

Holiday Email Marketing Playbook

*Surefire Strategies for Boosting
End-of-Year Business*





It's hard to believe that 2014 is almost over. Marketers are about to enter their busiest season — getting ready to launch campaigns they've been planning for months. It promises to be an extremely exciting few months. But it's also going to be tough.

That's because the online retail ecosystem is growing rapidly. Now more than ever, consumers rely on the Internet to find the best deals and connect with the best products.

[According to data from Shop.org](#), online shopping this holiday season — for the first time — will top \$100 billion.

The challenge is that brands will be competing for attention from the same consumers. Between travel, family, and time off from work, November and December are busy for everyone. Time-strapped consumers will be in efficiency mode finding thoughtful gifts at the best prices.

Quickstats: the 2014 Holiday Season Forecast

- ❄ [According to eMarketer](#), U.S. ecommerce retail sales will grow 16.6 percent this holiday season (up from last year's 15.3% growth).
- ❄ [Time.com reports](#) that 50% of all sales will be influenced in some way by digital interactions.
- ❄ [Shop.org points out](#) that 84% of shoppers use digital tools before and during trips to a store. These shoppers convert at a 40% higher rate than those who do not use these devices.
- ❄ [According to Yahoo](#), as much as 40% of annual sales are concentrated within the last two months of the year.
- ❄ UPS [recently announced plans](#) to hire as many as 95,000 seasonal employees to support the anticipated surge in holiday deliveries. Last Christmas, approximately 60% of all U.S. deliveries by UPS were e-commerce packages to consumers — up from 2012's 40% increase.
- ❄ 86% of all retailers [expect their 2014 online holiday sales](#) to increase.
- ❄ It was expected in 2013 that [the holidays would make up](#) 20-40% of a retailer's annual sales.



Why We Wrote This Guide

If your company can stand out, you'll have a massive opportunity to drive conversions, sales, and revenue. But you can't just run the same campaigns you ran last year — and you can't just implement one-size-fits-all content marketing, promotional, and email strategies as an afterthought. You need to be thoughtful, methodical, creative, and conversion-minded.

We wrote this playbook with a clear set of tactics to help you stand out from the competition, build substantive customer connection, and drive sales. We'll teach you:

- ❄ Tested and proven conversion drivers from top-performing campaigns
- ❄ Holiday-specific strategies and ideas
- ❄ Strategies to ramp up your email marketing strategy beyond the holidays into 2015
- ❄ Email marketing techniques that are essential for all holidays

Why Email Marketing?

Email marketing is the most-effective tool for reaching audiences in a personalized, one-to-one way. Here's why:

- ❄ Paid ads, especially on high-performing channels like Facebook and AdWords, are becoming increasingly expensive.
- ❄ Consumers are [likely to ignore display ads](#), making expensive ad buys inefficient.
- ❄ Shoppers want information in the moment — delivered at key points in their buying journeys.
- ❄ Over the last few years, shopping cart abandonment [has been on the rise](#), which means e-commerce giants need creative new ways to remind audiences to complete their purchases.
- ❄ People [rely on their mobile devices](#) for up-to-date, on-demand information. Email marketing messages go straight to subscriber mobile inboxes, which they are likely to check throughout the day. It has become increasingly important to appeal to mobile users [given the rise](#) of mobile Internet traffic and device adoption.



- ❄ Email has evolved into a highly sophisticated targeting mechanism. Marketing automation programs can be designed to target specific buying intents, respond to website browsing patterns, send targeted promotions, and address shopping cart abandonment.
- ❄ Email marketing supports all stages of the conversion funnel — to promote loyalty and brand awareness through compelling content and to amplify purchase behavior through personalization and behavioral targeting.

This holiday season, every brand on the planet will be competing for the same audience eyeballs. Email will enable your marketing team to differentiate. Personalization, engaging content, and compelling promotions will be your key differentiators.

7 Quick Tips for a Strong Holiday Email Program

- 1 Treat your holiday email marketing program as a new beginning. Make time to track historical patterns and find creative ways to reach your audience. When you approach your holiday campaigns with a fresh perspective, you'll be less confined to the same year-after-year routines and may uncover new opportunities to stand out from the crowd.
- 2 Know your subscriber list. Study their past behavior, including open rates, click-through rates, and website browsing patterns. Take the time to study A/B tests you've run throughout the year, so you can understand each different segment. This will help you see how to target your audiences more effectively. For instance, some segments will be more receptive to content than others, and some subscribers will respond to promotions, deals, and discounts. Give people the information they want — buying guides, coupon codes, and featured products.
- 3 Know your data, including last year's holiday stats and projected trends for 2015. Use this information to create a clear set of goals for your holiday campaigns. Choose targets that will encourage your team to be aggressive and strive for new milestones.



- 4 Create a clear content plan around all holidays. If you're not sure whether to get started, talk to your target customers to learn about their biggest pain points and needs. Empathize with them and offer a value proposition they absolutely cannot refuse.
- 5 Offer quality. Consumers can identify spam and cruddy deals from miles away. [According to one stat](#), 93% of marketers will send an email blast on Cyber Monday. If your messaging stinks, audiences will ignore you.
- 6 Create equally compelling landing pages. Traffic acquisition is only part of the marketing equation. You need to guide your audiences through the conversion funnel too.
- 7 Learn and adapt continually. Analyze trends and performance from every email campaign you run. When possible, start by testing on segments of your email list before deploying promotions in full.

Now let's put these tips into action using the following best practices and examples.



Your Holiday Playbook

November

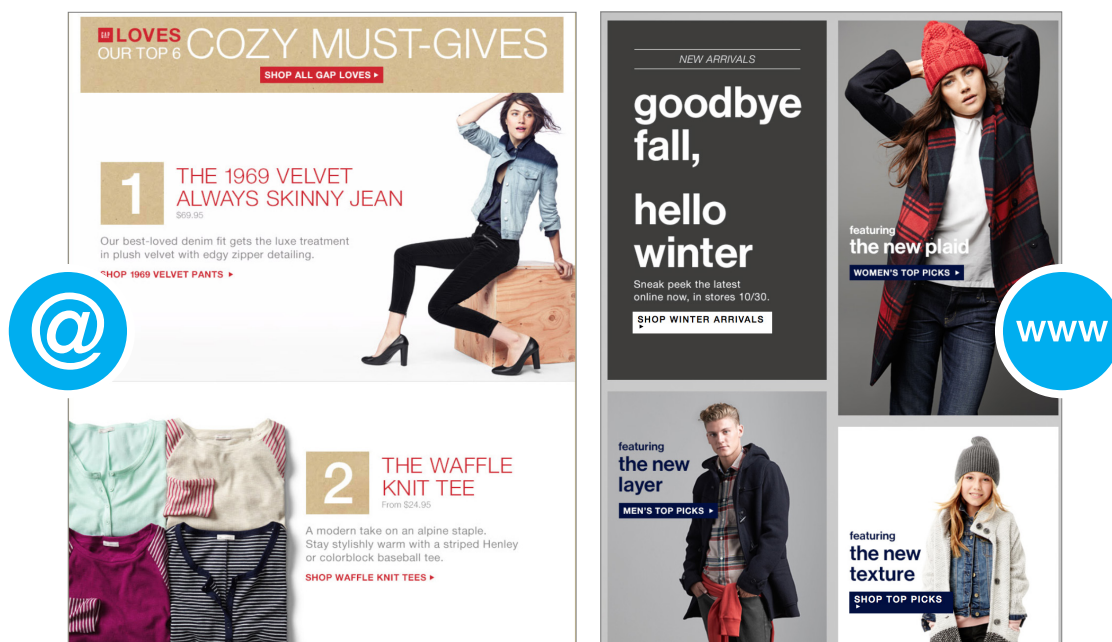
Daylight Savings Time (11/2)

It's not technically a holiday, but the day represents a major seasonal shift that has a direct impact on your audience's mindset and mood. It's the perfect time to send a reminder that winter is on the horizon — and that the year will become more festive and cozy as time passes.

Here are some tips for getting started:

- ❄️ Emphasize key holiday themes: family, warmth, coziness, festivity, delicious food, gift-giving and transitions.
- ❄️ Share a snapshot for upcoming Cyber Monday and Holiday deals.
- ❄️ Consider soft-launching your holiday shopping guide.
- ❄️ Send a reminder for subscribers to start buying cold-weather gear.

For inspiration, check out this campaign from Gap in November 2013:





Veterans Day (11/11)

Even though holiday festivities will not have started, Veterans Day deserves attention. Give thanks to vets who have devoted their lives to your country. Show the love you have for your consumers — your stakeholders. Keep in mind that many shoppers will have Veterans Day off, so give them a sale to celebrate (and start their holiday shopping early). Here are key details to keep in mind:

- ❄ Demonstrate strong national pride, with a celebratory mindset.
- ❄ Don't talk about Thanksgiving or Cyber Monday... yet.
- ❄ Give thanks to your nation's vets (and your consumers) in earnest.

Here is an example from Blowfish Shoes in 2013:







Thanksgiving Day (11/27)

Give thanks to your customers and wish their families well. Send a quick note acknowledging the holiday, but whatever you do — don't sell. Thanksgiving Day is an occasion for people to take the day off and spend time with family.

- ❄️ Keep it short.
- ❄️ Be thoughtful and sincere.

For inspiration, check out this Thanksgiving promo from Inkling in 2013. Rather than trying to sell something, the Inkling team gave their subscribers a free book.





[SHOP](#) | [GET THE APP](#)




A GIFT TO SAY THANKS


This **Thanksgiving**, we want to say thank you with something special: The Inkling Classics Holiday Collection. From *A Christmas Carol* to *Grimms' Fairy Tales* and *Pride & Prejudice*, this collection of five of our favorite literary classics has a little something for everyone. Better yet, **it's free to download**. So as the turkey roasts, curl up with a good (e)book for a spell—it's our treat.


[GET FREE EBOOK](#) ➔



Interactive eBooks for your iPad, iPhone, and Web

Follow Us   

 Download on the App Store




The Inkling Classics Holiday Collection
Inkling Edition, by Various

eBook Price: **Free**

[TRY A FREE SAMPLE](#)

This holiday season, cozy up with our free anthology eBook: the Inkling Classics Holiday Collection. Drawing from the free editions of literary masterpieces in our Inkling Classics library, we've compiled five stories that pair well with short days and snowy evenings. The collection includes "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott, "Pride & Prejudice" by Jane Austen, "Grimms' Fairy Tales" by the Grimm Brothers, and "Treasure Island" by Robert Louis Stevenson. As you read, Inkling's intuitive search, bookmarking, and navigation features guide your armchair adventures. Happy holidays, and happy reading!

Little Women
Pride and Prejudice
A Christmas Carol
Grimms' Fairy Tales
Treasure Island



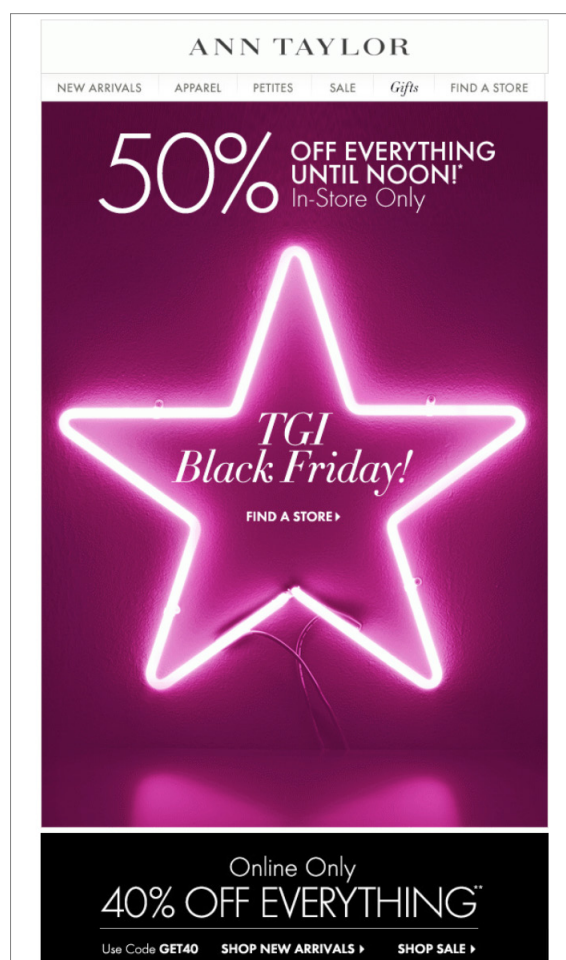


Black Friday (11/28)

Black Friday marks the beginning of retail's busiest season. You need to be aggressive from the get-go, and your deals need to be better than anyone else's. Keep in mind that the majority of your consumers will be starting their holiday shopping sprees today. Be front and center with the absolute best.

- ❄️ Reach your consumers as early in the day as possible.
- ❄️ Launch the best promotion possible.
- ❄️ Build anticipation to get customers excited. In fact, you could require them to sign up for your email list to get the deal early, before the general public.

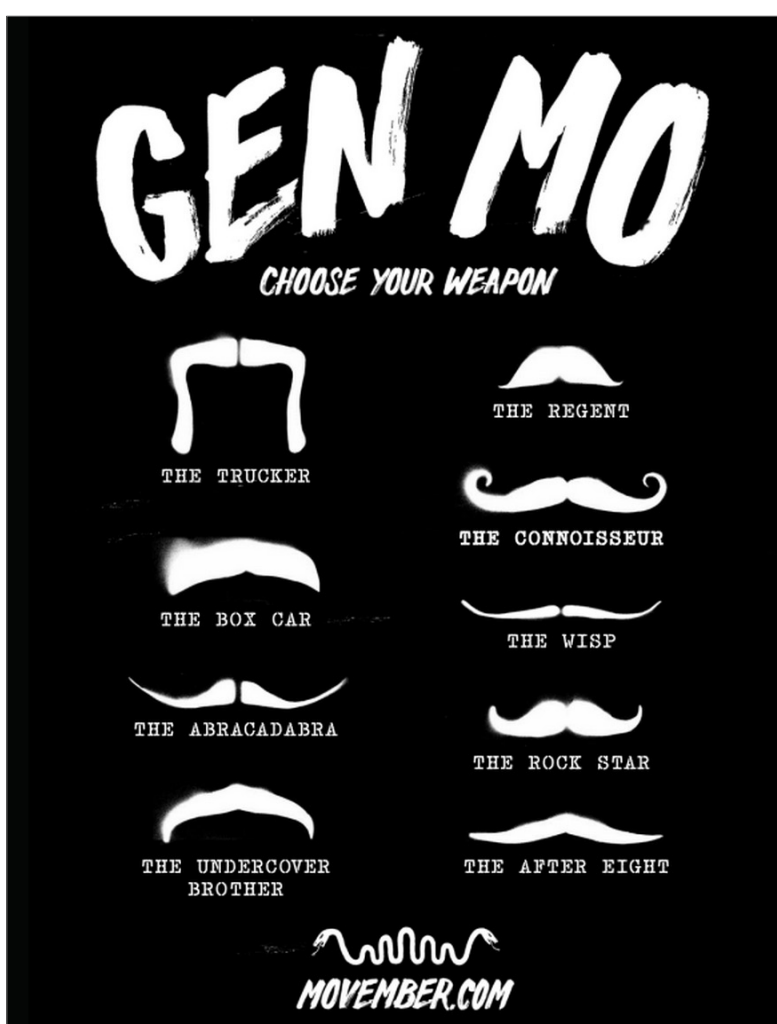
For inspiration, check out this Black Friday 2013 email promotion from Ann Taylor:





Bonus: Movember

While Movember isn't a holiday, an increasing number of companies — and people — are embracing the trend to support the cause it signifies (growing a mustache to inspire conversations about men's health topics such as prostate and testicular cancer). Movember is a great way to show that your company cares — and spark some fun with your email campaigns.



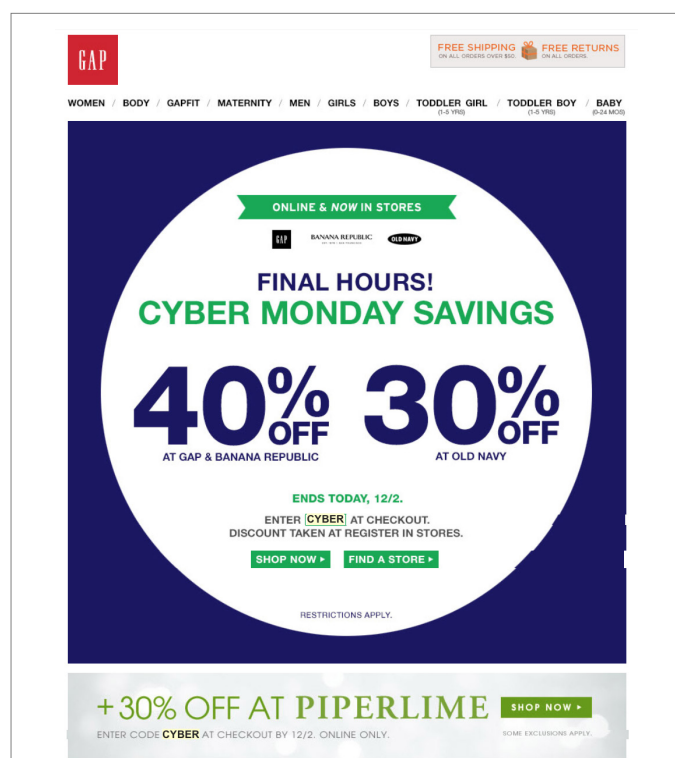


December

Cyber Monday (12/01)

Cyber Monday is a massive retail holiday for brands online. This year, the top themes to embrace are mobile, conversion rate optimization, and social media. The following 2013 stats roundup from Digiday explains why:

- ❄ Mobile sales exceeded 17 percent of total online sales, a whopping increase of 55.4 percent year-over-year.
- ❄ \$150 million in revenue came from social media referrals between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday.
- ❄ Shoppers with loaded online carts actually bought the items at a 12.6 higher rate on Cyber Monday than on Black Friday.



This Cyber Monday, your brand should:

- ❄ Out-do your in-store sales by appealing to those who prioritize convenience but still love deals.
- ❄ Connect with your consumers early via email.
- ❄ Introduce deals that make an impact, outperform the competition, and make your brand irresistible.
- ❄ Make your email clear, visually appealing, and easy to read across devices.



First Day of Hanukkah (12/17)

Retailers are often fixated on Christmas, but there's much more to the retail story. Remember that many of your customers will be celebrating something else — like Hanukkah, for one.

Remember that Hanukkah is on a completely different schedule from Christmas. It's important to release promotions and email campaigns around this audience as well. To get started:

- ❄ Create Hanukkah-specific deals rather than one-size-fits-all holiday promos.
- ❄ Allow plenty of prep time and effort for Hanukkah campaigns — especially since competitors may ignore the holiday altogether.

Super Saturday (12/20)

This is the last shopping Saturday of the holidays. It's also one of the last opportunities for free shipping. This day will be a valuable opportunity for last-minute shoppers to get what they need. So be helpful:

- ❄ Introduce last-minute specials.
- ❄ Emphasize quick shipping or site-to-store options.
- ❄ Alert shoppers as early in the day as possible (because they'll probably be a bit nervous).

For inspiration, check out the following holiday 2013 email campaign from Target:





December Solstice (12/21)

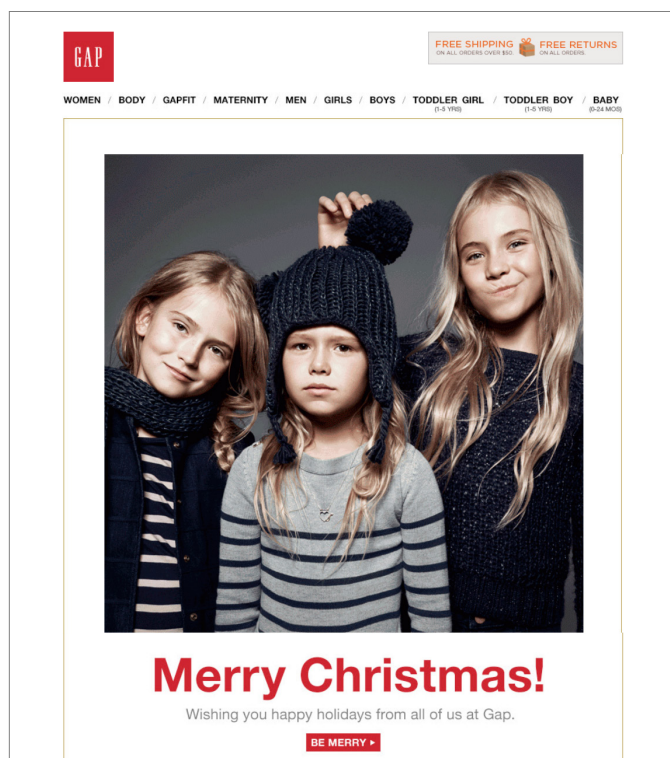
While December Solstice isn't an official holiday, we'd just like to remind you that it will be the shortest day of the year. What better excuse for a sale?

Christmas Eve & Last Day of Hanukkah (12/24)

The shopping season will be almost over, but it's still important to wish your audience well. To appeal to the truly last-minute shoppers, give them the option to buy a virtual gift card.

Christmas Day (12/25)

Take it easy with a short greeting to your audience.





New Year's Eve (12/31)

Get ready for celebration — and change. While the holiday rush will have subsided, resolution season is just around the corner. Within the next few days, you'll be in a great position to launch campaigns around getting healthy, opportunities for travel, and energy-packed “newness.”

Summing It All Up

Ideally, your marketing team started planning your holiday campaigns months ago. Regardless of the strategy that you have (or haven't) put in place, you can still accelerate campaign performance. It all comes down to email marketing — the most direct way to reach your audiences one-to-one.

Give your customers offers they can't refuse — that genuinely make their shopping seasons more rewarding — and be present at the right time in their buying journeys. Most important, optimize your email marketing campaigns for multiple devices and touch points, since consumers will engage with your brand in multiple ways. A cross-device, cross-platform strategy will help ensure that you forge the strongest consumer connections possible.



Ready to give it a go?

First, sign up for a [GetResponse 30-Day Free Trial](#). Then use our web form tool to place an attractive email sign-up form on your website. From there, go to Email Creator, grab a holiday email template, and customize your message. Complete your campaign with a matching template in Landing Page Creator. You'll be amazed at how quick and easy it is to set up a complete campaign — starting from scratch.

Happy Holidays!

Questions? Get in touch!



Abby Hartz
Community Specialist

www.getresponse.com
abigail.hartz@getresponse.com

 facebook.com/GetResponse

 twitter.com/GetResponse