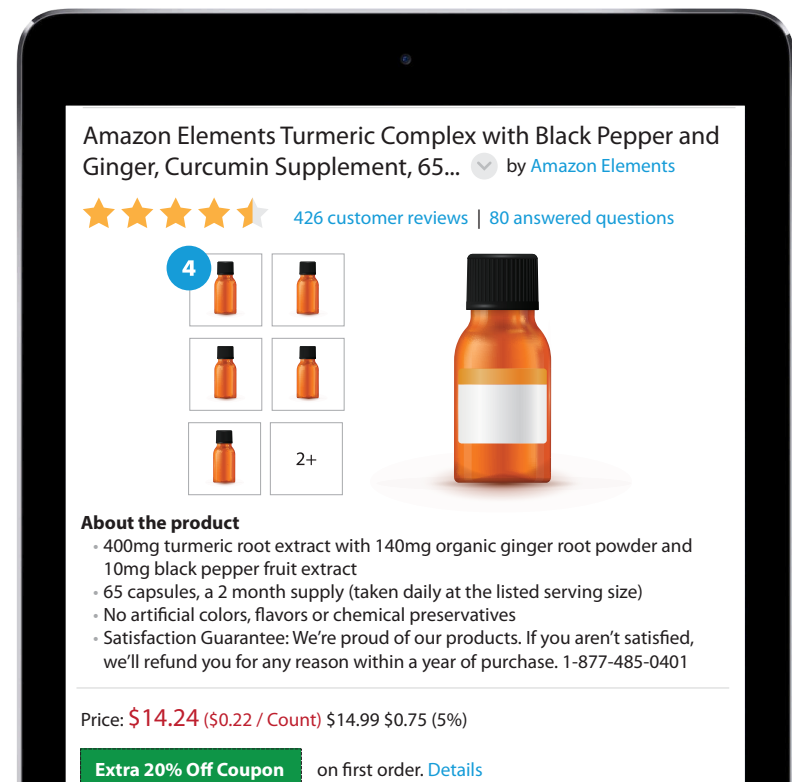
- ▶ No outside contact info can be included in descriptions. Most marketplaces will consider these to be listing errors.
- ▶ Some marketplaces will allow you to include limited HTML tags, such as ,
 and <p> to create bolding, line breaks and paragraphs. Use these where possible to optimize your descriptions for skimming and easy reading.

Maximise imagery. The marketplace may only require one image per listing, but in most circumstances buyers will want to see many more. Have at least four images per item and follow these best practices:

- ▶ Use a minimum size of 1,000 pixels for zooming
- ▶ Use different images to offer different angles and views
- ▶ Consider adding video when on marketplaces that allow it

Spend time on bullet points. These can be a great place to provide details consumers are likely to seek out when exploring and searching for holiday-related items. When crafting your bullet points:

- ▶ Think about what you would want to know as the consumer.
- ▶ Use simple, informational phrases.
- ▶ Provide specific details, such as compatibility with other items, to help drive conversions.
- ▶ Use your seller metrics to guide bullet points. For example: If you're getting a lot of feedback or seeing a lot of returns due to confusion over colors and sizing, add those details into your item descriptions.



3 PREPARE LOGISTICS

Start by looking at what worked, and what didn't, last year. Then make adjustments as needed. The most important logistics considerations include:

Catalogue changes. Make sure any new SKUs are active and live, but have a catalog change cut-off date in place to ensure you'll have ample time to focus on marketing, sales and fulfilment during peak times.

Shipping expectations. Be realistic. If you normally fulfil in 2 days but know you may need an extra day during holidays, plan on three to ensure no one will be disappointed. And if there are any days when your warehouses will not be fulfilling orders, take time now to configure those dates with your seller portals.

Contingency plans. Think of what could go wrong, and have an emergency plan in place for each potential scenario. Plan for the worst — listings are removed, quantities stop updating, you're unable to fulfil orders — and have backup plans in place. Should any of these come to fruition, you'll be ready to address them without struggling.

4 PLAN PROMOTIONS

What kinds of promotional discounts can you afford to offer while still maximising margins and profitability? Put together an actual calendar of your promotions and schedule as many as possible ahead of time. When planning your promotions:

Work with marketplace contacts. If you're lucky enough to have an "inside" contact, be sure to leverage that relationship. These contacts can provide all kinds of insights to help you build successful schedules.

Keep them fresh. If you always offer 20% off, consumers will come to expect it. And remember that promotions for top-selling items will differ from promotions for slow-moving inventory, so decide early how you'll address each type.

Test, test, test. It's always a great idea to run A/B tests early to see what kinds of promotions your audience responds to the best.

Don't Overlook Amazon Advertising!

If you don't have an Amazon Advertising plan in place, you need to create one as soon as possible. Eight in ten consumers turn to the marketplace giant throughout the holiday shopping season, making this a critical channel for any e-commerce strategy. At a minimum, you should:

- ④ Optimise your product content
- ④ Consider investing in an Amazon Branded Store
- ④ Get comfortable with the latest features for targeting and reporting



FOR DETAILS ON THESE AND OTHER KEY TACTICS, CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

[Amazon Advertising: The Amazon Brand Store](#)

[New Year, New Updates to Amazon A+ Content](#)

[Your Ultimate Guide to Advanced Amazon Advertising](#)

Looking ahead

Yes, it's a lot to think about. But if you start preparations early, putting these seasonal selling strategies into practice will soon become second nature. Before you know it, all that advanced planning will pay off in more conversions, sales and repeat purchases — all with less stress and fewer struggles. How do we know? Because these are the same proven tips and tactics used by thousands of successful brands and retailers, season after profitable season.



Connect and optimise the world's commerce

ChannelAdvisor is a leading provider of cloud-based e-commerce solutions that enable retailers and branded manufacturers to integrate, manage and optimise their merchandise sales across hundreds of online channels including Amazon, Google, eBay, Walmart, Facebook and more.



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