



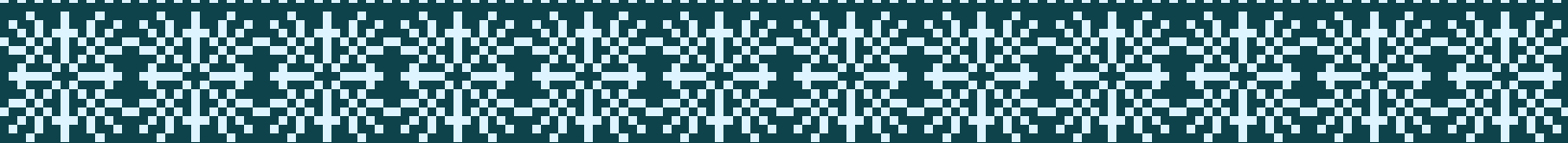
The Guide To

**ECOMMERCE**



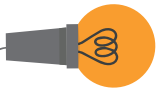
**HOLIDAY SUCCESS:**

**1. BEFORE THE SEASON**

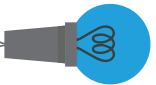


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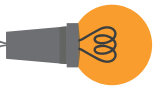
**Introduction**



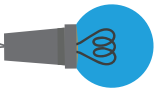
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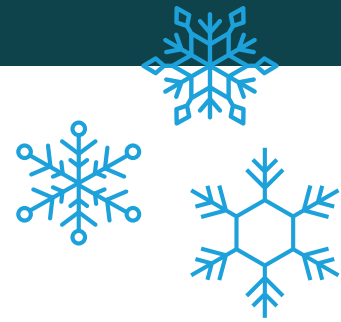
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## Introduction:

The holidays are going to be here before you know it! It might still be warm outside, but fall (and the holiday season hot on fall's heels) are well on their way. For many ecommerce companies, the holiday season has an outsized impact on annual revenue numbers. Preparation is critical to ensure you're set up for holiday success.

Last year, holiday sales increased to \$626.1 billion, according to the National Retail Federation. Online purchases are becoming a larger part of that each year, with online sales making up \$105 billion of 2015's number.

**This guide is the first in a three-part series** to help you succeed this holiday season, by breaking down your to-do list into more manageable sections. In this guide, we'll cover:

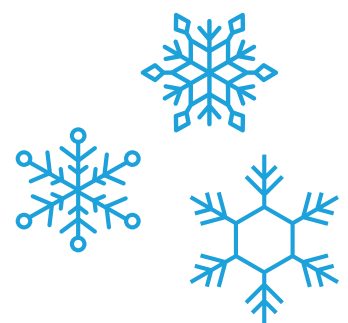
- How to reflect on 2015 to set 2016 up for success
- Steps to build your 2016 holiday marketing plan
- Guidance on developing your holiday campaigns
- Where to audit your systems before the holiday rush



## “What About B2B?”

You may think that as a B2B marketer you’re off the hook for holiday campaigns. That’s not the case! While you may not be selling the same volume as B2C during the holiday season, there are still opportunities for you to take advantage of the holidays promotionally. Whether it’s running a campaign that acknowledges that the holidays are a busy season or coming up with a plan to clear inventory before January, there are many different flavors of holiday campaigns.

Another thing B2B ecommerce companies need to keep in mind over the holiday season is that key purchasers of your products might be out of the office for the holidays. You’ll need to make sure you’re engaging early and often to get those purchases in before the end of the year.





## Chapter 1:

### REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW

#### START AT THE HIGH-LEVEL

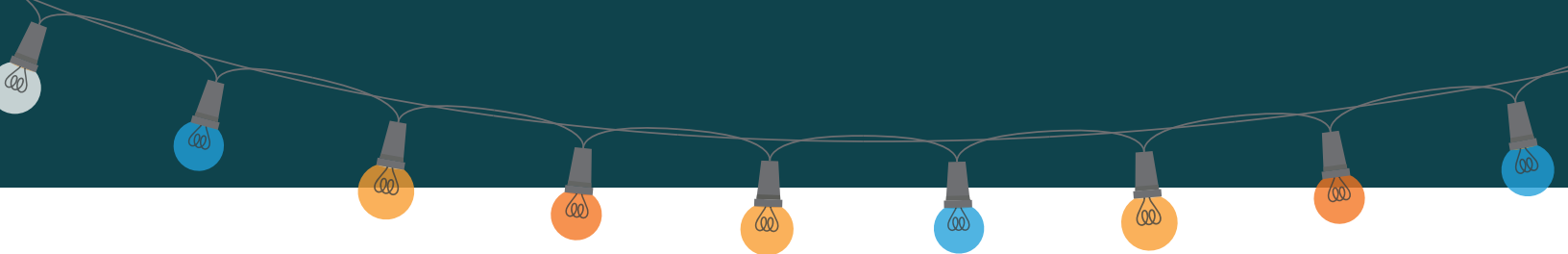
The first step on your road to holiday success is to take time to reflect on your last holiday season. Taking time to reflect gives you an opportunity to leverage your previous successes, as well as identify areas of improvement, so you can drive more revenue this year.

One thing to keep in mind is that the timing of the holidays change each year. Unlike 2015, this year Thanksgiving, Black Friday, and Cyber Monday are several days earlier in November. With the slightly earlier holidays, you have more buying days, and the revenue generated will impact both November and December sales.

#### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What worked in your marketing?
- What didn't work?
- How was your timing?
- What are you definitely repeating?
- What is up for debate?





## DIG DEEPER ON PROMOTIONS

The way to truly take your holiday season to the next level of success is to dig deep and find unique opportunities based on your previous activities. A big area of focus here should be looking at your promotions to make sure that they were both effective and had a good return on investment. If you're moving a lot of inventory but making a loss on it, you need to re-evaluate your plans.

For example, if you're offering a shipping promotion, you may want to increase the threshold value to qualify. Alternatively, you could have tiered promotions with percentages based on amount spent to qualify. There are a variety of ways that you can still encourage potential customers to a purchase, without negatively impacting your bottom line.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- How are you defining success for a promotion?
- What promotions drove the most revenue?
- What promotions drove the least revenue?
- What had the highest ROI? The lowest ROI?
- What promotions moved the most inventory?
- How successful were your post-holiday promotions?



## DIVE INTO YOUR EMAILS

Most ecommerce companies rely heavily on email promotions to drive traffic, and ultimately purchases. During the holiday season, consumers are getting more email than ever, so it's important that you're putting your best foot forward in your emails.

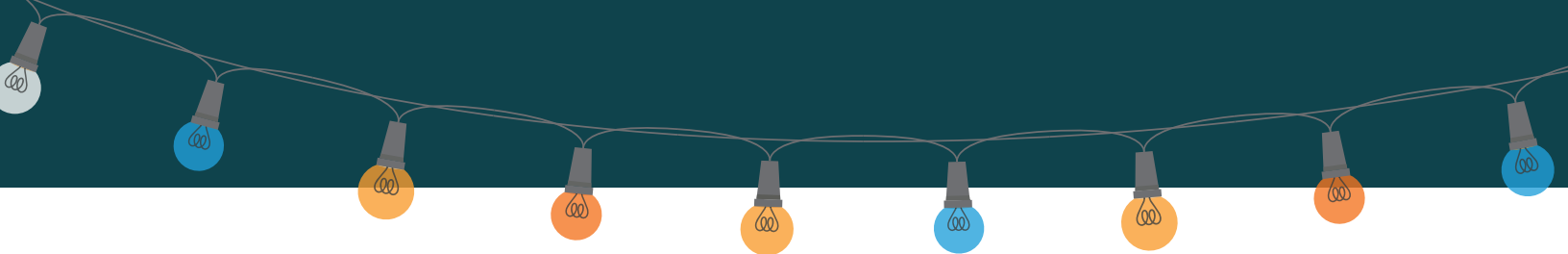
The best way to do that is by taking a long, hard look at your emails to determine what's working, and what isn't. Subject lines often determine whether people will open your email, so it's important to analyze and identify what resonates with your audience.



**Want to brush up on the latest email marketing best practices? [Check out the free email certification from HubSpot Academy!](#)**

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What email drove the most traffic? The least traffic?
- What email drove the most purchases? The fewest purchases?
- What subject lines saw the most opens?
- What times were the most effective?



## Chapter 2:

### MAKE YOUR PLAN

#### SET BENCHMARKS AND SET GOALS

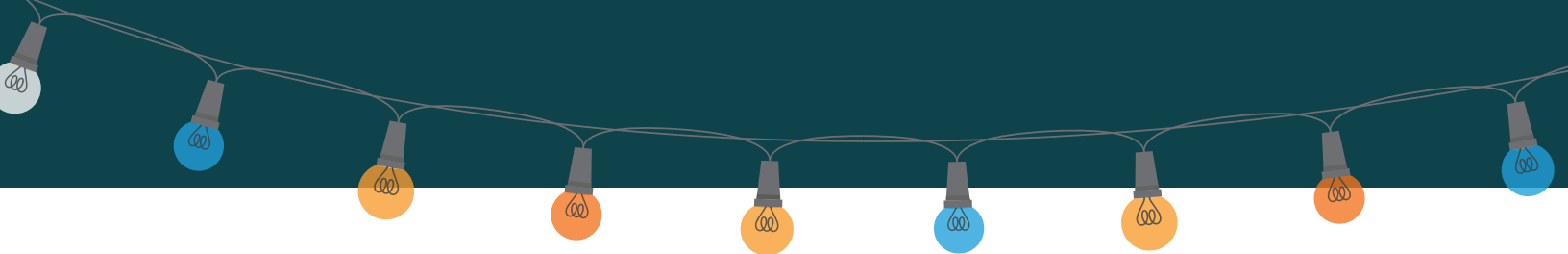
Now that you've taken a comprehensive look at how you did last year, set benchmarks based on that performance. What are reasonable expectations for email open, click, and conversion rates based on last year? What were your revenue targets? How did specific marketing activities drive revenue?

Then, once you have benchmarks for your holiday marketing activities, start to set goals. You should also start working to determine which specific activities you'll use to reach that goal. After all, the saying goes -- The best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Your holiday revenue goals may seem heady, but breaking them into their smaller components will help you reach them.

Keep in mind that you may have multiple goals that you'll develop. For example, you might add a set of "stretch goals" based on ideal (but possibly less realistic!) numbers.







### ASK FOR RESOURCES

Setting a series of goals is also an opportunity to ask for resources. As you start to plan, be realistic about what your holiday marketing budget looks like. Are you lacking in any areas?

You can then develop a plan with different goals based on resources allocated – with a higher stretch goal based on more resources to help you make your case.

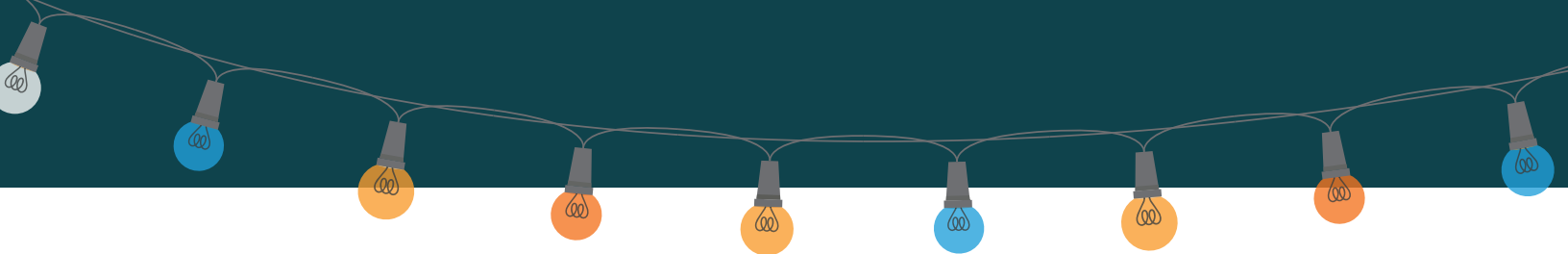
### DEVELOP KEY METRICS


Now that you've used your benchmarks to set goals, how will you track and the goals that you've set? You need to develop a set of metrics or reports that you can leverage to help you do this.



You may already have a dashboard that you look at every day, but now is the time to make sure it's up to date. You need to know that you'll be able to understand if everything is working, and course-correct if necessary.


### IDENTIFY PROMOTIONAL PERIODS

Next, take a look at the calendar to determine key promotion periods for the season:



NOVEMBER						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
 21	22	23	24	25	 26	27
28	 29	30				

DECEMBER						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	 24	 25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

JANUARY						
	1	2	3	4	5	
8	9	10	11	12		
15	16	17	18	19		
22	23	24	25	26		
29						

**THANKSGIVING:** Monday, November 21st – Thursday, November 24th

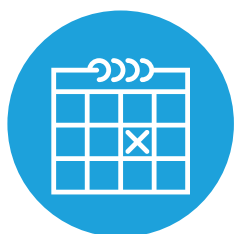
**BLACK FRIDAY:** Friday, November 25th – Saturday, November 26th

**CYBER MONDAY:** Sunday, November 27th – Tuesday, November 29th

**CHRISTMAS & HANUKKAH:** Thursday, December 1st – Sunday, December 25th

**NEW YEARS:** Monday, December 26th – Wednesday, January 4th

Depending on your product or team, you may want to consider other promotion periods. For example, if you work with non-US companies, you may want to get started earlier – right after Halloween – and skip Thanksgiving. It really depends on your organization and what’s right for you.



Want to keep track of all the North American holiday dates for 2016? [Download the Essential Ecommerce Marketing Calendar](#)



## Chapter 3:

### DEVELOP YOUR HOLIDAY CAMPAIGNS

#### BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Now that you understand best practices for your audience and the promotional timeframes you're working with, start brainstorming! There are so many opportunities beyond marketing only Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas. There are opportunities for Hanukkah and Kwanzaa campaigns, as well as promotions around shipping deadlines, and virtual gifting once those have passed. You could even have a Twelfth Night sale!



**Most shipping providers don't release their holiday shipping deadlines until October. Before the dates are confirmed, you can still start developing your promotional materials based on previous years. Make sure to include time for you to process the orders before the deadlines, too!**



## HOLIDAY CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Here are just a few holiday-specific campaign ideas that you can run:



### GIFTING:

- Gift Guides
- Holiday Messages



### HOLIDAY URGENCY:

- Holiday Countdown Promotions
- Last Day to Ship
- Last Minute Shoppers
- Gift Card Promotions (for people who missed the shipping deadlines)



### SALES AND PROMOTIONS:

- Flash Sales
- Sale Emails for Black Friday, Cyber Monday, New Years



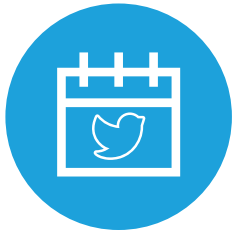
### CUSTOMER REWARDS:

- Friends & Family Discounts
- Early Access to Sales



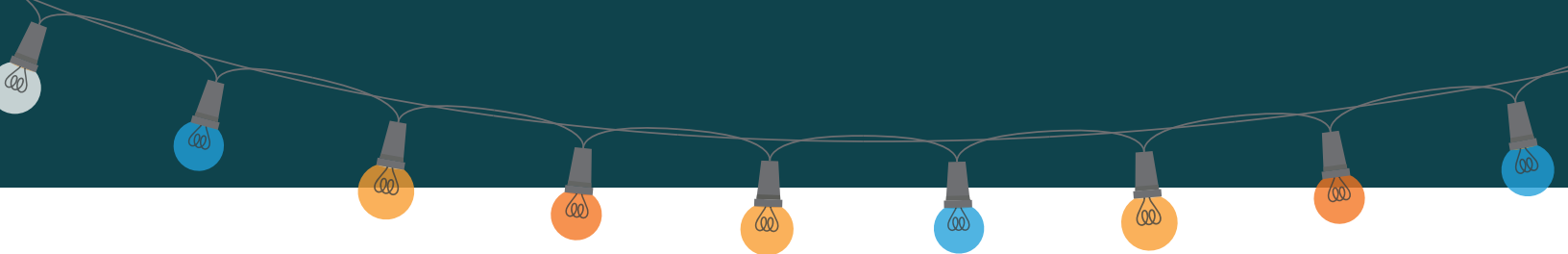
## THINK MULTI-CHANNEL

Ecommerce companies often over-rely on email as a channel. While email is a starting point for many of these campaigns, it doesn't have to stop there. Determine what other channels you're going to leverage for your campaigns, and what assets you need for them. For example, you should have a native social plan and a holiday PPC plan in place to fully support your promotional calendar.



Get your social media plan organized with these social media [content calendar templates](#).





## DECK OUT YOUR SITE

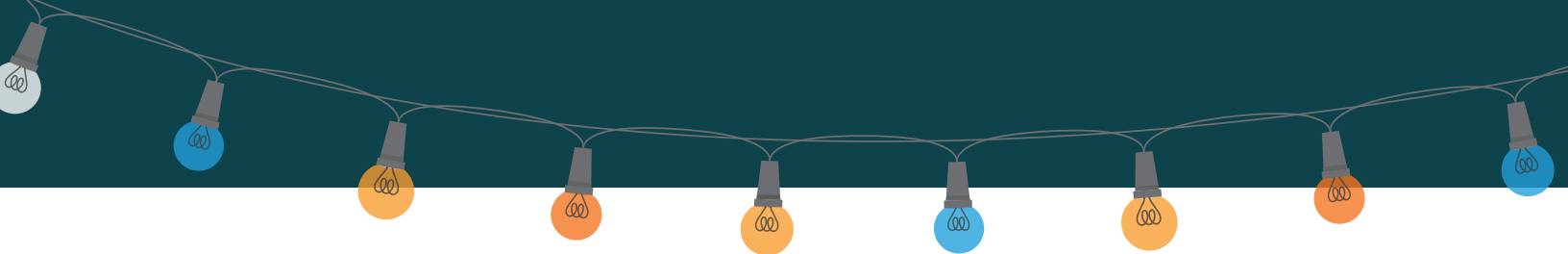
Determine early on how you're going to change your site, since you may need development resources to implement the changes. Test it out before the holiday season to ensure everything is all set. You don't want to be making a site change at the last minute and have it negatively impact your sales on an important day like Cyber Monday!

## NAVIGATION

Your navigation is prime real estate on your website. You have the opportunity to make aesthetic changes to your navigation to make it more seasonal – think about whether you'll add snowflakes or another non-denominational flavor. Beyond aesthetic changes, you can also leverage this space promotionally. You can link to gift guides, seasonal sales, and lookbooks. Alternatively, you can add a holiday countdown to add urgency and move your potential customers towards a purchase.

## MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

Between your benchmarks, goals, and promotion periods, you should be well on your way to putting together your holiday marketing plan. Now is the time to start adding deadlines to the calendar and put together a plan for execution. The way to hit ambitious holiday goals is to start sooner rather than later!



### THEN, GET STARTED

Once you have your plan, nothing should be keeping you from getting started! You can start preparing your offers, designing your visual assets, and writing your email and landing page copy. Given the volume of assets you'll be producing, staying organized is key to help you crank through them.

### OPTIMIZE EARLY

Once you've started creating your assets – the next step is to optimize them! Write multiple subject lines so you're ready to A/B test the best ones. Design a couple of email treatments to highlight your products. You won't regret being overprepared.



**Not feeling inspired? [Download 195+ free visual marketing design templates](#) to get started.**





## Chapter 4:

### COVER YOUR BASES

You're well on your way to making this holiday season a success with your promotion and content plans. But, you also need to make sure that your site is in tip-top shape before the holiday traffic hits it.

Now's your chance to do housekeeping and make sure you're putting your best foot forward -- on mobile, marketing automation, and list health. All three are critical to your year-round success, so it makes sense to check that everything's working well before a busy holiday season. After all, there's always room for optimization!

#### MAKE SURE YOU'RE READY FOR MOBILE

According to comScore, mobile accounted for one in 6 dollars spent online in Q4 2015, and you can only expect that to increase for holiday 2016. Beyond how a mobile responsive can impact your rankings in SERPs, think about your prospective customers. They're more likely to bounce from your website from their mobile device if it's hard to add an item to their cart or pay. By focusing on their mobile experience, you'll be solving for your own bottom line.



**Not sure how your site will fare on mobile? [Run your website through Website Grader.](#)**





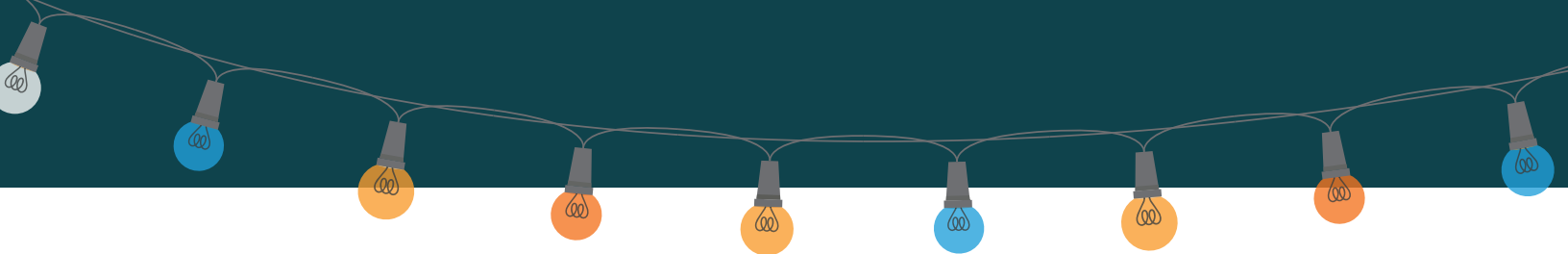
## TWEAK YOUR MARKETING AUTOMATION

More than 68% of shopping carts are abandoned, according to Baymard Institute. Over the holiday season, winning those shoppers back is more important than ever. What are you currently doing to win back those prospective customers, and where does that strategy need optimization?

If you don't have an abandoned cart flow set up, set one up as soon as possible. Of the \$4 trillion dollars in revenue left in carts annually, 63% is recoverable (BI Intelligence). If you do have an abandoned cart flow already set up, analyze its success and see where there are opportunities for optimization.



**Already doing abandoned cart nurturing? Learn about the 11 other automated emails you need [with this guide.](#)**



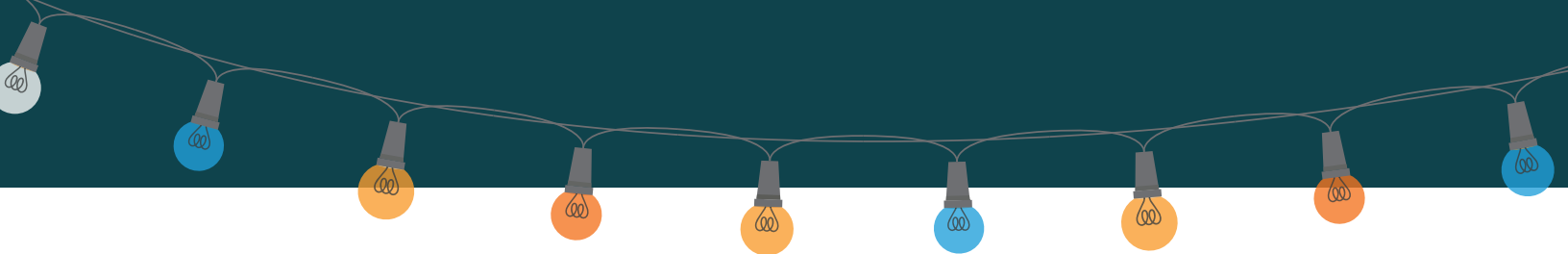
## HAVE A PLAN TO KEEP BUYERS COMING BACK

Too often, ecommerce companies are laser-focused on acquisition and don't consider how they're going to retain new customers once the season is over. To truly make the most out of your holiday season, you need to have a plan to keep your new holiday customers around through the new year. Building relationships with your first-time buyers will make a big impact on your bottom line.

## BE RESPONSIVE

You might be busier than ever this holiday season, but you should keep your customers in mind. They're often buying for others during the holiday season, instead of themselves. They might not know what your company is all about, unlike your typical customer. You need to be patient and responsive and meet these customers where they are. From email to social media, make sure you're ready to answer questions across channels. From email to social media, make sure you're ready to answer questions across channels.

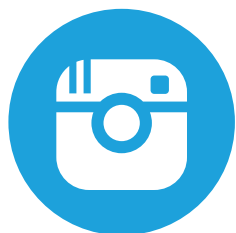




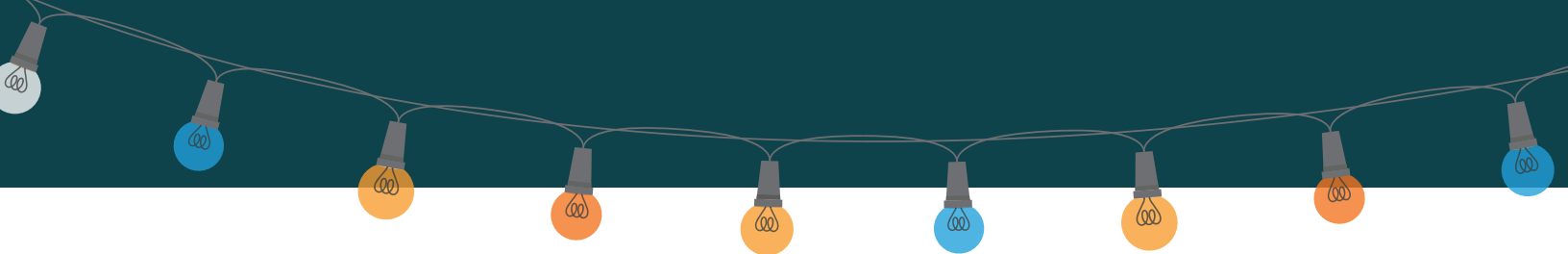
### KEEP IN TOUCH

Your relationship with your customers doesn't end with a purchase. Once they've purchased, you should follow up. For example, you could share a usage or getting started guide before they've even received your product. Otherwise, you should follow up to ask for a review.

After the holiday season, you should have a plan in place to reach out to these customers and re-engage them. They bought from you once, so unless the gift was a flop, they'll likely be back to purchase again if they had a good experience.



**Want to learn more about user-generated content strategy for ecommerce? [Download the guide.](#)**

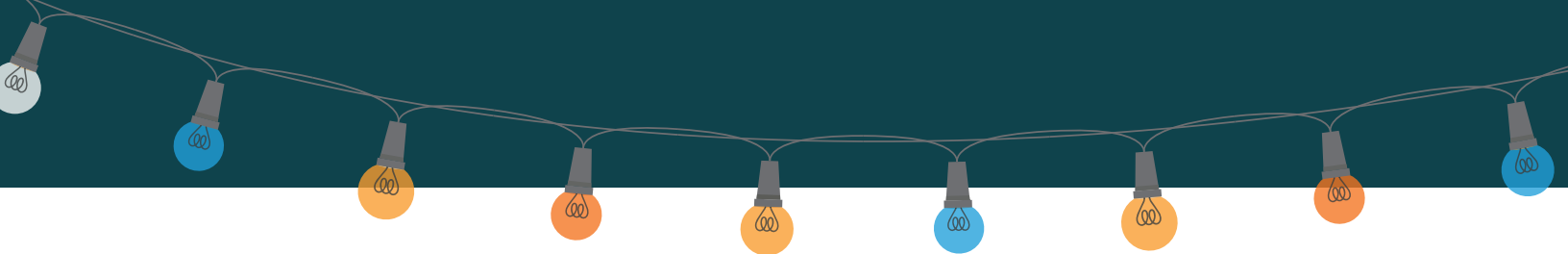


## PLAN FOR THE WORST

It may make you feel like the Grinch, but now is also a good time to plan for the worst. If November and December roll around and you aren't where you need to be on sales, what is your plan to get back on track?

Hopefully the time won't come, but you should develop back up promotions, sales, or discounts that you can roll out on a moments notice to continue to move the needle on your bottom line. If you do end up behind, you'll be happier that you aren't scrambling to develop campaigns at the last minute.





## Conclusion:

### MAKE A LIST, AND CHECK EVERYTHING TWICE

With a little planning, you'll be well on your way to a successful holiday season. Lay the groundwork by analyzing 2015, and assessing areas for improvement. Auditing your current infrastructure will help ensure that you're ready for the traffic onslaught. Then, build your marketing plan, step-by-step. You'll be ready to execute on that plan in no time!

Stay tuned for the second and third part of this series, to help you stay on top of everything you need to during and after the holiday season.

Created by: **Susannah Morris** | [@swmorris2](#) | Ecommerce Marketing Manager, HubSpot



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## CONVERT TRAFFIC INTO SALES

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## PERSONALIZE THE REMARKETING PROCESS

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## TRACK AND ATTRIBUTE REVENUE

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