



THE ECOMMERCE GUIDE TO
HOLIDAY

SHOPPING + MARKETING

PRESENTED BY



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INTRODUCTORY

Introductory content is for marketers who are new to the subject. This content typically includes step-by-step instructions on how to get started with this aspect of inbound marketing and learn its fundamentals. After reading it, you will be able to execute basic marketing tactics related to the topic.

INTERMEDIATE

THIS BOOK

Intermediate content is for marketers who are familiar with the subject but have only basic experience in executing strategies and tactics on the topic. This content typically covers the fundamentals and moves on to reveal more complex functions and examples. After reading it, you will feel comfortable leading projects with this aspect of inbound marketing.

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Introduction

The holiday season is, undoubtedly, prime time for consumer-facing businesses. Ecommerce is no exception, of course, but the online game is wildly different from the brick-and-mortar game. Macy's may be able to lure consumers in by hanging snowflakes in the front window and sending out glossy sale circulars, but this kind of cosmetic marketing won't begin to cut it for competitors in the increasingly crowded ecommerce field.

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Consumers have a tremendous amount of noise coming their way as the holidays approach. If you want to seize the unique opportunities offered during the holiday season, you'll need to employ strategies that allow your particular message to cut through the din. This does not mean fashioning ever-more glitzy and glamorous banner ads to tear your prospects' over-stimulated eyes away from your competitors' equally dazzling appeals.

No – this holiday season, savvy ecommerce firms will find ways to put consumers' actual needs and desires at the center of their marketing plan. In 2013, that is simply the only way to cut through the noise of the holiday season. Inbound marketing is the key to this consumer-oriented recentering.

“ You need to employ **strategies** that allow your particular message to cut through the din. ”

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Sounds pretty good, right? Well, it gets better. In fact, ecommerce companies that are willing and able to employ the full spate of inbound marketing tools this holiday season can do more than just cut through the noise. They can provide stressed out consumers with a calm eye at the center of the holiday shopping storm, a little niche of sanity in the midst of the tempest. This kind of service will begin to forge a human relationship between you and your customers that will absolutely set you apart from your competitors.



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Buying and Selling for Humans

As an ecommerce company, you're already well poised to play this rehumanizing role. At the most obvious level, you enable your customers to buy gifts for friends and loved ones at affordable prices without being forced to wade through the chaos of packed parking lots, long lines, harried clerks, out-of-stock products, etc. But that's just the beginning. Saying ecommerce can actually help rehumanize the process of buying holiday gifts may seem counterintuitive, but it's true – if ecommerce firms are willing and able to harness the power of inbound marketing.



The American shopping experience in general has suffered greatly with the rise of big box stores. This transition away from the age of mom and pop retailers has also been a transition away from the age of seasoned, helpful salespeople who have the time and knowledge to truly inform and assist their customers. Think about it; if you go to Walmart to shop for a lawnmower, what are the chances that you'll find yourself in conversation with a salesperson who actually knows something about lawnmowers, who can guide you to the purchase that best suits your needs? They're very slim.

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This is exactly where the methods of inbound marketing can begin the process of rehumanizing commerce. The chief principle of inbound marketing is that the best marketing is not flung willy nilly at potential customers. Rather, the best marketing strategies are holistic processes that draw customers in by offering them content that they actually want. This content need not be profoundly informative. It can be interesting or amusing or downright hilarious.

THE KEY IS TO BUILD AN AFFIRMATIVE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPANY AND CUSTOMER APART FROM ANY EXPLICIT SALES PITCH.

For instance, a lawnmower vendor could create engaging videos that explain best practices for lawnmower maintenance, help consumers to know how big of a lawnmower they need for their property size, explain the tradeoffs between performance and fuel efficiency, etc. By performing this service, inbound marketing-savvy ecommerce companies can start to fill the niche of an informed, helpful, friendly salesperson.

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Rehumanizing Holiday Shopping - And Making Money While You're At It!

What does this have to do with holiday shopping in particular? Well, the holidays are the period when shoppers are most in need of patient, knowledgeable assistance. During the holidays, most consumers shop not for themselves, but for others. That means they will frequently shop outside of their normal areas of interest and expertise. A mother who wants to buy a snowboard for her teenage son, for instance, would be deeply grateful for some informed guidance.



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Not all of your content needs to be in-depth informative, of course. Even content that is simply amusing or interesting will go a long way toward establishing a good human connection with your prospects. If you pull it off, if you manage to build a truly solid rapport with your prospects, they won't forget it. When it comes time to click "Purchase," yours will be the natural venue for that click. Inbound marketing allows ecommerce companies to seize a unique two-fold opportunity: to leverage your knowledge of your product to improve both your customers' holidays and your bottom line.



Of course, as important as holiday sales are, they're not the holy grail, right? The holy grail is a new crop of satisfied, loyal customers – or more specifically, high Long Term Value (LTV) with low Cost of Customer Acquisition (COCA). The ratio of LTV to COCA is a prime measure for the success of your marketing efforts. The good news is that the holidays are an ideal time for raking in LTV, with relatively low COCA.

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If the opportunities are great during the holiday shopping period, so are the challenges. In 2013, even the stodgiest brick-and-mortar merchants are grasping the need for a robust web presence. Sellers are quickly saturating the online marketplace. A few short years ago, having an SEO strategy – any SEO strategy – was enough to give you a competitive edge. Did you have some idea of who was browsing your site, or for how long? You were an ecommerce rock star! Now, however, as online markets become increasingly saturated, ecommerce will increasingly become a game of inches, and your marketing strategies will need to become more sophisticated.



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Get Those Elves Into the Workshop - Now!

1

Initiating Contact

A truly successful holiday season begins long before Black Friday. The run-up to the mad dash of cart-stuffing holiday shopping is all about making first contact and getting good information. It should go without saying that good SEO is absolutely vital. Holiday shoppers, venturing out of their normal purchasing patterns, are likely to begin their quest on a search engine. This is one of the central ways that you can get your brand onto the radar of potential prospects. So, you need to ask yourself

“ Is your **SEO strategy** as good as it could be? ”

Is it keeping up with the competition? Does it jibe with the latest Google Penguin updates? You'd better find out the answers to these questions, because if you don't, you can bet your competitors will. SEO does not stand alone, of course. You should also monitor social media for posts that express an interest in your particular category of products so you can engage directly with would-be consumers.

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2

Building a Relationship

Once you've got the ear of an interested consumer, it's time to let the real magic of inbound marketing take effect. As discussed above, the core of inbound marketing is creating compelling content that makes potential customers come to you. But how do you do it? On the practical level, the answers are fairly simple: get a blog, get in touch with someone who has a decent video camera, spend some time crafting a good product, etc. You'll want to get started now crafting desirable content that draws a connection between your products and the holiday-shopping imperative. You might consider a post that explains why your company's high-end headphones or tropical getaway packages or model airplane kits are not just a great value, but also make particularly good holiday gifts. Titling your posts with important holiday keywords – "Christmas Gifts for Dads," or "Get Away for the Holidays," or "What Smart Girls Want for Hannukah This Year" – will make your site a more likely hit on Google or Bing.



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The broader question of how to craft this sort of content in a winning, effective way is simple, but also profound and far from easy: empathy. You need to figure out what your customers themselves actually want. What do they need to know? How do they want to feel about their holiday gift purchase? What are their questions and concerns? How can you actually help them? Again, you need to shift your own perspective from what your company wants to what your consumers want. Resist the urge to try to close the deal in the video or article you're presenting. This is no time to make the hard sell. This is time to inform, assist, amuse, etc. Your prospects are perfectly aware that you want to sell to them. What they don't know – yet – is whether you're the kind of seller they like and trust enough to buy from.



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3

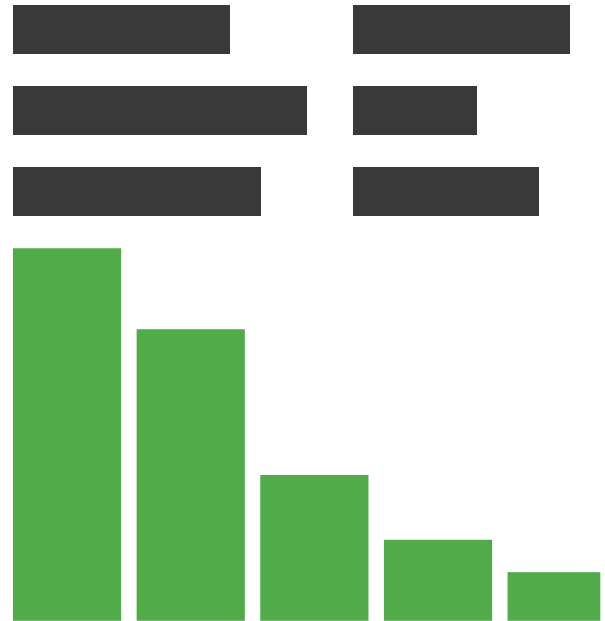
Getting to Know You

After you've created solid relationship-building content, the second step is to open the lines of communication. Yeah, you're giving your original content away for free, but that doesn't mean you're going to wait around and just hope that potential customers will keep you in mind around buying time. If site visitors want to keep drinking from the well of your expertise, they need to make

the relationship official. You need data. You need contact information.

You'll want to have this in your pocket long before department stores start pumping the air full of "Jingle Bells" and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." After all, if you're truly going to keep the customers at the center of your universe this holiday season, you first need to know who they are.

Who are they shopping for? Do they have children? How many? You'll want to get your information-gathering infrastructure up and running soon, because the holiday shopping period is prime time for new site traffic. Your page is going to be crawling with new prospects.



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That means that, for starters, every blog post should contain a link to a landing page that is tailor-made for the holiday season. Offer special holiday deals with a very clear expiration date. You could also do well to place that special holiday price immediately next to a crossed off “regular” price that will highlight just how much money your customers stand to gain by purchasing now.

~~\$69.99~~
\$29.99
SALE!

Visitors who find your content and special bargains compelling, but who aren't ready to purchase just yet, should have the option of becoming “members” or “subscribers” so they can stay abreast of “special holiday offers.” This will give you the personal and contact information you need to keep cultivating the relationship that began with great SEO and great content.

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Keeping In Touch

Once you have some sharp data in hand, it's time to engage your follow-up strategy. Email and social media will be your key vehicles. Again, you need to simultaneously build a sense of community and a sense of urgency. Send coupons with clear expiration dates, links to new and useful content, and to specially designed landing pages that demonstrate the value of shopping now for the holiday season. One of the main keys to effective follow-up is segmentation. Before you send a single email, you should know who you're emailing. Is this a customer who is interested in shoes? Hats? For whom? An adult female? A teenage boy? A baby girl? You can also tailor your homepage to a specific customer's specific shopping needs and interests.

Holiday-specific ecommerce companies (e.g. Christmas-themed vendors) will need to quickly build relationships that can be capitalized upon this holiday season, and then refreshed during the next holiday shopping rush. General year-round sellers have a slightly different challenge. They will need a strategy for generating holiday sales in the short term, and then following up with ongoing interactions and site-visits in the medium and long terms. In either case, it's a matter of understanding your market and calibrating your keeping-in-touch efforts accordingly.

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**CUSTOMERS WHO
PURCHASED**



**MIGHT ALSO
LIKE**

Targeting your followups to the precise needs of the individual consumer will continue to build the perception that there are actual humans involved in this process, not just soulless commerce-bots. Your holiday overtures will suddenly become so much more welcome. You'll be cutting through the copious noise of the holiday season by cutting straight to the point. You'll be helping your customers to find the products they really want, when they really want to buy them. That's the only sort of sales pitch that truly stands out amidst the chaos of your customers' over-crowded browser screens.

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Conclusion

This holiday season, you need to figure out what your customers really want. This consumer-centric mindset is the only route to creating good, effective inbound content. Most companies are so focused on their own goals that they neglect to really enter the mindset of their potential customers. The irony is that there is no surer way for a company to not get what it wants. You have to ask yourself: If I were shopping for stereo equipment online, what would really, honestly help me to make smart, confident decisions about my purchases? What sort of content would I be genuinely grateful for? Once you've done the hard work of changing your viewpoint so that it's centered on your customers, the rest of the marketing process is fairly straightforward. And the rewards will be rich. Companies that are willing and able to stop thinking for a little while about what they want in their stockings – i.e. a bigger bottom line – will find that they are rewarded with a growing pool of satisfied, loyal, repeat customers. In other words, a bigger bottom line.

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