



# 2020 Guide to Holiday Planning

Tips, tactics and expert advice for a successful holiday season.

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# Introduction

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With buying habits shifting and online sales rising, we're looking at a shopping season unlike any we've seen before. For businesses looking to convert an unprecedented holiday into record-breaking growth, planning early and prioritizing online efforts are a must.

The holiday season benefits brands and consumers alike. To little surprise, it drives some of the highest sales of the year. In 2019, U.S. online holiday sales reached **\$135.35 billion** and average order value reached **\$152.95**.

But a successful holiday strategy consists of much more than an online presence. To compete during the busiest season of the year, brands need to create meaningful connections with consumers, offer personalized online experiences, and provide holiday shoppers with added conveniences and peace of mind.

In this guide, we'll unwrap everything you need to succeed during the holidays, including:



Site Experience and UX



Shipping, Fulfillment and Returns



Marketing and Promotions



Customer Service and Support



Reporting and Analytics



# 2020 Holiday Calendar

Our month-to-month, chronological guide will help you create an award-winning strategy throughout the entire season — not to mention a holiday readiness checklist so good, you'll want to check it twice.

Before we get started, you'll want to mark these key 2020 holiday dates on your calendar:

 <p><b>14</b></p> <p>Canadian Thanksgiving October 14</p>	 <p><b>31</b></p> <p>Halloween October 31</p>	 <p><b>11</b></p> <p>Veteran's Day (USA) / Remembrance Day (CAN/AU/UK) November 11</p>	 <p><b>11</b></p> <p>Single's Day November 11</p>	 <p><b>26</b></p> <p>Thanksgiving Day November 26</p>
 <p><b>27</b></p> <p>Black Friday November 27</p>	 <p><b>28</b></p> <p>Small Business Saturday November 28</p>	 <p><b>27</b></p> <p>Cyber Monday November 30</p>	 <p><b>1</b></p> <p>Giving Tuesday December 1</p>	 <p><b>Dec. 10-18</b></p> <p>Hanukkah December 10-18</p>
 <p><b>14</b></p> <p>Green Monday December 14</p>	 <p><b>18</b></p> <p>Free Shipping Friday December 18</p>	 <p><b>19</b></p> <p>Super Saturday December 19</p>	 <p><b>24</b></p> <p>Christmas Eve December 24</p>	 <p><b>25</b></p> <p>Christmas Day December 25</p>
 <p><b>26</b></p> <p>Boxing Day December 26</p>	 <p><b>Dec. 26-Jan 1</b></p> <p>Kwanzaa December 26 - January 1, 2021</p>	 <p><b>31</b></p> <p>New Year's Eve December 31</p>	 <p><b>1</b></p> <p>New Year's Day January 1, 2021</p>	 <p><b>2</b></p> <p>National Returns Day January 2, 2021</p>



## August: Customer and User Experience

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In the ecommerce world, the end of summer marks the start of holiday planning. Before you dive in, make sure to give your business ample time to evaluate your site.

Consumers demand a personalized online experience. How does your site match up to their expectations? Does your ecommerce store have:

- ▲ Easy product set-up functionality
- ▲ Automated abandoned cart notifications
- ▲ Industry-leading uptime
- ▲ Multi-recipient functionality
- ▲ Automated web app backups ([e.g. Rewind](#))
- ▲ Website page builder
- ▲ Zero transaction fees

If not, now may be the time to update your experience.

Other key areas to measure are:

- ▲ Shipping and fulfillment options
- ▲ Third-party integrations
- ▲ Promotion functionality
- ▲ Marketplace integrations
- ▲ Tech support
- ▲ Analytics



When evaluating your current website, you may discover large cost-saving opportunities — leaving more room for your marketing budget. Imagine the holiday marketing campaigns you could execute.



## Bring your brand to life with leading website design.



### DIY WITH PAGE BUILDER.

BigCommerce [Page Builder](#) makes it easy to create a leading website design — and it doesn't require a graphic designer to do the work. Simply drag-and-drop different elements onto your page to create your desired experience.

### CONSIDER A HEADLESS APPROACH.

Content has the power to connect consumers with a brand — and holiday shoppers are eager for a personalized experience. BigCommerce offers a headless commerce solution that integrates with industry leading content management systems, such as [WordPress](#), and digital experience platforms like [Bloomreach](#). Our best-in-class solution enables businesses to focus on tailoring front-end experiences — no coding required.

### PARTNER WITH AN AGENCY.

Whether you have a small or large budget, hiring an agency is a great choice if you are looking for added support. Leave it to design and user experience experts to create a personalized, captivating ecommerce experience. Find more recommended agencies in the [Partner Directory](#).

“Often we’ll have one customer — usually ordering for a corporate gifting program — who wants to send gifts to a thousand different recipients. Instead of placing a thousand unique orders, it’s a better customer experience if we can simply route different items to individual addresses.”

- Lauren Cevallos, Ecommerce and Mail Order Manager, Lammes Candies



## Prepare Your Merchandising Strategy

To begin, you need to determine:

- ▲ What products will you sell during the holidays?
- ▲ How will you display these products on your site?
- ▲ Will you have a holiday-specific category in your navigation?

### **A GIFT TO YOUR CUSTOMERS: ADVANCED SEARCH AND PERSONALIZATION.**

Make your customers’ search for the perfect gift easier. Equip your online store with partner solutions like [Nosto](#) and [Segmentify](#) for product recommendations and [Klevu](#) for advanced search functionality. These solutions will simplify the customer journey and improve the overall experience.

## Checkout Optimization

Here are three tactics to help your customers convert:

- ▲ Consolidate your checkout to one page
- ▲ Offer more payment options such as [PayPal/Venmo](#), [American Express](#)
- ▲ Enable automated cart abandonment notifications

### **TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER WITH MULTI-RECIPIENT CAPABILITIES.**

Instead of having your customers place a plethora of orders for holiday gifts, enable multi-recipient functionality to remove unnecessary stress during the busy holiday season.



## September: Selling, Shipping and Fulfillment

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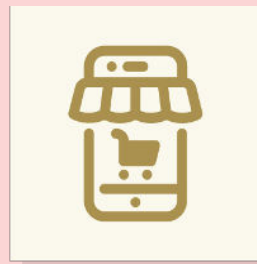
To execute on a great customer experience strategy, you'll need a clear plan on where to sell your products and how to ship and fulfill orders.

### Where to Sell

Your ecommerce store isn't the only place to spread holiday cheer. Here are some other sales channels to consider:



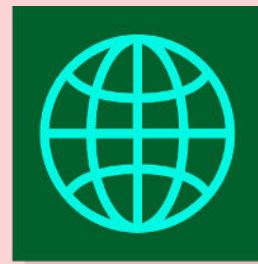
Online Marketplaces



Social Commerce



Brick-and-Mortar



Cross-Border

Just as with your own ecommerce site, you'll want to ensure the experience is as smooth as possible. Here are a few things to keep in mind to expand your reach and acquire new customers:

- ▲ Write compelling product titles and clear descriptions
- ▲ Feature high-quality product imagery to entice new customers
- ▲ Integrate the channels you sell on with your ecommerce platform
- ▲ Let your customers know where they can find your products on your ecommerce store
- ▲ Encourage customers to opt into your email newsletter or follow you on social media



## BRING JOY TO THE WORLD WITH CROSS-BORDER SELLING

Take your products on a one-way ticket around the world. While many initiatives translate to a global strategy, you may want to consider specific ecommerce features.

Enabling multi-currency functionality allows customers to transact in their local currency. This improves customer satisfaction, increases conversion rates, and gives brands complete control of pricing. The BigCommerce payments API offers integrations with leading global payment providers, like [Adyen](#) and [PayPal](#).

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“We launched multi-currency in early summer 2019, which drove about an 80% increase in conversions over just three months.”

Justin Wang, Co-Founder and CEO of LARQ

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LARQ



Multi-store capabilities make it possible to achieve optimal customer segmentation and meet the needs of multi-language, multi-currency, multi-brand and more. If you have many SKUs, you may consider implementing a product information management system (PIM) like [Jasper](#), [Akeneo](#), or [Salsify](#).

Lastly, you'll need to account for key differences in your audience segments. Some will be more clear, like language and customer demographics, while others will require a bit more research. Partnering with a global agency can help your brand succeed across ecommerce, digital marketing, branding and technology integrations.

“Our platform migration was pretty challenging and a complex project with a number of moving parts. We went live with seven sites, four currencies, and three different languages in six months. The BigCommerce team is keeping up with all the trends in ecommerce so as we evolve, they are evolving with us, and supporting our growth.”

- Mark Hopkins, Chief Information Officer at Skullcandy

## Shipping

Unfortunately, we don't all have a big red sleigh to deliver products to homes around the world in one night. But, there are many shipping and fulfillment solutions that can help.

During the holiday season, you'll likely experience an increase in orders. To prepare for the heightened traffic, you'll need to determine how you will handle shipping. There are three primary options:

- ▲ Handle shipping and fulfillment in-house
- ▲ Outsource shipping and fulfillment with a third-party logistics provider (3PL)
- ▲ Outsource shipping and fulfillment with a dropshipper

Whichever path you follow, you'll want to automate your shipping process. Shipping software gives you access to one dashboard where you can compare rates, print labels, manage orders, print shipping labels in bulk, and reconcile shipping bills. You can also set shipping rules to automatically select the cheapest rate, fastest method, etc. To understand how sales tax affects your shipping cost, integrate a tax and accounting software like [Avalara](#), [Vertex](#), or [Quickbooks](#) to help determine where and when you need to charge tax.

With the right shipping strategy in place, you'll be able to offer your shoppers a better shipping experience, improving conversion and brand loyalty. BigCommerce offers partnerships and integrations to help accomplish this, such as [ShipBob](#), [Shipstation](#), [ShipperHQ](#), and [FedEx](#) — and global solutions like [EasyShip](#), [Flavorcloud](#), or [Global-e](#).



## Fulfillment

### MANAGE YOUR INVENTORY.

Get ready to stock up — appropriately. Inventory management can make or break your success amidst the holiday rush. To prepare, study sales data from previous holiday seasons to create detailed demand forecasts.

Now more than ever, the holidays can present unpredictable challenges. Maybe your products are featured on a national news broadcast or organically endorsed by a celebrity. Real-time inventory tracking will help you navigate supply and demand challenges. Depending on your business needs, you may also consider integrating an order management system like [Brightpearl](#).

**“The automation cut down the labor by about 8x. It’s a great win for productivity. Now people can come in, get their job done and get out of here to spend time with their families.”**

**- Ben Johnson, VP Operations at Casey’s Distributing, on their integration with Brightpearl.**

### DELIVER AN INCREDIBLE UNBOXING EXPERIENCE.

Think of every order as a gift. The unboxing experience is very important to both your customers and marketing strategy. Create an exceptional unboxing experience that inspires them to share on social media or with friends and family. You can work with partners like [Arka](#) and [Noissue](#) to create custom packaging materials. For more sustainable options, check out [EcoEnclose](#).

### STAY CONNECTED WITH YOUR STOREFRONT.

For brands selling both online and offline, a point-of-sale system (POS) integration is key. You will gain access to full visibility of inventory and can even leverage offline inventory to fulfill online orders. BigCommerce offers integrations with [Vend](#), [Square](#), [Springboard Retail](#), [Clover](#) and more.

### WIN BACK CUSTOMERS WITH RETURNS.

On average, shoppers return **15% to 30%** of online purchases during the holiday season. In 2019, this amounted to roughly \$41.6 billion in returns. As a result, returns continue to be a large area of concern for many e-tailers.

It's key to understand your options for product returns. Rather than viewing returns as a loss, use them as an opportunity to win back customers (and potentially acquire new ones who discovered you from a gift).

Make the return process as convenient as possible. You can work directly with your 3PL provider to create an automated process or use a returns solution, like [Happy Returns](#), to simplify the process for customers — and earn their loyalty.

**“People often treat the returns process as an afterthought, but it’s an equally important part of the customer’s overall experience with a brand.”**

**- Russell Klein, Chief Commercial Officer, BigCommerce**





## October: Marketing and Promotions

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### Connect with Customers

The season brings a unique merriment and nostalgia that encourages spirited fun, giving back, and meaningful time spent with family and friends. When marketing your products, focus on connecting your brand to the season.

There are several ways you can build an emotional connection with your customers:



**Team up with a charitable organization to highlight your mission and values and give back.**



**Bring a storytelling approach to your marketing collateral.**



**Highlight user-generated content to celebrate your customers.**

### Give the Gift of Promotions

By tying your brand to the season, customers will feel more inclined to shop with you. Take it a step further with promotional strategies and they'll also feel more inclined to purchase, share with friends, and, ultimately, come back for more. Here are a few tactics you can implement:

- ▲ Upsell with gift cards at checkout
- ▲ Offer special seasonal services like free gift-wrapping and shipping
- ▲ Add urgency with limited-time offers by the hour or days



- ▲ Enable customers to give back by adding a [PayPal Donate](#) button to checkout
- ▲ Reward customers with exclusive discounts through a referral or loyalty program

## Integrate Your Marketing Efforts

In order to bring your promotions to life, you'll need to share them through an integrated marketing campaign. This will enable your brand to connect your story to the season and cultivate engagement with your customers — across all channels. Just like a holiday cookie recipe, your campaign will consist of many sweet ingredients.

Your ecommerce store is your home, so begin by creating core messaging for your website. Craft content and copywriting that resonates and engages your audience and do your best to offer additional content resources, like holiday gift guides. Once you've locked down your website content strategy, spread the cheer onto additional marketing channels.

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“Customers are conditioned to expect certain moments in the year where there are heavy promotional periods, like Black Friday and Cyber Monday. What we want to do as a brand is to elevate that promotional experience. Create real unique promotions that don't cheapen the brand, but still offer a great option for the consumer.”

- Alex Kubo, VP Ecommerce and Digital Marketing, Burrow

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**BURROW**



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Share holiday stories through the eyes of your customers using user-generated content. If you are looking to leverage influencers, ask them to create content focusing on a holiday memory. You can also engage your followers in real-time with Instagram or Facebook Live sessions. Remember, many consumers choose to communicate with brands via social media, so be sure to respond to all inquiries within 24–48 hours.

## PAID ADVERTISING

Organic content is king, but paid advertising can boost your brand in a saturated market. A quick place to begin is [Facebook](#) or [Instagram Ads](#), since you can simply boost organic content. Where you'll want to spend a little more time is search engine marketing and overall conversion rate optimization.

Organic SEO will help you rank on Google, but, similar to social media, a paid boost can garner thousands of more views. [Google Ads](#) is key to any paid strategy as it can help drive both website and in-store visits. If you have an omnichannel approach, investing in paid advertising can help drive traffic across channels, too.

The following partners can help with your conversion rate optimization:

- ▶ [Logical Position](#) (Google Ads PPC management, paid social)
- ▶ [Google Shopping by Sales & Orders](#)
- ▶ [Facebook & Google Easy Ads by ROI Hunter](#)
- ▶ [Google Ads Keyword Genius](#)

## EMAIL

Remember how excited you were as a child to receive snail mail? Your emails should deliver the same excitement to your customers. Email marketing is a great opportunity to send personalized communication. With an email marketing tool like [Omnisend](#), [Klaviyo](#), or [Mailchimp](#), you can combine beautiful email templates with dynamic discount codes, campaign targeting, and tracking and attribution.

Find creative ways to announce new products and promotions and increase your click-through and conversion rates.

## SMS

When it comes to holiday, SMS provides a special opportunity to connect with your customers. Many brands leverage SMS marketing to execute pre-built sequences and conversations specific to cart abandonment, order and shipping confirmations, personalized rewards, limited-time promotions and more.





## SEO

To enhance the performance of your content, focus on implementing SEO tactics:

- ▲ Make sure your ecommerce platform is equipped with industry-leading SEO tools
- ▲ Consistently assess your site's load times and overall performance with [Google Analytics](#) and [Google Search Console](#)
- ▲ Identify relevant keywords for holiday
- ▲ Create landing pages for Black Friday and Cyber Monday offers with custom URLs, compelling page titles and meta descriptions
- ▲ Coordinate SEO with other marketing efforts like paid search and social media

If you want to outsource this work, there are many agencies like [Coalition Technologies](#) that offer expertise across SEO, web design, pay-per-click (PPC), social media, SMS, and email strategies.

**“Create holiday-specific deal pages. These pages can target terms for Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals for your niche. Some niches have more volume than others, but it still can be worth it for high intent traffic. Launch them early to get them to rank and add an email signup. You can then send additional emails on holiday sales.”**

**- Kevin Jones, Senior SEO & Content Marketing Manager, BigCommerce**



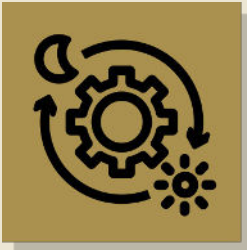
# November: Customer Service and Support

The holiday season is quickly approaching and, to be prepared for success, both your business and your customers need adequate support.

## Support for Your Ecommerce Store

The holiday nightmare: a crashed website on Cyber Week. After months of hard work, your customers are disappointed and unable to make purchases. It's often overlooked, but support for your business is make or break for success.

When choosing an ecommerce platform, make sure it comes with:



**24/7  
Global Support**



**Premium  
Security Features**



**Industry-  
Leading Uptime**

BigCommerce comes with all of this and more. Our support team can help you with anything related to selling online and growing your business, like boosting conversion, improving your shopping experience, managing catalog transfers, and recommending solutions for taxes, payments, shipping and software integrations. We also stand out from the crowd with ongoing content resources, like our [product blog](#) and [BigCommerce blog](#), and our offering of growth and launch services where you will work with a dedicated ecommerce expert.



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“The BigCommerce customer support team has always been easy to contact and work with, and all of our questions have been addressed immediately, which makes our lives much less stressful.”

- Sarah Hoffman, Online Sales Director at Precision Camera

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## Supporting Your Customers

You've got a dedicated support team behind your store. Now, you must take care of your customers. The holidays are undoubtedly a busy and sometimes stressful time. Be prepared to handle any questions and concerns, and make information readily available.

### DEDICATED SUPPORT.

Even when something goes wrong, a positive customer support experience can lead to a loyal customer. You should have dedicated support for phone, email, and social media — and be sure to respond to all inquiries within 24–48 hours.

To enhance the customer experience further, consider adding:

- ▲ Chat support powered by solutions like [Drift](#) or [iAdvize](#)
- ▲ Contact information to your website and all order confirmations
- ▲ An FAQ page that offers quick and easy answers

### ASK FOR FEEDBACK.

“How was your experience today?” This is a simple question that brings a lot of value to your business. Not only are you obtaining customer testimonials, but you will also learn a lot about how you can improve as a business.

**Looking for product reviews? Incentivize your customers to leave a review with a special one-time discount or free shipping.**





## December: Reporting and Analytics

Once Cyber Week 2020 is in the books, the holidays still aren't quite over. Now, it's time to measure the performance of your promotions and campaigns.

### Measuring Holiday Success

Numbers don't mean much until you translate them into insights. Measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) can help you understand your overall performance.

BigCommerce merchants benefit from Ecommerce Analytics and Insight reports, directly in the platform, that provide a deeper look at customer data all in one easy-to-view dashboard, at no extra cost. [Google Analytics](#) is another great tool to integrate to further optimize your website.

When it comes to KPIs, there are three buckets:



Marketing Success Factors



Ecommerce Data



General Business Metrics



## ECOMMERCE DATA.

This group of data helps measure the performance of your website, customer journeys, and what content or products are performing best. Here are few KPIs to consider:

- ▲ Sales
- ▲ Average Order Value (AOV)
- ▲ Conversion Rate
- ▲ Shopping Cart Abandonment Rate
- ▲ Traffic (New vs. Returning)
- ▲ Site Speed
- ▲ Bounce Rate
- ▲ Traffic Source
- ▲ Mobile Site Traffic
- ▲ Day Part Monitoring
- ▲ Product Affinity

## MARKETING SUCCESS FACTORS.

This group of data will help you understand how specific campaigns are performing. Consider these KPIs:

- ▲ Pay-Per-Click (PPC)
- ▲ Click-Through-Rate (CTR)
- ▲ Subscriber Growth Rate
- ▲ Email Open Rate
- ▲ Social Followers
- ▲ Number and Quality of Product Reviews
- ▲ Banner or Display Advertising CTRs
- ▲ Blog Traffic
- ▲ Affiliate Performance
- ▲ Average Position (Search)

## GENERAL BUSINESS METRICS.

You are probably measuring these KPIs throughout the year, but taking a closer look during the holidays can help identify opportunities for the future:

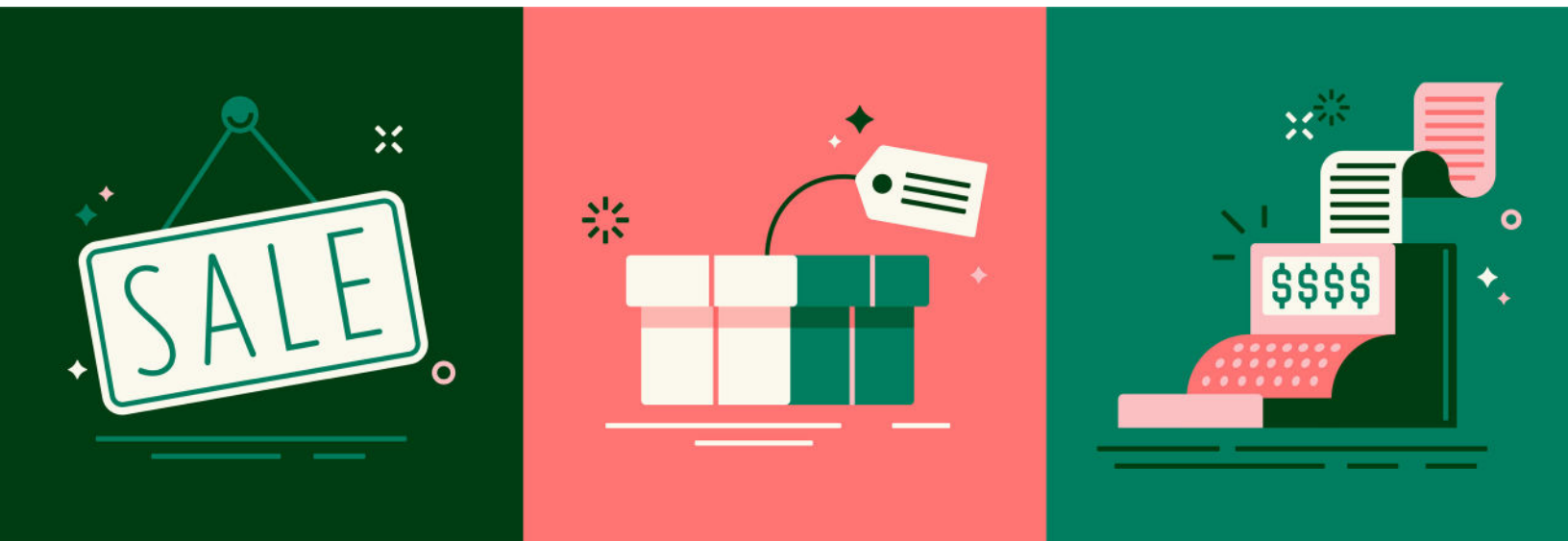
- ▲ Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)
- ▲ Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)
- ▲ Gross Profit
- ▲ Average Margin
- ▲ Cost of Goods Sold (COGS)
- ▲ Competitive Pricing



## New Year Celebrations and 2021 Planning

With the blink of an eye, the year is nearly complete and your holiday campaigns are coming to a close. As you prepare for your final holiday push for New Year's celebrations, keep a few things in mind:

- ▶ Use your analytics and insights to make any final adjustments to your holiday strategy to capitalize on New Year's traffic
- ▶ Quickly process returns and focus on offering high-quality customer support through National Returns Day on January 2, 2021 to retain more loyal customers
- ▶ Get creative with a final holiday marketing push to drive more revenue for New Year's celebrations



### **FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR BUSINESS IN 2021.**

A new year sparks new resolutions and goals. Apply the same mindset to your business and take the time to evaluate your annual growth. Take note of where you succeeded, where you failed, and what you learned.

Taking a moment to reflect on your growth will confidently set you up for the future. Every year will bring new challenges, but creating a future-proof strategy will help you build, innovate, and grow.

As you begin crafting your 2021 strategy, be sure to:

- ▶ Set goals and objectives to hold your team accountable
- ▶ Identify areas of improvement and invest in the right solutions
- ▶ Continue to grow your business and engaged customer base with creative marketing

## Summary

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With the help of these tips, tactics and expert advice, you'll create an award-winning holiday strategy, grow your online presence through powerful storytelling, and convert consumers into loyal customers through:

- ▲ Optimized site experience and UX
- ▲ Efficient selling, shipping and fulfillment strategies
- ▲ Fully integrated marketing campaigns
- ▲ Best-in-class customer service and support
- ▲ In-depth analytics and insights

And even more importantly, you'll have the tools to grow and scale your business into the New Year. As you close out the holiday season, know that BigCommerce is here to support your next phase of growth through our best-in-class ecommerce platform with leading partner integrations.

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**“Preparing for the holiday sales season isn’t something that happens in the weeks leading up to the holidays. It is truly something we start thinking about months in advance. We focused heavily on list growth and better engagement throughout the year because we knew it would pay off when the holidays rolled around. It’s definitely about the long game.”**

- John Merris, CEO of Solo Stove

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 **solo stove**





## CUSTOMER AND USER EXPERIENCE

- Evaluate your website tools and functionality
- Define your merchandising strategy
- Activate abandoned cart notifications
- Enable multi-recipient capabilities
- Optimize your checkout experience with one-page checkout



## SELLING, SHIPPING AND FULFILLMENT

- Integrate additional sales channels into your ecommerce platform
- Enable multi-currency functionality for cross-border selling
- Finalize your shipping and fulfillment strategy (in-house vs. outsourcing)
- Determine your packaging and unboxing experience
- Evaluate and optimize your return process and policy



## MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

- Enable gift card functionality
- Enhance your content with seasonal storytelling
- Finalize your promotional strategy and tactics
- Ensure your campaigns are fully integrated across channels
- Amplify your sales with a strong SEO strategy







## CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUPPORT

- Evaluate your ecommerce platform to ensure you have access to 24/7 support
- Secure dedicated customer service resources for phone, email and social media
- Respond to all inquiries within 24–48 hours
- Make sure your contact information and FAQs are easily accessible
- Ask customers for feedback to enhance the customer experience



## MEASURING SUCCESS

- Establish clear goals and KPIs to track
- Integrate Google Analytics to your ecommerce store
- Make real-time changes based on your data
- Apply your holiday insights as you create your 2021 strategy

Begin a free trial with BigCommerce and receive 3 months free on any retail plan today. Already a customer? Visit our [product blog](#) for more ways to optimize your BigCommerce store.

