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Tips to drive sales and convert customers on free shipping day, Dec. 17

Dec. 14 2009
 By Nate Gilmore

First there was Black Friday, then Cyber Monday, and now there's Free Shipping Day, a one-day, online shopping event that rewards shoppers who do their last-minute Christmas shopping at home. The second annual Free Shipping Day is Dec. 17. On that day participating merchants offer customers free shipping and guarantee delivery by Christmas Eve. Last year, FreeShippingDay.com got 250,000 hits in the 10 days leading up to Free Shipping Day, which was Dec. 18.

Free Shipping Day is a great time to test if a free shipping offer is right for your business. While some merchants argue against offering free shipping because it's not profitable, there are a number of things you can do to make it worthwhile for you and your customers.

1. If you don't think your profit margin can handle offering free shipping on every item, you can offer free shipping with a minimum purchase. Many customers will spend more just to qualify for the free shipping.
 2. Beat out your competitors by offering free shipping outside the lower 48 states or perhaps in Canada or the United Kingdom. According to estimates by Freeshipping.org, more than half of all free shipping offers don't cover Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. territories. Use an overseas warehouse to cut international shipping costs by 75%.
 3. Offer free shipping as part of a membership rewards program for returning buyers or buyers that refer additional business to your Web site.
 4. Try offering flat-rate shipping. Although not quite free shipping, customers will know that their shipping costs will not increase no matter what they purchase.
- Figure out which free shipping scenario works best for you and your customers. Then once you've got that worked out, make sure you let your customers know about it. You can do that by:
1. Emphasizing the urgency of the offer. Let your customers know that the offer is only good for Free Shipping Day.
 2. Participate in Free Shipping Day as soon as possible so it can add your logo and free shipping offer to the FreeShippingDay.com homepage. You can sign up [here](#).
 3. Send an e-mail to your newsletter subscribers promoting your "Free Shipping Day" offer.
 4. Advertise your "Free Shipping Day" offer in a prominent place on your Web site. Make sure merchants know about it before they get to cart checkout.
 5. Send out a press release to the media about your involvement in Free Shipping Day.
 6. Promote your involvement in Free Shipping Day on Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace.

Clearly, Free Shipping Day is good for merchants who have the chance to increase sales as the Christmas season winds down. It's a way to encourage consumers to shop online later in the season. And you'll build goodwill with your customers who'll be more inclined to buy from you throughout the year.

David Wurtz of TopTVMounts.com, an online seller of TV wall mounts, understands the value that free shipping has to online conversions. "We make shipping a competitive advantage to our online sales by bundling free shipping offers with every purchase. Buyers love free shipping! They want their dollars to go toward the product they purchase, not to get the product to their doorstep."

Joe Alexander of Keetsa.com, an online seller of memory foam mattresses, goes a step further. "We built our entire business around an intelligent supply chain to support our end goal of always offering free shipping to our resellers and customers. Free Shipping day is a great way to make that point and grow sales at the end of the holiday season."

Nate Gilmore is the VP marketing at Shipwire, an outsourced product fulfillment service provider offering growing businesses instant access to a global warehouse network. Shipwire helps merchants such as TopTVMounts.com and Keetsa.com dramatically cut their shipping costs so that they can offer free shipping in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom (shipwire.com/trial).

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