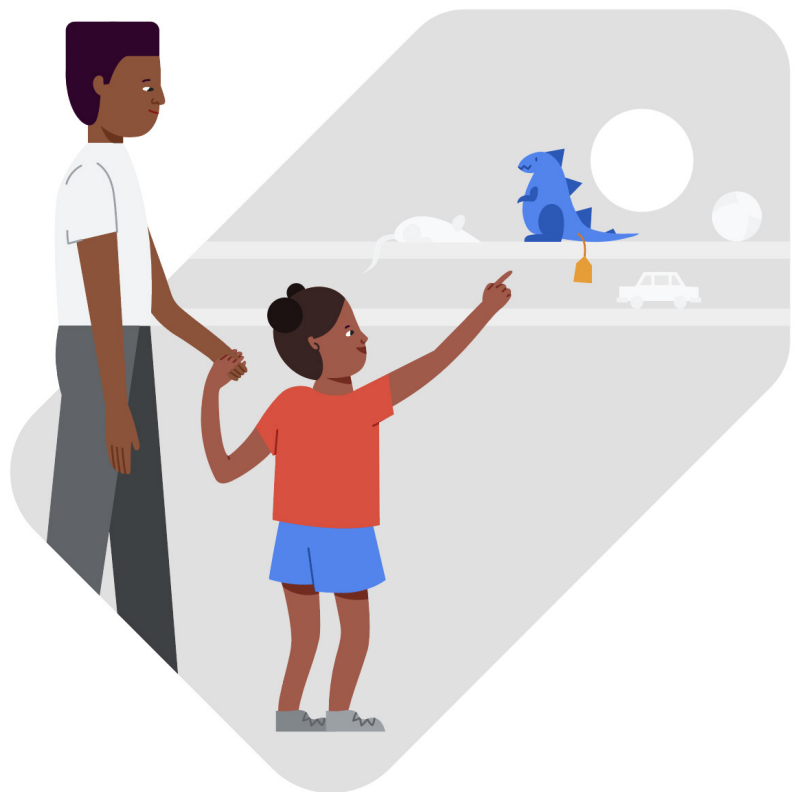# Holiday Retail
Playbook 2019

Your growth is our goal.
Discover how Google can
help this holiday season.

Google

Welcome

This guide is for retail advertisers who have at least 2 years of experience with Google Ads, and are involved with planning and managing digital marketing campaigns for holiday activation.

Contents

Holiday highlights from 2018

$853B

Retail had its largest season ever

with eCommerce sales reaching their strongest growth in over a decade at +18.4% YoY[1]

For the first time ever, more than half of the time spent and purchases occurred online

- 56% of time spent shopping was online[2]
- 53% of shopper-reported purchases were made online[3]

According to Forrester, half of US retail sales are now digitally impacted, and they expect that to grow to 58% by 2023[4]

The shift to mobile was even more dramatic

- 61% of online purchases were made via mobile, +27% YoY[5]
- 60% of consumers shopped via a mobile app[6]

With the rise of mobile and the emergence of new platforms, consumers have changed how they shop. They want to buy from brands that help them discover new things, find what they need, and get things with the least amount of friction, all in a personalized and relevant way. It's more important now than ever to lay the digital groundwork early for success during the 2019 holiday season.

Hundreds of millions of potential customers visit Google each day

Google is the

#1 driver

of both traffic and transactions volume to retail sites[7]

70%
of US smartphone users rely on Google before buying something new[8]

We're here to help you find your next customer and drive more sales.
Your potential customers are shopping anywhere and everywhere. We can help you connect with them in all of these places while elevating your brand so that it stands out among the competition. And, once you've connected with your customers, we can help you remove friction from the entire customer experience to close the deal.

In this guide, we'll share best practices and tips to unlock holiday retail success. We'll also cover how you can leverage data, insights, and automation to accelerate your business growth this holiday season.

Set your holiday game plan (May - June)

It's never too early to start planning

- Searches for "gifts for" and "gifts from" start accelerating the final week of October[9]

- Whether customers end up buying in stores or online, 67% of holiday shopping was planned before purchase[10]

Stay ahead of important dates

Tune in to when your customers are starting to do their research. Top shopping days occurred throughout the season rather than in concentrated peaks. Build your presence before holiday traffic spikes to capture early consumer demand and maximize profitability.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Nov 18	19	20	21	22 Thanksgiving	23 #1 Overall & #1 In-Store Sales Day	24
25	26 #2 Online Sales Day	27 #1 Online Sales Day	28	29	30	Dec 1 #5 Overall & #5 In-Store Sales Day
2	3 #5 Online Sales Day	4 #4 Online Sales Day	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 #3 Online Sales Day	12	13	14	15 #4 Overall & #4 In-Store Sales Day
16	17	18	19	20	21 #3 Overall & #3 In-Store Sales Day	22 #2 Overall & #2 In-Store Sales Day
23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28 #3 Overall & #3 In-Store Sales Day	29 *Source: Mastercard Advisors*

Plan your promotional calendar, especially if you offer international shipping. You can promote your products during international holidays, such as Diwali, Christmas, and Boxing Day.

🏷️ Looking ahead: 2019 Global Holiday Calendar

JANUARY

1	New Year's Day (Global)
28	Australia Day (AU)

FEBRUARY

3	Super Bowl Sunday (US)
5	Lunar New Year (TW, HK, VN, KO, JP)
14	Valentine's Day (Global)
18	President's Day (US)

MARCH

1-9	Carnival (BR)
14	White Day (JP, TW, VN, KO)
17	St. Patrick's Day (Global)
20-21	Holi Festival (Global)
21	Spring Equinox (JP)
31	Mother's Day (UK) Back to School (AR, CL)

APRIL

19-27	Passover (Global)
19-21	Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday (Global)
22	Earth Day (US)
29-30	Golden Week (JP)

MAY

1	May Day (Global)
1-6	Golden Week cont. (JP)
5	Cinco de Mayo (US, MX)
5-30	Ramadan (Global)
12	Mother's Day (US)
20	Victoria Day (CA)
27-31	Hot Sale (AR, MX), Cyber Day (AR, MX)
27	Memorial Day (US)

JUNE

1-4	Ramadan cont. (Global)
16	Father's Day (US)

JULY

1	Canada Day (CA)
4	Independence Day (US)
14	Bastille Day (FR)
15	Sea Day (JP) Back to School (CO, MX)

AUGUST

11	Mountain Day (JP) Back to School (US)

SEPTEMBER

2	Labor Day (US)
16	Respect for the Aged Day (JP)
23	Autumn Equinox (JP)
21-30	Oktoberfest (DE) Back to School (UK)

OCTOBER

1-6	Oktoberfest cont. (DE)
3	Day of German Unity (DE)
14	Thanksgiving (CA), Health and Sports Day (JP)
22	Enthronement Ceremony Day (JP)
27	Diwali (Global)
31	Halloween (Global)

NOVEMBER

3	Culture Day (JP)
11	Singles Day (TW, HK), Veterans Day (US), Armistice Day (FR), Remembrance Day (CA, AU, UK)
15-18	El Buen Fin (MX)
23	Labor Thanksgiving Day (JP)
28	Thanksgiving (US)
29	Black Friday (Global)
30	Small Business Saturday (US)

DECEMBER

2	Cyber Monday (Global)
9	Green Monday (Global)
17	Free Shipping Day (Global)
22-30	Hanukkah (Global)
22	December Solstice (JP)
25	Christmas Day (Global)
26	Boxing Day (Global)

Identify trends and set flexible budgets to capture potential demand

67% of holiday shoppers confess that they still have shopping to do heading into the last week before Christmas[11]

86% of people still shopping after Christmas week searched digitally about holiday-related shopping[12]

Shopping demand maintains through the holidays and into the new year, so make sure you're setting flexible and sustainable budgets across your campaigns by examining historical data and layering your account's current year-on-year trends.

Use Shopping Insights to surface trending products and understand demand (US only). Capture missed traffic by budgeting more for days where your historical click share decreased, but retail query volume or your competitor's click share increased. You can also check out the Opportunities page in Merchant Center and Recommendations page in Google Ads for more budget opportunities.

Set your marketing goals and develop a robust measurement framework

90% of U.S. holiday shoppers used more than one channel for shopping activities in the previous 2 days[13]

Last-click attribution no longer provides an accurate picture for today's cross-channel consumer. Establish clear targets to measure your success with a data-driven attribution model that's consistent across Google Ads and Search Ads 360. Include store visits and sales conversions to track the impact of your online ads on offline conversions.

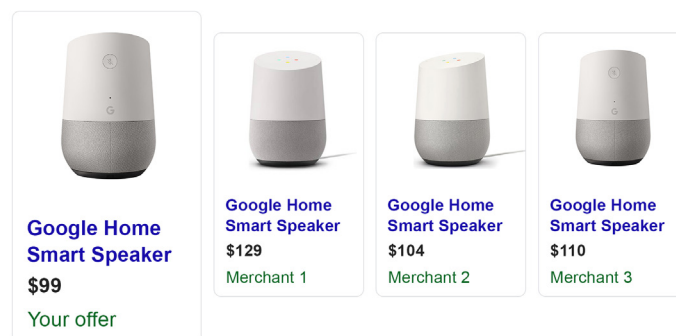# Build your digital storefront (May - August)

42%
of holiday shoppers wished that retailers did a better job of sharing inventory online[14]

81%
of holiday shoppers who used Google were looking for brand and product information[15]

🏷️ **Expand your product assortment with competitive pricing**

Understand demand for products that you don't already stock with the product suggestions report and talk to your merchandising team about adding them to your catalog to offer what your customers are looking for. Also check price benchmark metrics to see how price-competitive you are against other retailers on Google Ads.

Google Home Smart Speaker
$99
Your offer

Google Home Smart Speaker
$129
Merchant 1

Google Home Smart Speaker
$104
Merchant 2

Google Home Smart Speaker
$110
Merchant 3

🏷️ **Show your products on platforms across Google**

Whether or not you want to advertise, submit your entire inventory in Merchant Center for eligibility to show your products on surfaces across Google. Keep your data fresh by enabling automated feed delivery, the Shopping Content API and/or automated item updates to make frequent updates to fluctuating product price and availability during the holidays. You can also opt your product data into Shopping ads to start advertising your products on Google.

See more tips on how to optimize your product data in Merchant Center.
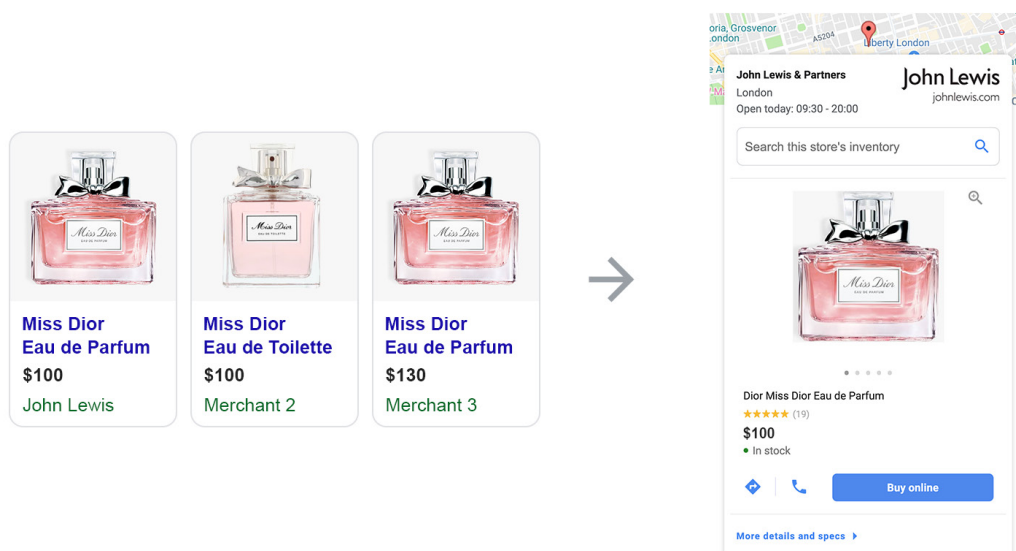
Case Study: IKEA

IKEA is a go-to destination for many shoppers looking for well-designed, functional home furnishings at accessible prices. To improve visibility and increase their return-on-ad-spend, the company focused on optimizing their product data and implementing Smart Bidding for Shopping ads. As a result, IKEA doubled their sales.

Make it easy for people to find your store locations and inventory

75% of consumers expect retailers to have product availability information before visiting in store[16]

Set up a Google My Business account to show your most up-to-date store information on Google. Use Local campaigns to specifically optimize for store visits and access exclusive ad inventory on Google Maps. Promote your local inventory with local inventory ads to drive both online and in-store sales by showcasing your products and stores to nearby shoppers searching on Google.
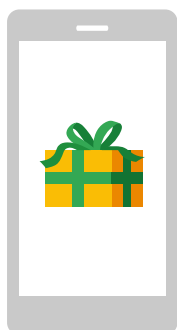
Case Study: Elite SEM & Big 5 Sporting Goods

Performance marketing digital agency Elite SEM partnered with leading sporting goods retailer Big 5 Sporting Goods in the United States to activate local inventory ads and drove a 25% YOY increase in store visits after the shipping cutoff date.

Create a frictionless mobile shopping experience

180%

growth over mobile searches for "online shopping" in the past 2 years[17]

A one second delay in mobile load times can impact mobile conversions by up to

20%[18]

Mobile has been the catalyst for retail growth. Consumers are using digital to decide where to shop and are increasingly leaning into mobile for purchases. A frictionless experience helps you stand out from the competition and minimize drop-off.

Reduce your mobile load time using tips from Test My Site. Create a positive shopping experience by using autofill forms, avoiding interstitials, and placing the product's price and "Add to cart" button above the fold. Enable instant checkout across Google surfaces with Shopping Actions (available in US and FR only).

Learn how to build a strong mobile strategy.

# Drive discovery of your products and reach new customers (July - September)

48%

of shoppers are open to buying from new retailers during the holiday season, and in the 2018 holiday season 30% of them actually did[19]

Build awareness of your brand and products on broader queries

Mobile searches containing the word 'brands" have increased by over 80% over the past 2 years.[20]

Stay in front of potential customers as they start their shopping journey by bidding and highlighting your products on broader search queries. Use Showcase Shopping ads, now available on Google Images, to promote your brand and products earlier in the purchase journey. Show store-specific products, prices, and store information in a highly visual and easy-to-browse ad format with local catalog ads (LCA). Opt into Search Partners in your campaign settings to extend your reach across Google's sites and networks.
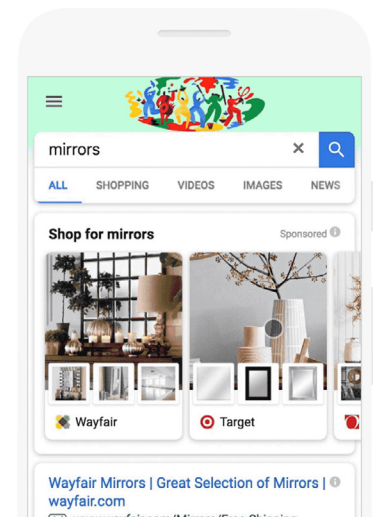
Case Study: Made.com

UK-based retailer Made.com offers home furniture and accessories. By launching Showcase Shopping ads, they saw higher than 59% of their engagements were from new visitors.

MADE®

## Use video to inspire, educate, and convert shoppers

More than
90%
of shoppers say that they've discovered new products and brands via YouTube[21]

More than
40%
of global shoppers say they have purchased products they discovered on YouTube[22]

More than half of shoppers say online video has helped them decide which specific brand or product to buy[23]

Whether it's tagging along on shopping trips with influencers or searching for details about specific products, people turn to YouTube to decide what to buy. No matter where they are in their journey, be sure you're there to meet them with inspiring and helpful content. Upload videos of store tours, product demos, and seasonal gift recommendations to engage shoppers. Promote your brand or products using TrueView for action, to drive them to your landing page and make a purchase.
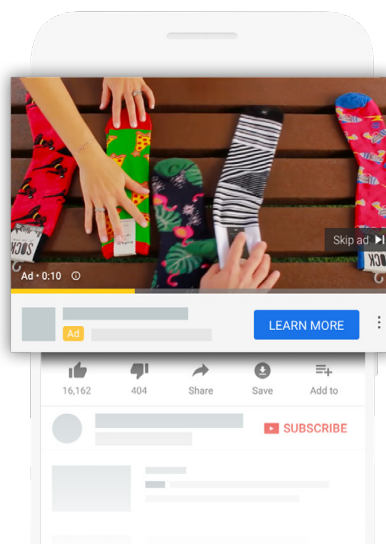
Identify your most valuable customers

Find new customers based on who they are, their interests and habits, what they're actively researching, or how they've interacted with your business by using audience lists across Search, Display, Shopping, and Video campaigns. You can also show ads to similar audiences who share characteristics with people in your existing remarketing lists.

Case Study: GameStop

As a large video game retailer in the United States, GameStop wanted to find customers who shared traits similar to their existing website visitors. By using similar audiences, the company saw a 30% increase in conversion rates.

GameStop

Make your products discoverable for holiday traffic peaks

More products in the ads auction means you'll qualify for more impressions and be visible to holiday shoppers. Check the Opportunities page in Merchant Center to fix top issues and get disapproved products back in the auction long before the holiday season.

Create a campaign with a Dynamic Search Ad (DSA) ad group targeting "all web pages" or "landing pages from your standard ad groups" to ensure your entire inventory is eligible to show in text ads. You can also enable DSA in your campaign settings and add DSA ad group(s) to improve your Search campaign performance. Opt into Search Partners in your campaign settings to extend your reach across Google's sites and networks.

Manage a portfolio of seasonally relevant keywords. Hunt for missing keywords by running a search terms report for last holiday season to uncover converting queries and potential terms to add. While certain keywords may not have performed well in the past, they may perform better when targeted in conjunction with audiences that have previously visited your site. Test high-volume product keywords (for example: "Black Friday") on these audiences using the "Targeting" setting to limit your Search ad group/campaign to people in this audience. Regularly review your negative keywords to make sure you're not unintentionally restricting your traffic.

Establish your presence when shoppers are searching for your products

Set the right bids to boost your product visibility to shoppers. You can do this automatically by adding your products to a Smart Shopping campaign. Smart Shopping campaigns use machine learning to optimize bids, products, and audiences based on available signals, including seasonal demand and device type, so you can maximize your conversion value for your budget. In early testing, advertisers using Smart Shopping campaigns drove over 20% more conversion value on average at a similar cost.[24]

Case Study: Magazines.com

Since 1999, Magazines.com has been the trusted online source for deals and discounts on popular magazine subscriptions. It partnered with Rakuten Marketing to launch Smart Shopping campaigns, which increased Black Friday revenue by 180% YoY.

magaz!nes.com

However, if you do not meet the requirements for or cannot run Smart Shopping campaigns, you can use Target ROAS Smart Bidding to optimize your bids automatically.

Similar to Smart Shopping campaigns, this bid strategy uses machine learning and available signals, including device type, to maximize your conversion value at a return on ad spend (ROAS).

If these automated solutions are not a fit for your business, you can still take steps to segment your performance and set the right bid adjustment modifiers.
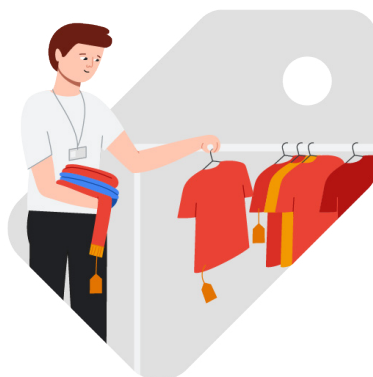
Case Study: Centauro

Centauro is a Brazilian sporting goods retailer with almost 200 store locations. By adopting Target ROAS Smart Bidding, they were able to increase online shopping revenue by 100% on Black Friday.

CENTAURO

Expand your global footprint

International online shopping is rapidly growing. Shopping ads are now available in 42+ countries.

Assess your global opportunity by using the Market Finder. Easily promote your products with multiple language support for Shopping ads on Google and configure your shipping settings in Merchant Center to export your products to new countries.

Maximize the relevance of your text ads to reach more customers

Have 3+ ads per ad group with your ad rotation set to "Optimize" to test what resonates with your audience. Set your ad rotation settings to optimize for clicks or conversions. Make sure to align ad copy and images with your promotional calendar - launching ads with the right offers and deadlines.

Learn more about creating effective text ads.
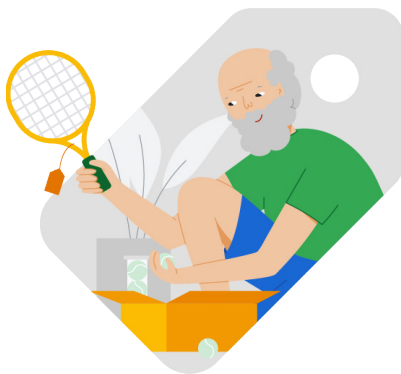
Drive online and offline sales (October - December)

Be top of mind for your high-value products

Up to
3X
the engagement from shoppers seen by shopping ads in the top results on mobile[25]

Pay attention to absolute top impression share (ATIS) and click share as a way to understand where you're ranking. A higher ATIS shows that you're getting a larger number of impressions in the top position of search results. Meanwhile, more clicks will drive higher click share compared to your competitors. When both metrics increase, this indicates that your visibility is strong. Increase bids strategically for top products with gaps in ATIS and click share to ensure that your ads show above the competition, especially on mobile where visibility on a small screen matters.

If you're looking to maximize visibility in a specific product category, separate your products into a campaign. Set a lower ROAS target with the Target ROAS bid strategy to continue showing ads for relevant search queries in the best possible position while optimizing for your return. If you'd like to maximize visibility without regard to return, you can manually optimize bids or use the Maximize Clicks bid strategy to drive a high ATIS.

## Bid to capture high-converting traffic across devices

Make sure you're not going dark - allocate adequate budgets to capture holiday traffic surges. If you're not using Smart Bidding, which already factors in seasonal demand, review bids regularly and bid above your competition to capitalize on increasing conversion rates during holiday peaks. You may also lower your return-on-ad-spend (ROAS) target if you're using a ROAS target ROAS with Smart Shopping campaigns or Smart Bidding to bid more aggressively. If you're using the enhanced cost-per-click (ECPC) bid strategy, also focus on adjusting your base bids to stand up to peak competition.

🏷️ Highlight your unique offers and promotions

Extensions provide a

10-15%
average CTR uplift per added extension shown[26]

Engage last-minute shoppers and deal-seekers looking for end-of-year sales. Add at least 4 ad extensions and insert countdown timers for sales to boost your text ads. Differentiate your Shopping ads by using sale price annotations and Merchant Promotions.
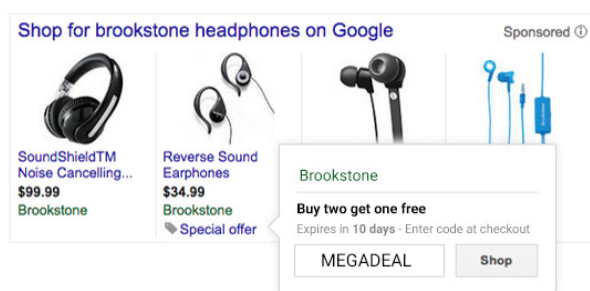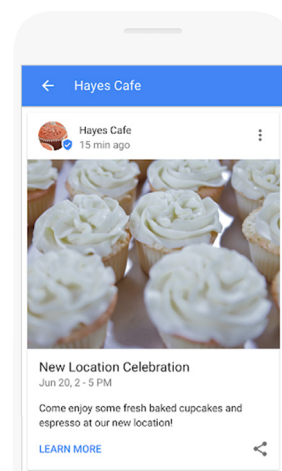

🏷️ Seize opportunities to drive nearby customers to your stores

Mobile searches for "where to buy" grew by

85% [27]

Searches for "store hours" peak on Christmas eve, the highest day of the year.[28]

Make sure to update your store hours and create a post through Google My Business if you're holding holiday events or offering special services like gift wrapping.

After shipping cutoffs pass, last-minute shoppers will turn to local stores to find what they need. Increase location bid adjustments around your stores with location extensions across Search, Shopping, Display, and YouTube campaigns during times when you expect more foot traffic, such as on the weekends or after shipping cutoff dates close to Christmas. To capture even more local opportunity, integrate store visits into automated Smart Bidding and make sure you're optimizing against a complete picture of online and offline performance.

Turn new customers into repeat customers

77%
of shoppers say they regularly or occasionally abandon a cart when shopping online[29]

Reconnect with interested shoppers using remarketing lists across your campaigns and re-engage your existing customers using your own first-party data with Customer Match. Leverage ad customizers to adjust your ad text or offer special promotions for specific audience lists, including loyal customers.

Establish a crisis response plan

Be prepared in case trouble arises and confirm holiday on-call contacts. Set up automated rules in Google Ads to monitor low conversion rates and alert you of any potential landing page or website issues.

Conclusion

The holidays can be a hectic time. Use the months before the peak season to build brand awareness and traffic while testing new tactics to find growth opportunities. When the holidays hit, you'll have a strong foundation to propel your business forward by connecting with more shoppers and driving sales. Get an early start today to keep the coal out of the stockings and set your campaigns for the most success this holiday season.

Get more best practices for unlocking holiday shopping success.

Holiday Shopping Checklists
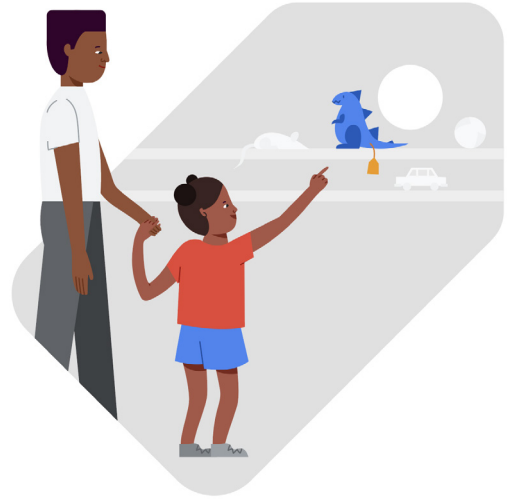
🎁 **Set your holiday game plan (May - June)**

Get an early start to set your campaigns up for the most success.

☐ **Identify trends, forecast your budget, and set your goals**

Use Shopping Insights to surface trending products and understand demand (US only). Set flexible and sustainable budgets by examining trends and historical data, and layering your account's current year-on-year trends.

☐ **Develop a measurement framework**

Set up a data-driven attribution model across Google Ads and Search Ads 360 that includes tracking the impact of your online ads on offline conversions.

☐ **Set your calendar**

Stay ahead of key dates to plan your promotional campaigns.

🎁 **Build your digital storefront (May - August)**

Create your digital shelf to offer what your customers are searching for while delivering the best customer experience to close the deal.

☐ **Expand your product assortment with competitive pricing**

Understand demand for products that you don't already stock with the product suggestions report and talk to your merchandising team about adding them to your catalog to offer what your customers are looking for. Also check price benchmark metrics to see how price competitive you are against other retailers on Google Ads.

☐ **Show your products on platforms across Google**

Whether or not you want to advertise with Shopping ads, submit your entire inventory in Merchant Center for eligibility to show your products on surfaces across Google. You can also opt your product data into Shopping ads to start advertising your products on Google. Identify opportunities to improve your feed health and data quality.

☐ **Make it easy for shoppers to find your store locations and inventory**

Show your most up-to-date store information on Google. Use Local campaigns to optimize for store visits and access exclusive ad inventory on Google Maps. Promote your local inventory with local inventory ads.

☐ **Create a frictionless mobile shopping experience**

Mobile has been the catalyst for retail growth. Make your mobile shopping experience as seamless as possible to reduce drop-off and drive more mobile conversions.

🎁 ## Drive discovery of your products and reach new customers (July - September)

Use the months before the peak holiday season to drive momentum by setting up brand and acquisition campaigns while testing new tactics to find growth opportunities.

☐ **Build awareness of your brand and products on broader queries**

Highlight your brand and products earlier in the purchase journey with Showcase Shopping ads and store-specific products, prices, and store information with local catalog ads (LCA). Opt into Search Partners in your campaign settings to extend your reach across Google's sites and networks.

☐ **Use video to inspire, educate and engage shoppers**

Upload videos of store tours, product demos, and seasonal gift recommendations to engage shoppers. Use TrueView for Shopping campaigns on YouTube to connect viewers directly with your products.

☐ **Identify your most valuable customers**

Create and test audience lists to discover high-converting audience segments. Use these lists later to re-engage new customers during the peak holiday season.

☐ **Make your products discoverable**

More products in the auction means you'll be visible to more holiday shoppers. Check the Opportunities tab in Merchant Center to get disapproved products back in the auction. Add seasonally relevant keywords and use Dynamic Search Ads (DSA) to make your entire inventory eligible for text ads.

☐ **Establish your presence when shoppers are searching for your products**

Set the right bids to boost your product visibility to shoppers. Test automated solutions like Smart Shopping campaigns and Target ROAS Smart Bidding to automatically optimize for queries that are more likely to convert.

☐ **Expand your global footprint**

Assess your global opportunity by using the Market Finder. Easily promote your products with multiple language support for Shopping ads on Google and configure your shipping settings in Merchant Center to export your products to new countries.

☐ **Maximize the relevance of your text ads to reach more customers**

Keep testing your ads to see what messaging resonates most with your audience and plan ahead to align ad copy and images with your promotional calendar. Learn more about creating effective text ads.

🍰

🎁 **Drive online and offline sales (October - December)**

Kick your holiday plans into high gear! Connect with your customers and drive them to make the final purchase with you.

☐ **Be top of mind for your high-value products**

Pay attention to absolute top impression share (ATIS) and click share to understand where you're ranking.

☐ **Bid to capture high-converting traffic across devices**

Make sure you're not going dark—allocate adequate budgets to capture holiday traffic surges. If you're not using Smart Shopping campaigns or Smart Bidding, which already factor in seasonal demand, review bids regularly and bid above your competition to capitalize on increasing conversion rates during holiday peaks.

☐ **Highlight your unique offers and promotions**

Engage last-minute shoppers and deal-seekers looking for end-of-year sales. Add at least 4 ad extensions and insert countdown timers for sales to boost your text ads. Differentiate your Shopping ads by using sale price annotations and Merchant Promotions.

☐ **Seize opportunities to drive nearby customers to your stores**

Increase location bids with location extensions across Search, Shopping, Display, and YouTube campaigns on times when you expect more foot traffic, such as store hours and weekends.

☐ **Turn new customers to repeat customers**

Use remarketing lists and Customer Match to reconnect with your customers and drive them to make a purchase.

☐ **Establish a crisis response plan**

Be prepared in case trouble arises and confirm holiday on-call contacts. Set up automated rules in Google Ads to monitor low conversion rates and alert you of any potential landing page or website issues.

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24. Google Data, Feb - May 2018. Based on A/B traffic split for 50 advertisers with Smart Shopping campaigns spend > $4k and comparable spend is within 50%
25. Google internal data, 2016
26. Google internal data: this will vary by client, business type and extension type, among other factors, and Google cannot guarantee this or any uplift
27. Google Data, US, Jan - Jun 2015 vs. Jan - Jun 2017
28. Google Data, US, Nov - Dec 2017
29. Google/Ipsos, "Shopping Tracker", January-December 2018, Online survey, US, Adults 18+ n=11191 online shoppers past 2 days.

Google