PayPal
Holiday selling
every month of the year.
PLANNING FOR HOLIDAY SELLING.

Contents

Planning for holiday selling

Year-round holiday sales. 5
Your holiday checklist. 6
Choose your holidays. 7
Holiday close-up. 8
Plan, plan, plan. 9

Developing a marketing strategy

Develop your strategy. 11
Events. 12
Promotions. 13

Getting your technology ready

Get your tech ready. 15
Financial Programs. 16
Customer Relationship Management (CRM). 17
Content. 18
Online properties. 19
Communications. 20

Conclusion 21

PayPal

About the author.

Gene Marks is a columnist, author, and small business owner. He writes daily for *The New York Times* newspaper and weekly for *Forbes* magazine, *The Huffington Post* website, *Inc.* magazine, *Entrepreneur.com*, *Fox Business* and *Philadelphia* Magazine.

*Author was compensated by PayPal to write this piece.

The information in this article has been prepared by PayPal and is for informational and marketing purposes only. It does not constitute legal, financial, business or investment advice of any kind and is not a substitute for qualified professional advice.

PayPal

Planning for holiday selling

Year-round holiday sales.

Holiday selling isn't just for Christmas anymore.

Every quarter has at least three major holidays—that's one a month—giving you plenty to choose from.

When you ask most people what the word "holiday" conjures up for them, it's usually the same things: family, vacation, time away from work, relaxation, meals, gifts. When you ask a business owner about the holidays, it's also something more. It's opportunity. Holidays give any business, regardless of industry, the chance to bring in more customers.

If you think that the holiday season starts after Halloween and ends after New Years Day, think again Yes, the Christmas season is the very important for retailers. In many cases, it can account for more than half of their annual sales. But does it have to be the one time of the year when you do your most sales? Of course not.

There are dozens of holidays, national events, and appreciation weeks in a calendar year—from Administration Professionals Day in April to Singles Day in China in November. Whatever business you're in, you can benefit by capitalizing on these other key selling times of the year.

PROMOTE PRODUCTS LINKED TO PARTICULAR HOLIDAYS.

Andrea Sreshta of LuminAID, a provider of portable solar lights for outdoor recreation, targets campaigns around the summer holidays—particularly Memorial Day, July 4th, and Labor Day—when people are starting to head outdoors. Another popular selling day for her: "#GivingTuesday," the day after Cyber Monday. "It's a great opportunity to feature our Give Light, Get Light program, where customers can purchase lights for themselves and donate lights to our humanitarian aid charitable partners," she said.

Your holiday checklist.

As a refresher, here's a partial list of holidays and events:

Winter

January
New Year's Day/Chinese New Year/
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February
Valentine's Day/Presidents' Day/
Black History Month

March
St. Patrick's Day/Purim/
Women's History Month

Spring

April
Easter/Earth Day/
Administrative Professionals Week

May
Mother's Day/Memorial Day/
Cinco de Mayo

June
Father's Day/Graduation/
LGBT Pride Month

Summer

July
Independence Day/Parents Day

August
Back to School
(it's not technically a holiday,
but still a sales opportunity)

September
Labor Day/Patriot Day/
Grandparents Day/
Rosh Hashanah

Fall

October
Columbus Day/Halloween

November
Thanksgiving/Black Friday/
Small Business Saturday/Cyber Monday/
#GivingTuesday/China Singles' Day

December
Christmas/Chanukah/Kwanzaa

PayPal

Choose your holidays.

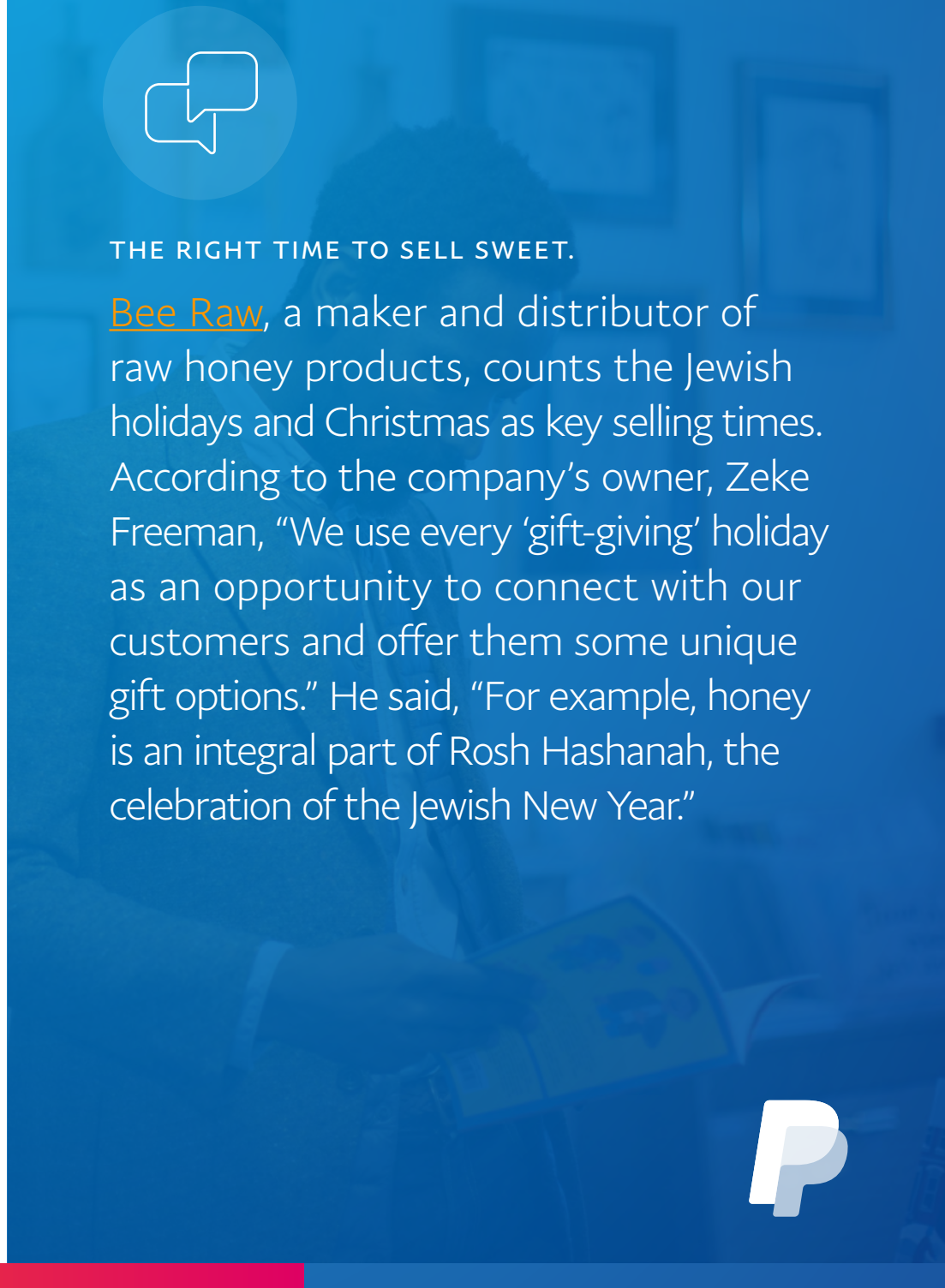
Choose four holidays that make the most sense for your business—but also target a holiday that might not seem like a natural fit at first.

Since you're most likely a small company with limited resources, don't overdo it. Trying to hit every holiday in a calendar year is a sure way to burn through your marketing dollars and frustrate yourself. Start small—your goal should be more about maximizing the return on your efforts. Choose just four a year—or one a quarter—it'll give you the time to get more bang from each holiday. Don't worry, you've got a lot of choices.

The holidays, national events, and awareness weeks listed on the previous page are well known and pretty much every business, retail or not, thinks about doing something around these days. So choose what you think is best, and don't be afraid to experiment with holidays that might not seem a natural fit at first.

The most important element is to develop your sales and marketing plans carefully. Like any project, the devil's in the details. Your advanced planning can make the difference between successful holiday campaigns and ones that disappoint.

See Holiday selling every month of the year: Develop your marketing strategy for tips on creating winning campaigns for each holiday sales period.



THE RIGHT TIME TO SELL SWEET.

Bee Raw, a maker and distributor of raw honey products, counts the Jewish holidays and Christmas as key selling times. According to the company's owner, Zeke Freeman, "We use every 'gift-giving' holiday as an opportunity to connect with our customers and offer them some unique gift options." He said, "For example, honey is an integral part of Rosh Hashanah, the celebration of the Jewish New Year."

Holiday close-up.

HALLOWEEN.

Halloween in the U.S. is big business. In 2017, consumers are expected to spend $9.1 billion on costumes, candy, and decorations.[1] And its popularity is creeping into other global markets like Canada, the UK, and Asia.

Melissa O'Malley, director of cross-border trade initiatives at PayPal, offers a few ideas for small businesses that want to capitalize on the holiday. "Offer products for Halloween parties, vintage wares to decorate a haunted house, and decorations or flowers in black and orange, the holiday's traditional colors."[2] Of course, don't forget the opportunity to sell costume and candy supplies.

CHINA SINGLES' DAY.

China's Singles' Day is the anti-Valentine's holiday, taking place on 11/11 (the date is a nod to the link between singles and the number one). In recent years, it's become a major shopping day, with many retailers offering Singles' Day specials or discounts.

Small businesses outside of China can also get in on the action, with the potential to reach millions of shoppers online. Popular Singles' Day products include everything from cars and computers to clothing and food. For best results, think about offering deep discounts or special offers like free shipping.

#GIVINGTUESDAY.

#GivingTuesday is an opportunity for consumers and businesses to give back to charities. It falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, November 28th this year, following Black Friday and Cyber Monday. It has gained global popularity since it started in 2012. PayPal has supported #GivingTuesday since its inception. In 2015, PayPal users gave more than $45.8 million globally on Giving Tuesday, breaking the Guinness World Records title for "Most money raised online for charity in 24 hours."[3]

Small businesses can participate in #GivingTuesday by donating a percentage of sales for a product or product line to a charity. Make your commitment a success by advertising it through your social media channels. Your business can do well by doing good.

[1] https://nrf.com/resources/consumer-data/halloween-headquarters

[2] http://multichannelmerchant.com/must-reads/3-holidays-easily-selling-right-now-13102015/

[3] PayPal Giving Fund results for the 2015 holiday season, as determined by PayPal internal tracking.

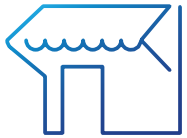
Plan, plan, plan.

When it comes to planning, start early and execute throughout the year.

CREATE AN ANNUAL MARKETING PLAN.

Get out your calendar now and start building your annual marketing plan. Choose your key holidays and events, put them in the calendar, and plan backward for the number of days you think it'll take to get your sales and marketing strategy ready. Put those dates in your calendar as well. Then, make sure everyone in your organization knows these will be your big promotional events.

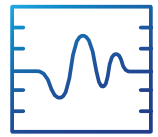
Make sure to consider your sales cycle, so you choose the right holidays based on your business. Some companies traditionally introduce new products in the fall, while others are very Christmas-oriented. Still others have very busy summer seasons. Time your holiday sales pushes accordingly.



PLAN FOR INVENTORY NEEDS.

Make your buying plans early. If you're having a big promotion in six or nine months, talk to key suppliers and try to negotiate discounts for early purchases. Make sure to record the new inventory in your accounting system, and build alerts in case it runs short before your holiday promotion begins, so you can quickly re-order. The worst thing that can happen is to build a successful holiday campaign, bring in a lot of customers, and then run out of the things they want to buy.

If you have a sales or support team, make sure you also plan for staffing needs well in advance. Take the time to make sure they're knowledgeable about the holiday and how it ties into your business and your campaign. Then, make sure they're ready to go when your holiday campaign starts.



LOOK CLOSELY AT CASH FLOW.

Be careful that your cash flow isn't squeezed between spending on inventory and receiving payments from customers. Review your options to understand what type of financing may be available for your business.

If you use PayPal to process your transactions, you may be eligible for a PayPal Working Capital[4] business loan. It can help cover shortfalls and ensure that you're running smoothly in the short term. Other options include a longer-term line of credit from a bank. Make sure all of these options are in place and ready to go before your holiday promotions begin.

[4] PayPal Working Capital is subject to credit approval, as determined by the lender, WebBank, Member FDIC. To apply for PayPal Working Capital, your business must have a PayPal business or premier account for at least 90 days and process between $15,000 (or for premier accounts $20,000) and $20 million within those 90 days or within any time period less than or equal to 12 months. PayPal sales include processing on PayPal Express Checkout, PayPal Payments Standard, PayPal Payments Pro, and PayPal Here.

PayPal

Developing a marketing strategy

Develop your strategy.

At this point, you've decided to go all out on a holiday each quarter and you've made your plans. Now, it's time to get into the details of your holiday campaigns. To do this you'll need to choose your tactics. On the following pages are three you should seriously consider.

Events.

It doesn't matter whether you sell cookies or catalytic converters, your customers want to use what you offer in the best way possible.

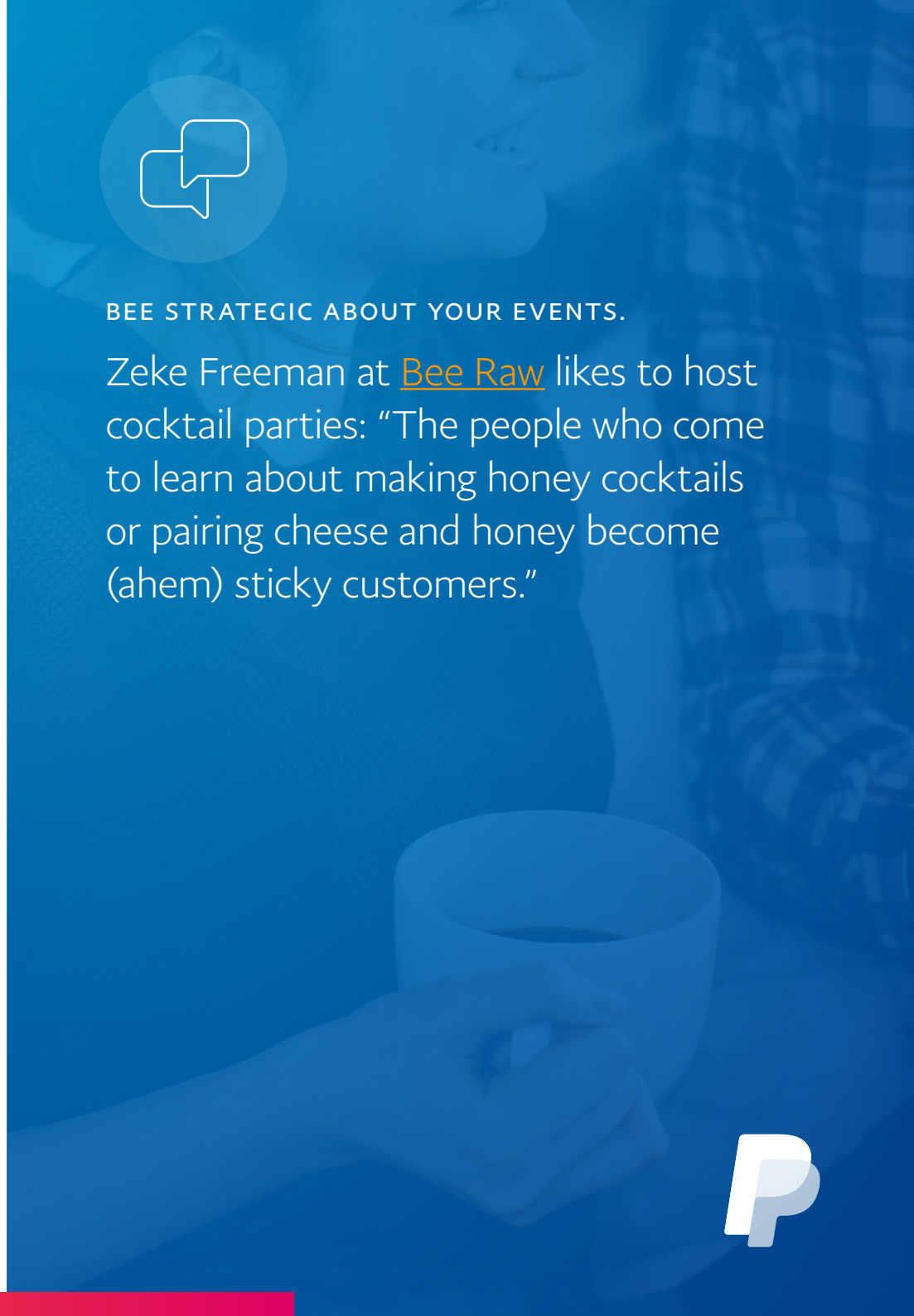
Events can be both online and offline—mix it up and do a few of each.

One way you can help them is to schedule events around your target holidays.

When figuring out the kinds of events that might work, there's no need to re-create the wheel. Schedule in-store or on-location events where you demonstrate your products, bring in guest speakers, or host a cocktail party. For example, Zeke Freeman, owner of Bee Raw, is a big fan of educational events: "The people who come to our events learn about making honey cocktails or pairing cheese and honey become (ahem) sticky customers."

You can also do something online, like a webinar or video event using Facebook Live or Google Hangouts on Air. Make them engaging and with a call to action, such as "Visit our website in the next five hours for a buy-one-get-one-free offer." Do a few of these events and mix it up—a couple online and a couple live, on-site.

Make sure you tie the event to the holiday by positioning it as a special event honoring some group or in commemoration of some event.



BEE STRATEGIC ABOUT YOUR EVENTS.

Zeke Freeman at Bee Raw likes to host cocktail parties: "The people who come to learn about making honey cocktails or pairing cheese and honey become (ahem) sticky customers."

Promotions.

Use the holidays to offer a unique sale, gift-with-purchase, or discount.

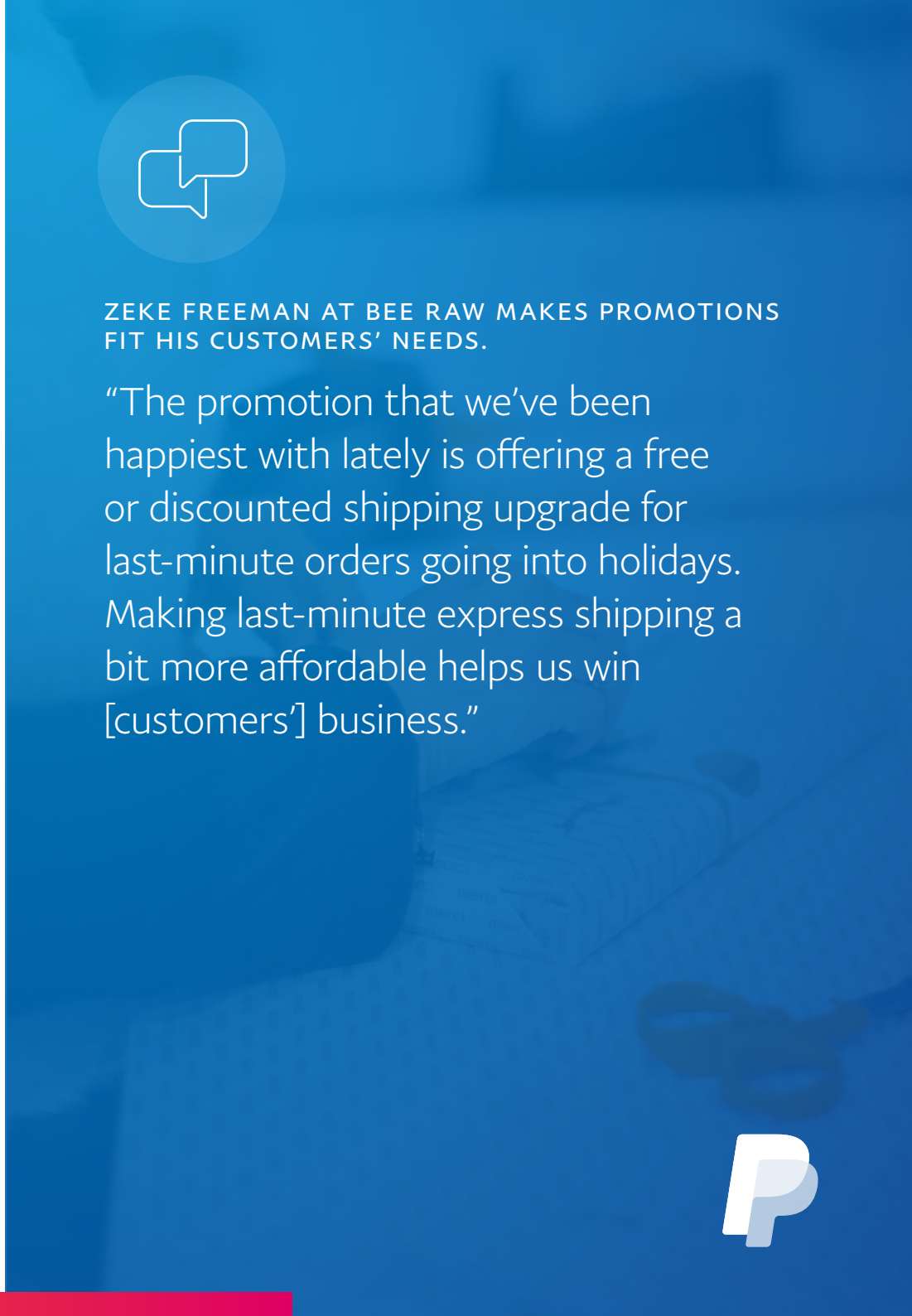
"We've found that giving discounts creates an expectation of more discounts," says Zeke Freeman from Bee Raw.

You can run special promotions or have a few special days where something is less expensive for a short period of time. But know your audience, because simply offering discounts doesn't work for every business or in every situation. "We've found that giving discounts creates an expectation of more discounts," says Freeman from Bee Raw.

Follow best practices when creating a sales promotion:

- Make sure there's always a call to action in your promotional materials—something to click or a number to call.
- Make the customer benefit clear and simple, so they know what's in it for them.
- Make it clear to visitors when the offer expires.
- Make your promotion memorable and entertaining.
- Run it multiple times (because people need to see it again and again before it sinks in).
- Perhaps most important, make sure you're targeting the right demographic.

Of course, all of this takes time and planning. You know your customers and prospects best, so you probably have a good guess as to what they'll find valuable.



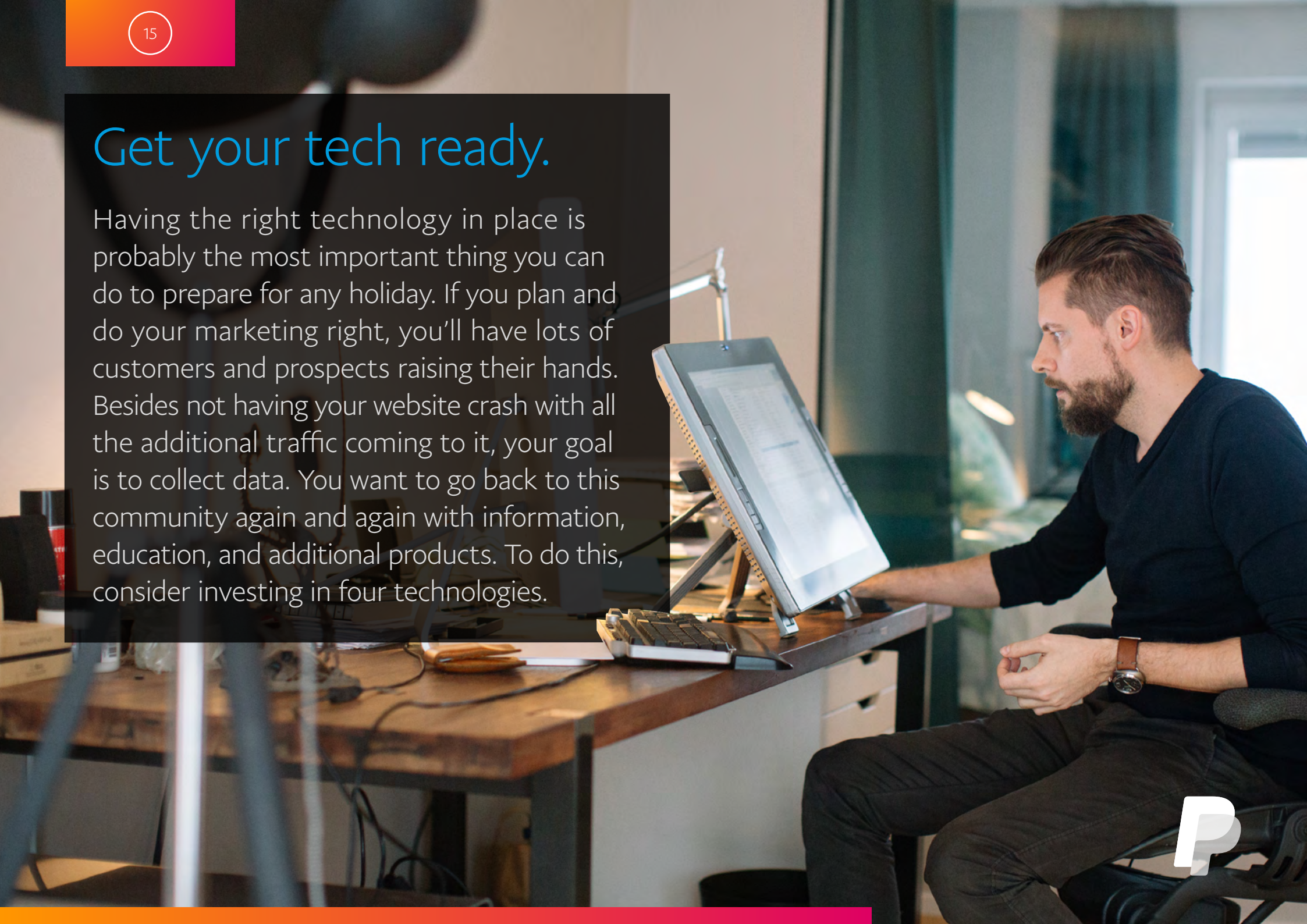
ZEKE FREEMAN AT BEE RAW MAKES PROMOTIONS FIT HIS CUSTOMERS' NEEDS.

"The promotion that we've been happiest with lately is offering a free or discounted shipping upgrade for last-minute orders going into holidays. Making last-minute express shipping a bit more affordable helps us win [customers'] business."

Getting your technology ready

Get your tech ready.

Having the right technology in place is probably the most important thing you can do to prepare for any holiday. If you plan and do your marketing right, you'll have lots of customers and prospects raising their hands. Besides not having your website crash with all the additional traffic coming to it, your goal is to collect data. You want to go back to this community again and again with information, education, and additional products. To do this, consider investing in four technologies.



1. Financial Programs.

You need both a good ecommerce platform and an integrated accounting system.

Consider a hosted ecommerce solution—most have put considerable R&D into their platforms to help you drive sales and optimize conversion rates.

At its most basic, an ecommerce platform allows you to upload and sell your items across multiple channels (online and off) and via multiple devices (desktop or mobile). A more robust solution will have tools to help you drive traffic to your site, convert visitors into customers, process transactions, fulfill and ship orders, and connect with your accounting system.

Make sure the ecommerce platform you choose allows you to accept credit cards, debit cards, and PayPal, along with any other mobile payment services that might be right for your business.

An accounting system should help you handle and organize invoices, cash receipts, ordering, and inventory management. It should have multiple user access, so wherever your people are—at customer sites, in-house, and online—they can keep it up to date.

You need to get data every day on sales, costs, gross margins, inventory, and overhead expenses, so that you can make better decisions about managing your cash and controlling your expenses. A good accounting system can streamline all of this.

CONSIDER A TURNKEY ACCOUNTING SOLUTION.

If you don't yet have an accounting solution, look for one with a robust set of tools and that integrates with your existing ecommerce platform. Beyond balancing your books, an accounting solution should perform a wide range of tasks:

- **Send invoices and get paid online**: Great for service-based businesses. Most packages give you the capability to customize your invoices for a professional look.
- **Order management**: As we mentioned above, some accounting solutions have an order management feature to track goods once they're sold.
- **Sync with your shopping cart and online payments**: Make sure the solution syncs with your online merchant service and payments processor.

2. Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

CRM is a broad category covering sales, marketing, and customer support. Make sure the solution you choose does exactly what you want it to—but is extensible for future needs.

CRM applications collect data from anyone who visited your business, in-person or online. They're affordable and have seen enormous growth over the past few years. Most are cloud-based and can integrate with your website, ecommerce platform, and accounting software. Take advantage of the three big things CRM apps do:

1. Ensure nothing falls through the cracks.
2. Keep your people up to date.
3. Help your business grow in value.

Obviously, the goal of holiday selling campaigns is sales. But the sales don't have to end when the holidays end. You need to consider how you'll keep those customers returning throughout the year. How are you staying in touch? How are you making sure that your community feels appreciated? That's what your CRM system can do for your business.

THREE BIG ADVANTAGES OF USING CRM.

Ensure nothing falls through the cracks.
If implemented properly, your CRM system will have reminders, tasks, appointments, actions, calls, and lists of everyone in your database, so you can make sure no one is forgotten. Everyone should hear from your business periodically to remind them how what you sell can help make their lives better.

Keep your people up to date.
If implemented properly, your CRM system will maintain a history of notes, data, emails, activities, and calendar items. When a customer or prospect contacts you—whether online, by phone, or in person—your staff will have their relevant details. They'll know what's been purchased before and who they worked with. They'll know their likes, dislikes, preferences, favorite baseball team, and shoe size—if that's the kind of data you're keeping.

Help your business grow in value.
If implemented properly, your CRM system will include so much valuable data about your community that any future partner, investor, or buyer will want to pay extra for your database—if you decide to share it (and have your customers' approval, of course).

3. Content.

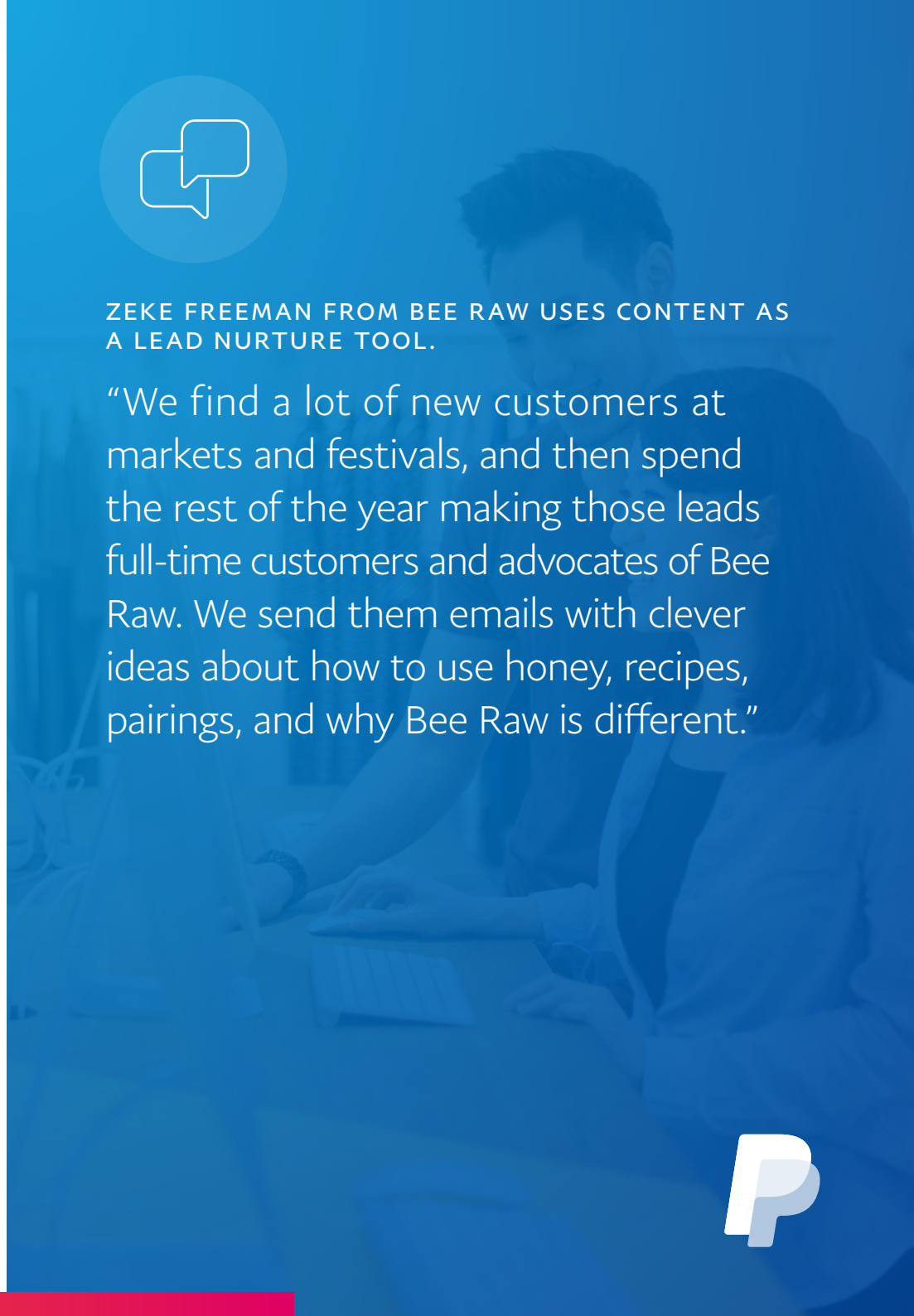
Content marketing is a very popular way to build your community and then stay in touch.

Four easy ways to communicate with your customers and prospects: Blog. Email. Tweet. Post.

When you've set up your plans for the year, build a schedule of content around the holidays you're promoting. Blog. Send emails. Tweet. Post on Facebook and LinkedIn. Driving content through your website will support what you're doing for each holiday.

Make sure to make your interactions meaningful, which you can do by personalizing your email content. Inform or entertain customers by sending links to holiday-themed blogs, newsletters, online videos—they don't have to be your own. Include holiday promotion and special offers in your emails.

Launch your holiday promotions through social channels such as Facebook and Twitter, offering special promotions for those who follow you online. It can help you grow your brand and generate sales—especially through referrals. Fans are likely to forward your emails, bringing first time visitors to your site.



ZEKE FREEMAN FROM BEE RAW USES CONTENT AS A LEAD NURTURE TOOL.

"We find a lot of new customers at markets and festivals, and then spend the rest of the year making those leads full-time customers and advocates of Bee Raw. We send them emails with clever ideas about how to use honey, recipes, pairings, and why Bee Raw is different."

Online properties.

You need to double-down on your efforts online. The idea is that your holiday efforts will be driving more people to purchase from you online. Is your website ready? It's a critical gateway for your company, so you must invest in it if you're going to fully take advantage of the holidays.

INVEST IN MOBILE.

Make sure your website is mobile-optimized. Ensure that when users land on your site from their mobile devices they can navigate, search, choose, and pay for their selections quickly and easily. That includes the checkout experience, too. Make it easy for customers to pay on a small screen with as few clicks as possible. Adding a PayPal button, for instance, gives your customers a shortcut to purchase.

CLEAN UP AND OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE.

Do a thorough review of your website (if you have one). Make sure your homepage promotes your best-selling products. Make sure shoppers can easily navigate your product pages, add items to their cart, and pay quickly and easily. Offering payment options like PayPal is a good way to help shorten the path from selection to completed purchase.

Also, ask your developer to perform stress testing before you get inundated with all those new visitors. You don't want your site experiencing any problems when customers are trying to buy. And speaking of testing, don't forget to test out any new additions or redesigns. All of this should be done well in advance of your holiday campaigns.

INVEST IN SEARCH.

Go through your search engine optimization (SEO) carefully. The algorithms change all the time, so you may need to update your keywords and re-design outdated pages. Also consider investing in online advertising and retargeting tools to specially promote your holiday activities.

RE-VISIT SOCIAL MEDIA.

If you use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social media to promote your business, do a full review of your activities. Make sure your pages are up to date, updated often, and are ready for more engagement once your holiday activities begin. Most social media applications integrate with e-commerce to make selling your items faster and easier, along with advertising options to help you promote your holiday events and activities.

PayPal

4. Communications.

Finally, you need a good way to communicate.

Successful marketing communication, whether for the holidays or beyond, is about reaching the right people at the right time on the right channel.

Your financial and CRM systems will be accumulating data, the purpose of which is to leverage your relationships with customers and prospects. But they're just databases. You need a way to keep in touch and respond to those customers and prospects throughout the year. And to do this, you need the right communications technologies.

Consider subscribing to an email service so you can send newsletters, updates, and helpful information. There's no need for you to reinvent the wheel when email providers have years of experience developing best practices for email marketing.

More importantly, their email servers should be whitelisted, so you don't need to worry about being categorized as a spammer.

Also consider some new services that automatically send data via text or voicemail to those customers who've chosen those methods of communications. Many of these systems are cloud-based and so should integrate fairly easily with your ecommerce system and your website.

EMAIL MARKETING, MORE RELEVANT THAT EVER.

With so many ways to engage customers in digital channels, you might think email isn't the vital marketing tool it used to be. In fact, if done right, email marketing is still one of the most important means of connecting with consumers.

CONCLUSION.

You can make a good argument that all your marketing should be holiday focused. There are plenty of great holidays, national events, and awareness weeks throughout the year that can help drive sales. You can follow the traditional route. You can target specific groups of people. Or you can get totally goofy and have some fun. But the opportunities are there, and it's not just about Christmas.

So choose a few good ones. Spread them out. Pick a few good activities around each holiday. And then make sure your house is in order—particularly when it comes to tech.

It doesn't matter whether you're an online seller, a brick-and-mortar retailer, a manufacturer, a distributor, a service provider. We've all got the same objective: growing our businesses.

FIND OUT HOW PAYPAL CAN HELP SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS, CALL US AT 1-888-430-6611 OR VISIT PAYPAL.COM/BUSINESS.

PLEASE NOTE:

The information in this article has been prepared by PayPal and is for informational and marketing purposes only. It does not constitute legal, financial, business or investment advice of any kind and is not a substitute for qualified professional advice.

You should not act or refrain from acting on the basis of any content included in this article without seeking the appropriate professional advice. The contents of this article contain general information and may not reflect current developments or address your situation. PayPal disclaims all liability for actions you take or fail to take based on any content on this article.

Although the information in this article has been gathered from sources believed to be reliable, no representation is made as to its accuracy. Links and other tools are provided for informational purposes, and PayPal is not responsible for their content. This article is not an endorsement or recommendation of any third-party products or third-party services of any kind.

PayPal