

# Christmas is just around the corner: is your business ready?

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Gaye Steel outlines creative ways to help optimise your business during the competitive Christmas period.

**r.** marketing & multimedia



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Retailers find the Christmas season the busiest time of year. You can do a lot of business, but you also face fierce competition. Given the Australian Christmas 2011 retail sales figures were the worst in 27 years it is critical to be creative and find different ways to market your company and merchandise during the festive season. If you can, you're well on your way to increasing sales during this crucial time of year.

Here are some key retail marketing strategies to consider:

**Create multiple promotion days.** In the US, many businesses look forward to Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) as a kickoff to holiday gift purchases. To keep the sales momentum going, do not rely on just one day to generate your holiday sales, create several promotional days during the holiday season. You can use the month of December to create promotional buying days and keep that momentum going.

**To boost customer traffic** strive for a distinctive atmosphere, dress up your premises with festive decorations and lights that sparkle and sizzle. Add a wide variety of entertainment and community activities such community group buying event nights, Santa store visits, and bauble decorating/painting.

**Bundle products to drive average weight of purchase.**

As the holidays approach, people look for bargains and gift ideas. Try bundling complementary products for the holiday season and offer discounts. For example, bringing in a photographer to take holiday pictures and offer a discount on a picture frame to go with the purchase of any photograph package.

**Free gifts.** In the US, retail sales peak between Thanksgiving and Christmas. People are prepared to spend their money, so it is sometimes just a matter of offering them an incentive to come and spend their money at your store. Offering free gifts to customers who spend a set amount at your business or offering different levels of gifts for customers who purchase more products or the chance to be entered into a draw to win a larger prize. Higher value customers can also be rewarded with a 'Fast Pass' checkout to avoid crowds and long queues.

**Special services.** If you can add value to your store's offering beyond promotional savings, then you may be able to grab more business. Highlight the attractiveness of convenience to shoppers and offer special services such as free gift wrapping or a concierge service which directs people to not only the correct area of the store but also suggests possible gift ideas. Help make your customer's holiday shopping experience easier, and they may spend more money with your business.

**Partner with other businesses.** You can increase your stores visibility if you partner with complementary vendors and develop a network customers can use to get what they need. For example, if you own a fashion clothing store, team up with a shoe store or cosmetic/personal care store. You then send those customers looking for shoes or cosmetics to them and they send any customers looking for the latest fashion trends to you. This is also beneficial in that the partnering stores can share in advertising costs.

The lines continue to blur between purely online and bricks & mortar retailing. Many traditional retailers offer their core shoppers the choice and convenience of an online channel. Retailers are promoting compelling online deals, and even more are offering free shipping offers this year.

During the Christmas season online sales have increased significantly from year to year. Unfortunately, so have the number of competitors. Have you developed a plan to stand out from the crowd? If not, now is the perfect time to design and implement your online strategy. Here are a few key online marketing strategies to consider for the lead up to Christmas:



*Note that it is critical to identify and understand your target market prior to developing and implementing the following strategies.*

**Create dedicated Christmas themed landing pages.**

Christmas shoppers are often looking for the perfect gift idea. A Christmas themed landing page can provide direction as well as introduce your customers to products they normally would not be interested in. You should consider developing several different landing pages based on the source of the originating link.

**Review the accuracy of your site.** Although this area seems obvious, site accuracy is often overlooked. Ensure each item has an accurate description and clear picture and review your inventory to ensure all new items are presented. Remember to test all navigation and links to ensure each is working - as the Christmas season gains momentum, customers will not have patience for broken links, missing pictures, or poor navigation.

**Optimise your search engine.** Your placement in the results of popular search engines will be critical to attracting new customers. Each page in your site should have relevant and descriptive meta tags. Remember to keep your content updated as frequently as possible to ensure your site is attractive to web crawlers. If you aren't ranking well you may want to consider paid search. This option allows you to list your website at the top of search results when specific keywords are searched.

**Focus on conversion rates.** All your hard work to increase site traffic will be worthless if visitors aren't buying your products. Generating a sense of urgency can help drive conversions - consider running specials with an expiry date

or providing a countdown of days left to order to ensure Christmas delivery. Offering unique give-aways can also help you stand out from the competition. Many sales are lost during check out, so test the usability of this process frequently. Consider showing additional costs, such as shipping, as early in the process as possible so the customer isn't surprised at the end. To obtain the highest return on investment possible you must focus on your conversion rates throughout the season and adjust accordingly.

**A final word....**

Christmas is around 100 days away. With prior planning, you will gain momentum and set your business up for success during the run up to the festive season. Develop in-store and online retail marketing strategies to exploit the opportunities the Christmas holiday period provides. ■

**This article was contributed by Gaye Steel from phdcreative, a multi award-winning brand and design agency specialising in retail. If you would like help in preparing your Christmas marketing strategies please contact phdcreative on 02 9431 1400 or visit [www.phdcreative.com.au](http://www.phdcreative.com.au)**

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