

RETAIL'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

HOLIDAY PLANNING



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CHAPTER 1: STARTING ON TIME IS STARTING EARLY

A BIGGER PLAYGROUND

For most retailers, the holidays are a frenzied rush of juggling multiple campaigns, meeting revenue goals, and hitting lofty numbers before the year is up. It's far from a relaxing time of year.

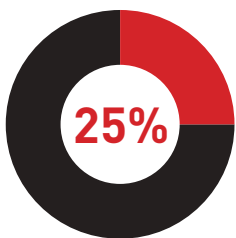
The holiday season has become critically important to online retailers. With the rise of Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, Green Monday, Super Saturday, and Boxing Day, the definition of "the holidays" has expanded substantially. While these retail days have helped distribute the holiday rush across a wider range, they've also made holiday campaign planning far more complex.

Expanding digital channels, such as mobile and social media, have added to the immense opportunities that the holidays provide. Just last year, mobile accounted for 50.3% of all e-commerce traffic, surpassed desktop traffic for the first time ever. Knowing this, it shouldn't be a surprise that 38% of shoppers now say they will not return to a retailer's website if it's not mobile optimized.

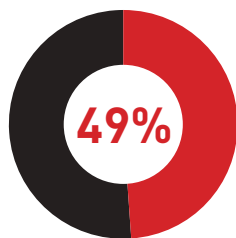
PLANNING OUT THE COMPLEXITY

The digital holiday landscape has become more complex but where there is complexity, there is opportunity. E-commerce retailers who think ahead, can benefit enormously from the digital opportunities that are being opened to them.

The first and most important step toward taking advantage of this growing digital landscape is getting an early start. Most SMB retailers begin their holiday planning around October or November, while most big-box stores start as early as June or July. Kicking things off sooner is helpful, especially because consumers are purchasing holiday gifts earlier than they ever have before.



25% of shoppers said they did some holiday shopping before Halloween.



49% of e-commerce marketers will have created and launched a holiday marketing campaign before Halloween.



The following sections will go into detail on how to lower your cost(s) per thousand impressions (CPMs), improve your conversion rates, and streamline your entire holiday campaign process. And, to make sure everything here is as actionable as possible, we've also added some custom tools—including calendars, heat maps, and checklists—that will reduce the noise and complexity of the holiday season.

E-COMMERCE INDUSTRY TRENDS

While most marketers understand the importance of holiday campaigns, many are still unsure as to *how* they perform during the months leading up to the new year. To shed some light on this, we did a deep dive into our own data.

In order for marketers to run successful holiday campaigns, they should look to secure a large pool of cookie users. These cookies are what enable marketers to target them.

IMPRESSIONS

In order to run successful holiday campaigns, marketers will need large pools of cookie users. A great way to ensure that you have this audience is to focus on putting more budget behind your prospecting campaigns in August and September. This will grow your audience so that you can retarget them later in the year. Contrary to popular belief, the number of ad impressions served is higher across all industries during these months than at the end of the year—even dipping slightly for retailers in December.

While prospecting is shown to help marketers' holiday campaigns when implemented in the summer months, it is also crucial during the holiday season. When looking at our internal data, we noticed that marketers who ran prospecting and retargeting campaigns simultaneously in November saw 32% more impressions served than marketers who ran retargeting alone.

HOLIDAY SHOPPING TRENDS

Every retailer should have their holiday campaigns up and running by the time October hits. While it may still feel like fall, the National Retail Foundation reports that over 40% of people plan to begin their shopping by October, with over 12% planning to begin before September even rolls around. October is also the last month to take advantage of cheaper CPMs, with November seeing 18% higher rates than just the month before.

CPMS AND CPCS

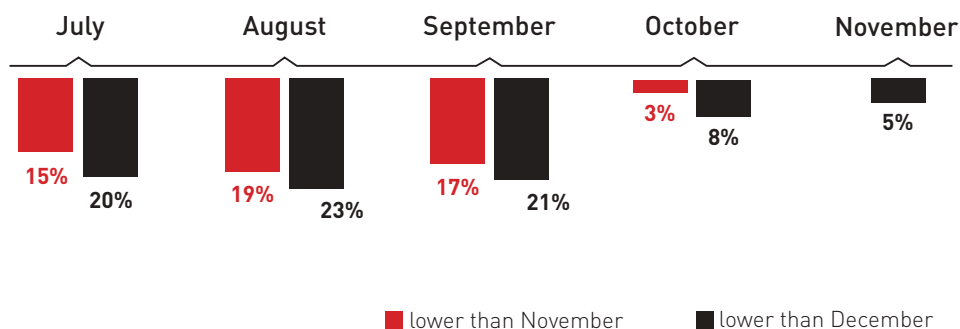
It's no secret that digital marketing prices begin to rise during the final months of the year—and competition for ad space is fierce. With Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday all taking place in November, every marketer is out for a piece of the retail pie.

CPMs slowly rise and the average cost per click (CPC) can jump over 20%—or more during Black Friday—from just a couple months prior. However, that doesn't change the fact that this is still the best time for reaching, and converting, interested holiday shoppers. To ensure your products are getting in front of the customers you care about the most, remember to increase your budgets so that you can beat out the competition.

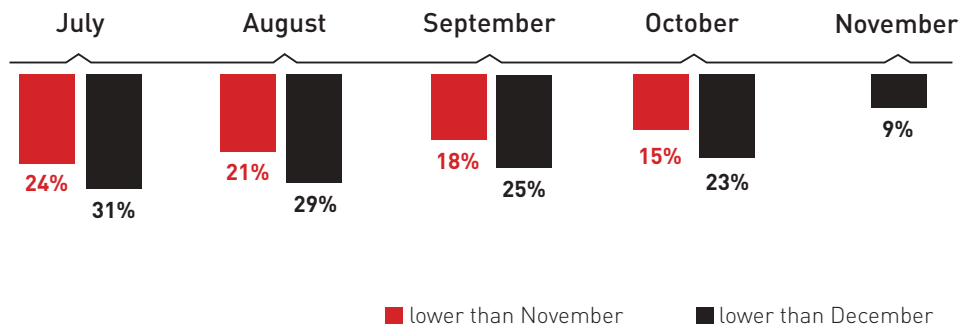
Marketers who are looking to decrease their average CPCs and CPMs during this holiday campaign season should consider running ads early on to save money.



Average monthly CPC compared to December in 2016*



Average monthly CPM compared to December in 2016*



After diving into the data, we noticed some trends that surprised us and some that reaffirmed long-held beliefs. What didn't surprise us is that November and December still reign supreme when it comes to online marketing. Click-through rates (CTRs) skyrocket during Black Friday and hold steady through the end of the year. In addition, [the majority of Americans won't start their holiday shopping until December](#). However, when you couple this with the fact that CPMs and the average CPC is higher, it's easy to see that retailers will need to get serious about their holiday budgets if they want to beat their sales goals.

What did surprise us is that the average number of ad impressions served on a monthly basis actually begins to decrease as we move from October into the final few weeks of the year. Because CPCs and CPMs are lower during the summer and fall months, this is a great time of the year to get your brand in front of the customers you care about the most—with much less interference from competitors.

Bottom line, the earlier you start, the more likely you'll be able to get your brand in front of your target audience and stay top of mind during the holiday season.

*Data pulled from all spending AdRoll customers from July through December 2016, unless otherwise noted.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING

Looking at the industry trends, it's easy to see that the summer months of June through September have much lower sales across the board. Although this may seem like bad news for retailers, it actually presents a greater opportunity than most realize.

These months are a perfect time to get some low-cost testing done, long before the holidays. Taking advantage of low CPMs can effectively expand your marketing budget and allow you to get more creative with your testing. According to RJMetrics, [e-commerce retailers have started getting a lot more creative to make the online customer experience smoother.](#)

In the following sections, we'll take an in-depth look at both creative tests (e.g., user-generated content) and practical tests (e.g., optimizing your retail and mobile pages).

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The use of influencer and partner marketing has become a popular trend over the last couple of years. As consumers have become more savvy at deciphering "brand-speak," it has become more and more challenging for brands to reach their customers.

For most brands, influencers are the most effective solution for breaking through this brand-blindness. Influencers build up a trustworthy relationship with their fans over years and years of quality interactions. They can then, on occasion, loan that trust to a brand that has similar interests and customers.

Although it might be tempting to tap into this resource immediately, it's important to first build up some credit. Influencers can be very protective of their audience's interests; after all, this is their biggest asset—they won't loan it out to just any brand that comes along with a checkbook.

As we'll find out in the following chapters, it's important to build a rapport with your influencers of choice early in the year. Having a solid relationship with your influencers can not only help your campaigns run smoothly but also increase your social reach tremendously. A recent study showed that [one influencer sharing your post can lead to a 31.8% increase in social shares](#), while five influencers sharing your content can quadruple the number of social shares. Maximizing your reach during that crucial retail period around the holidays is all about starting those relationships early.

CHAPTER 2: HOLIDAY PLANNING ANALYSIS

To set up and measure your campaigns successfully, it's necessary to define clear and obtainable goals for your business. Your goals—whether they relate to target revenue, customer acquisition, or something else—inform which metrics and segmentation strategies will be most applicable to your marketing needs. Below, we've laid out the strategies every marketer will need to ensure the success of their holiday campaigns.

METRICS TO IMPROVE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR ADS:



New site visitors

The number of new visitors who came to your site after you launched a campaign



Cost per acquisition (CPA)

Your overall campaign spend divided by the total number of new customers acquired



View-through conversions (VTCs)

Conversions that resulted from customers who viewed ads but did not click



Impressions

The total number of times an ad was viewed by a member of an online audience, which are typically measured in CPM



Attributed closed deals

The total number of deals closed from prospective customers who interacted with an advertising campaign



Return on investment (ROI)

The total revenue generated by your campaign, divided by your total costs



Customer lifetime value (LTV)

The net profit attributed to a customer over their lifetime

METRICS TO IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS'S BOTTOM LINE:



Year-over-year (YOY) growth goals

The basis of your entire campaign measurement strategy should back into your YOY growth goals. Interested in serving more ads to more customers, driving more users to your site, or increasing sales? As a marketer, you should identify what your key growth goals are for this year's holiday strategy, and optimize each campaign to meet these goals.



Year-over-year (YOY) traffic

Your YOY traffic will help you determine how many customers should visit your site. This traffic will help you determine how much ad spend to put behind things like retargeting campaigns. If this user traffic has increased, it would be a good idea to increase your holiday marketing budget to ensure you'll be able to convert as many users as possible. If this traffic has decreased since last year, campaign scope may need to be readjusted. Your internal team should look to pull the highest-performing campaigns from the previous year to maintain that year's conversion rate with a smaller audience.



New user acquisition

If you do find that your traffic is down, what are you doing to reverse this trend? Products like AdRoll Prospecting and AdRoll Retargeting can work together to help bring new and returning quality users to your site and eventually lead them to convert—all by delivering highly personalized ads to the sites they visit most often.



Conversion rates

From here, marketers can begin to look at their overall conversion rate. Industry metrics show that conversion rates typically fall anywhere between 1 and 2%. If you're interested in improving these rates, a strong retargeting campaign across web, social, and mobile will help guarantee your message gets in front of the right audience, at the right time.



Yearly revenue goals

Marketers should also use the summer months to analyze the progress of their yearly revenue goals. This will help you understand how much weight will be put on holiday sales to meet your company's numbers. A little behind on the year? Then it might be time to pour on the gas. A little ahead on the year? Then it's *definitely* time to pour on the gas.



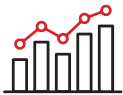
Customer loyalty

This time of the year is perfect for assessing how your company is doing in terms of customer loyalty. Have you been re-engaging your most important customers? It's well documented that it costs five times as much to acquire a new customer as it does to maintain a current one. Additionally, studies have shown that even a 5% increase in customer retention can result in a 25-95% increase in overall profits. Bottom line, the holidays are the time to re-engage customers and your campaigns should be able to measure your success in doing so. A good way to do this is by offering special discounts or exclusive items to your most valued clients.

SEGMENTATION

Now that you've identified the key metrics needed to measure the success of your different campaigns, it's time to look at how you should segment your audience in order to meet your holiday marketing goals. Audience segmentation is the easiest way to serve the most relevant messages to your target audience.

By segmenting based on things like products viewed, time on site, or purchase history, you can make sure each ad contains the information your audience cares about the most. When creating a segmentation strategy, it's important to take a full-funnel approach. This means that your segments should include customers at the top, middle, and bottom of the funnel—with some segments aimed at growing your customer base. Below, we've compiled the most successful segmentation strategies for online marketers.



Prospecting

This segment is aimed at driving new audiences to your site. By analyzing the behavior of your current customer base, we're able to drive net-new, interested audiences to your site.



Number of pages viewed

This is one of the most versatile strategies because it can be optimized to all stages of the marketing funnel. It segments customers based on the number of pages they've viewed. So, a group of customers who came to your homepage but bounced quickly would fall into an upper-funnel campaign, while a group of customers who visited five pages or more would fall closer to the bottom.



Gifting campaigns

Have any gift guides on your site? Make sure to segment out the users who have viewed them.



Product pages

One of the simplest and most personal strategies, this segment allows marketers to target users based on the products or services they've viewed on your site. If you're interested in increasing sales for a lagging product or boosting revenue for a premium service, this strategy is for you.



Cart abandoners

This is one of the highest-intent segments. This strategy allows marketers to target users who have put products in their cart but left without completing a purchase. With [cart abandonment rates hovering somewhere in the 60–80% range](#), this segment can make the difference between converting a customer and losing a sale. We'll go into more depth on exactly how to fix cart abandonment in the following chapter.



Loyalty

This is where your CRM comes into play. This segment allows you to target the users who mean the most to your business and show them the love they deserve. This is where every marketer should be sending emails to last year's holiday customers to remind them of new products. Marketers should also send emails to loyal customers with exclusive deals and product offers.

CHAPTER 3: OPTIMIZING THE USER EXPERIENCE

Written by: Selz

Creating a consistent sales funnel takes a lot of trial and error, but it's well worth the effort. Understandably, the last thing you want to do is test your user experience in the midst of the chaotic holiday season. This is why it's vital to start optimizing now.

The good news is that with just a few simple adjustments you can improve your online sales and ROI. In this chapter, you're going to learn how to reduce your bounce rate, optimize your retail pages, create a smooth checkout funnel, and reduce cart abandonment. All of these optimizations, when working together, can increase your revenue dramatically.

REDUCING YOUR BOUNCE RATE

Have you ever walked into a store because of the beautiful display in the window? Or, conversely, have you ever left a store because it's messy, disorganized, and can't find the checkout? As digital marketers, it's easy to forget that online stores act as a physical representation of our brand. As such, we need to treat our store with the same love and attention that you would treat a physical storefront. Visitors will "walk into" your store if there is a beautiful layout in the same way they'll "walk out" if your website is cluttered and difficult to navigate.

First, to begin improving your bounce rate, you'll want to make potential customers feel like you understand them and their needs. This is why your copy must shine. You should always present your main value proposition in the very first headline on your site:

- Highlight the features of your product
- Highlight the benefits of your product
- Highlight the problem that your product addresses

Remember to keep the headlines cohesive so they flow together throughout your whole page. If someone were to read only your headlines, they should understand what you're selling.

Secondly, you'll want to focus on brand imagery. Copy will only take your users so far—you need to keep them scrolling in order to make the sale. Break up your content with graphics, photos, and mockups.

Finally, use your content wisely. Blogs and social feeds are incredibly important to your overall brand. But keep them away from checkout pages, where they can distract the shopper from completing their purchase.

OPTIMIZING YOUR RETAIL PAGES

While your website itself needs lengthy copy, tons of images, and relevant content, retail pages simply do not. Your homepage has already convinced them to browse your products, so when they get to the product page, your *only* goal is to make the sale.

There are plenty of things that you absolutely need on your retail pages:

Clear product descriptions

Tell your users exactly what they're going to get when they purchase your product. Include relevant information on sizing, material, tech specs, etc. It's completely encouraged to use a little marketing charm when writing your product description, but don't leave out the facts.

Multiple images

Use more than one image to display your product. Of course it depends on what you're selling, but showing a real person using, wearing, or displaying your image will always convert better than just a bare product. Try to vary the angles and scenarios you show your product in.

User reviews

These are paramount to your sales—adding them to your site can [improve conversions by 161%](#). Giving the user a straightforward star rating and allowing them to read other user reviews, even if those reviews are poor, greatly increases the user's trust in your brand. If you're using [Selz](#), you can actually install the Yotpo app into your store to do this seamlessly.

FAQs

These should be tailored to your products. If you're selling apparel, it's helpful to provide sizing information, like whether it runs small or large. If you're selling an event, your users may need some additional information before they commit to buying. The easiest way to build your FAQ page is to take real questions from real customers on your support side and use those to guide you.

Buy buttons

This goes without saying, but we'll say it anyway: buy buttons are easily the most important thing on your retail page. That means having easy-to-find buttons with solid CTAs. There are common CTAs that you can use on your buy buttons, like "buy now," "learn more," or "view product," but there's no proven button copy that works for everyone. That's why it's imperative to test your site and gather data before you're pushing for holiday sales. Run some A/B tests first to figure out what button text works; then you can start experimenting with color, size, position, and more.

CREATING A SMOOTHER CHECKOUT FUNNEL

The checkout process is a crucial step in completing the sale, and this is another thing you want to have nailed down before the influx of traffic to your site during the holidays. There are a few things to consider including in your checkout funnel:

Shipping rates

Shipping can seriously make or break your sale. According to a recent UPS Pulse survey, [free shipping was deemed the second most important factor](#) for shoppers when purchasing online, and [93% of shoppers take action for free shipping](#). But if you cannot offer free shipping, you should be transparent about how much it will cost early in the funnel. There's nothing more frustrating than getting through the entire checkout process, only to find out that the shipping price is higher than expected.



DID YOU KNOW
Adding user reviews to your site can improve conversions by **161%**.



FUN FACTS
According to a recent UPS Pulse survey, free shipping was deemed the second most important factor for shoppers when purchasing online, and **93%** of shoppers take action for free shipping.

Progress bars

Progress bars aren't a mandatory part of checkout, but they certainly help. If you have a longer checkout process because of the product you're selling or the specific information you need, then include a progress bar to let your user know they're almost finished. Try to keep your checkout within three to four steps and help your customer understand their progress with each step.

Checkout timers

A checkout timer is a countdown of how long your user has to complete the checkout before they lose their item. This is an excellent technique if you're selling tickets to events or other in-demand items. It gives your users a reason to purchase quickly, encouraging a sale. Of course, this is just one more thing to test before making it live during the holidays. You should be positive that a cart timer is encouraging sales and not hindering them.

E-commerce hosting

This is a fantastic way to start and build your website. E-commerce hosting providers allow you to create your website, add your products, and sell them, all from the same place. If you're just getting started, or want a simpler way to run your business, you can [use a site like Selz to build your store](#). E-commerce sites like Selz have already perfected the checkout funnel, ensuring that your customers won't drop off due to an inconsistent checkout process.

REDUCING CART ABANDONMENT

Even if you've reduced your bounce rate, optimized your sales pages, and created a flawless checkout process, the sad truth is you're still going to lose a few buyers. In 2017, the Baymard Institute looked at 37 cart abandonment studies and found that [the average online shopping cart abandonment rate is 69%](#). That's a lot of missed sales. Luckily, there are quite a few tried-and-true tricks to win back your customers:

Retargeting

Retargeting is one of the best and most cost-effective ways to win back a cart abandoner. With AdRoll, you can easily [track users who have abandoned their carts](#) using the smart pixel. From there, you can serve them ads featuring the products they've viewed, allowing them to come back and purchase at a later time.

Abandoned cart emails

If a user is logged in to their account while they're shopping on your site, you can retarget them through abandoned cart emails. This means that your customer will get an email when they leave an item in their cart without buying it. This is super simple to do with both [AdRoll](#) and [Selz](#), and you can automate the process to send the email 1-4 hours after the cart has been abandoned. It's also recommended to send a second abandoned cart email 24 hours after the cart was abandoned. This is where you can offer a coupon or an incentive, like free shipping. Sometimes the customer just needs that extra incentive to buy the product.

GET STARTED NOW

The most important thing to understand when optimizing your site for conversions is that it takes a long time to test these things. When you're A/B testing your site, you should only be running one test at a time, and with this new wealth of information, you'll be needing to run more than a few tests. Start optimizing your website now, and you'll have a killer sales-making machine just in time for the holidays.



In 2017, the Baymard Institute looked at 37 cart abandonment studies and found that the average online shopping cart abandonment rate is **69%**.



It's recommended to send a second abandoned cart email 24 hours after the cart was abandoned.

CHAPTER 4: GROWING YOUR CUSTOMER BASE



REACHING NEW USERS

It's an understatement to say that reaching new users is a pivotal function of marketers' day-to-day lives—for many, it's the *sole* focus of their jobs. In fact, our recent [State of Performance Marketing Report](#) found that marketers spend over 70% of their budgets on prospecting and converting new users.

Despite this, we've noticed that many marketers in the space are still making one crucial mistake—they're waiting way too long to start running their holiday campaigns to acquire new customers.

In this section, we'll discuss why marketers should be focused on growing their customer base and reveal the top strategies for converting customers at the lowest possible cost.

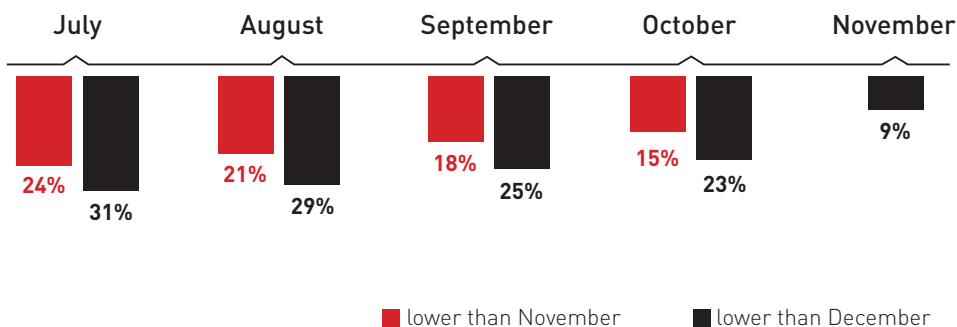
ACQUIRING NEW USERS EARLY

In talking with our clients, we've noticed that many marketers have already identified the channels where their target audience exists and have implemented strategies to coax those potential new customers to visit their site. Yet many are put off by the high prices of running advertising around the holidays.

To avoid holiday costs and get a jump start on competitors, the most successful marketers will often begin running their campaigns in September or October—some even do it as early as July. In fact, the National Research Foundation recently found that nearly 20% of all shoppers will begin their holiday shopping in September or earlier. And it's no wonder why. A quick look at AdRoll's internal data found that each month from July to October saw CPMs at least 15% less than November and roughly 25% less than December, with little to no decrease in the number of impressions served.

Most businesses know that retaining and upselling their current customers is the easiest and cheapest way to increase their revenue. Easy wins can come from turning current customers into continuous revenue streams. But businesses with stagnant customer growth will eventually stall out and see their revenue decline. To combat this, a healthy mix of new customer acquisition and current account growth will ensure your business sees healthy returns year after year.

Average monthly CPM compared to December in 2016*



*Data pulled from all spending AdRoll customers from July through December 2016, unless otherwise noted.

USING ADROLL PROSPECTING

Now that you understand the importance of running new-user acquisition campaigns early, it's time to set your plans into motion. While tactics like direct mailers have shown some success in the past, the easiest—and most efficient—way to grow your customer base is through tools like AdRoll Prospecting.

What is Prospecting?

Prospecting is an upper-funnel product that finds and drives new, interested users to your site. By comparing the customers who have already converted on your site to over 1 billion digital profiles, prospecting attracts site visitors—across web and social media—who are most likely to be interested in your products or services.

How does it work?

Instead of making an educated guess about what your ideal customer might look like, prospecting leverages your website's customer data to find audiences who act like your converted users, driving the highest-value new users possible.

How AdRoll Prospecting is unique



1.2+ BILLION DIGITAL PROFILES

Tap into the IntentMap™, the world's largest advertising opt-in data co-op, to reach audiences who are in the market for your offering.



FULL-FUNNEL MARKETING

AdRoll Prospecting and AdRoll Retargeting work more effectively in tandem to attract and convert customers.



POWERFUL MACHINE LEARNING

Over time, AdRoll Prospecting calibrates and becomes increasingly precise.



TRANSPARENT REPORTING

We don't hide performance, so you can monitor how AdRoll Prospecting and AdRoll Retargeting perform individually and together.



DATA SCIENCE, NOT ASSUMPTIONS

AdRoll Prospecting uses your existing customer data to find new, high-value prospects.

SHIEKH SHOES



"With less than a month before Black Friday, Shiekh Shoes asked AdRoll to help with their holiday promotions. Shiekh also needed support for its newly acquired sites: Karmalooop, PLNDR, and Kazbah."

Shiekh Shoes was ready to win new customers and engage past buyers for the holidays—but after a negative experience with a former digital marketing vendor, the company was hesitant to make any large-scale changes right before peak season. The AdRoll team was confident it could deliver success on a set budget—even though it was so close to a busy holiday season. A week before Black Friday, Shiekh launched AdRoll Prospecting and Retargeting on the web and Facebook. After a short time, they saw a 20% lift in ROI and were planning to invest heavily in AdRoll Prospecting for the holidays to come.

CHAPTER 5: HOW TO START WITH INFLUENCER MARKETING

Written by: bitly

THE STATE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

The holidays are the most lucrative—but also the most competitive—time of year for brands. Marketers are in a frenzy to get their creative ready, finalize the pricing for products, and prepare enticing deals for the big rush.

Which naturally begs the question: If every brand is having a big sale, can anyone hear the deals through the noise?

During this time, consumers aren't just shopping for gifts; they're shopping for gift ideas. More than half look for ideas and deals on social channels.

But here's the thing—it's hard to stand out on social media. Even if you pay to promote an ad or product on Facebook, 67% of millennials say they've never clicked a sponsored post. The majority [95%] say their most credible source of information is their friends.

But there's another way to get in front of holiday shoppers. Influencers—from food bloggers and YouTubers to Instagram celebrities—are far more trusted than brands. And for every dollar brands spend on influencer marketing, they can see \$6.50 in return.

Here's how major brands are creating great influencer content for holiday campaigns.

5 EXAMPLES OF AWESOME INFLUENCER HOLIDAY MARKETING

1 OLD NAVY TAPS AN INFLUENCER FOR FASHION TIPS

When Old Navy wanted to promote certain lines of holiday clothes, the brand decided to get an expert on the case. Meghan Rienks has 1.3 million followers on Instagram and 2 million subscribers on YouTube. Old Navy worked with Rienks to debut three different fashion styles for the holidays, which promoted the brand's clothing lines and put Old Navy in front of Rienks's followers.

Takeaway:

Any brand can work with influencers to showcase their products in action. Even tech companies can have a user go through the user interface or talk about their brand experience. Highlighting influencers using products is a built-in testimonial—with shareable content to boot.



67% of millennials say they've never clicked a sponsored post. The majority (95%) say their most credible source of information is their friends.



And for every dollar brands spend on influencer marketing, they can see \$6.50 in return

2 HALLMARK WORKS WITH MICRO-INFLUENCERS

During the holiday season, Hallmark wanted to showcase a special ornament collection, so the team decided to work with a number of influencers who had the specific audience that Hallmark wanted to target. While they may not have the million-plus reach of big-time social media personalities, these micro-influencers can have just as big an effect by connecting different crowds around one event. For Hallmark's campaign, each influencer took a picture of the ornament collection and linked to the product page within his or her bio.

Takeaway:

By working with influencers to photograph how your product can help build special moments, you can create brand affinity that is less of a sales pitch and more experiential in nature.

3 AMAZON SPONSORS VIDEO CONTENT

Amazon wanted to get more awareness around Amazon Prime, so the company worked with YouTube influencers Ingrid Nilsen, who has 4 million subscribers, and Alex Wassabi, who has 8.5 million.

By building the sponsorship into a preexisting story (e.g., Nilsen talked about how she wants to get something special for her dog for the holidays and used Prime to order), Amazon created engaging video content without pushing the product too hard. In the end, Nilsen's video garnered 1.3 million views.

Takeaway:

While video marketing is undoubtedly a fast-growing marketing channel, it has been challenging for brands to create popular video content. Working with YouTube celebrities, who already have established audiences, can help companies break through into video and grow a following.



Micro-influencers can have just as big an effect by connecting different crowds around one event.



Nilsen's video garnered 1.3 million views.

4 STARBUCKS ASKS FOR DESIGN HELP

For the past few years, Starbucks has hosted the #redcupcontest to encourage customers to come up with their most festive ideas for the holiday season. Winning designs are featured on Starbucks cups across 25 thousand different stores around the world. By highlighting their followers' creativity, Starbucks gets everyone engaged and encourages participation from top fans. There have been thousands of entries, and the hashtag was shared more than 40 thousand times.

Takeaway:

By crowdsourcing content, you can connect to influencers and audiences with much broader campaigns. For the holidays, you could compile different stories from influencers who work in the industry or are interested in your space.



There have been thousands of entries, and the hashtag was shared more than **40 thousand times.**

5 ORIGINAL GRAIN USES MICRO-INFLUENCERS

Smaller brands can work with influencers, too. Watch brand Original Grain often features photos of their watches taken by different photographers. For the holidays, the brand showcased a watch with Christmas decorations around it.

Caitlin and Dani, the bloggers who took the picture, have around 10 thousand followers—meaning the brand still got into that crossover audience without spending budget on paid ads.

Takeaway:

You don't have to be a Fortune 500 company to work with influencers. Micro-influencers with up to 10 thousand followers still reach a big audience and create a ripple effect among their fans.



Micro-influencers with up to **10 thousand followers** still reach a big audience.

SETTING UP AN INFLUENCER OUTREACH PROGRAM

Identifying your influencers means identifying the audiences you want to reach. To do this, we recommend a few steps:

- Search through hashtags
- Post requests for expert advice at HelpAReporter.com
- See who your existing influencers follow
- Ask influencers to recommend friends

When you've narrowed down the list to a handful of influencers who might work for your brand, there are 5 effective channels through which to reach out:

- Email
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Agency (if they're represented)
- Events

THE TEMPLATE

Whatever channel you use, make sure your first message is straightforward and to the point:

from: John <john@adroll.com>
to: Carrie <carrie@adroll.com>
date: Fri, Jul 14, 2017 at 9:43 AM
subject: AdRoll Holiday Horror Campaign

Hi Carrie,

We love the work that you do for Y. We're currently running a campaign about Z, and we thought it would be great to have you join us! If you're interested, we can send over the full creative brief.

Best,
John

THE CREATIVE BRIEF

The creative brief is the cornerstone of the influencer marketing program. When someone has agreed to work with your brand, double check that both sides understand the partnership and make sure to follow any sponsorship disclosure requirements in posts.

Build a creative brief that specifies the campaign objective, what success looks like, and exactly what you're hoping the influencer will contribute in terms of design, message, and content.

The Creative Brief

Our newest product, Product X, helps customers see clear across the internet. You've been chosen to be a partner to help us launch the product and spread the message by showing it in action!

CAMPAIGN GUIDELINES

- Do try to include branded colors (blue and orange) in your imagery
- Do tag @bitly in each promotion
- Do not use multiple filters or special effects
- Do not include identifiable logos from competitors

DATES

6/6 - Receive your campaign briefs and materials in the mail

6/12 - Submit first photo and caption

6/18 - Submit second photo and caption

HASHTAGS

#bitly, #bitlynetwork, #customerexperience

COPY GUIDELINES

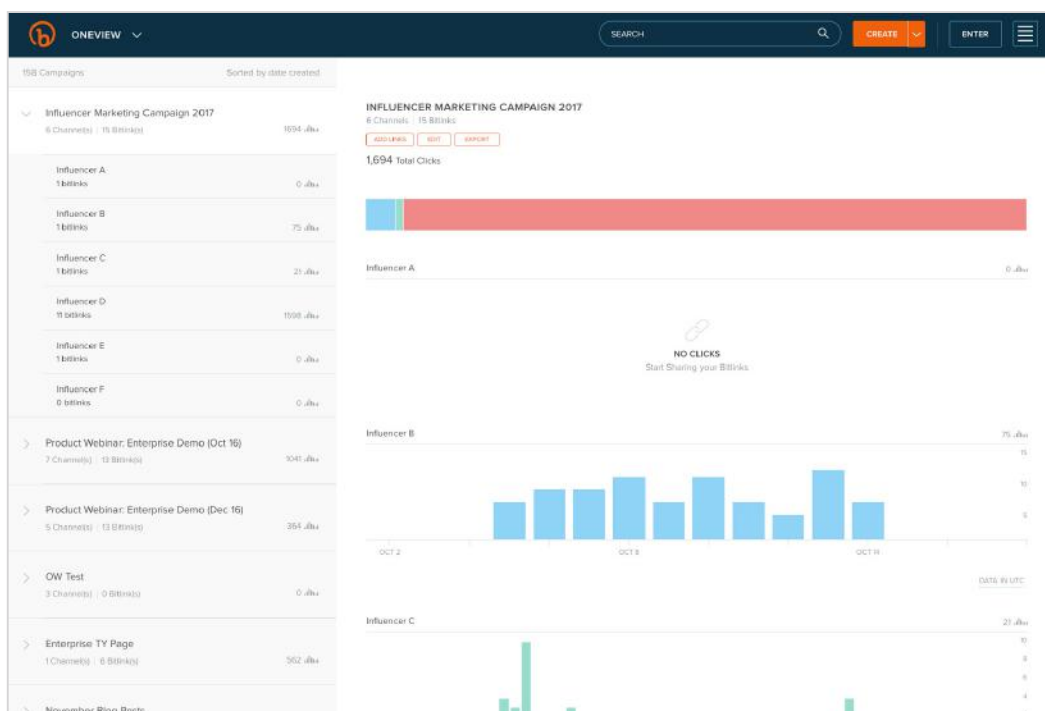
Keep it short, sweet, and informative. Above all, have fun and tailor it to your audience!

TRACKING SUCCESS

Results from influencer marketing programs are notoriously hard to measure. A lot of the time, you might not have access to the analytics that would help you figure out which campaigns are really driving ROI. You can usually see part of the customer journey, but not all of it.

To really track influencer marketing, you have to make sure that you have tracking tools in place from the start:

1. Use a trackable link



With a link management platform like Bitly, you can shorten and customize every link. When you hand links to influencers, you can track how many clicks are being driven back to the destination. This gives you a macro view of how each influencer in the program is performing.

2. Use separate landing pages

You should ideally build a different landing page for each influencer, so that you can have a unique destination that shows how much traffic and how many sales each influencer is driving. Aside from who is driving traffic, each landing page should be identical in every way so there aren't any variables that could otherwise affect conversions.

3. Put everything in one place

Start an Excel sheet or use a reporting tool to ensure that you can track the results side-by-side. If you're running a lot of different holiday campaigns or working with different groups of influencers, you should centralize all the metrics to see which content is working best.

Testing influencer campaigns earlier in the year will reveal which influencers drive the best ROI, so when the holidays come around you can concentrate on only the best influencers for your brand.

CHAPTER 6: USER-GENERATED CONTENT

The first things that come to mind when most people think about user-generated content are terrible pictures of products with bad lighting in not-so-desirable locations. And, yes, while it's true that some user-generated campaigns can be poorly executed, when they do work, they are incredibly effective.

In fact, according to a survey by Yotpo, user-generated content can increase CTRs for Facebook ads by up to 300%. User-generated campaigns also show a 50% lower CPC and CPA.

There's clearly a huge upside to creating user-generated content, but the questions still remain: How do we launch a successful user-generated campaign, and how can we prevent a user-generated campaign from being a flop?

USER-GENERATED CONTENT REDEFINED

User-generated content is a lot broader of a category than most marketers realize. It includes a variety of assets such as user reviews, comments, pictures, and answers to FAQs. User-generated content works for one very simple reason: **customers trust other customers when it comes to buying decisions**. According to a Nielsen study, over 90% of consumers trust recommendations from strangers and influencers over those from brands.

According to data gathered by Yotpo, adding user-generated reviews to your holiday campaigns can be one of the single best changes you can make this holiday season:



Apparel

Looking at the overall uplift in Apparel, Yotpo found that people who are looking at UGC convert at a 207% higher rate than people who are not looking at UGC.



Beauty

Looking at the overall uplift in Beauty, Yotpo found that people who are looking at UGC convert at a 213% higher rate than people who are not looking at UGC.



Overall

Across all industries, people who look at UGC convert at a 161% higher rate than people who are not looking at UGC.



In fact, according to a survey by Yotpo, user-generated content can increase click-through rates (CTRs) for Facebook ads by up to **300%**.



According to a Nielsen study, over **90%** of consumers trust recommendations from strangers and influencers over those from brands.

UGC BEST PRACTICES

Maybe you already have some user-generated content, or you're starting fresh. Either way, getting user-generated content should be a top priority before the holiday season. There are a few ways you can start gathering user-generated content:

REVIEWS

User reviews are one of the most powerful sales tools out there. If users can't leave reviews on your site, then you should prioritize this must-have feature.

Some businesses are afraid to enable user reviews on their sites out of fear that they'll receive negative feedback and lose sales. **But this couldn't be further from the truth.**

Bad reviews, as it turns out, can help you increase sales. According to Yotpo, if the feedback on a site is entirely positive, 95% of visitors believe the reviews are fake or company-screened. Perfect reviews cause users to doubt the integrity of the brand far more than a few disgruntled reviews.

The biggest advantage to setting up user reviews *before* the holiday season is that you can gather user feedback quickly and catch problems before they start. One of the main challenges that e-commerce retailers face is providing potential customers with a realistic idea of what their products are actually like. User reviews, (like when a customer tells you your sizing is off or that an item didn't arrive on time), are one of the best ways to fix your process before everything is in full swing.

FAQ

Speaking of fixing problems before they start, improving your FAQ section for each product is a standard best practice that often gets overlooked. According to a report by the Baymard Institute, 69% of all consumers abandon their shopping cart, often for a number of very predictable reasons.

While using retargeting is the easiest way to re-engage those high-intent buyers, preventing cart abandonment in the first place is obviously preferred. Once you've set up a way to get feedback from your users, you should leverage that feedback to respond to the most common pain points. Adding answers about shipping costs, sizing, and general product information can help you boost conversions and save you a lot of marketing dollars down the line.

USER-GENERATED CAMPAIGNS

Adding user-generated content on your site certainly helps drive conversions, but it can also do much more than that. Once you've optimized your site, the next step is to leverage your user content to help drive traffic to it as well.

PROMOTE YOUR USER REVIEWS

While it's certainly good to have user-generated content on your website, if you simply stop there, you'll only be affecting site visitors. A great way to attract new users to your e-commerce site is to showcase your best user reviews in your marketing materials.

Not only does this help shoppers trust your brand, but it also **boosts your search engine optimization (SEO)**. Reviews provide search engines with fresh content that Google can use to judge the interest people have in your brand. Reviews also make your customers work as an army of link builders and keyword writers who can shape your SEO structure without you having to lift a finger.



According to Yotpo, if the feedback on a site is entirely positive, **95%** of visitors believe the reviews are fake or company-screened.



According to a report by the Baymard Institute, **69%** of all consumers abandon their shopping cart, often for a number of very predictable reasons.

SOCIAL PROMOTION

As we mentioned earlier, user-generated content can increase CTRs for Facebook ads by up to 300%. One reason user-generated content works so well is that social media is becoming more and more saturated by brands that are competing for each user's attention. As a result, most social media platforms are becoming stuffed full of ads, and users are increasingly starting to ignore them.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, one way for e-commerce brands to stand out is by having less-produced ads. Simply using their photos and comments as the ad creative itself can create authenticity for your ad. This means that a user is less likely to identify your ad as an ad.

COLLECTING CREATIVE CONTENT

Soliciting creative user-generated content can be challenging. The trick to getting good user content is creating good content prompts. Rather than asking a customer to simply take a picture of your product, you should give your customers a theme that can provide them with direction. If you are selling makeup, for instance, you can ask your users to take selfies before they go out on the town. If you are selling crafting materials or DIY kits, you can ask for pictures of your customers' finished projects.

If you do ask your customers to provide you with content, be sure to give them something in return. Running contests for free products is a great way to incentivize your users. In fact, 63% of consumers said they would be likely to share a link for a holiday contest. If you start collecting user-generated content early, you'll be in a better position to leverage it later in the year.



As we mentioned earlier, user-generated content can increase CTRs for Facebook ads by up to **300%**.



63% of consumers said they would be likely to share a link for a holiday contest.

CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

As we've seen in the previous chapters, the real key to creating a successful holiday campaign is starting sooner rather than later. Not only planning early, which most marketers already do, but starting early in your prospecting, testing, and overall relationship building.

After looking at the average CPMs for the year, it's easy to see that there are huge opportunities to stretch your marketing budget by starting your prospecting early. By taking advantage of those lower CPMs, you can build your retargeting pool long before you're ready to sell to your new audience. Then, once the holidays are in full swing, your ads will run more efficiently since you'll be retargeting an audience you've already vetted in Q3. Taking advantage of AdRoll Prospecting is an easy decision that any marketer can make right away.

Before the holidays roll around, it's also very important to take care of your testing. Not only testing CTAs and ad collateral, but also micro-testing all aspects of your retail and mobile pages.



According to a 2016 study by Facebook IQ, 60% of shoppers say they plan to start making more purchases on their smartphones, and 54% of those people say they're more likely to shop with a retailer that makes it easy to buy on several devices.

It's clear that getting your sites mobile ready is a good move to make when improving your holiday campaigns. But troubleshooting the mobile experience takes a lot of time and testing, so it's best to begin working on it during the slow season when mistakes are less costly.

Beyond the technical aspects of lowering costs, though, the other trend we discovered when planning this holiday guide was the importance of relationship building. As we saw with Bitly's influencer campaigns, it takes time to build trustworthy relationships with the partners you want to work with. Trying to jump-start a relationship during the hectic holiday season when everyone is busy or traveling can become an uphill battle. To save yourself the headaches of misplaced emails and slow response times, begin building those relationships now while the season is slower.

Remember that when it comes to building a holiday retail campaign, it's not about being perfect; it's about iterating over time. Starting now and sculpting your campaign over a longer period of time is the best way to improve your overall holiday success.

To get started with your holiday planning, be sure to grab our [Holiday Checklist](#) and Interactive [Holiday Calendar](#).

AUTHORS:

AdRoll

AdRoll is a leading performance marketing platform with over 35,000 clients worldwide. Its suite of high-performance tools works across devices, helping businesses attract, convert, and grow their customer base. The company is home to the world's largest opt-in advertiser data co-op, the IntentMap™ with over 1.2 billion digital profiles. AdRoll's goal is to build the most powerful marketing platform through performance, usability, and openness.

AdRoll is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices in Chicago, New York, Tokyo, London, Dublin, and Sydney. Learn more at www.adroll.com.

bitly

Bitly is used by businesses around the world to build stronger connections with their customers across every digital channel. With an enterprise-grade Link Management Platform, Bitly connects every component of a company's internal and external communications and offers tools, data and analytics for transparency and control over the customer experience.

Selz

Selz is a simple e-commerce platform designed to help entrepreneurs create online stores, sell from existing websites, or sell through social networks. Selz gives you all the tools you need to build your online presence, sell your products, market to your customers, and track sales. It's seriously simple selling.