13 ecommerce tips to prep for peak season

nosto
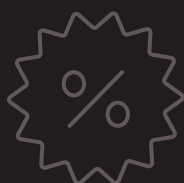
ShipBob   attentive®   gorgias

Contents

13 ecommerce tips to prep for peak season

Every year, the likes of Black Friday Cyber Monday (BFCM), Thanksgiving, and Christmas present ecommerce brands with a lucrative window for reaching floods of new customers and driving revenue—but only with the right foundations in place!

When it comes to peak season, preparation is half the battle. That's why we've put together a handy list of things to focus on now, that'll put your brand on track for another successful holiday season this year.

Let's get to it.
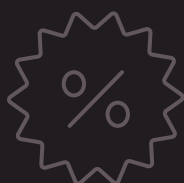
Tip #1: Get to know your audience

During peak season (and particularly BFCM), most brands should expect both an influx of new traffic that is unfamiliar with their brand (i.e. folks shopping for gifts), and returning customers who are shopping both for themselves and for others.
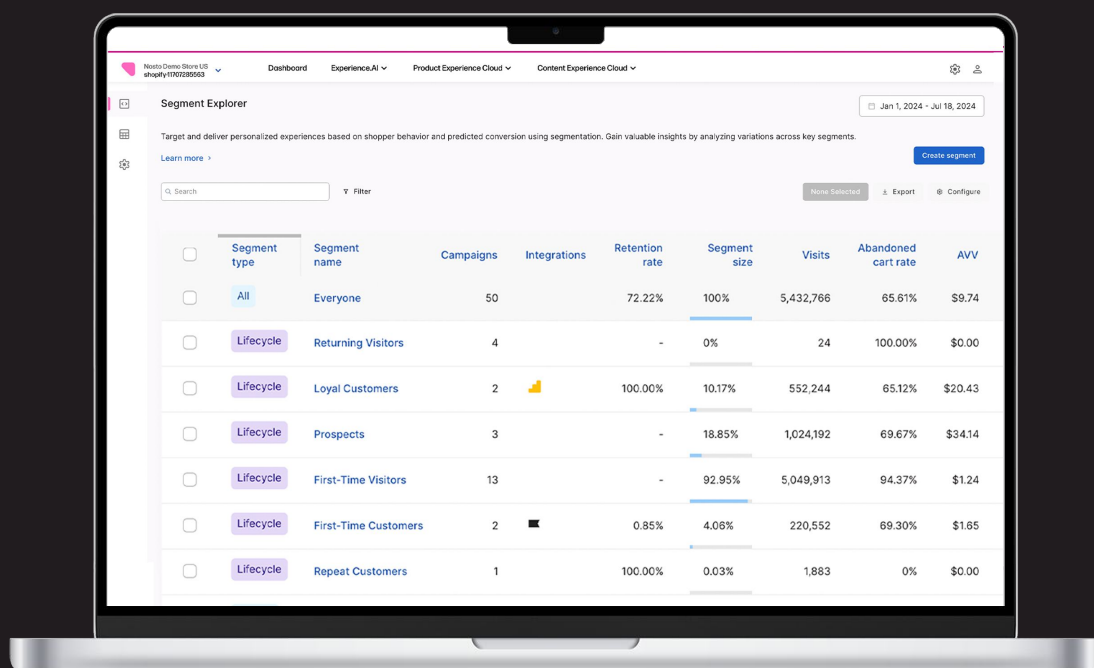
With this in mind, you'll want to make sure you have any potential actionable shopper segments set up in advance, so you've the opportunity to get to know those audiences ahead of peak season:

- Where are they coming from
- What pages are they visiting
- What products are they purchasing
- What products are they adding to cart but abandoning
- What's their AOV, items per transaction
- What pages are they bouncing from

Tracking information like this will assist you in being able to spot opportunities to improve and optimize the onsite customer journey during peak for these specific subsets of customers (i.e. how you should treat new visitors versus returning visitors, organic traffic versus paid traffic, visitors coming from SMS versus email, visitors shopping on mobile versus desktop).

Nosto users: Nosto comes out-of-the-box with the aforementioned segments, so you're already ahead of the game! However, you should take a look in your Audience Insights dashboard at the % of traffic you've captured an email for; this will give you an idea of how big an opportunity there'll be to send personalized emails when you start promoting peak season sales. P.S. if this % is low, now's the time to work to increase email capture so you can reach out to people ahead of peak season and retarget them thereon. Chat with your CSM about how you can accomplish this using Nosto's behavioral pop-ups.

Tip #2: Weigh up your product catalog

Crucially, you're going to want to make sure your product catalog is well-prepped for some spiky sales—and that you've thought about it strategically.

Start by analyzing your inventory and considering what's likely to fly off the shelves. Are you going to have enough stock to fulfill orders of your best-sellers, for instance? What about items that have proven popular during previous peak seasons (look to past purchasing trends)?

On the other hand, you might have products with too much stock! Good news: peak season's a great time to shift it. You could promote these high-inventory products in your merchandising, bundle them together for a special discount, or—and if you've a lot of excess stock items—create a specific landing page that gathers them all and offers a discount.

You're also going to want to evaluate your tagging taxonomy in good time.

Remember, any campaign and experience that you set up for peak season will only pull through relevant products if your catalog's properly tagged and categorized. For instance, what'll happen if you sell out of your best-selling product in a certain color? Will the other color options of the same product be tagged with the same methodology so they can pull through in your recommendations? Make time to make sure that's the case.

Finally, get to building out your seasonal collections so you can easily activate these on-site. Trust us: the you in 3 months time will be thanking current you for setting these up in advance.

Nosto users: remember, our data extractor tool makes it easy-peasy to clean up your product data. So, if your catalog does need a little bit of housekeeping, panic not! If you are unsure about the state of your product catalog, take a look at your Product Intelligence dashboards for a real-time assessment.
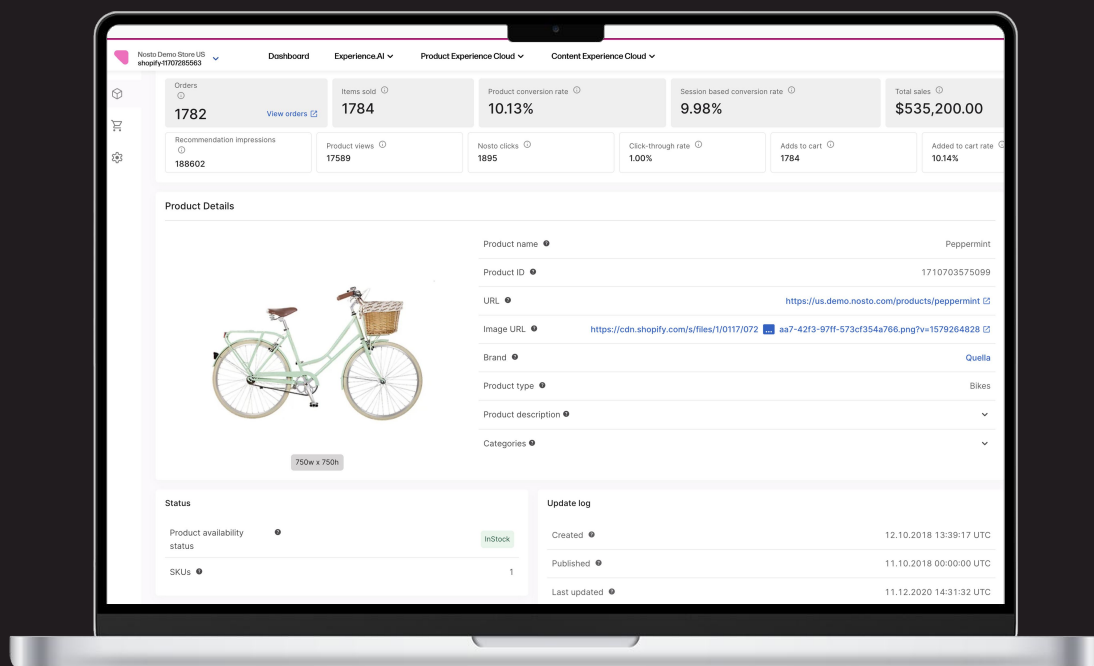
Tip #3: Start to plan your attack

Having identified any actionable audience segments, and given your product catalog some consideration, now's the time to start assembling a plan.

Start by asking yourself some practical questions...

- Which pages are my most highly trafficked pages?
- Which do I typically drive my paid traffic towards?
- What are my most popular search terms?
- Which search terms return 0 results?
- What do my 404 pages look like? Are there product recommendations in place to keep people on the road to discovery?
- Am I going to have to mitigate a lack of inventory?

Answering the above will give you an indication of where you should prioritize your efforts and allow you to craft a plan for success. Oh, and don't worry if you're stuck for ideas on what sorts of commerce experiences you can create—over the coming days we'll be giving you plenty of inspo.

Nosto users: Secure yourself a free spot for our next Commerce Experience (CXP) Certification workshops to supplement the content we'll be sharing in this advent. We'll help you understand what sorts of experiences you can create with our platform, and, crucially, which to prioritize! Reach out to your CSM to get your promo code prior to registering 😉
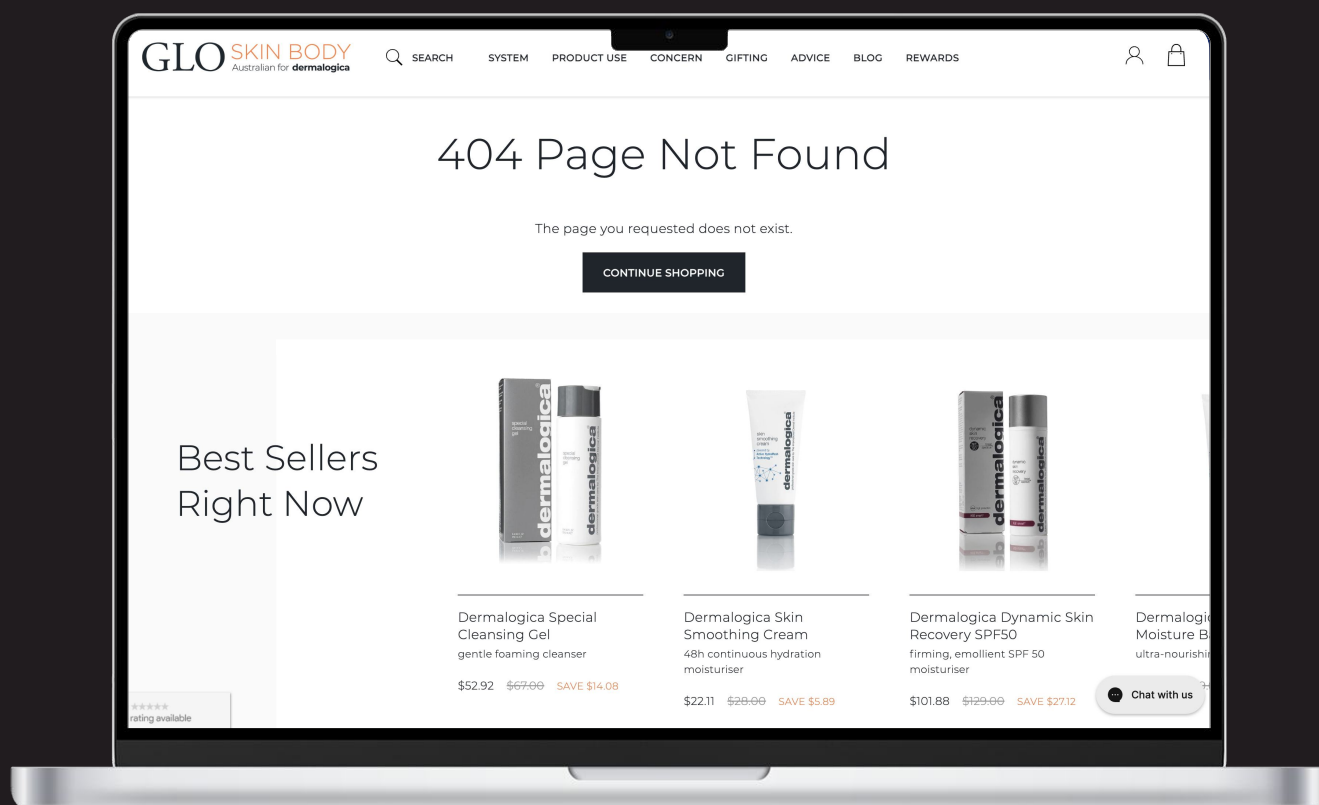
Tip #4: Leverage customer insights & automation

Customer support is the backbone of a successful BFCM. The earlier you prepare for ecommerce's busiest season, the greater the rewards. We'll guide you through creating a BFCM strategy from past customer interactions, integrating AI into your support strategy, and automating essential onsite campaigns.

Create your BFCM strategy from past customer interactions

Start with your past customer interactions to refine the customer experience. Addressing pre-sales barriers and post-purchase concerns can be achieved with these steps:

- **Revisit your data:** Use historical support tickets and feedback to identify common concerns. Tailor your onsite campaigns based on these insights.
- **Encourage real-time conversations:** Add live chat support with specific CTAs for personalized assistance.
- **Optimize timely messaging:** Deliver campaign messages based on browsing patterns.
- **Educate to reduce returns:** Provide clear product information to set accurate expectations.

Add AI to the team

AI can meet customer demands faster than human agents. Let AI handle repetitive tasks so you have time to drive sales. Follow these steps to integrate AI:

- **Onboard:** Teach the AI your processes and brand voice.
- **Automate:** Allow AI to handle tickets.
- **Observe:** Monitor AI's response quality.
- **Coach:** Continuously improve AI accuracy.

Meet customers where they are with automation

Automate these marketing campaigns on your website to enhance your customer touchpoints:

- **Welcome campaigns:** Engage new subscribers with a welcome discount.
- **Browsing and cart abandonment campaigns:** Remind customers to keep shopping or nudge them with a discount.
- **Upsell and cross-sell campaigns:** Promote complementary products before shoppers checkout.
- **Winback campaigns:** Re-engage lapsed customers.
- **Loyalty campaigns:** Extend exclusive offers to rewards members.
- **VIP campaigns:** Offer early access to BFCM sales.
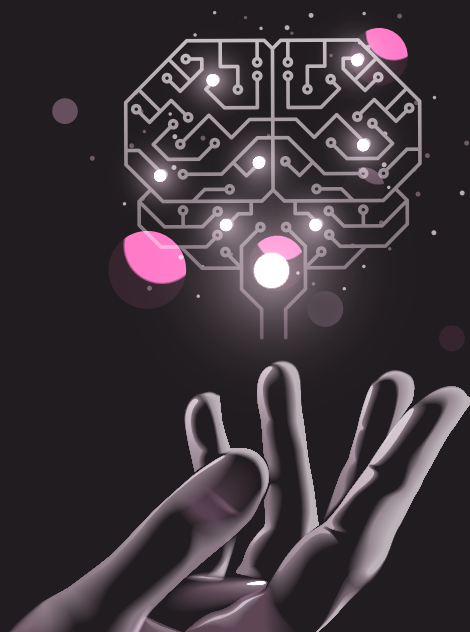
Tip #5: Personalize your communications

Last year, brands that used Attentive drove $1.8 billion in revenue from personalized SMS and email during Cyber Week—a 64% increase from the year before. This highlights the power and growing importance of owned channels. But, as consumers look to get more value out of their purchases—and have more choice than ever thanks to ecommerce growth—they're comparing their options closely, and brands have to work for their attention. With 63% of consumers worldwide willing to pay more to shop with a brand they're loyal to, relationship-building owned channels like SMS and email are critical for Black Friday success.

Collect customer data to power personalization

Personalization is a critical piece of the equation. 78% of consumers say they'll likely engage with a personalized offer tailored to their interests. Meanwhile, 68% will ditch a brand for more personalized experiences elsewhere. So the earlier you start learning about your subscribers' interests, behaviors, and preferences, the more targeted your campaigns will be year-round—but also for Black Friday.
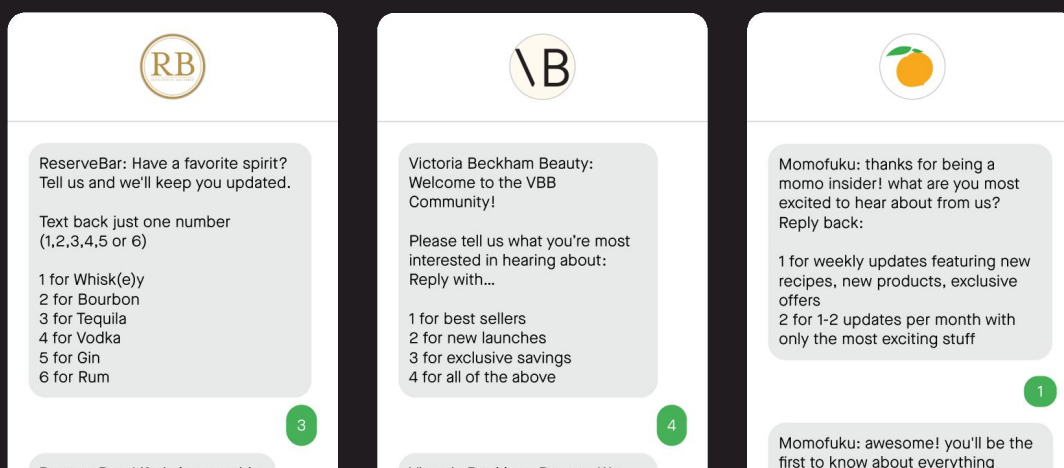
In addition to behavioral data like browsing history, email and SMS engagement, and purchases, start collecting zero-party data from your customers for interest-based segmentation and better product recommendations.

Some ways to get zero-party data before the holidays include sending surveys and polls by text to learn more about subscribers through keyword responses, using an on-site quiz to give product recommendations while learning about your customers' needs and interests, or adding a post-purchase survey to your checkout page to ask about the context of their purchase.

Use AI to elevate your strategy by hyper-personalizing messages at scale

With AI, you can deliver more accurate product recommendations and craft messages that resonate. You can reach customers on their preferred channel at a time they're most likely to engage. And this happens in real time based on your evolving relationship with your subscribers, giving brands who use AI a competitive advantage. By understanding customer preferences and behaviors through data, merchants can craft messages that resonate deeply with their audience, ultimately increasing engagement, conversion, and ROI.

It's never too early to start crafting your Black Friday messaging strategy. Be sure to check out Attentive's Complete BFCM Archive for more resources and inspiration.

RB

ReserveBar: Have a favorite spirit? Tell us and we'll keep you updated.

Text back just one number
(1,2,3,4,5 or 6)

1 for Whisk(e)y
2 for Bourbon
3 for Tequila
4 for Vodka
5 for Gin
6 for Rum

\B

Victoria Beckham Beauty: Welcome to the VBB Community!

Please tell us what you're most interested in hearing about: Reply with...

1 for best sellers
2 for new launches
3 for exclusive savings
4 for all of the above

Momofuku: thanks for being a momo insider! what are you most excited to hear about from us? Reply back:

1 for weekly updates featuring new recipes, new products, exclusive offers
2 for 1-2 updates per month with only the most exciting stuff

Momofuku: awesome! you'll be the first to know about everything

Tip #6: Align your merchandising to the season

Your peak season shoppers want to browse and buy fast, so it's crucial that you focus on facilitating relevant product discovery from the get-go. A well-merchandised store that pushes the right products to the right people is going to be your golden ticket!

Focus on your key product discovery real estate

On-site search, category pages, product recommendations slots, and any content tiles you have featuring products will all need to be optimized. Prioritize the parts that get the most views first.

Acknowledge peak-season-likelihoods

Odds are, you're going to have shoppers seeking out the best BFCM deals. And you're going to face quick product sellouts. Unless you adjust your merchandising around such likelihoods, the first items in a shoppers' search results, for instance, might not be discounted—or worse still, might be out of stock. By leveraging product attribute and performance data, you can ensure that relevant, discounted and in-stock items appear first and foremost throughout your campaigns.

Get personal

Presenting products that're aligned with your shoppers' individual preferences can be game-changing. For example, your category pages might include thousands of products that are lengthy to sift through, but by boosting items that are definitely available in say, a shopper's preferred size, you're bound to remove frustrations and up conversions.

Don't forget to merchandise for paid traffic

Most retailers invest heavily in ad spend over peak season and need a dedicated merch strategy for those coming from paid channels. Be sure the experiences they're shown on-site align with the ads that attracted there. So, if your ad is featuring a specific product, make sure you are driving the shopper to the PDP or PLP where that same item is available for purchase.

Nosto users: Remember with Nosto's global merchandising rules, we give you the ability to rerank products within your recommendations slots (as well as across your search results and category pages), based on product attributes such as price, inventory level, and performance metrics such as CR and margin with one click of a button allowing you to easily merchandise to scale ahead of peak season.
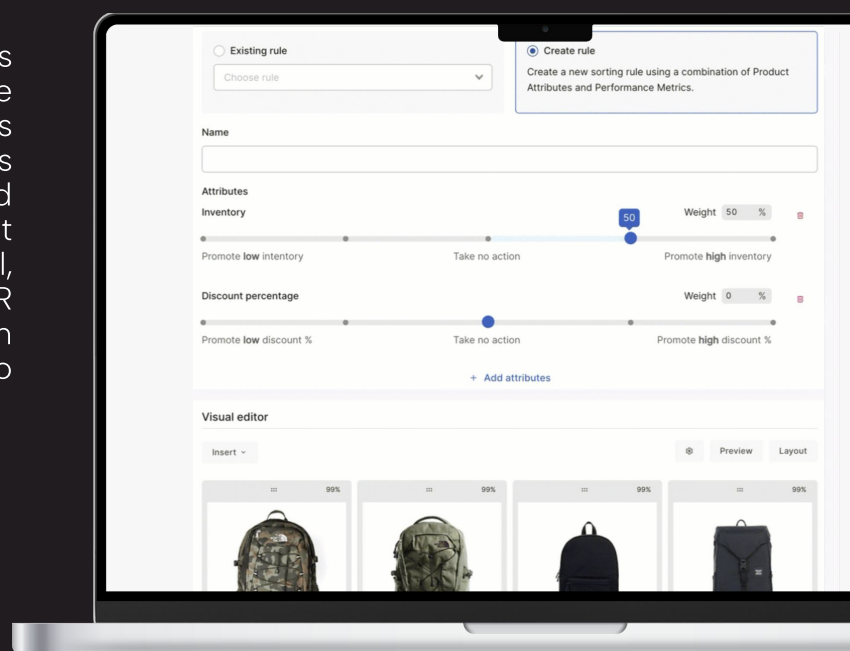
Tip #7: Prove your value and amplify your social proof

Competition's always rife over peak season, and <u>our analysis of shopping behavior last year</u> showed people were taking a lot longer to make purchasing decisions, with the cost of living crunch making shoppers more cautious. That's why it's a must that you highlight your USPs this year, right off the bat:

- Do you offer free, expedited shipping?
- Free returns?
- Are you a small, woman- and/or minority-owned business?
- Are you committed to sustainability?
- Socially conscious in other ways?

Such things might just be the tipping point when it comes to shoppers choosing where to buy from, so be sure to make them visible on the likes of your global site header, your homepage, and your PDPs.

You should also look to include some social proof across your store. It'll help instill confidence (and urgency) among your shoppers and encourage them to convert.

For example, show overall shopper activity on popular items with FOMO messaging like 'X left in stock'. Set a fallback for items with more than 10 units left, to instead show how many people are currently viewing them.

Think about leveraging your own customer's content on your site as well. User-generated content inspires shoppers and boosts brand credibility. Did someone say BFCM haul reels? 👀

Nosto users: If you're on Shopify and using Nosto's visual UGC, don't forget you can embed neat little <u>add-to-cart buttons directly within your UGC widgets</u>. This lets shoppers effortlessly select their preferred size and color, and directly add the tagged product to cart, precisely when they're most inclined to buy!
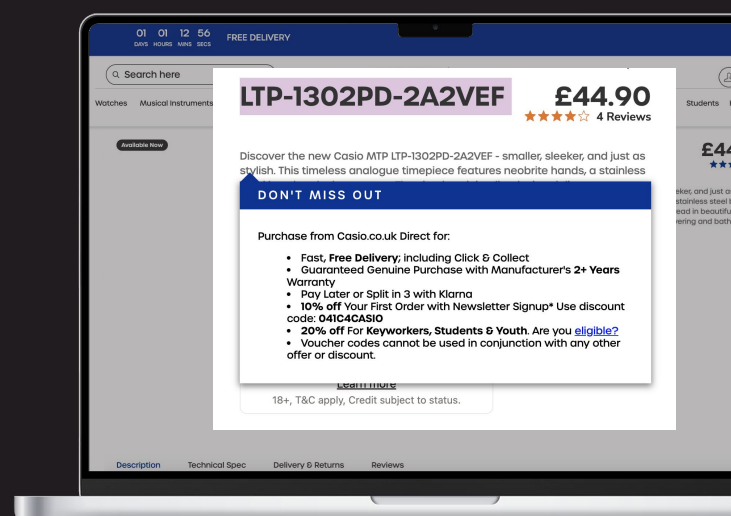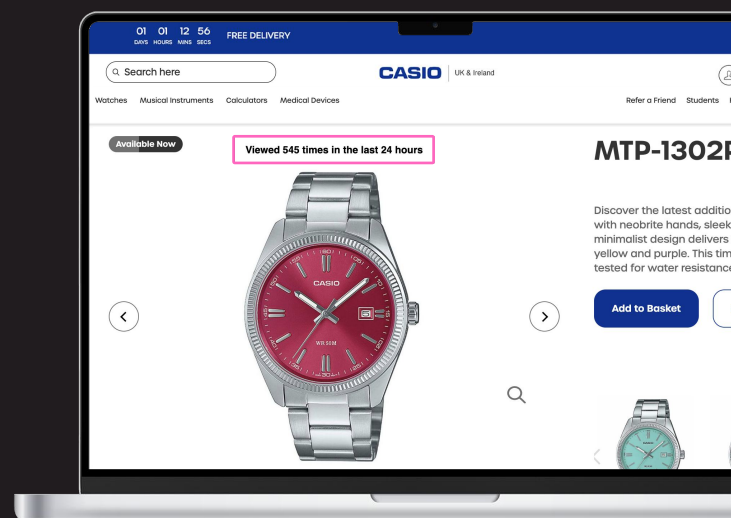
Tip #8: Deals of the day

Daily deals are a great way to create a sense of urgency among your shoppers and motivate them to quickly convert while the discounts are on. Merchants tend to use these daily offers in the run-up to Cyber Weekend, elongating the buzz.

Try launching a daily deals campaign that your traffic can sign up to (having each deal sent straight to their inbox and pointing them back to your store). This can be particularly effective in driving repeat visits, and thus repeat purchases.

Want to increase the conversion likelihood of your daily deals all the more? Explore having them powered by product recommendations. By this, we mean having each item you promote be a personalized recommendation to a specific shopper that is filtered so only discounted items show. It would be wise to also include a fallback of best-sellers with discounts, so that any traffic you don't have enough data on to serve 1:1 recommendations will still see something recommended.

Oh, and remember how our second tip urged you to anticipate any surplus stock that you might have over peak season? Well, daily deals are one way to shift it, offering limited-time discounts that tempt shoppers to snap those slower-moving products right up.

Nosto users: if you're reading this, you're already ahead with your peak season planning, which means you'll likely have time to test out any planned onsite activations in advance. You're going to want to prioritize implementing whatever performs well. Our client, Bulletproof, was considering running a deal of the day campaign one BFCM, so tested it out months in advance and the results confirmed it was worthy—with the deal times seeing a 22.2% post-click conversion rate!
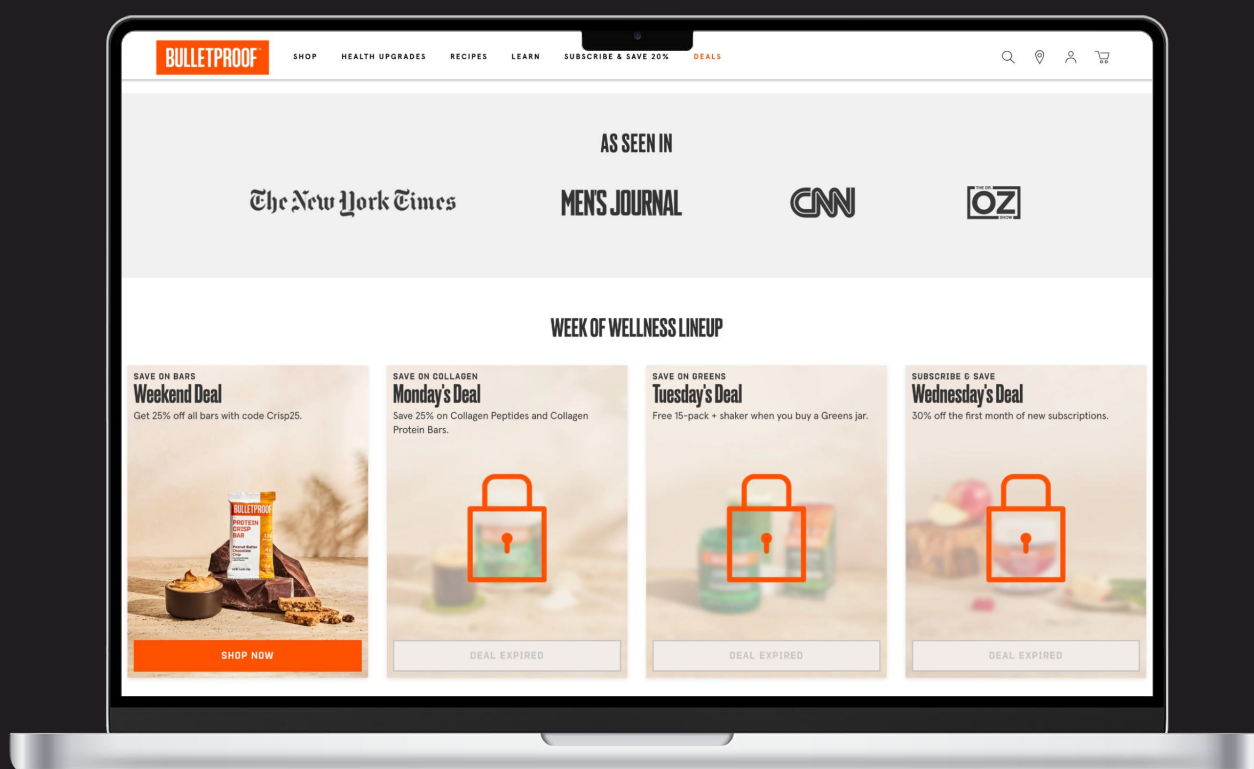
Tip #9: Shoppable landing pages and gift guides

Shoppable landing pages and gift guides can be a savior for peak-season shoppers who are often scrambling for ideas on what to buy their loved ones.

Inspire these shoppers by curating pages and gift guides that showcase the likes of the below across your different product categories:

- Best-sellers
- Most-viewed products
- Highly rated items

Providing a curated list of your catalog's top picks on a single page helps shoppers see what's hot without them needing to wade through your whole store. It's why these pages are an excellent place to drive paid traffic. That pool's going to be rich with new visitors to whom you're going to want to show off all your best bits!

There are all sorts of ways to structure your shoppable landing pages and gift guides, but the key is to have clear sections that help people immediately navigate to where's relevant for them, depending on their search. Consider how shoppers might be looking for:

- Specific gift recipients, e.g., 'gifts for dad', 'gifts for her'
- A certain type of item, e.g., 'necklaces', 'earrings'
- Themselves! Include personalized recommendations to those who you've enough data for
- Social proof, e.g., get some UGC widgets on there

Nosto users: You couldn't be better placed to create highly engaging gift guides, with the likes of Content Personalization, Product Recommendations and Visual UGC all at your fingertips. Fusing these different experiences into these pages will make them all the more rich and interesting, and, crucially, stand out from your competition's.
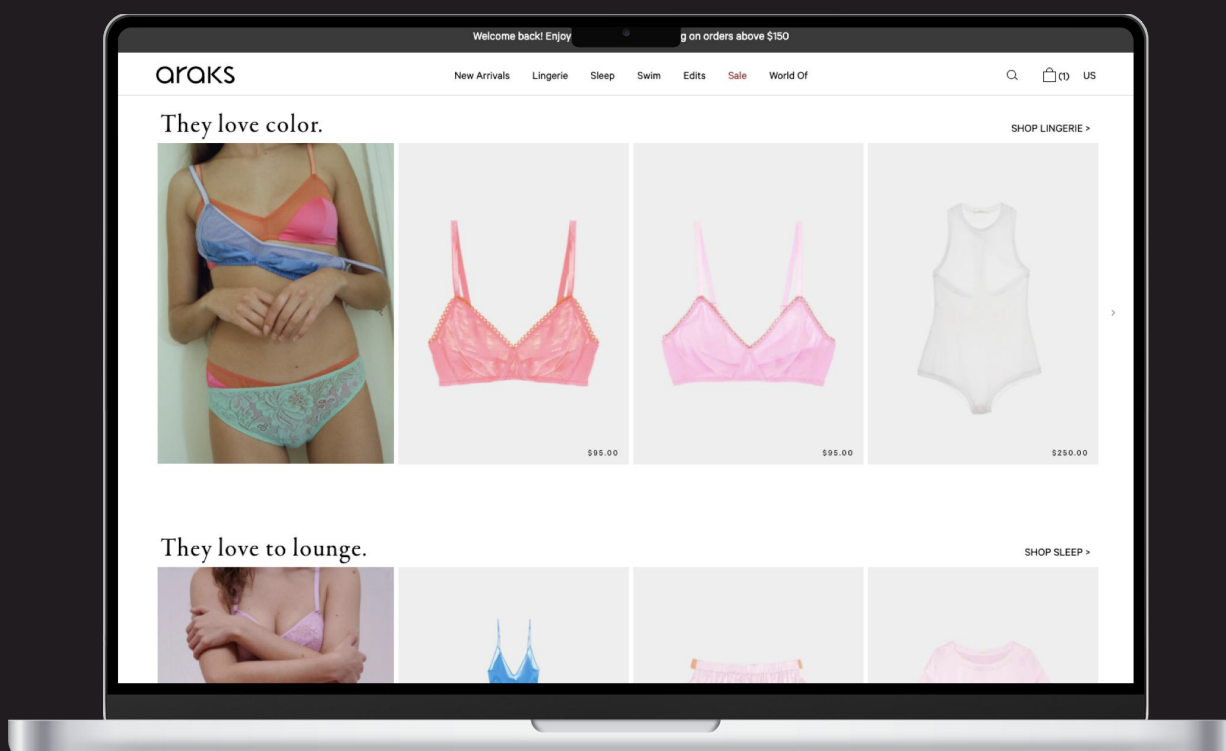
Tip #10: Bundle on up!

Bundling up your products is another nifty tactic for encouraging sales and cross-sells, while serving your peak-season shoppers some inspo. Bundles are especially effective during the holiday season because they let shoppers easily purchase full 'gift sets' for a discounted price.

You might be used to displaying complementary upsells on the likes of your PDPs or checkout pages already (think 'Often bought with...', 'You might also like...' type recommendations).

So, why not combine them into a single product bundle that offers the suggested products together in one quick add-to-cart, and for a discounted price?

Your bundles could be inspirational, grouping products that aesthetically complement each other, such as kitchenware items in matching prints. They could also be practical, offering batteries in a bundle alongside battery-powered items, for instance. And, if you offer the likes of gift wrapping services or gift cards, think about including those too.

If all this is sounding like too much manual effort, don't worry! Nosto's Dynamic Bundles can auto-generate complementary products from set categories to create the perfect bundles that make it easy for shoppers to buy more.

Nosto users: Did you know that, if you're on Shopify, you can create experiences through Nosto that give shoppers the ability to build their own bundles on your store with discounts that dynamically apply? Here's the tech doc.
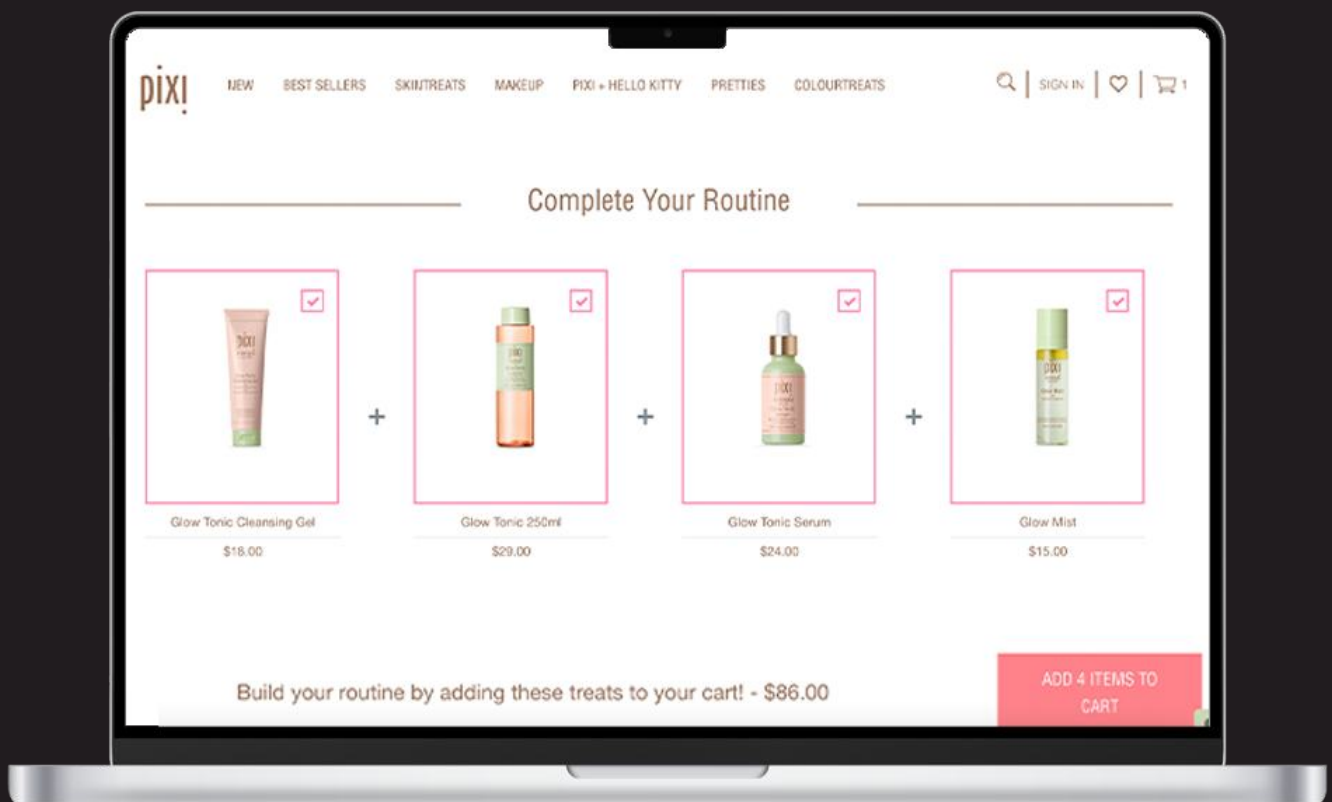
Tip #11: Develop your holiday fulfillment gameplan

If you have your own warehouse, a warehouse management system (WMS) is essential to keeping up with holiday demand, including replenishing inventory earlier than usual and coordinating enough labor to fulfill orders using anticipated order volume data.

Conversely, a scalable third-party logistics provider (3PL) that lets you store products in more than one warehouse (across regions and even countries) to strategically place inventory closer to more customers can reduce shipping costs and transit times. This also helps reduce risk if a fulfillment center or carrier gets overloaded, or if carriers are unable to pick up due to weather. Some fulfillment partners like ShipBob take distribution one step farther and offer inventory placement and rebalancing services to coordinate, move, and allocate products throughout their network on the brand's behalf.

Once you have your holiday delivery deadlines, create a shipping calendar, building in a buffer, and communicate your order cutoff dates to your customers. You can also offer free and fast shipping (testing different options and free shipping thresholds above your AOV to see what resonates) and display estimated delivery dates and fast shipping badges on product pages to instill confidence pre-checkout.

Another logistics-meets-marketing tactic is to design a compelling unboxing experience. Custom packaging, marketing inserts, gift notes, and other personal touches can help you stand out. Just be sure to accumulate all materials, and calculate the costs and effort involved to fulfill each order.

Nosto users: Using content personalization in a very practical way will allow you to customize important messages around shipping times and/or deadlines across your store. For instance, you could surface ribbons on PDPs such as 'Order now, and your product will be shipped today!'. Or, if you have brick-and-mortar stores, you can direct shoppers there based on their geo-locations if they miss the shipping deadline before Christmas. P.S. Don't forget that you can test and schedule all of your content campaigns in advance.

Tip #12: Put your plan in motion

Now that you've thought about all the different commerce experiences you want your online store to sparkle with this peak season, it's time to get the ball rolling.

First things first: think about any assets you might need to have created to execute your campaigns so you can get them briefed into your team in good time. Well-briefed creatives = happy creatives.

Next, think about timeframes. When exactly do you want your deals of the day to start? Your gift guides to be accessible from? Or those seasonal bundles to be up and running by? Pen your lineup.

Do remember (and here comes the 't' word!) to test your experiences beforehand, so you can be certain they'll impact things like path-to-purchase in a positive way. For example, try A/B testing different product recommendation template styles (i.e., including an add-to-cart button versus driving traffic straight to the PDP). You might just see better conversions!

Once you know what's likely to perform best and you have your assets at the ready, all that's left to do is schedule your campaigns, so you can sit back, relax, and watch your peak season experiences run without a hitch.

Nosto users: if you're planning on implementing any seasonal product recommendations, why not let our Generative Copy functionality lend your creative team a hand, suggesting engaging and highly-performant recommendation titles.

Tip #13: Don't let your influx of new customers go to waste

Your store will have seen a decent amount of net-new shoppers over peak season, lured by all the juicy discounts (or perhaps their loved ones' wishlists!). What you're not going to want to do is fall off their radar the minute peak season closes out. That's why our final tip is to make sure you have a game plan that keeps people coming back for more.

Firstly, it's important that you monitor the engagement of these shoppers right from the moment they purchase.

From there, you can identify, for example, those who've made a one-off purchase and haven't been back to your site in a certain period of time, then create a 'lapsed purchaser' segment to target them specifically.

With the example above, you might want to have re-engagement flows designed specifically for these customers. Make sure they're not part of any other workflow, though, as you won't want to bombard them.
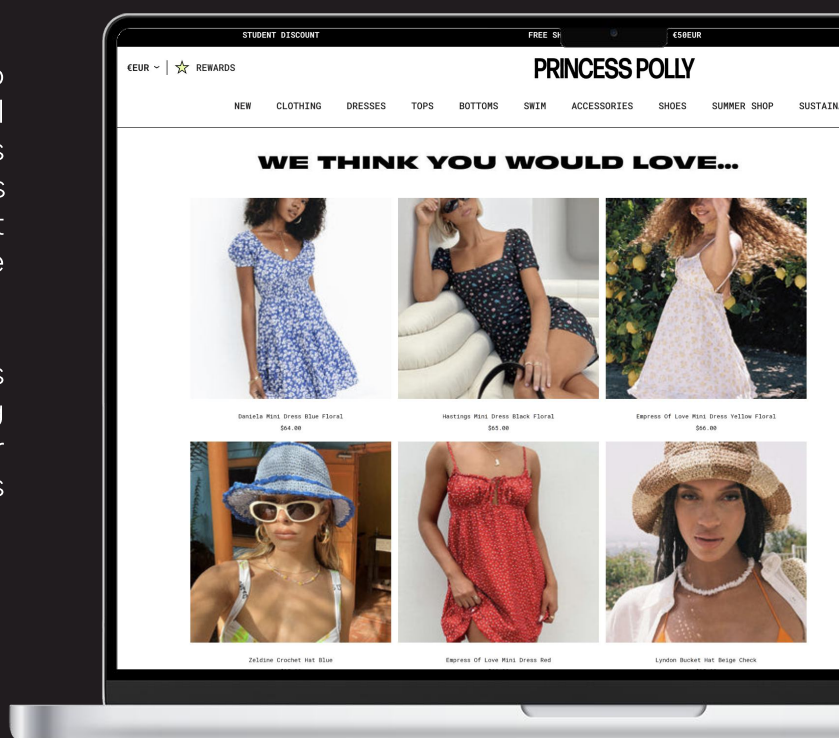
With any post-purchase emails you do send, be sure you're including email widgets within them. Whether that's product recommendations tailored towards their shopping affinities, or a glimpse at what's new since their last visit, you're sure to urge them back to your store.
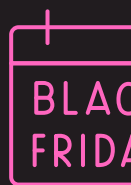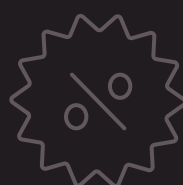
Continue targeting those customers onsite with the likes of FOMO messaging (e.g. 'Last chance', 'Low stock') on their previously browsed products, or items visually similar to those.

It's also an idea to send any future gift guides to them nice and early to make it simple for them to shop. Need a hand creating gift guides? Skip back to tip 9!

Remember, you don't have to resort to discounting to keep this segment engaged. Try various incentives and other types of messaging to grab their attention before axing your prices.

Nosto users: a good rule of thumb is to set up segments inside of Nosto for your peak season paid campaigns ahead of time, so you can see how those shoppers move through the funnel (see customer distribution funnel within Audience Insights). And remember, any segment within Nosto can be synced back with your ESP, Facebook Ad Manager, and Google Analytics for effective remarketing.

nosto