

Prepping for Christmas: 9 Things You Should Do Right Now to Ensure a Successful Holiday Season

[Francesca Nicasio](#) • September 12, 2017 •



It's September once again, and if you're a retailer, you know this can only mean one thing: it's time to ramp up your holiday planning.

The Christmas season is the biggest shopping event of the year, and for many merchants, holiday sales can account for up to 30 percent of their annual revenue.

No doubt retailers will bring their A-game during the holidays, so you need to work extra hard to compete.

Achieving holiday retail success is completely doable. But you do need to plan ahead and take steps to prepare for the upcoming seasonal rush. To help you do that, we've put together several key tasks you should complete before the Christmas season. Check them out below and see if you need to add anything to your to-do list.

Sales & Marketing

1. PLAN YOUR HOLIDAY DISPLAYS

Make sure your displays (i.e., window and in-store displays, shop layouts) can grab attention and entice people to buy. Start planning what you'll showcase in your store and craft the stories that you'll tell through your displays.

From a logistical standpoint, see to it that you have the materials to set up stunning displays.

These include:

Lights – Invest in good lighting that makes your displays pop. If possible, use white lights to generate interest.

Props – Do away with generic props and get yourself something holiday-specific. As Retail Doctor Bob Phibbs notes, if your store looks the same on December 15th as it did on September 15th, you'll probably settle for crumbs when you could've had the entire season.

Signage – "Sale" signs are pretty standard, and you should definitely have them in your signage mix. But be sure to throw in unique messages and signs to get the attention of holiday shoppers.

Here's a great example: In last year's expert webinar, Bob showed us how a retailer cleverly created a sign to encourage impulse buys during the holiday season. The sign read "The gift you forgot!" and it successfully drove sales for the merchant.

See if you can do something similar this season.



2. ORDER HOLIDAY-SPECIFIC MERCHANDISE

Will you be selling gift items or holiday-themed merchandise? What about gift bundles? If so, you should place those orders sooner rather than later. Complete your holiday inventory planning, and order merchandise by the end of the month at the latest to ensure that you're able to stock up on in-demand holiday items.

The same goes for gift cards. Order holiday-centric gift cards and plan out where and how you're going to promote them. Gift cards are especially popular during the Christmas season, and they're great for your bottom line.

3. MAKE YOUR WEBSITE HOLIDAY-CENTRIC

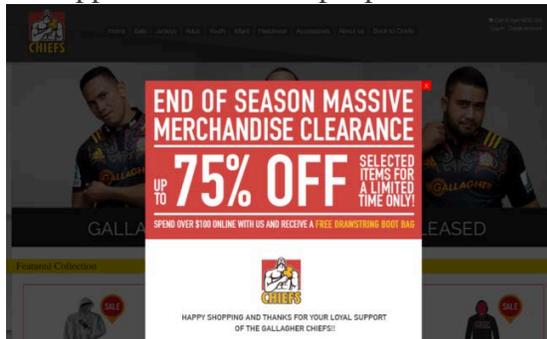
See to it that your website is holiday-centric. For instance, you may want to plan the Christmas-themed banners that you'll display. And during the holidays, many retailers create special gift sections or categories such as "For Her" or "Gifts under \$50". Consider doing the same thing on your website.

Check out this example from Macy's. The retailer created gift-centric categories for its holiday guide to make it easy for customers to shop for presents.



If you're running seasonal promotions, ensure that your website visitors can access and redeem your offers easily.

Have a look at what the [Gallagher Chiefs](#) did last year. The professional rugby team (and great Vend customer) ran a promotion in which select items are 75% off. Plus, customers who spent over \$100 got a drawstring boot bag for free. These promotions were announced using a lightbox that appeared soon after people land on their site, so visitors were aware of their promotions.



Operations

4. HIRE SEASONAL STAFF FOR THE RUSH

If you're hiring additional staff this season, now is the time to start looking. Get the word out by posting on job boards, re-hiring previous employees, and asking for referrals.

Aside from that, see if you can implement more creative hiring tactics. Jennifer Martin of Zest Business Consulting, advises retailers to go beyond traditional hiring methods and be more proactive with finding the right staff.

"If you have a few key employees and you want to find others just like them, then learn about them just like you would with defining your ideal clients," she says. "Find out what their hobbies are, where they spend their down time, and what they do for fun. If you find that a number of your ideal workers take yoga, then guess where you'll find more people like them? Yup, at yoga classes."

5. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH STORE SUPPLIES

The holidays will be hectic and running out of supplies when the Christmas season is in full swing could spell disaster. Prepare those supplies now, so you won't have to worry about them later on. Here are a few items you may want to stock up on:

- Cash desk supplies, including bags, pens, till tape, staplers, hold tags, etc.
- Payment terminal paper
- Receipt paper
- Gift cards
- Gift boxes
- Hangers
- Cleaning supplies

6. TIGHTEN UP SECURITY

The holidays bring more traffic, but this could also mean more opportunities for theft. Get your loss prevention ducks in a row well before the Christmas season picks up. Here are a few friendly reminders:

Set the right user permissions – Most modern point-of-sale systems allow you to set user permissions to enable or restrict staff members from doing certain tasks. Check with your POS solution provider and see how you can update permissions in your store.

Review your user permissions to make sure you know exactly what your staff can see and do with your POS. A big mistake many retailers make is applying the same permissions for all users.

You should also be vigilant when it comes to who can process voided sales, as this is a very easy way to steal stock.

Invest in loss prevention solutions – There are plenty of tools and technologies in the market that can help beef up store security. Depending on your store and budget, you could consider investing in the following:

- Signage
- Mirrors
- Cameras
- RFID
- Foot traffic technologies

Conduct partial inventory counts – Consider cycle counting instead of doing full inventory counts. Cycle counting means physically counting just certain portions of inventory on a daily or weekly basis, so you won't have to do a full inventory count anymore.

In doing so, you're able to identify stock discrepancies and theft sooner rather than later. Not mention, cycle counting helps you stay on top of inventory without disrupting regular store hours.

7. LAY OUT YOUR HOLIDAY POLICIES

You may want to implement special policies for the holidays. For example, many retailers are more lenient with returns and exchanges when it comes to products that were purchased during the holidays so they can accommodate purchases that were made early in the season.

You should also be clear about how you'll process returns. Will you issue cash refunds or store credit? Will you allow shoppers to return items without a receipt? These are just some of the matters you'll need to address.

There no one-size-fits-all policy for returns and exchanges, so craft your rules based on what makes the most sense for your business. Whatever you decide, though, communicate it clearly with your staff, and ensure your policies are consistent across all your stores.

Fulfillment

8. MAP OUT A FULFILLMENT PLAN

Order fulfillment is a big deal all year round, but during the holiday season, it truly is a make or break factor. The smallest difference in shipping cost or delivery dates can be a deciding factor for consumers, so you want to optimize fulfillment as much as you can.

The first step to implementing a more efficient fulfillment process is to gain real-time visibility across your sales channels. You and your staff should always know what products you have in stock and where they are, so you can provide accurate availability and fulfillment information to your customers.

Additionally, knowing where products are stocked can help you map out fulfillment routes and improve decision making when it comes where to stock up and when.

Technology

9. ENSURE YOUR SOLUTIONS CAN HANDLE THE RUSH

Having a solid holiday plan on paper is great, but you risk having things fall apart if you lack the technology to support your plans. Before implementing your holiday programs, make certain that

your systems can handle the rush. **It's important that you take this step before the seasonal crowds descend — the holidays are the *worst* time to deal with tech issues, and the last thing you want is to wrangle your technology when you have holiday shoppers at your doorstep.**

Do the following before November of this year:

Upgrade your software – Are you planning to implement new software for the holidays or the new year? Perhaps you've outgrown your stock control system. Or maybe you want to run special promotions but need a new platform to do it. Whatever the case, figure out the systems you need, get them all set up before the holidays. This means everything should be installed correctly, and all your data should be migrated to the new platform.

Install additional hardware – Try to anticipate the amount of extra traffic that you'll get this season, and arrange any other equipment you'll need to accommodate your guests. One common example? Your point of sale system. Retailers often require additional registers for the holiday season, so if you're one of them, take some time to set everything up. For instance, if you need extra iPads or computers to ring up sales, get them into your store ASAP.

See to it that your website can handle the extra traffic – Speaking of added traffic, let's not forget about your online visitors. If you're running online marketing campaigns and plan to drive traffic to your ecommerce store, then make sure your site can handle it.

Test the speed of your site and have a chat with your hosting provider to ensure that things run smoothly when people visit your online store in the coming months.

Conclusion

The holiday shopping season may not be in full swing yet, but it's high time you start preparing. The steps you take today will determine whether or not you'll thrive during the Christmas season. So, give yourself the gift of preparedness and take action ASAP.



ABOUT [FRANCESCA NICASIO](#)

Francesca Nicasio is Vend's Retail Expert and Content Strategist. She writes about trends, tips, and other cool things that enable retailers to increase sales, serve customers better, and be more awesome overall. She's also the author of [Retail Survival of the Fittest](#), a free eBook to help retailers future-proof their stores.