



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
**HOLIDAY PREP ON
GOOGLE SEARCH
& SHOPPING**



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GEAR UP FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Once the year-end holiday season is in sight, the jobs of most retail marketers are never quite finished.

In Google paid search and Google Shopping, there are keyword lists to create, promotions to feature, landing pages to refresh, as well as budgets to finalize, feeds to manage, and campaigns to structure.

With this guide, you have a road map to successfully navigate Google's search and shopping channels during the holiday season.

This year, there's no need to wonder how to get your campaigns in top shape and when to take care of specific tasks. As soon as the back-to-school season ends, it's time to shift your focus to the holidays.

With this guide, you have a road map to successfully navigate Google's search and shopping channels during the holiday season. You'll find strategies and tactics to put in play during each month of the holiday season to achieve success during the busiest shopping season of the year.





A MONTHLY GUIDE TO SEARCH & SHOPPING HOLIDAY SUCCESS





08. AUGUST

ASSESS THE HOLIDAY LANDSCAPE

Goal

Learn From Past Performance

Before deciding where you want to go with your holiday campaigns, you need to know where you're coming from. Take a look at past performance and results in paid search and Google Shopping prior to setting goals to better predict future performance and understand your unique opportunities for growth. This data will help you plan variables such as timing, budget, and promotions.

Tactics

Time Your Holiday Adjustments

Timing is important when planning your holiday strategy. Start with a review of [daily YoY trends](#) and determine when volume has ramped up in the past. This will give you a basis for when to start adjusting campaigns for the upcoming season.

Review how your paid search and Google Shopping campaigns performed last year. Pay particular attention to top-performing and low-performing keywords for search ads and top-selling and low-selling products for shopping ads.

Data from past holiday seasons can be particularly helpful here, as top performers during this time may differ from other times of the year. For example, some less popular products during other times of the year (like stocking stuffers) might spike during the holiday season.

Make note of when impression and click volume began ticking up last year, and plan to see similar trends this year. Prepare to have your holiday adjustments in place by that time.

Remember, [shoppers are searching for and buying gifts more often](#) during the holiday season, which can result in purchases with a lower AOV than usual. Make note of when impression and click volume began ticking up last year, and plan to see similar trends this year. As such, prepare to have your holiday adjustments in place by that time.

Plan to Size up Your Competition With Price Benchmarks

While deciding how to market your vertical and individual products to your audience, be aware of how your prices and approach compare with other retailers.

Using [Google Ads' Price Benchmarks](#), an upcoming release, you will be able to compare your pricing with that of other retailers. This information can help you compete strategically based on how your product price compares with other retailers. You'll be able to bid more aggressively when you have price-competitive products in your catalog.

Review Past Trends While Setting Daily Budget

Note how your budget stood up to revenue targets in previous years, and take note of which days drove the most revenue and consumed the most spend. Use your findings as a guide for setting your daily budget. Perhaps you want to allocate more spend to high-traffic days (such as Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday), or conserve budget for days with less competition from large companies with the budget to compete.

If you're running low on budget, consider breaking out your top products into a separate campaign. This helps ensure sufficient spend is given to your strongest performers for maximum visibility throughout the holiday season.

Monitor & Optimize Site Speed

During critical revenue periods and times of high traffic, your site should enable shoppers to browse and complete purchases quickly. Per Google, [53% of mobile visitors](#) will leave a page if a site takes longer than three seconds to load. Check and ensure your desktop site and mobile site are running at peak performance.

Use the [PageSpeed Tool](#) to determine how your site performs on all devices, and [Test My Site](#) for mobile speed specifically. This information is key when setting your expectations for the holiday season.

While you don't want to be making major code updates and re-platforming during this critical season, [look to increase the speed in your off-season](#).

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09. SEPTEMBER OPTIMIZE FOR MOBILE SHOPPERS

Goal

Structure Mobile Campaigns & Nurture Your Feed Accordingly

Early holiday shoppers will begin researching and making purchases with the back-to-school season in the rearview mirror, so now is the time to plan your holiday promotions and campaign structure.

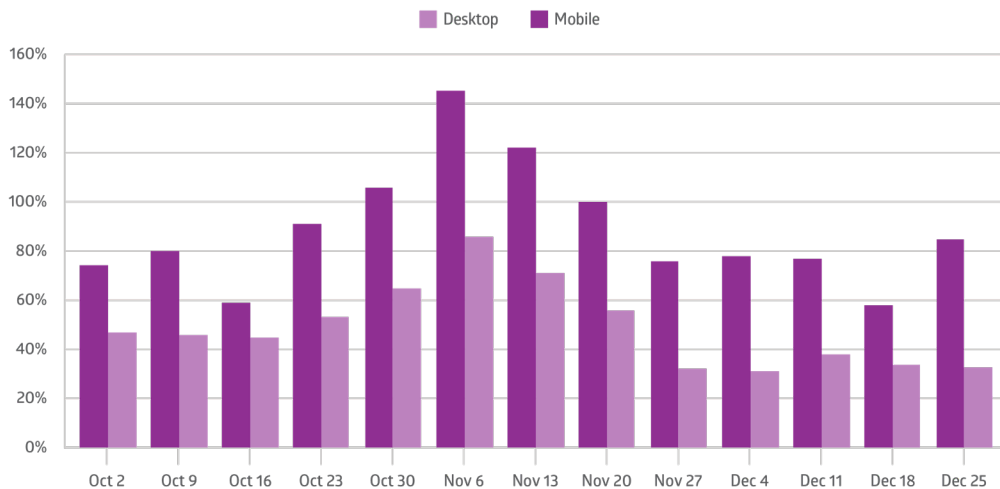
Focus on your audience. Not only do you need to know what products your customers are searching for, but also how they're finding them. Once the holiday rush sets in, you want to be locked in with a strategic plan that is cohesive across your search and shopping channels.

Tactics

Make the Most of Mobile Shopping

Mobile shopping is the new window shopping. According to the [2018 Google Shopping Benchmarks Report](#), shoppers are using phones to browse, discover, and make purchases more frequently than ever before.

Weekly Holiday Revenue Growth, Mobile vs. Desktop
Google Shopping, YoY 2017



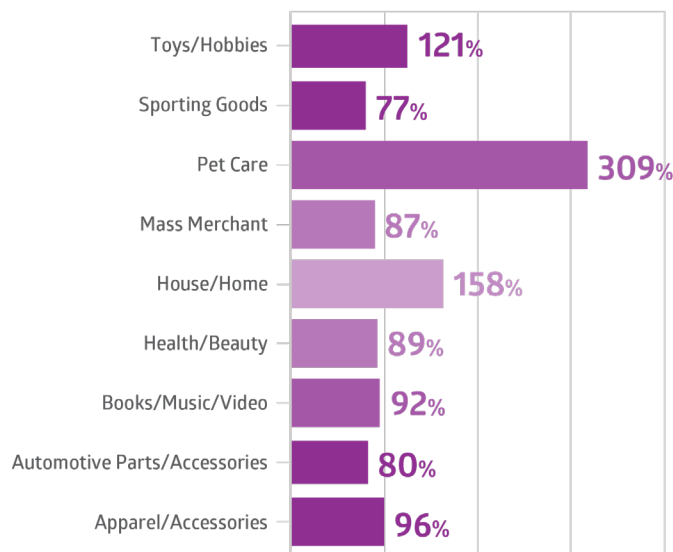
During the 2017 holiday season, mobile revenue growth surpassed that of desktop each week between October and December. During the week of Cyber Monday and the following week, mobile revenue growth doubled that of desktop.

When taking a look at mobile revenue growth across a range of verticals, it's clear mobile shopping is earning its keep. There was major growth in several retail-specific verticals in 2017, including pet care, which experienced the highest spike of any vertical by a significant margin.

Shoppers are using phones to browse, discover, and make purchases more frequently than ever before.

For the budget conscious, mobile also presents an opportunity to earn revenue at a lower cost per click. Be sure to dig into mobile revenue growth in your

Mobile Revenue Growth, By Vertical Google Shopping, Nov–Dec 2017



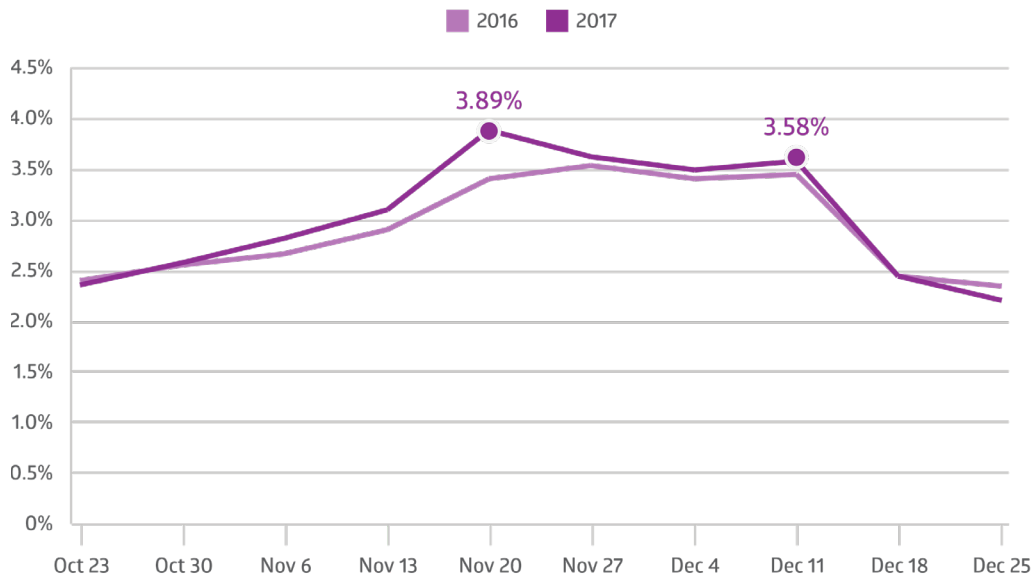
account to determine how best to structure your mobile campaigns. Consider creating separate campaigns for mobile so you can easily allocate budget to mobile campaigns and view their performance.

For retailers with brick-and-mortar stores, bear in mind that [up to 80% of local searches on mobile devices](#) turn into purchases. If you're using Google's Local Inventory Ads, now is the time to be sure they are optimized for increased foot traffic to your stores during the holidays.

Be Proactive With Early Promotions

Come October, early shoppers will be bargain hunting and making more informed decisions on where to make holiday purchases. According to the 2018 Google Shopping Benchmarks Report, conversion rates are peaking earlier in the season.

Weekly Holiday Conversion Rates Google Shopping, 2016–2017



Source: Sidecar 2018 Google Shopping Report

Plan your promotional campaigns now to ensure you capture shoppers' attention while they are still in the early holiday shopping stage.

Review Product Feed & Titles

Your digital “storefront” needs to be squeaky clean to show on the SERP and attract those key window shoppers leading up to the holiday season. To be successful in Google Shopping, [feed optimization](#) and [product title optimization](#) are crucial. Use Merchant Promotions to drive conversions, click through rate, and lower CPC while incorporating specific, keyword-rich terms in product titles to capture shoppers' attention.

Take this month to troubleshoot issues in your feed and minimize product disapprovals, giving priority to your top performers. Missing the GTIN attribute is a common reason for disapprovals, so be sure GTINs are included for all of your products that require them.

Be sure that color attributes in your product feed match color names on your product landing pages. For example, if you use “Sky Blue” as a shirt color name on your landing page, use that same name in the product feed. Google Merchant Center guidelines no longer recommend standardizing color names in the product feed. If names differ across your landing pages and feed, your products may be disapproved.

Break out Top Performers

Create a separate campaign for your top performers using your performance data from previous years to gain a clear view of how these products are doing. Or, as an alternative, create custom labels in your feed for top holiday sellers, so these products are categorized and bids on these items can be easily adjusted.

Be Selective With Search Queries

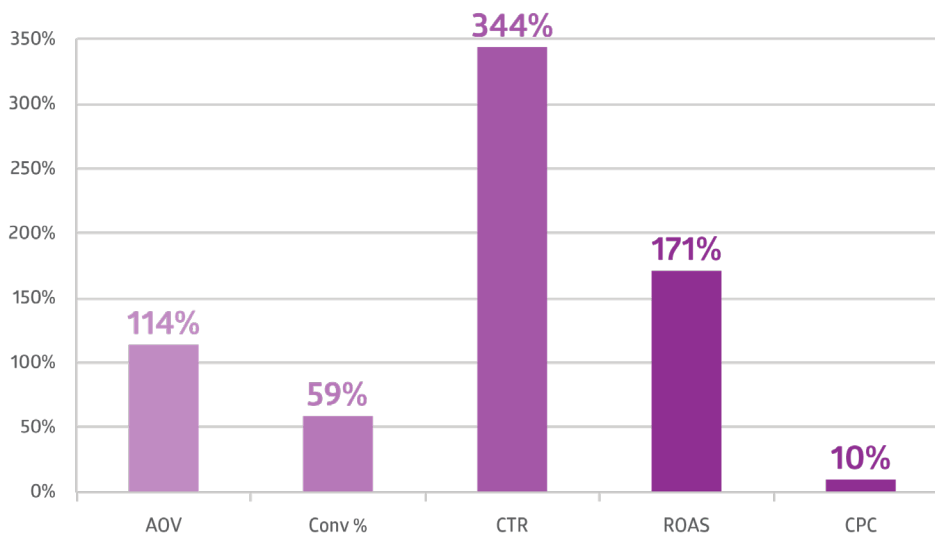
It's important to know how your products stack up against competitors so you can allocate spend wisely. If you're a popular brand with name recognition, consider investing a little less in branded queries during the holiday season, and allocating some spend to more generic terms.

If you're a niche retailer, it's smart to invest in branded search queries with less competition.

The logic here is that consumers familiar with your brand are more likely to go directly to your website to purchase items. Certain products will be popular without additional budget and promotion, allowing you to invest in products that need more visibility.

Difference in Performance, Branded vs. Non-Branded Queries Google Shopping, 2017

Example: coffee maker vs. Cuisinart coffee maker



Source: Sidecar 2018 Google Shopping Report

However, if you're a niche retailer, it's smart to invest in branded search queries with less competition.






According to the 2018 Google Shopping Benchmarks Report, clicks from branded searches delivered 171% more ROI and a CTR four times higher than that of non-branded searches.

Sign up for Merchant Promotions for Google Shopping Ads

If you're not already using Google Merchant Promotions to maximize orders and revenue in Google Shopping, holiday is a great time to start. Google Merchant Promotions helps boost click through rates and entices shoppers with deals on products straight from Google Shopping.

See women's winter jackets

Sponsored ⓘ

 <p>Women's Winter Warmer Jacket...</p> <p>\$135.00</p> <p>Glacial Gear</p> <p>Special offer</p>	 <p>John Mountain's Women's Quilt</p> <p>\$159.99</p> <p>John Mountain</p> <p>15% Price Drop</p>	 <p>Women's Thermal Winter Coat...</p> <p>\$140.00</p> <p>Alaskan Sunrise</p> <p>Free Shipping</p>	 <p>Redline Women's Goose Down...</p> <p>\$99.99</p> <p>Redline.com</p>	 <p>Women's Hybrid Wool Hooded...</p> <p>\$120.00</p> <p>Deville Apparel</p> <p>★★★★☆ (55)</p>
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Glacial Gear

25% Off Your Order

Expires in 7 days • Enter Code at checkout

HOLIDAY Shop

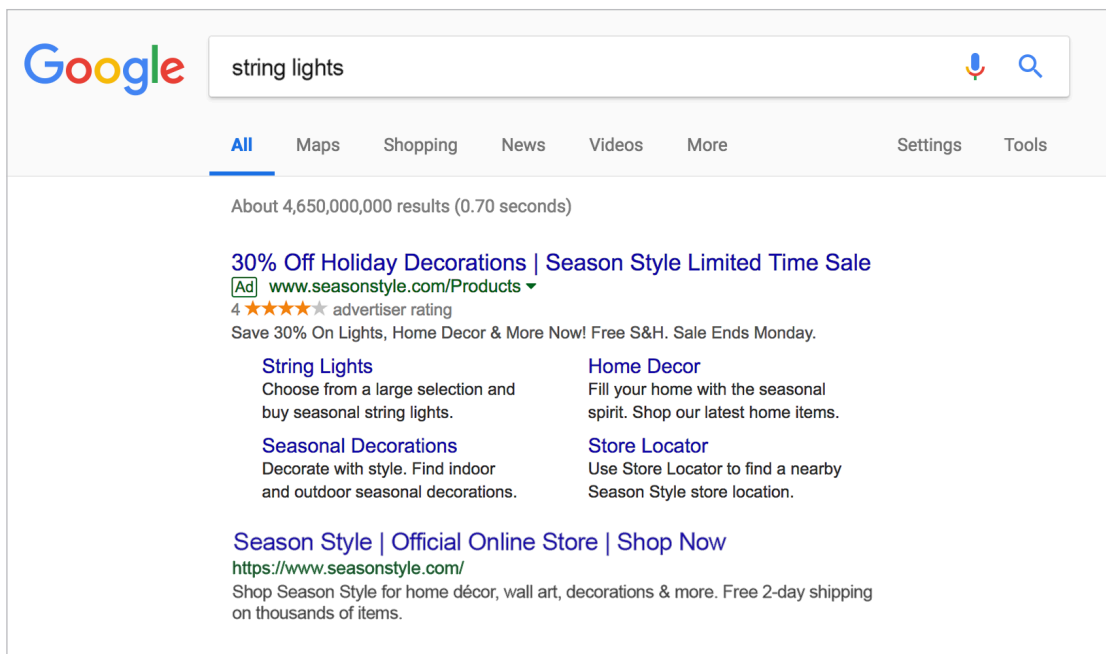


If you're new to these promotions, you'll need to fill out an [interest form](#) before you can set them up. Plan for the approval process to take one to two days (it may be longer with increased interest around holidays). Once approved, check out this [step-by-step guide to setting up Merchant Promotions](#).

Add Sitelink Extensions for Google Search Ads

Sitelink extensions, which can be added at the account, campaign, or ad group level, showcase more information about your site and products directly on the SERP. They can increase click through rates by showing multiple links to pages of your website and allow shoppers to find what they're looking for with fewer clicks.

On desktop, sitelink extensions show up to 6 links, while mobile can show up to 8 links. Sitelinks can be easily updated with promotions throughout the holiday season.





10. OCTOBER PUT YOUR STRATEGY INTO ACTION

Goal

Retarget Customers & Capitalize on Channel Discrepancies

By this time you've researched and planned your early promotions and holiday strategy. Your prep work is done, now it's time to execute.

October is all about double duty—use this month to implement your strategy and prepare for next month's major shopping days as the season moves into full swing.

Tactics

Remarket to Warm Audiences

If a new customer is going to make a second purchase from you, it will typically happen soon after the first. This means purchases made in October or in the back-to-school shopping season have a high probability of influencing purchases during the holidays, when shoppers are looking to buy gifts for their friends and family.

Segmenting your audience allows you to target them more effectively and bid differently on their conversion potential. One of your most valuable audiences is past seasonal customers who are familiar with your brand. You can retarget past customers and other customers like them using Customer Match, one of Google's remarketing tools. Using targeted ads, Customer Match can be used to increase brand awareness and conversions.

For example, you can segment customers who purchased within the past two years during holiday, add those email addresses into Google Ads, and increase your bid adjustments to hit members of that audience with search and shopping ads.

You can retarget past customers and other customers like them using Customer Match. Using targeted ads, Customer Match can be used to increase brand awareness and conversions.

For cart abandoners or shoppers who have visited your site, you can stay top of mind using Google's other remarketing tool, RLSA. Increase your bid adjustments for RLSA audiences to consistently engage shoppers as they continue their holiday shopping.

For more audience segmentation and remarketing strategies, check out this comprehensive guide to [Customer Match & RLSA](#).


Keywords: Turn Negatives Into Positives

Perhaps you have some branded search terms you've designated as negative keywords to keep costs down or a very broad term that wasn't operating at an efficient rate. This is a smart decision during other times in the year, but holiday time is an opportunity to earn high ROI on certain queries. Make sure to monitor their performance, and revert to the negative list if they are exhausting too much of your budget.

You can take this a step further by converting these keywords into a cross-channel opportunity between Google Shopping and paid search. Review and test negative keywords in your search and shopping accounts. An inefficient query on Google Shopping may be a valuable, early-funnel keyword in paid search.

Manage Ad Disapprovals

Ad disapprovals are one of the most common ways your Google Shopping feed can be compromised. Beginning now and continuing through December, be on



the lookout for inconsistencies between your feed and landing page that could result in disapproved ads. For example, if a different price is listed on your landing page and feed, the ad will be disapproved.

Ensure price and availability (in stock or out of stock) are accurately reflected. If there are frequent changes, consider updating your feed several times per day.

Additionally, make sure you're adding any relevant coupon codes to your Merchant Center promotions, otherwise shoppers won't know they exist. Remember that if a promotion is reflected in the Merchant Center, the product will still show but without the special tag offer.



11. NOVEMBER

FOCUS ON YOUR CUSTOMERS

Goal

Revisit Efficiency Targets & Understand What Customers Value

You've used data from previous years to inform your campaigns while nurturing your budget over the previous months. Now you can focus on curating and adjusting your efficiency targets and promotions for the holiday season.

If you expect a major influx of traffic during this time, make sure your promotional campaigns and revenue strategies are adjusted accordingly and prepared for higher volume.

Tactics

Revisit Efficiency Targets

To reap the rewards of increased holiday traffic, you may need to spend more and reduce efficiency for larger returns as the cost of promotions and bidding rises. Consider bumping down your efficiency targets to maximize revenue during holiday.

Here's the logic—competition is stiff, and cost per click and cost per order will increase as ROAS decreases. You'll spend more by running campaigns at lower efficiency, but the increased volume should compensate by delivering more revenue.

For instance, if you're operating at 10:1 ROAS, you'll make \$10,000 in revenue from \$1,000 in spend. If you drop ROAS to 5:1, you make \$20,000 in revenue from \$4,000 in spend (instead of \$20,000 in revenue from \$2,000 in spend at 10:1 ROAS).

Manage Ads by Inventory

If you run out of inventory of, say, a popular women's winter down coat in navy on Black Friday, your product will be at risk of running out of the Google Shopping ad rotation. This can be a costly mistake during the holidays. Shoppers are seeking



out that specific item, and you could lose out on sales when they set out to purchase the item elsewhere.

You can avoid this pitfall with the right strategy in place.

Use item group IDs to show the item in other colors and sizes to shoppers in pursuit of that specific winter coat. While a shopper might prefer the coat in black, perhaps they would consider the coat in charcoal gray if it's in stock at the time they're ready to order.

Item group IDs allow you to easily group together variants of a single product with the option to bid differently on them.

Item group IDs allow you to easily group together variants of a single product with the option to bid differently on them. [Here's an example](#), courtesy of Google, of how you would use variants in different sizes and colors under one item group ID.



Submit variant details through the variant attributes. For example:

Product	Google logo T-shirt
title	Google Logo T-shirt - Small - Red
id	12345-S-R
color	red
size	S
item_group_id	12345

Product	Google logo T-shirt
title	Google Logo T-shirt - Medium - Blue
id	12345-M-B
color	blue
size	M
item_group_id	12345

Because Google ultimately favors one variant, you may want to ensure you're bidding up on variants of an item so they can take the place of your top performer if inventory runs out. But don't expect the variant—like the same winter coat in fire engine red—to rival the top performer.

It's best to allow historical product performance to inform your approach to this tactic. In some cases, you might want to reduce visibility of a particularly unpopular variant if clicks drive up costs without corresponding conversions.

Update Merchant Promotions & Sitelink Extensions

[Google Merchant Promotions](#) is the magic behind the “Special offer” prompts that often appear under Google Shopping ads. When you're looking to differentiate from fierce competition during the holiday season, these can give your ads an extra boost to attract shoppers.

Be sure to keep your Merchant Promotions for Google Shopping and sitelink extensions for Google search ads up to date with current offers, especially in advance of Black Friday weekend when shoppers are ready to pull the trigger on holiday purchases.

***Special note on free shipping:** Today's customers are looking for efficiency, easy, and quick shopping. For the holiday season, focus on the quick aspect. If you're offering free shipping, be sure your offer appears in Merchant Promotions.*

Keep your Merchant Promotions for Google Shopping and sitelink extensions for Google search ads up to date with current offers, especially in advance of Black Friday weekend.

Leverage Local Inventory Ads

Shoppers always love a good online deal, but consumers are keen to buy in-store this month as well, particularly on Thanksgiving and Black Friday weekend.

If you have brick-and-mortar stores and are using Google's local inventory ads, here are a few ideas to take advantage of the increased foot traffic, as well as bridge your online search and in-store experiences.

Bank on shoppers who are closer to your stores. Use [location extensions](#) to set a radius around each store (i.e., one mile, three miles, etc.) and set a positive bid adjustment for each radius, with higher adjustments for customers who are closer to your stores. This approach can be especially helpful during Black Friday weekend when shoppers are primed for purchase.

Show LIAs only during store hours. Dayparting can be applied to local-only LIAs to display ads specifically when stores are open. This is a timely way to utilize your budget and spend during hours of the day when your investment can convert.

Target by in-store pickup locations. Appeal to this shopper preference by creating a separate campaign and adding in-store pickup locations as your targets. Adjust bids accordingly. You could bid more aggressively to entice consumers to buy now and pick up in store, where they might discover additional products to purchase.



12. DECEMBER STAY STRONG DURING & AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

Goal

Stay Strong Throughout the Holiday Rush & Continue Momentum Into the New Year

Cyber Five has come and gone, but your holiday workload doesn't end there. Ensure December runs smoothly with constant monitoring, and use your learnings to lay the groundwork for a productive start to the new year.

It's okay to take a breather once the rush is over, but remember that your marketing shouldn't end when the holiday does. Start thinking about developing strategies to convert new shoppers into loyal customers.

Tactics

Continue Monitoring Your Product Feed

Stay alert for product disapprovals in your product feed. Remember to make necessary promotion updates to your feed, such as new product pages or adjusted discounts, and efficiently resolve any disapprovals that occur.

Scale Back Aggressive Bids Post-Holiday Rush

Product demand scales back after the holiday rush, so avoid blowing your budget in the days following peak shopping time. If you've raised your bids in search or shopping and adjusted your efficiency targets for the holiday season, make sure to reset them promptly after the holidays end.

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Entice New Customers to Return in the New Year

Remember, the holidays are the perfect time to be attracting and engaging with new customers. These customers can become repeat customers if you continue to engage with them after the holidays. Be sure to add email addresses to your Customer Match list so you can remarket to holiday shoppers next season, or for the next big sale you're running in the new year.

You have a narrow window to encourage secondary sales and build relationships with new holiday customers. Make sure you use this post-holiday opportunity to pursue new connections and foster budding relationships.

ACTUALIZE YOUR BEST HOLIDAY SEASON

It's no small task to prepare for the holiday season. By beginning early and implementing a strong strategy across Google's search ecosystem, you give yourself the greatest advantage to capitalize on the season's opportunities.

These goals and tactics can each be adjusted to fit your vertical, goals, and products in search and shopping. Begin the holiday season with your best foot forward, and ensure your business is positioned for success throughout the year-end retail rush and beyond.





SIDECAR

Data + Technology + People

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