

Xi Digital

Xi Digital's Holiday
Marketing Guide

2020

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Traditionally, the Holiday Season involved the 4-week period between US Thanksgiving and Christmas. According to Facebook, however, with the introduction of more and more novelty Holidays and viral shopping days worldwide, the Busiest Shopping Season of the year now encompasses Q4 in its entirety - that's October 1st to January 1st.

With holiday online shopping consistently rising year after year, it's no surprise that this year might surpass Canada Post's report of \$126 billion in online Holiday sales in Canada. With a global pandemic erupting this year, e-commerce sales have more than doubled since last year. And for the 2020 holiday season, we can only imagine the upheaval of online shopping. In fact, Deloitte predicts that during Q4 holiday retail sales can expect to grow between 25% to 35% reaching \$182 billion to \$192 billion in total.

What does this mean?

It means that online Holiday Shopping is only continuing to grow and even exceed expectations this year because of COVID-19. So what does this mean for online retailers? It's more important this year than ever to ensure that your marketing and sales strategy also grows to accommodate current shopping trends. If your business doesn't have an e-commerce presence, now is the time to create one, and if not key online and social strategies can support your business in other ways to ensure it gets a piece of the wave that's about to come.

But where do you start?

In Xi Digital's 2020 Holiday Marketing Guide, we'll outline exactly what you need to plan for, so you have the most successful Holiday Season ever!

- ✓ **Key Holidays & Shipping Dates**
- ✓ **Multichannel Trends**
- ✓ **Social Strategies**
- ✓ **PPC Tactics**
- ✓ **Additional Considerations**



Key Holidays

With the new stay-at-home policies, individuals most likely begin their holiday shopping for 2020 earlier. In 2019, online conversions began steadily increasing as early as mid-October, with 1 in 10 shoppers having completed their Holiday shopping by late November. While those who begin early may miss some key holidays and sales, they're ensuring to get all their sought after items and products. But to understand why consumers start Holiday shopping so early, you have to know what they're shopping for:



Black Friday

Black Friday has long been a fundamental part of the US Holiday Shopping Season, and has made its way into Canada over roughly the last 10 years, reaching record sales in 2012, and effectively overshadowing Boxing Day in terms of Holiday sales. Now recognized in Europe, Australia, South Africa (and growing), Black Friday contributes 9% to overall Holiday shopping spending, while Black Friday promotions trigger consumers to begin their Holiday Shopping early in the week leading up to Black Friday; by the following Monday last year, consumers had completed 50% of their Holiday Shopping.



Cyber Monday

The Monday following the Black Friday Shopping Weekend usually boasts even further markdowns on tech-based items. Last year, Cyber Monday contributed 19.2% to Canadian Holiday revenue, and 15% to global Holiday revenue. In North America, Cyber Monday typically yields the highest sales of the season.



Christmas Eve

Last-minute Christmas shopping is a huge opportunity in the multichannel retail arena. For obvious reasons, retail sales on Christmas Eve are largely made in-store. However, these purchases entail heavy online and mobile research beforehand to ensure consumers know exactly where they can find exactly what they're looking for, within the time constraints of a short shopping day.



Boxing Week

What was once the busiest Canadian shopping day of the year, is now a week of opportunity for businesses to clear out old merchandise. Boxing week is when consumers who got it wrong or simply forgot someone in the gift-giving department finds a steeply marked-down replacement. It's also when consumers are rushing to stores to make post-Christmas refunds or exchanges, presenting your store with the opportunity to upsell.



Dates to Watch



Canadian Black Friday

Black Friday has always been known as the Friday after the US Thanksgiving, which falls on the last Thursday of November every year. But much like everything else this year, Black Friday might look a little bit different. Black Friday sales are going to mostly focus on online shopping and sales are going to begin much earlier.



11:11 Singles Day

A relatively new phenomenon, 11:11 Singles Day takes place on November 11, and celebrates those without romantic partners who wish to bestow special treatment upon themselves. While the Holiday originated in China, it has quickly gained popularity in Europe and Asia with the highly individualistic nature of Millennial culture, and is projected to surpass its 25% growth year over year as it penetrates western culture. Outside of Canada, people are reportedly now spending more pampering themselves on 11:11 Singles Day than on Cyber Monday, causing some experts to mark this as the official start of the peak Holiday shopping season.

Key Shipping Dates

This year, Canada Post has encouraged those who are participating in online holiday shopping to begin as early as possible. With COVID-19 increasing e-commerce sales, there has been a significant increase in packages and gifts. With that being said, delivery times may be longer than usual. Get your orders in early so your friends and family can have their gifts by Christmas. Canada Post now offers tools to help customers in delivering their gifts in a more efficient way.

- ✓ **The Delivery Tool that tells consumers how long it takes to send packages in Canada**
- ✓ **The Tracking Tool to see the status of your order**
- ✓ **The Service Alerts Tool to see delivery service impacts and updates**

Thankfully, Canada Post shares their key shipping dates every year so that consumers can plan their purchases and shipping accordingly, and retailers and business owners can effectively market to capture that audience.

- ✓ **November 17, 2020 - Canada Post Weekend Delivery Begins**
- ✓ **December 11, 2020 - Canada Post Regular Parcel Shipping Deadline**
- ✓ **December 13, 2020 - Canada Post Expedited Parcel Shipping Deadline (National)**
- ✓ **December 19, 2020 - Canada Post Expedited Parcel Shipping Deadline (Regional)**
- ✓ **December 20, 2020 - Canada Post ExpressPost Shipping Deadline (National)**
- ✓ **December 21, 2020 - Canada Post Priority Shipping Deadline**



Multichannel Trends

While ecommerce Holiday spend continues to increase, as mentioned, the in-store experience is still an integral part of Holiday Shopping. Almost half of US shoppers prefer to shop for presents in-store to enjoy the Holiday ambiance, while 27% still find it a great way to spend time with family. That said, even brick-and-mortar purchase decisions are largely preceded or influenced by online, social, and mobile research in order to understand whether a business can accommodate major Holiday shopping pain points.

Product Availability

Holiday gift-giving is about finding the perfect present; imagine putting the work into product research only to find out the item is out of stock. Product availability is one of the main drivers in Holiday purchase decisions, with 75% of Holiday shoppers expecting online inventory transparency, and in-store availability before even visiting a retail location where a desired item is sold. The Buy Online, Pickup In-store (BOPIS) trend continues to be very popular for Holiday shopping, as it offers the consumer the assurance that their items will be available to them no matter when they are able to make it to a physical store location.

Shipping & Delivery Options

In the same vein as product availability, there's no point in purchasing the perfect gift if it won't get where it needs to be in-time. Along with real-time inventory display, consumers also expect accurate shipping times; an interesting find is that while accuracy regarding shipping time is very important, there isn't a specific shipping time that is necessarily more preferable.

While statistics show that 67% of Canadian online Holiday shoppers will abandon their shopping cart if a free shipping option is not offered, 36% of all Canadian online shoppers chose to pay for shipping on their most recent online purchase. This would indicate that it's important to provide multiple shipping times and cost options as consumers are evidently willing to spend different amounts on shipping depending on the urgency of the purchase.



Easy Return Policy

Of course, finding the perfect present isn't fool-proof, and a good Holiday return policy is a staple for any type of retailer. Almost 70% of Holiday shoppers check out a store's return policy before even looking at their product offering; almost 80% of shoppers will abandon a brand altogether once they've had a negative return experience with them. It's important to ensure your in-store staff and online store infrastructure can seamlessly accommodate issues surrounding returns to not only potentially turn around a lost sale, but also encourage customers to come back even after they've made a return.

Social Strategies

Social media is an invaluable tool for free marketing. As 75% of Canadian retailers start Holiday promotions the week leading up to Black Friday, now is the time to make sure you've created business profiles for your company on social media, and that your profiles are current and optimized in order to leverage them to get your Holiday marketing messaging across. Whether your messaging is surrounding your store's solutions to the abovementioned pain points, or product and promotion-focused, it's important to engage a Holiday social strategy that is consistent, and can compete among the 54,000 links shared on Facebook every 60 seconds, for example. Social revenue last year for the weekend of US Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday grew year over year, as follows, showing that a good Holiday social strategy is as instrumental as any other part of your Holiday marketing initiatives:

- ✓ **Thanksgiving - up 39%**
- ✓ **Black Friday - up 48%**
- ✓ **Cyber Monday - up 63%**

Stories & Videos

Deloitte has deemed social to be "the new shop window", as 1/3 of Millennial shoppers and 1/3 of their parents have stated that social media videos have influenced their purchase decisions. Facebook reported that marketing messages that combine video and text have a 95% retention rate in consumers, vs 10% for

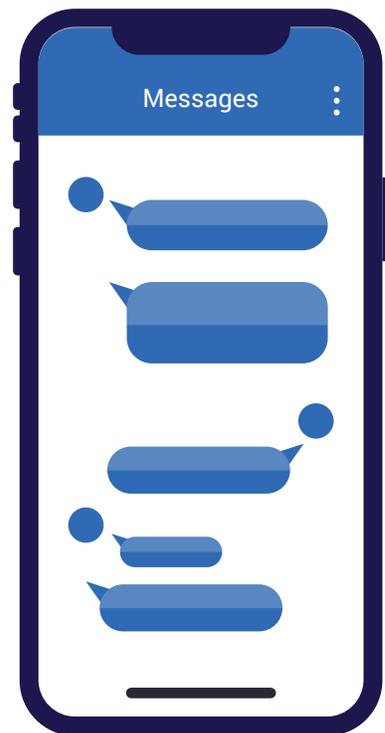




text-only messages. During the Holiday season, videos can elicit feelings of urgency surrounding missing out on Black Friday & Cyber Monday Deals, or they can create feelings of joy, coziness, luxury, and warmth surrounding gift-giving ideas. The Stories feature, as seen on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, has been said to increase product and brand awareness by 69%. It's important that your social strategy involves diverse content for both standard video posts and Stories; video posts can be ranked in Google Search results and help your business get found in specific search queries, while Stories can help build a sense of urgency, especially around sales and promotions, given that they expire in 24 hours. As an example, many retailers have daily deals throughout the week of Black Friday. While your business' social media posts can promote "The Week of Daily Deals", you can share the specific Deal of the Day to your Stories. As Stories expire, you don't have to worry about taking down old promotions from your social profiles.

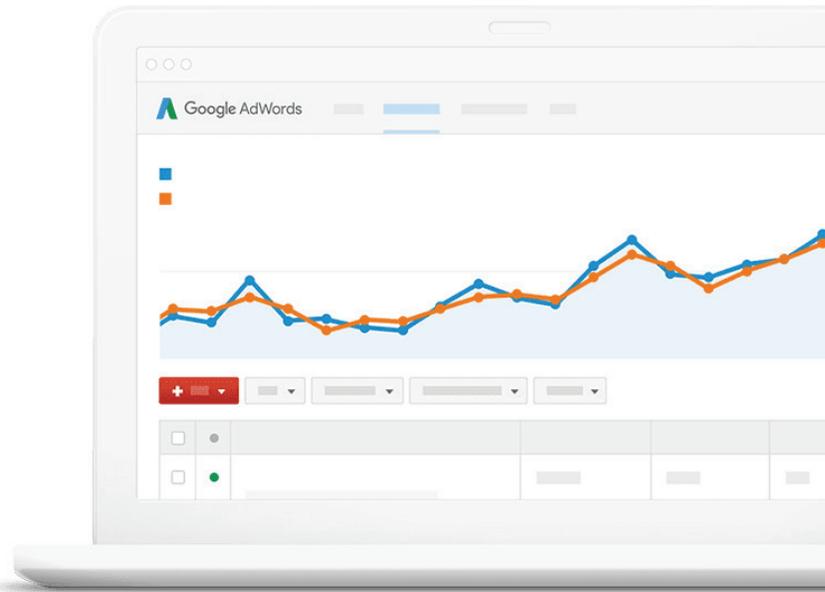
Messenger & Chat

Live chat is a standard feature on many retail-based websites; many businesses are now extending that to also leveraging Facebook Messenger to connect with customers and address their comments and concerns. Approximately 20 billion Facebook Messenger messages are sent between businesses and their customers each month! As you enter the peak shopping season, it's worth being more responsive to messages and comments on social media, as the information and personal touch you provide can be the game changer in helping your customer convert. Facebook Messenger enables your potential customers to interact with you without having to create a separate account on your website, and also allows them to easily review their conversation with you as they process their purchase decisions.



PPC Tactics

There are various paid strategies across the Google Ad Network and Facebook Ads Platform that usually yield great results any time of year. During high-competition times, like the Black Friday through New Year season, PPC tactics are even more essential in order to compete with the flood of marketing messages from retailers of all kinds, a few of which can make a huge difference in conversions.



Promotion & Location Extensions

Promotion and location extensions are additional information appended to your Google Ads. Promotion extensions can incentivize purchases by offering promo codes during comparison shopping, or build a sense of urgency with countdown timers for sales or promotions you are providing on products being advertised. Google reported that ads utilizing promotion extensions with countdown timers saw 10-15% higher CTR per ad extension used, while Canada Post shared that timed-promotions, like 1-Day sales, at infrequent and strategic intervals can have a great impact on a consumer's sense of urgency to purchase, as they're not sure when and if to expect another sale soon. Location extensions leverage your existing Google My Business listing to ensure your product ads show up in location-based searches related to the service areas on your Google My Business listing. Location extensions can be especially useful for capitalizing on mobile searches, as "where to buy" mobile searches increased by 85% last year, giving your business an opportunity for both organic and ad exposure.

Remarketing/Dynamic Marketing

Consumers are much more likely to comparison shop or perform product research online during the Holiday season than any other time. With everything and everyone they need to buy for, it's not uncommon for consumers to become overwhelmed by their options, or simply forget some of the products they've viewed online. Enabling remarketing/dynamic marketing is one of the easiest ways to maintain consumers' share of mind with very low effort or time needed on your part. By setting up Remarketing tags, you make it possible for consumers who have previously viewed a certain product, or abandoned a cart with certain products, to



be presented with ads of that product anywhere within the Google Display Network. This not only encourages consumers to reconsider their abandoned cart, but also to remember that they had liked or intended to purchase a product they may have forgotten, thereby boosting conversions that might have otherwise been lost.

Additional Considerations

While we've shared trending tactics for the 2019 Holiday Season, there are several items to consider that never go out of style:

Holiday Branding

Leading up to the Holiday season, take the time to create some engaging Holiday branding and imagery for your business. Your website's main banner, your Facebook Business Page's Cover Photo, Google My Business posts, and any sales and promotional messaging you put out should be themed around the Holiday you're promoting. Black Friday tends to focus on getting to stores early to get the best deals. Cyber Monday highlights super sales on tech gadgets. Christmas focuses on joy, family, and gift giving; your seasonal branding should be designed accordingly.

SEO

Search engine optimization is important all the time, and should be an on-going consideration for your business throughout the year. You'll want to address any SEO issues and implement fixes well ahead of the Holiday Shopping season to give Google and other search engines enough time to pick up on, and index, the new information. If your website and social profiles' SEO is in bad shape going into the Holidays, your business can miss out on valuable organic search traffic from related or location-based search queries.

UX Design

You'll also want to audit your site to make sure its design and functionality is the most user-friendly. During a high competition season where consumers can be enticed by a plethora of promotions, a poorly placed Call to Action, or hard to read product description can be all it takes to make or break a conversion - this includes mobile as well. As little as a one-second delay in mobile load time can reduce conversions by 20%. Mobile searches also funnel 62% of all Holiday ecommerce traffic, and Holiday mobile sales grew 31% year over year. Make sure your website is mobile responsive so it renders well and loads quickly across various smartphones and tablets, without a separate m.dot website.



Conclusion

From October to January, this is your business' opportunity to make one last push to meet your annual sales goals. The Holiday Season is dynamic especially because of COVID-19, and one that requires you to optimize your business and its marketing in-store, online, and on mobile, to best capture your share of Holiday spending. Knowing your audience's preferences, and where and how they absorb product information helps you prepare accordingly, and measure the difference in Holiday revenue these changes make year to year. If you're still unsure of how to leverage current in-store, online, and mobile trends in your Holiday Marketing Strategy, reach out to the Digital Marketing Team at Xi Digital. We've created custom Social Media, Content, and PPC strategies to help the businesses we promote to build brand awareness, drive in-store, and web traffic, distribute promotions and increase overall conversions. Contact us today!

Resources

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