

CRITICAL COMPETITION

SIX STRATEGIES FOR YOUR Q4 E-COMMERCE MARKETING PLAN

Online sales jumped 76% from June 2019 to June 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Shopify predicts that B2C ecommerce sales will reach \$4.5 trillion by 2021.

This year has been particularly challenging for businesses. The onset of the global pandemic in March and its effects on the economy forced many consumers into frugality, and retailers all over the country had no option but to shut their doors. With the possible exception of grocery and liquor stores, most industries have needed time to figure out how to adapt.

But one of the few fortunate effects of the coronavirus was that many consumers earnestly started shopping online — many for the first time. Forbes reported in April that e-commerce purchases had grown by 129% year over year in the US and Canada with 146% growth in overall online sales.

It's commonplace to see companies pushing their sales in the fourth quarter in order to achieve annual and holiday revenue goals and clear out their year-end inventory. But with so many companies trying to recoup their losses from early spring this year, the competition will be much more fierce. This year, companies have to make sure their e-commerce marketing plan in the fourth quarter is planned more effectively than ever. Companies must be adaptable if they want to compete and crush their e-commerce marketing goals in the online post-pandemic selling frenzy.

Here are six strategies you can take as you plan for the end of the year.

1. REVIEW LAST YEAR'S Q4 PLAN

Formulating a plan for Q4 marketing can feel like a daunting task, but fortunately, you have Google Analytics data from the previous year to help you proceed in the most strategic way. Analytics can be sorted by revenue.

The steps to finding the revenue percentages of products selling year over year are as follows:

1. Navigate to Google Analytics
2. Click on "Customization > Custom Reports"

3. Create two tabs to compare Q4 in 2018 and 2019
4. Add to each tab:
 - Average price • Unique purchases
 - Average quantity • Product revenue
5. Navigate to “Dimension Drilldowns” and add:
 - Product • Product category • Product SKU
6. Sort by unique purchases
7. Save and download report
8. Open in Excel and paste the following in cell I8:
`=IF(MATCH($A8,$A9:O),(D8-D9)/D9,"")`

Pay careful attention to which products gave you the greatest return last year so you know what to focus your efforts on and can set an attainable goal for this year.

Ask yourself:

- [What were the best sellers last year?](#)
- [Do we have our best sellers in stock?](#)
- [Can we restock enough to manage holiday demands?](#)
- [What will people want to see more of due to the pandemic?](#)
- [Are our search campaigns increasing traffic on best-seller product pages?](#)
- [Can we possibly increase our revenue goals with online sales growing?](#)



2. ANALYZE YOUR COMPETITORS

Another strategy that will help you focus your efforts is observing your competition, which can help you anticipate new trends and shifts in the market. You can keep up with your industry competition by running a quick competitor analysis simply by searching for products, business names, or ideas like yours on Google or Amazon, using a keyword tool like Ahrefs to help. This will help you see which companies are targeting the same audience as you with the same products.

Elements to examine within these companies' marketing strategies include their:

- Website • Social media • Prices • Messaging • Shipping methods • Online reviews

Once you've seen what competitors are doing well or lacking in these areas, you can get ideas for improvement or make their weaknesses your strong points.

Remember that the holiday season is a time when many consumers are visiting your site's product pages for the first time ever, which makes it a prime time to stand out from your competitors and turn these visitors into loyal repeat customers. You can keep people on your site and lure customers from competitors by offering sales events and promotions comparable to or better than the ones your competitors are running, if it fits into your holiday budgets.



3. CREATE A CONTENT MARKETING PLAN

The Digital Advertising Summit held by Adobe in 2018 revealed that over 50% of consumers find it easy to ignore ads online. With this in mind, it's more important than ever to stand out and make your content less spammy and more engaging. Forget the lowest-price point marketing tactics; consumers of today want to know what makes your product the best and how it will address their pain points. Cue content marketing.

Content marketing is not a new concept; buyers are bombarded with all kinds of marketing material every day. If you're going to be heard, you must deliver hard-hitting content that cuts through the fluff and marketing jargon and explains the benefits and uses of your products.

Give your prospective buyers the most gratifying user experience by creating shareable:

- [How-to guides](#)
- [Explainer videos](#)
- [Product reviews and demos](#)
- [And more](#)

This kind of content also happens to be highly shareable on social media by organizations and individuals, which increases your organic traffic and exposure. See some of our favorite examples of great content marketing [here](#).



4. PLAN TO USE MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Shopify reports that an omnichannel/multi-channel approach can increase your sales by up to 190% compared to a single-channel approach. If you've been limiting your marketing to a single channel, you're missing out on big revenue opportunities — especially now that so many more people are shopping online. Customers aren't loyal to any one channel; in fact, most consumers compare deals and discounts across channels before they ever make a purchase — even on Amazon Prime Day, on which 76% of shoppers will visit other sites to compare deals. So, you need to promote and sell your products across multiple channels.

Today's consumers are making purchases across Amazon, Facebook, Instagram, Etsy, your website, and more. If you aren't already, make it your Q4 goal to sell in all the places your customers are currently buying. But before selecting new channels, identify the ones that make sense for your business to be on, especially your target audience. In order to figure out who your audiences are and where they're shopping, ask yourself some of the following questions:

- [What is their age?](#)
- [How much money do they make per year?](#)
- [Where do they live?](#)
- [What is their education level?](#)
- [What struggles do they have that makes them seek out your products?](#)

These questions will help you figure out what channels will be most effective for targeting your customers. For example, you'd be less likely to find the baby boomer generation on Twitter compared to Facebook. Similarly, you shouldn't spend time targeting teenagers with traditional marketing materials (billboards, direct mail, TV ads, etc.) when they're mainly shopping through social media.





5. USE CUSTOMER SERVICE CHATBOTS

Approximately a third of Americans say they would consider halting business with a company that provided poor customer service. When it comes to online sales, customer service matters. There's nothing quite as frustrating for a customer as not hearing back after multiple emails and calls when they don't have the option to speak to someone face to face. This kind of negative experience could cost you customers.

One way you can make sure customers get prompt responses to their inquiries is to make use of chatbots. These can resolve basic questions at all hours when live representatives are unavailable, and they can even upsell your customers.

Another simple way to appease your customers is to optimize your website for user-friendliness and keep your social media pages, website, and Google My Business listing up to date so people can easily find what they're looking for.

6. PLAN HOLIDAY SALES EVENTS IN ADVANCE

Retailers make more money at once during Q4 than they do at any other time of the year, and failure to perform in this quarter could spell disaster for your company. **Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the week before Christmas** are some of the biggest shopping times of the entire year. Your holiday success hinges upon your preparation, so start planning out your sales events and timelines well in advance so there's enough time to prepare and plan your content, search, social, and email campaigns around these plans.

Whatever marketing efforts you've pursued throughout the year should be doubled down on in the last four months of the year — especially now that more people than ever will be shopping online this holiday season. Some things you can strategize for the holiday season include:

- [Discounts and coupon codes](#)
- [Sales events](#)
- [Abandoned cart email flows](#)
- [Landing pages](#)
- [Gift guides](#)
- [Product launch calendars](#)
- [Social media ads](#)
- [Retargeting ads](#)

If you don't feel confident about your Q4 marketing plan this year, it's wise to consult a group of specialists who can identify all the holes in your campaign and determine the best end-of-year marketing strategies for your budget and audience.

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