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- Marketing
- Direct Marketing
- Case Studies
- Event Marketing
- E Commerce
- Market Research
- New Appointments
- Public Relations
- Social Media Marketing
- SME Marketing
- Promotions and Incentives
- Special Offers
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Marketing News: Top tips to avoid having "bah humbug" e-commerce sales this Christmas

News Release from: MarketingUK
09/10/2009
Nate Gilmore ,Shipwire,e-commerce order fulfillment,e-commerce ,Christmas gift

Christmas is not looking jolly for retailers at the moment. A postal strike is sweeping the nation, with the fear that many businesses could go bust in its wake. In addition, a recent survey of Britain's leading store group executives found that 34% do not expect strong growth until 2011 and are preparing for a 'flat Christmas'.

In the face of this difficult climate, it is imperative that retailers need to start planning now if they are to ensure success this holiday season. An intelligent and considered marketing plan should be accompanied by a comprehensive crisis management plan and a critical eye. Shipwire's Nate Gilmore shares some of his tips on how to make sure that this Christmas is a plentiful one.

Start your holiday marketing...yesterday

In mid September, the search experts at Google noted a large spike in the search terms related to "Christmas gift". That is a pretty good indicator that the holiday season has arrived online, making it the perfect time to reach out to your past customers and offer discounts to the early bird shopper. You do not even have to have your inventory in place; simply offer your customers a back order special deal. If you sell out early you may still have time to resupply before the holiday shopping season is over.



Avoid the "foreseeable" crisis

If you have been in business for more than a year, look back at what caused panic over the last few years and plan ahead. Perhaps you ran you of boxes or oversold one product? Keep an eye out for looming problems such as the possible postal service strike or your internet connection dying when you are trying to download orders. The impact of postage strikes is especially relevant to online sellers where delivery times and pricing is extremely relevant. The impact for a merchant that is not anticipating the strike ahead of time could be catastrophic.

Presents for your customers

Drive shoppers to your site with a prepared marketing plan of promotions and deals. Discount coupon codes and free or reduced shipping offers don't just make for happy customers, they make for return customers. The key thing to remember is that a customer that has bought from you in the past is easier to reach than a new customer. The economy, in the condition it is, doesn't allow the luxury of new buyer acquisition all the time. That's why customer retention, cross-selling, up-selling and repeat purchasing is more important than ever before. People give you their business and they want to know that you appreciate that. Make sure you thank your customers in any way you can - from loyalty cards to discounts and special offers. It's important to keep past and present customers happy, because they are the ones who matter the most to your business and will refer others.

Save your money, save your business

Don't forget to drive your costs down. Today, small businesses can get a host of free marketing and sales tools such as those we mentioned above. If you have a website and you're not running Google Analytics you are either selling blind or paying too much. Also, you should look at whether you can outsource any "cash hungry" pieces of your business. If one of your suppliers can drop ship for you this could help you avoid inventory costs. If you need temporary holiday warehouse capacity, product fulfillment companies can turn big infrastructure costs like warehouses in a success based variable cost.

Get on your customers' shopping list

People are spending more time than ever on social networks and these tools can be a great way to give your business a personality; reach your past and present customers and potentially a network of future customers. Twitter and tools such as Tweet Deck can help small businesses monitor customer feedback in real time and can spread a promotion from 100 potential buyers to thousands through

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re-tweeting! The advantage of viral advertising is its cost, or lack thereof. Another helpful tip, hook up your existing blog to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn via your blog's RSS feed and keep all your social networks up to date at once.

Social media has also changed the face and even the personality of online advertising. Now products aren't interruptions to life, but are positioned to enhance and enrich the online experience. They are seamlessly integrated into user content and tailored to that particular audience. Ecommerce is not just about the shopping cart anymore. It's about pulling your audience from their content and encouraging them to buy. A very big component of the online advertising channel is viral videos. YouTube is a great promotional and educational medium and it continues to grow rapidly. If you have a product that takes some explaining, why not film a product demonstration upload it to YouTube. The best part is that it is of no cost to you and is a great "vertical search" opportunity.

If it's not broke...just tune it!

If you think your e-commerce technology isn't working well enough then it is time to take another look. Smart search optimisation maybe the answer to your problems. Many retailer sites are looking for heavy content driven sites to attract more organic search traffic through SEO. This makes sense since content helps build a community, and community helps sell more products and services. It's like in the offline world where a certain bakery may recommend a certain florist and vice-versa. A site is often judged by the company it keeps.

It helps to do final conversion testing for SEO landing pages. It's key to know your traffic and know your conversion. Online, it's easy to do this as you can monitor your checkout process and abandoned cart rate. If you attract a lead with a good marketing plan and hook up a lead through a certain channel, you can trace exactly what works and what doesn't, making it easy to find out your ROI. Another great way to ensure a smooth process is to use your partners wisely. If you syndicate product listings through marketplaces, make sure your pricing is consistent across all of them. Attention to detail will get you loyal customers by the cart-full.

Got gifts - Need sleigh?

Shipping options are a crucial part of the online buying experience. If you are up front about your options and include shipping discounts then accurate shipping can also be a conversion tool. Consider bundling free or upgraded shipping with larger purchases.

If you attract international shoppers it is still not to late to house a few best sellers overseas to offer international buyers local shipping. Storing your best selling products in the local market by outsourcing some of your fulfillment can really cut your shipping costs and help you reach a new market.

Check out your checkout

Don't frustrate your customers at the end of your checkout by providing minimal payment options. Be upfront about your payment and shipping options and invite feedback from your buyers. It's best to offer an alternative non-credit card checkout such as Google Checkout, Amazon, PayPal. Some buyers are still a little reluctant to use their credit cards online.

About Author: Nate Gilmore, VP Marketing at Shipwire [e-commerce order fulfillment](#) with warehouse locations in the U.K., Canada and the U.S.

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