The **Holiday Handbook** for Shopify Entrepreneurs

Sell more this holiday season with tips on design, marketing, sales, and more.

Pixel Union

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The holidays are important.

The popularity of holiday shopping should come as no surprise to anyone. For decades, retailers have been raking in enormous numbers in the months leading up to Christmas.

What's way more interesting is the growing dominance of ecommerce when it comes to holiday sales.

For example, did you know that 2017 saw an incredible $108.2 billion in online sales during November and December? This year promises to blow that number out of the water, with mobile shopping on the rise and consumers becoming more accustomed to doing their holiday shopping online.

Last year, Shopify saw a few key trends emerge. Mobile sales surpassed desktop, Cyber Monday sales surpassed Black Friday sales, BFCM popularity grew outside of the United States, and email was the conversion king.

As a Shopify entrepreneur, the stakes have never been higher. The good news is that there's tons you can do to prepare your store for a successful holiday season.

In this handbook you'll find actionable tips to help you optimize your store's design, sharpen your marketing plan, develop winning sales strategies, and more.

Use these tips to develop your holiday strategy, and reach out to us if you have any questions along the way!

Think mobile-first.

Have you noticed a high number of mobile visitors but a low conversion rate? It's time to think about improving your store's mobile experience.

In 2017, during the peak ecommerce sales period (Black Friday and Cyber Monday), mobile accounted for 64% of all Shopify orders. Pundits expect this number to climb in 2018.

If you're reading this on desktop, switch over to your phone to view the next couple examples. Simpler Times Co. uses our mobile-first Shopify theme Handy to offer a seamless experience on mobile. Reach is another strong mobile-first theme, which Epically Beautiful uses to create a simple yet elegant experience for their mobile shoppers.

Mobile-first and mobile-friendly are two different looks. You don't have to use a mobile-first theme, but your theme needs to be mobile-friendly. The good news is that every theme in the Shopify theme store is mobile-friendly.

Want to improve your store's mobile experience?
Check out Handy and Reach

Shopify merchant review

"I love how simple Reach is but in a nice elegant way. Highly recommended!" - Epically Beautiful

Holiday-ize your store.

One of the easiest ways to get your store ready for the holidays is to add some festive flair. For Black Friday, consider taking it literally and darken your theme colours. For the rest of the holidays, think red and green backgrounds, holiday-themed hero images, or even animated effects.

If you'd rather leave your homepage as is, try creating a festive landing page. Rather than hiring a designer or developer to do the job, enlist the help of ShopPad's fantastic Page Studio app and create your own eye-catching, conversion-focused landing page.

We're also big fans of Shopify's White Christmas app, which transforms your store into a winter wonderland with a "pleasant natural snow effect." Remember those old storefronts painted with snowy holiday scenes? It's exactly like that.

A little holiday cheer can go a long way in delighting your customers. And we all know that happy shoppers lead to happy Shopify entrepreneurs.

Ready to holiday-ize your store?
Try the White Christmas app

Shopify merchant tip

"Even if your product isn't particularly festive, make sure your visuals are. Add seasonal backgrounds to your theme and festive stickers to your product photography." - Lizzie, Owner, Secret Halo

Choose the right theme.

Your theme is the foundation of your Shopify store. It's where you showcase your products, communicate your brand identity, and transact sales. It's important to choose the right theme for your business and make sure it's set up properly.

Free Shopify themes are great for some merchants, but you don't have to look hard to find something lacking in their look and feel. There are many reasons why merchants upgrade to a premium (or paid) theme—better design, more variation, more customization, and a richer customer experience.

While it may seem daunting to change your theme before the holidays, a good theme shouldn't take long to set up, especially if it's supported by a reputable theme developer. Shopify also lets you preview every theme in their theme store.

We're biased, but for single-product and small-catalog stores we recommend Startup and Launch. If you have a larger catalog, you can't go wrong with Atlantic, Pacific, or Grid. And if you're a high-volume seller, check out our Amazon-inspired Empire theme or Turbo by Out of the Sandbox.

Want a new look for your store?

Explore our themes

Shopify merchant review

"Atlantic is clean, modern, and fits our brand perfectly. The team at Pixel Union have been excellent to work with. They have gone above and beyond to help make our online store a success." - 2nd Kind

Update your current theme.

Did you know that most Shopify theme developers release regular updates with performance improvements and new features? In the past, updating your theme has required a lot of copying and pasting—but not anymore.

The Theme Updater app, which currently supports all Out of the Sandbox and Pixel Union themes, makes updating a breeze, handling most of the manual work required to update your theme. The app can even move over custom code on recent versions of these Shopify themes.

With any major theme change, it's a good idea to back up your theme. However, one of the great features about the Theme Updater app is that it doesn't affect your live store—it simply creates an unpublished version of your Shopify theme, which you can test before going live.

The app is free to use, and offers a pro version that will generate a list of any code that can't be carried over automatically. This way, you know exactly where to look to complete the transfer of your custom code.

Ready to update your theme?
Get the Theme Updater app

Shopify merchant review

"The Theme Updater app worked perfectly for me on my Turbo theme. What a time saver! This app is one of the reasons I went with Out of the Sandbox for my theme." - Burnish Jewellery

Build your mailing list.

Email marketing may not be the hottest new marketing trend, but it's tried, tested, and true.

Don't believe us? Consider that during Black Friday 2017, email marketing campaigns drove an incredible [23% of online sales](#).

If you're not already collecting email addresses, you better start now. When it comes time to send those BFCM emails, you'll be glad you spent the time beefing up your list.

The easiest way to build your mailing list is with a specialized email collection popup. Our free app [Pixelpop](#) takes two seconds to install and makes it easy to create a variety of popups and banners designed to engage shoppers and help you get the most out of everyone who visits your store.

Create an email signup popup and set it to sync new email signups to your mailing list of choice. Currently, Pixelpop integrates with Mailchimp, Constant Contact, Klaviyo, and Conversio, with the option to export a list of email signups if your mailing service isn't supported.

Want to build your mailing list?
[Get Pixelpop for free](#)

Shopify merchant review

"I've just created my first popup and it was super fast and easy! It's a really good tool to create incentives for potential customers once they reach my online store." - [Finnly's Fine Jewellery](#)

Plan some email campaigns.

Now that you're building your mailing list, it's time to start engaging your subscribers. There are many different email marketing strategies to choose from year-round. We'll share a few of our favourites below.

The classic sale announcement. Announce a sale exclusively to your newsletter subscribers to give them the inside track on other shoppers. Shoppers love to feel special.

The scarcity announcement. Are you running low on a particular product or collection? Create urgency by letting shoppers know supplies are limited and they better act fast.

The sale extension. Keep the sale running for those who can't get enough. Extend your sale, let customers know via email, and capitalize on the frenzy of the holiday season.

Also remember to set up abandoned cart emails in case anyone gets partially through the checkout process and needs a reminder to complete their purchase!

Did you know?

Promotional emails have a median click through rate of 4.8%, exactly three times higher than the 1.6% generated by non-transactional messages. Use that to your advantage!

Collaborate on a gift guide.

"Must-have" gift guides are a great way of cross-promoting products with like-minded stores in your industry. It's important to get a jump on this before your contacts get inundated with requests from other industrious entrepreneurs.

The numbers don't lie: nearly two-thirds of holiday shoppers like the idea of using a gift guide to help them make the right choice. Gift guides play on the concept of social proof (which we'll get to in a later chapter) and help establish trust.

Collaborate with other merchants in your industry and each highlight a product (that doesn't compete with others in the gift guide, of course). Brainstorm a distribution plan that hits all your strongest marketing channels: social media, email newsletters, landing pages, blog posts, etc.

It's also a good idea to categorize your gift guide with a name (e.g. "Top 10 gifts for the sports-crazed kid in your life").

The holidays are a perfect time to build your network and reach new customers. Gift guides are a great way to do this!

Did you know?

44% of consumers expect proactive recommendations and tips when shopping online. Help your customers and increase conversions!

Drive sales with Instagram.

As Instagram grows, so does the opportunity to get in front of new customers. The average Shopify order from Instagram is $65.00, putting it 15% ahead of Facebook in that category.

So how do you drive sales with Instagram? You start by tagging products. If you haven't already, switch your Instagram account to a business account and connect it to your Shopify store (this gives you great insights into your audience as well).

To start tagging products, follow these steps. Get creative with how you position your products in your posts. If two products go well together, include them both in one post (bonus tip: consider creating a bundle sale in your online store).

You can tag your products in both stories and posts. If you're doing it right, your products will even be featured in Instagram's tailored shopping feeds.

What are you waiting for?
Tag your products on Instagram

Did you know?

Agencies report two to three times more engagement with Instagram stories than with regular content. Tell your story!

Offer strategic discounts.

Holiday shoppers are always looking for bargains. There are so many types of deals you can offer: "15% off", "Buy one, get one free", "Spend $100 or more, save 20%", and on and on.

One way of finding out which strategy works best for your store is to look at past sales trends. By looking at last year's sales data (or even data from earlier this year), you can predict what your hot products will be and which products might be best suited for a discount.

Another way is to ask your customers what type of deals they'd like to see. Take a poll on social media or in your newsletter, and then cater your discounts to your customers' demands.

The best way to run sales and promotions in your Shopify store is to add Ultimate Special Offers. It's the only app that offers every type of discount in one place. It's also free to try and takes seconds to install. Add it now and use it to manage all your holiday sales and promotions.

Looking to create a sale or promotion?

Try Ultimate Special Offers for free

Shopify merchant review

"This app has increased my sales using the upsell/cross-sell, bundle, and discount features. I strongly recommend this app!"
- Nature's Treasure Trove

Create a sense of urgency.

"One day only!", "Limited time offer!", and "While supplies last!" are all terms you've heard on classic TV commercials before, and for good reason. They create a sense of urgency and provide an immediate call to action.

If shoppers see they have limited time to take advantage of a sale, they're more likely to make a purchase. And while the above examples may seem corny and overused, there are more strategic ways of conveying the same message without sounding like a late-night infomercial host.

Countdown Sales Timer lets you create an elegant banner at the top or bottom of your store that communicates the amount of time left in a sale. It's free to use and makes it easy to create urgency without being too in-your-face.

This app can also be used to count down time until the start of a sale, a product launch, a shipping deadline, and more.

Looking to create a sense of urgency?
Do it with Countdown Sales Timer

Shopify merchant review

"I used Countdown Sales Timer to promote my Black Friday sale. It was easy to use and very effective!" - Sassy Bach

Offer gift cards.

Buying gifts is tough. Holiday gift-givers always run the risk of giving something that is ultimately returned or unused.

Enter the gift card. For uncertain shoppers, gift cards are a great way of giving a gift that's sure to delight its recipient.

To start selling gift cards, you'll first need to upgrade to a "Shopify" level plan (anything above "Basic") to gain access to the gift card feature. Once activated, create your gift card product and just like that you're ready to go.

Shopify's stock gift card designs are pretty limited. This is where the free Shopkeeper Gift Cards app comes in handy. It allows you to pick a holiday-themed design, add a personal message, and include a "from" name.

The app's paid plans offer additional features like a larger design library and branded gift cards.

Want to try Shopkeeper Gift Cards?
Sign up free or get 25% off the pro plan

Shopify merchant review

"I was unhappy with Shopify's standard gift cards, so I downloaded Shopkeeper Gift Cards. If you buy the pro plan there are lots of holiday designs. Thanks for making a great app, y'all!" - Waxpops

Sell at a holiday market.

One of the biggest knocks on online shopping is that shoppers can't touch, try on, or sample a product before buying. In fact, a whopping 89% of shoppers born between 1980 and 2000 favour heading to a physical store to purchase items.

With plenty of "real-life" markets to choose from, the holidays are the perfect time to give your customers that human option. Beyond helping you sell more, holiday markets have shown to be great for brand awareness and customer engagement.

When preparing for a market, decide what your goal is and position your offering around that.

If you want to drive sales, sell an exclusive product or offer a one-day sale. If you want to build brand awareness, offer a free (yet worthwhile) item that shoppers can take home. If you want to engage customers, get them to sign up for your newsletter or participate in a social media contest.

If your holiday-market budget is small, consider partnering with a like-minded business in your industry (perhaps one from your gift guide!) and set up a stall together.

Shopify merchant tip

Holiday markets complement our online store because we can offer free samples, educate people about our products, and make human connections. This helps our customers become more comfortable purchasing online. - Kimiko Foster, Owner, Miiko Skin Co.

Promote free shipping.

Shipping fees kill conversions. Nearly 61% of American shoppers claim they would abandon their order if hit with shipping costs. In a world where free shipping has graduated from nice-to-have to must-have, how do you survive?

Offering free shipping to everyone on every order simply isn't sustainable. The best way to combat this is by offering free shipping over a certain threshold, offering free shipping to customers in certain locations, or both.

Smart Shipping Bar makes it easy to do this. Set your free-shipping threshold at a viable number for your business, and target only the countries where you can afford to offer free shipping.

The app is highly customizable and a great way to increase conversions and average order value. There's even a "free forever" plan to help you get started right away.

Want to increase conversions and order values?
Get Smart Shipping Bar for free

Shopify merchant review

"The Smart Shipping Bar app is super easy to set up and works great. As always, Pixel Union is enjoyable to work with and helpful with any questions we have." - Harlan Ruby

Polish your product photos.

Good product photography is so important when it comes to building customer confidence and boosting conversions.

This is particularly true for highly visual and tactile items like clothing, electronics, and home goods. Because shoppers are looking at your products on a screen, it's important to give them as close to an in-store experience as possible.

Having quality photos is a great first step. In addition, include a zoom-in function on your product pages so customers can see the fine details of you product. Take photos at different angles so customers can visualize the entire product. And finally, if a product comes in different colours, allow your customers to see how it looks in each one. These suggestions can be time-consuming, but they're ultimately worth it.

If you're looking for a quick way to clean up your product photography, Bonanza Background Burner is a great place to start. It removes busy, unsightly backgrounds and replaces them with a clean, white backdrop to make your products pop.

Tired of your current product photography?
Refresh it with Bonanza Background Burner

Did you know?

75% of consumers admit to judging a company's credibility based on the look of their website. First impressions are important!

Build trust with social proof.

Remember when Tickle Me Elmo was the hottest item on kids' wishlists? Or the Nintendo 64? People wanted these products because everyone else was buying them. In the ecommerce world, this phenomenon is known as "social proof."

A great way to build social proof is by showing recent sales notifications. These subtle popups give your store the feeling of a bustling brick-and-mortar shop, helping you build trust with customers and increasing conversions along the way.

Bizzy Social Proof is a great option for quickly adding recent sales notifications to your store. Once installed, you can easily manage the appearance and frequency of your notifications, and even track how much they've helped boost conversions.

To expand your social proof strategy even further, you'll want to build an audience and foster relationships with social followers, brand ambassadors, and influencers.

Want to start (or continue) building social proof?
Try Bizzy Social Proof for free

Shopify merchant review

"Powerful yet simple. Nicer than all the other popup notification apps we've tried and it gives you more control over the look and feel. Very good." - Infinity Pro

Be a shipping hero.

Having a rock-solid shipping and fulfillment strategy is important year-round, but it takes on new magnitude during the hectic months of November and December.

In 2017, Shopify entrepreneurs shipped their products an incredible 12.6 billion miles across the globe. You can imagine there were more than a few hiccups along the way.

Offer a great shipping experience by creating a dedicated page with holiday shipping information. If possible, display shipping cut-off dates at checkout. Most of our themes come with a shipping rates calculator baked into the cart page, or you can add one by making a few changes to your code.

Once you've nailed down your shipping and fulfillment strategy you'll need a way to track where you're sourcing, storing, and selling your products. Shopify's new built-in Locations feature is the best tool for this. Even if you have a small catalog of products, get into the habit of using Locations so that, as your inventory grows, you'll have the structure to support it.

Need a better grasp on your inventory?
Start managing it with Shopify Locations

Shopify merchant tip

"We keep an elaborate holiday schedule for when our suppliers are closed or on vacation so we can anticipate any delays and act ahead of time." - Thomas, Owner, Thodio

Support your customers.

As a Shopify merchant, you know customer support is important. If you can't answer your customers' questions, they're probably not going to stick around.

Responding to emails, tweets, Facebook messages, and Instagram DMs is great, but it takes time. The longer it takes to answer a customer's question, the more likely you are to lose them before they make a purchase.

The best way to combat this is with on-site support. If a customer can chat with someone from your store at the same time that they're browsing it, your conversion rate is sure to increase. While this may seem labour-intensive (and it can be), offering live support during peak sales periods can have a huge impact on your conversion rate.

There are a lot of good Shopify apps that offer live chat functionality. We recommend Tidio. It's easy to install, filters multiple channels into one, and has bot options to give your customers 24/7 support.

Want to connect with customers quicker?

Offer live support with Tidio

Shopify merchant review

Super effective chat app! I tested quite a few and ultimately chose this one for my online boutique. Valuable features plus stellar customer service! - Roses N Retro

Your Holiday Checklist

☑ Consider mobile-friendliness with [Handy](#) and [Reach](#)

☑ Create a winter wonderland with the [White Christmas app](#)

☑ Explore the [Shopify theme store](#)

☑ Update your theme with the [Theme Updater app](#)

☑ Build your mailing list with [Pixelpop Popups & Banners](#)

☑ Plan some email marketing campaigns

☑ Collaborate on a gift guide with other businesses

☑ Tag your products in Instagram posts and stories

☑ Create a discount or sale with [Ultimate Special Offers](#)

☑ Build urgency with [Countdown Sales Timer](#)

☑ Design a holiday gift card with [Shopkeeper Gift Cards](#)

☑ Book a stall at a physical holiday market

☑ Promote free shipping with [Smart Shipping Bar](#)

☑ Enhance your product photos with [Bonanza](#)

☑ Show recent order notifications with [Bizzy Social Proof](#)

☑ Implement [Shopify Locations](#) into your shipping strategy

☑ Connect with your customers using [Tidio](#)

Note that not every task or app is going to apply to your online store, and that's totally okay. Use what makes sense for your store, and have a wonderful holiday selling season!

We help Shopify entrepreneurs sell more.

As a Shopify Plus Partner and industry leader in ecommerce design, our premium Shopify themes have helped over 15,000 new and existing brands grow their businesses online.

Our rich catalog of Shopify apps includes Ultimate Special Offers, Pixelpop Popups & Banners, Bizzy Social Proof, Countdown Sales Timer, and Smart Shipping Bar. Each of these apps is built to help you increase conversions and sales.

Is there anything we missed or anything you'd like to see covered in a future handbook? We'd love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for reading!

The Pixel Union Team