

THE RETAIL MARKETER'S

Black Friday Survival Guide

 ometria

Introduction

So what do some of your current challenges look like?

Black Friday, and its less-vaunted cousin, **Cyber Monday** are now undeniably huge contributors to the retail calendar. But much like the Christmas shopping season the period around Black Friday grows and grows, and the National Retail Federation (NRF) identified a flurry of holiday deals that started as early as October.

It's been nearly a decade since the phenomenon hit the UK, when Asda started to promote it and others followed suit. In 2020, the average spend per customer was estimated to be £316 in the UK, slightly up from £293 in 2019. This represents a huge opportunity to boost sales, as well as convert new shoppers into long-term customers.

What happened on Black Friday 2020, and what's going to happen in 2021?

Before looking ahead to this year's period, it's worth considering what happened in 2020, as the patterns could be similar.

According to Forbes, foot traffic fell 42% for the weekend in the US in 2020, coinciding with a 23.9% decline in revenue for bricks-and-mortar retailers. In the UK, Black Friday coincided with the second

national lockdown in response to the pandemic, meaning that "non-essential" shops were forced to close. As a result, according to data from Barclaycard, there was a 10% decline in spending on Black Friday compared to 2019.

Online was a different story, as Cyber Monday ended up being the biggest online shopping day in US history, increasing by 15% year on year. In the UK the growth was even greater as online sales appeared to soar 38% according to IMRG. Looking at our own data in our 2021 retail benchmark, it's clear that the three-week period around Black Friday were the most productive weeks for online retail, in an already big year.

As countries continue to recover from the worst of the pandemic, it's highly possible that both online and in-store sales will be up compared to 2020. Online continues to grow at pace, and people should be more confident (and able) to shop in stores in 2021. The challenges and opportunities for retailers just got bigger.

The Challenges. Faced with a bigger Black Friday than ever, let's take a look at the current hurdles between you and a successful Cyber Weekend.

01 **More competition than ever – online and in-store**

It's no secret that ecommerce grew massively in 2020, and shows little sign of slowing down. With in-store shopping likely to partially recover from 2020, your competition for consumers' attention is substantially harder. It's essential that you create online experiences that your customers will love.

02 **Racing to the bottom**

Black Friday is synonymous with deals, and with companies like Amazon offering up to 80% off in some circumstances, other retailers have a lot to live up to. If you've been offering discounts throughout the year, you may need to up the game in order to interest customers. Although you run the risk of getting into a discount spiral which eats into margins and may undermine your product offering. It's a delicate balance that retailers need to strike to make the most out of Black Friday.

03 Low customer lifetime value (CLV) shoppers

There are shoppers who are only out for a bargain, and will prepare their inbox for the brands they want to get discounts for. But these customers are like fair-weather friends, they are only interested in offers, so they won't be back until next Black Friday. So how do you turn these short-term customers into loyal customers and increase their CLV?

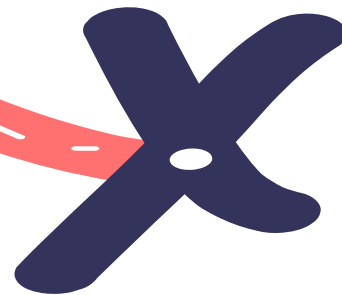
04 Getting emails into inbox

All the effort that you put into your Black Friday campaign emails, from agonizing over the creative elements, to building out the right segments for the interests of your customers, will be for nothing if your emails can't be seen. This is every marketer's worst nightmare, but could easily happen without you realizing it. On one of the most competitive retail days of the year, having poor deliverability is like going into a boxing match with one hand tied behind your back. So how can you ensure it's as good as possible?



What to prioritize

The Black Friday weekend is not a time to gamble on new types of campaigns or techniques. There is pressure to maximize sales, and you must ensure that every possible recipient knows about your offers. Taking a personalized approach may be a better way of hitting those targets, plus it'll pay off in the long run as it builds loyalty. So where should you start, and what campaign ideas have the highest potential value with the minimum resource requirements?





Guiding principles for Black Friday

There is a temptation to see Black Friday as a flashpoint and one-off sales event. However, retailers should think of it more as an opportunity to win over new long-term customers. In short, rather than thinking about average order value, retailers should think about potential CLV.

We saw last year that two-thirds of shoppers planned to spend with brands they already shop with, so ensuring that you have a retention strategy in place is essential.

Everything starts with personalization

Rather than getting dragged into a race to the bottom on price, a retailer's greatest asset should be its customer experience. Achieving an emotional connection with your customers is essential to creating the first building block to a long-term relationship. Taking a personalized approach is essential to engage different segments of your customers, and will ultimately help you stand out from the competition as you hit customers' inboxes.

The good news is that personalization doesn't have to be a huge mountain of work, as we'll explain later in this guide.



Guiding principles for Black Friday



It's a marathon, not a sprint

Black Friday is a major period for customer acquisition, but focusing just on acquiring customers without thinking about what comes next is a recipe for diminishing returns. "One and done" customers eat into your profitability, so working on ways to turn as many of those customers into loyal customers with lifecycle marketing is key.

Think beyond email and embrace cross-channel

Understandably, email inboxes are the main battlefield for customers' attention, but it should not be your only focus. Getting through to your customers via SMS or social channels can help you make the most of the day and ensure you are top of mind when they come to spend.

Campaign tactics

It should come as no surprise that preparation is key. To create campaigns that not only reach your customers but don't hinder their overall experience with you, it's imperative to have your ducks in a customer-centric row long before the Cyber Weekend horn blows. This requires your Black Friday planning to start months before the typical campaign countdown, which is why we're arming you with all this information now.

These are the four key areas to consider in your Black Friday prep:

- Broadcast campaigns
- Marketing automation campaigns
- Deliverability
- Cross-channel opportunities



Broadcast campaigns



The humble broadcast campaign (or newsletter) is at the heart of any Black Friday marketing strategy. But with so many brands upping their sends over this period, it can be hard to grab the attention of holiday shoppers and keep it, especially if you're sending the same, generic messages to everyone.

And when it comes to standing out, marketers have two tools at their disposal:

- Sending targeted broadcast campaigns to activate specific customer segments with messages that are relevant to them
- Using personalization in their campaigns to make sure that they're relevant to the recipient, rather than sending the same message to everyone

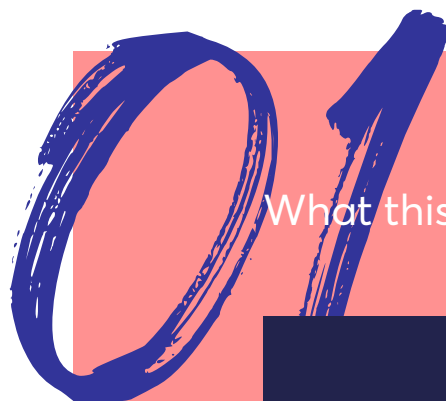


Targeted broadcast messages

Targeted messaging with tailored content can help to activate specific customer groups, especially past Black Friday shoppers and brand-new subscribers.

Summary

- Use your segment of last year's Black Friday shoppers to send targeted messages to re-engage and excite them
- Based on a shopper's previous purchase, send relevant items with incentives to encourage them to spend with you this year

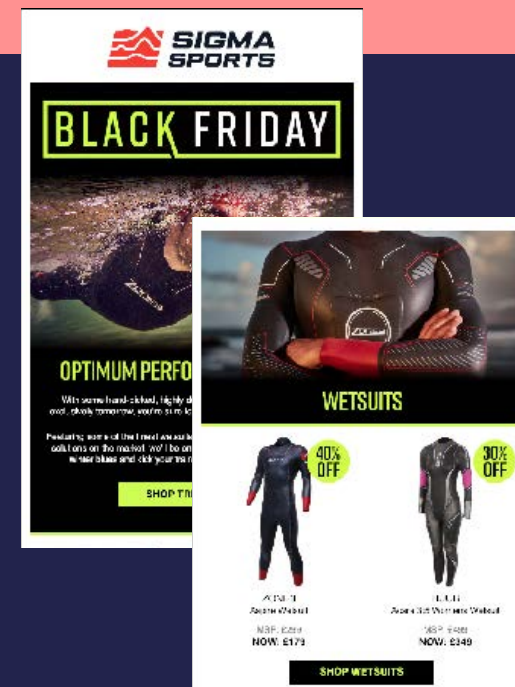


What this looks like in practice:

REAL WORLD EXAMPLE:

Sigma Sport

Premier cycling brand Sigma Sport wanted to re-engage customers who had shopped with them the previous Black Friday. After creating a segment of these shoppers, Sigma Sport designed a targeted campaign to generate excitement around the Cyber Weekend by highlighting available products and including a discount incentive.



But the effort shouldn't stop there. Most retailers not only reactivate this segment with discounts but also select a relevant category for each shopper. For example, one strategy is to show items based on their purchases of the previous year to encourage them to spend with you. This also means that you send relevant content, highlighting your value as a brand.



Target VIP shoppers with rewards for their loyalty

Black Friday is a great opportunity to reward your best shoppers, offering them something that will make them feel special, and improve their customer experience.

02

What this looks like in practice:

Send targeted messages to VIP or high-value shoppers offering perks that are likely to activate them around the Black Friday period, such as early access to a sale or free delivery for orders over a certain value.

What about when your most loyal aren't engaging?

Sometimes even your most loyal customers need a little encouragement to spend with you during the Cyber Weekend. Based on your definition of a VIP customer, you can craft specific personal messages to go out to your most-valued customers ahead of Black Friday. While they are likely to continue spending with you regardless, it's a good idea to highlight items in their basket or in their browsing history that may be on sale and perhaps offer the added incentive of free delivery.



Resend key messages to unengaged users

During Cyber Weekend, retarget customers who have engaged but not purchased, but also coax those that haven't engaged at all with relevant messaging.



What this looks like in practice:

Create an element of FOMO with unengaged users by sending further emails that encourage urgency, such as "You only have three hours until the sale ends!" You can also segment further by geo-location to ensure that emails are received at the most impactful time for the recipient.

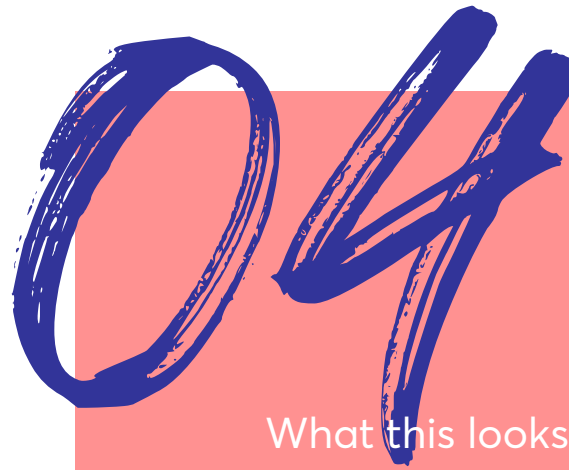
Summary

- Go cross-channel to encourage the unengaged to visit your store
- Create an element of urgency to those that have clicked but not purchased
- Make sure email send times are appropriate for the location of the recipient



Include key shipping and delivery deadlines in all broadcast messages

To up the urgency during the Cyber Weekend, include all deadlines in your emails.



What this looks like in practice:

For those who open your emails but don't click through to make purchases, they are still displaying a level of interest in the brand – especially as multiple other brands vie for their attention at the same time. This creates an opportunity to pique their interest by including key dates and deadlines. You can also up the urgency by including a countdown timer which corresponds with the time they've opened the email.

Summary

- Pique interest by including key dates and delivery deadlines in your broadcast email
- Create urgency with the inclusion of a live countdown timer

Personalization

When you've got an increased email send schedule and Black Friday revenue targets to hit, personalizing your broadcast sends may seem like too much to add to your (already full) festive marketing plate. But when you consider the need to stand out in the short term, and encourage ongoing engagement in the long term, adding a personalized element to your key Black Friday campaigns makes sense.

Fortunately, teams of any size can personalize elements of their Black Friday marketing strategy.

Here are some tactics taken from our whitepaper on newsletter personalization **One size fits none** 🎯. The graph above highlights the impact and effort of changes you can make to your broadcast campaigns during Black Friday. Depending on your time and the resources you have at hand, you can opt for high- or low-effort practices. Below are some staples ranging from low to high effort.



Effort: the amount of resource taken

Impact: positive effect on the customer experience (typically measured in increased engagement and long-term CLV)

01

Product recommendations

A light effort way to make your Black Friday broadcasts more impactful is the inclusion of personalised product recommendations. Inserted by a simple line of code in an email, recommendations are an effective way of making it more likely that customers will see something they like.

02

Personalized offers and incentives

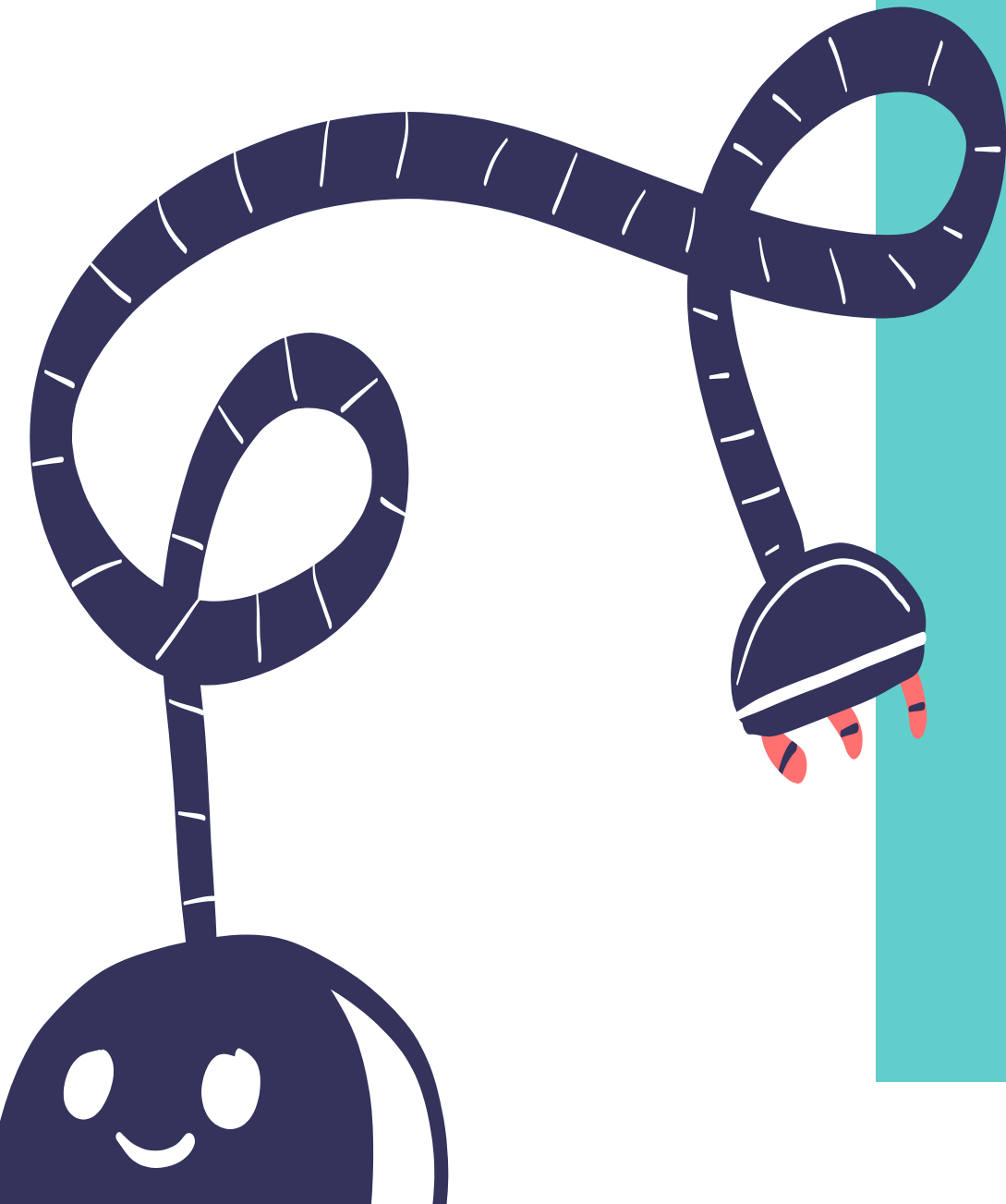
Another way of giving you Black Friday newsletters a personal touch is to use dynamic banners to display different offers to different customers. Dynamic banners offer marketers the ability to change up offers and rewards depending on the status of the customer; for example, including perks for customers you particularly want to activate (such as VIPS, at-risk or lapsing customers).

03

Segmentation

Segmenting your broadcast messages is a great first step to tailoring experiences for specific customer groups.

While creating multiple versions of the same Black Friday campaigns for different audiences might seem like a whole lot of effort, there are ways of making the process far more efficient, such as using advanced segmentation to identify the right audiences for each version of your message. Around the festive season, this might mean selecting your top-performing categories and using segmentation to send tailored versions of emails to people most likely to be interested in that category.



Automated campaigns

Automation campaigns are an important part of any Black Friday marketing strategy, but are often forgotten, missing valuable opportunities to generate more revenue. You likely have some automation campaigns in place, and now is the time to give them a festive tweak.

Give your campaigns a health check

Check that your campaigns are Black Friday-ready for an influx of potential new browsers and customers.

01 Welcome campaigns

Giving new subscribers and customers a warm welcome to your brand is vital if they're going to continue shopping with you after the festive cheer has faded away. You should consider:

- Shortening the gaps between welcome email sends, if your welcome series has more than one email. You have limited time to capitalize on a new subscriber's holiday shopping habits, so ensure they're fully introduced to your brand and key selling points early on.
- Include key festive information – such as shipping deadlines and seasonal offers – in your welcome series for new subscribers who may have missed them the first time around.

02 Cart and browse abandonment campaigns

With more traffic hitting your site, your cart and browse abandonment campaigns will likely trigger at a much higher rate than usual, offering a fantastic opportunity to generate more revenue. Consider:

- Investing in both types of campaigns, if you don't already have them in place.
- Shortening the delay period before sending these campaigns. Instead of the usual trigger of a few hours, send your abandonment and browse emails within the hour to capitalize on your shoppers' attention.
- Using dynamic offers when sending to customer segments that you particularly want to activate, such as lapsed shoppers who have come back to browse.
- Including "similar items" product recommendations to tempt them to make a purchase, even if they've decided against the item they abandoned.

03 Post-purchase campaigns

So you've convinced a shopper to make a Black Friday purchase – great job! A speedy follow-up capitalizing on a shopper's post-purchase good vibes may mean the difference between them coming back and doing more holiday shopping with you, or slipping away into the festive fog. We recommend that you:

- Send a triggered email one to two hours after a purchase has been made. Based on the category their recent purchase belonged to, cross-sell relevant items or things that "lookalike shoppers" (those who have purchased the same or similar items) have also bought in conjunction with the product.
- Consider offering new shoppers a perk like free shipping to incentivize a quick follow-up purchase.

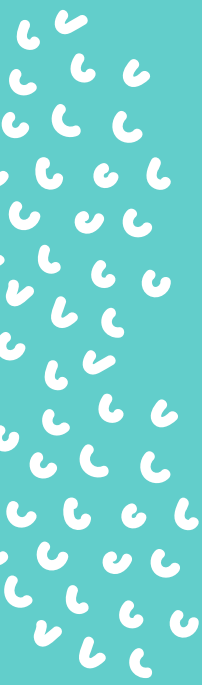
AUTOMATION OPPORTUNITIES



What your customer journey *really* looks like

It's easy to presume that all campaigns are in perfect working order and to plan accordingly. With the increased automation opportunities that the festive season brings, it's important to circle back on your campaigns to make sure they're tiptop and sasdready to go.

Whether you're checking in on old campaigns, or setting up new ones for the Black Friday period, the best way to make sure they're in good shape is to experience them as a customer and sign up for them yourself. In order to gauge the potential of new automated messaging, both before and during peak times, you need to sign up to your own campaigns. This is why preparation is key. By experiencing the customer journey yourself, you learn in greater depth whether your current strategy is delivering the greatest impact.



Things to apply to all campaigns

There are a few staples to consider in all your automated campaigns. Most of them are already in place within the day-to-day execution of your usual campaigns, but since this is a high-octane period, it's essential to make sure they are all running smoothly.

Include product recommendations to encourage purchases and cross-sell related items

You want shoppers to come back to the site after purchasing, so keep them engaged and excited by highlighting additional products.

Double-check everything is in working order

Sign up to your emails and send yourself test emails before running campaigns. Every detail counts during this period as customers will move on quickly to another brand or offer if the customer journey is disrupted.

Festive overhaul

Nothing kills the holiday spirit quite like a summer-themed welcome campaign. Consider updating your copy and images to reflect the season so that all email engagement feels relevant.



DELIVERABILITY

Avoiding deliverability dilemmas

As noted, preparation for the Black Friday weekend makes all the difference. It's no different with deliverability. Creating your campaigns is only half of the Black Friday battle; the other half is making sure they're actually received as your competitors flood your customers' inboxes across the Cyber Weekend. So, how do you ensure the campaigns you've worked so hard on actually meet the gaze of your customers?

Start building up your sending volume slowly and early

- Starting to build your volume before the big event prepares your customers and mailbox providers alike.
- Mailbox providers will be more receptive to your messages because they've seen you send more volume over the last few weeks. Your Cyber Weekend volume won't be a surprise, so they will be more likely to let the volume in. Let's face it, who really likes a surprise?

Build up your frequency over time

- If you plan on sending more frequently than usual add in the extra sends over time to ensure your customers are comfortable with the increase. Your customers will be receiving more emails from nearly every brand they subscribe to, so it's a balance between getting their attention and scaring them off.
- Where you have previously changed frequency, for instance during a sale period, use that data to guide you on what did or didn't work.





Tease your shoppers; re-engage with both active and inactive customers to warm them up

- We all love a discount, but we especially love a discount on something we already want. Personalization is a sure-fire way of fostering engagement; and teasing your customers to get them engaged in your products early will improve the open and click-through rates of your campaigns once Black Friday arrives. This initial engagement with your campaigns can make or break where the rest of the messages end up; so ensure customers are going to want the deals you're sending.



Choose and test timings with your warm-up emails

- Research has shown that opens and clicks on Black Friday spike at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., so if in doubt plan your sends to arrive before these times. However, the popularity of these time slots also means lots of businesses will send at the same time and mailbox providers and their filters will have a capacity limit on what they can handle, making it harder to deliver at these times. Use your sends in the run up to Black Friday to **test send times** to see if your customers have another preferred time to buy, like lunch or during afternoon tea.

Allow customers who aren't interested to snooze

- Not everyone embraces the shopping experience of Black Friday and some customers may unsubscribe or mark the campaigns as spam. Rather than lose these subscribers, consider using a snooze button to allow customers to opt out of Black Friday, ensuring you keep them subscribed in the long run.

Ramp-up example: Increasing contact numbers

In this example:

BAU = standard segment used for broadcasts made up of engaged contacts

Less engaged = segment of less engaged contacts which are occasionally sent special offers and sale campaigns

Least engaged = contacts rarely sent to except at sale periods

	BF week -2			BF week -1			BF week		
Segment	Send 1	Send 2	Send 3	Send 1	Send 2	Send 3	Send 1	Send 2	Send 3
BAU	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Less engaged		X		X	X		X	X	X
Least engaged			X		X	X	X	X	X

Ramp-up example: Increasing frequency of sends

Example:

3x a week sender increasing to 5x a week for the week of Black Friday

	BF week -2		BF week -1		BF week	
Send day 1		X		X		X
Send day 2				X		X
Send day 3		X		X		X
Send day 4						X
Send day 5		X		X		X

Going cross-channel

The channels that you choose to communicate with your customers depends a lot on your business and where your shoppers interact with you most. Cross-channel is a great way to stay engaged with your customers away from the inbox; but it has to be done in a way that doesn't feel intrusive or leave the recipient feeling hounded.

Being able to prioritize channels is great for your marketing budget because you can work with cheaper channels like email and diversify to more costly channels like social media to target specific customers like VIPs.



Create social custom audiences

Creating a social custom audience helps to target specific groups and prove ROI, and this strategy can be narrowed down to very specific criteria. We advise focusing on customers who (a) haven't engaged with emails, and (b) are VIPs and other key segments you really want to encourage to spend with you.

Get nostalgic with direct mail

Direct mail is one of the most costly cross-channel practices, so it is best reserved for the most loyal and VIP customers. This added touch can be a great way to target high-value customers, making them feel valued and appreciated.

Customer service

Again, this strategy may be best reserved for VIP customers. For example, a phone call to customers who have not shopped since last Black Friday may be the added personal touch that encourages them to spend with you again during the Cyber Weekend.

SMS

Text messaging, or SMS, is a challenging channel to perfect as it can feel intrusive if cadence doesn't match the customers' usual experience with you. But if used in line with the rest of the customer touchpoints, and erring on the side of less is more, this is a channel that is great for transactional messages (which customers want to see) and highlighting sales on items they've been browsing.

Lookalike customers

You can create campaigns to acquire customers who reflect your best customers. In practice, this looks like "shoppers who bought this also bought..." which encourages additional purchases and creates more in-depth insights of shopping habits.

Conclusion

Cyber Weekend is a great opportunity to further brand knowledge, encourage loyalty, and increase revenue. The key to success during this period is preparation – from your scheduled email blasts to deliverability to personalization and more.

Although preparation may take longer than traditional batch-and-blast methods, aiming to uphold your attention to customer experience will maintain your value with customers as well as work to your advantage across the three days.

The key tactics to remember are:



Broadcast campaigns

- Reward your most loyal customers
- Target previous Black Friday shoppers
- Use dynamic content
- Resend key messages to non-openers



Deliverability

- Start building up your sending volume slowly and early
- Tease your shoppers; re-engage with both active and inactive customers to warm them up
- Pick your timing well; avoid sending at peaks, and test timings with your warm-up emails



Automation emails

- Give your campaigns a health check
- Use product recommendations
- Highlight popular categories and use relevant seasonal content
- Perfect your post-purchase campaigns



Cross-channel opportunities

- Create custom social audiences
- Use direct mail and customer service calls for VIPs who haven't engaged in a while
- Try SMS
- Use lookalike customers to acquire customers who look like your best shoppers

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It's time to say goodbye to your ESP

Get ready for a new era of personalised,
AI-powered customer marketing with **Ometria**



HEAL'S



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