



Holiday selling every month of the year.

GETTING YOUR TECHNOLOGY READY.





About the author.

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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.

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 THAN 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
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[Learn how to plan your holiday sales calendar](#) and then [develop a marketing strategy](#).

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