

2020 EDITION —

# ShipStation Holiday Prep Guide

ShipStation®

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# Introduction

Online sellers spend significant resources finding and attracting customers. But these efforts are wasted if they don't buy. A lot of companies overlook a key piece of the consumer's journey—delivery. However, delivering packages should not be taken lightly. Shipping is the final touchpoint a customer has with your brand. As such according to our research guide [Last Touch, Lasting Impact](#), **80% of customers say the shipping experience is what stands out most in their online shopping experience because it is the final touchpoint they have with the brand.**

For the second year in a row, ShipStation has collected survey results from 1400+ ecommerce consumers. Our research guide Last Touch, Lasting Impact goes over the impact shipping has on customer conversion, satisfaction, and retention.

## Shipping Speed and Cost Are Still Important

While customers are willing to wait longer for their orders, they do still shop around for the best deals and quickest shipping options.

- 37% of consumers agree that shipping speed influences their purchasing decisions more than they did a year ago.
- 40% are more concerned about shipping costs than they were a year ago.

## How Much Are Customers Willing to Pay for Shipping?

- 40% of consumers are more likely to pay for express shipping now than they were pre-COVID. This is up from 31% last year.
- 60% of respondents, however, also expect merchants to offer a slower, free shipping option.

Your holiday strategies directly impact consumer satisfaction and their decision to purchase again in the future. At this point, it's stating the obvious that 2020 has been an odd year for most businesses around the world. COVID-19 presented many challenges that required adaptation in one way or another by both business owners and consumers, and the coming holiday season may be one of the most important and complicated we have ever seen. With the help of our ShipStation partners we've compiled helpful tips for meeting your customer expectations this holiday season.

CHAPTER 01 —

# Prepare Your Brand for the Holidays

PART 01 —

## Preparing for Peak Periods in Ecommerce

At a time when web traffic is at a high, there is a great opportunity for merchants to make the most of the increased customer activity and engagement and ultimately drive sales. Businesses have the opportunity to attract new customers, as well as target repeat and valued customers during this period — offering rewards where best-suited.

Putting strategic plans in place to optimise web and mobile ecommerce sites is therefore hugely beneficial to merchants during peak periods, ensuring infrastructure is fully prepared to support the surge in customers and purchases. Below are the key areas merchants can specifically focus on to make sure they are getting the best out of their ecommerce store during peak periods.

### Site Speed and Performance

First things first, make sure your website is prepared for a surge of visitors, as the last thing you want to happen during peak period is your site facing technical issues and getting in the way of customers making purchases. This makes it necessary that any potential technical limitations be addressed and dealt with prior to the busy season. Better safe than sorry, right? Having a team of technical developers on hand 24/7 gives you the reassurance that someone is always ready at the rescue should there be any problems.

A larger number of site visitors could also have a knock-on effect on site speed. [Google](#) reports that **53% of mobile users abandon sites that take over 3 seconds to load.**

### Enhancing User Experience

Users' general on-site experience expectations are continually on the rise, and this is only heightened during the busy sales period. The sense of urgency is prominent, with customers itching to complete their purchases in record timing. Improving the user experience (UX) of your ecommerce store should therefore be a crucial part of your marketing strategy, with a particular focus on reducing the number of clicks/steps required in order for customers to get to the point of purchase. This is just as essential for both mobile and desktop versions of your site and by simplifying the user experience, you give your users a smoother journey to basket helping increase opportunities to convert.

## Call To Action Buttons

Another area to pay attention to is the various CTA's you'll have located on your site's homepage and product pages. Optimising all CTA buttons is essential to ensure they are clearly visible and stand out to the customer. This is especially important on mobile where there is generally less space. CTA buttons help guide the customer through the various stages of the purchasing journey and increase the chance of a conversion.

## Free Shipping

While it may not be something merchants are keen on offering all year round, providing a free shipping option during peak periods can better your chances of scoring success. It's an extra incentive that can help tempt customers who are already in a "buying mode" to push over the line and convert. Transparency about delivery times during this period is also crucial as customers require accuracy.

## Live Chat Service

No online shopping website is too small for an online chat helpline service. Providing a live chat function can reduce the risk of customers resorting to competitors by being on hand to solve any queries straight away. If a customer comes across a question or issue when browsing or during checkout, live chat can help solve the problem and increase the chance of a purchase. This can of course be further improved by upgrading this to a 24/7 service meaning that super late nighters or early risers are still able to get the help they need.

There's something a little more comforting about speaking to a live person during the purchase process and having someone walk you through any issues you might be encountering. This helps customers feel valued and appreciated and could make the difference between a sale and a bad experience.

## Product Recommendations

Offering product recommendations can help jump customers straight to products they may be interested in, cutting out the time-consuming searching. Customers experience a smoother and more streamlined shopping experience which can help to encourage purchases.



*This section was contributed by 5874. 5874 Commerce is a global commerce agency that delivers solutions that drive scalability, growth, and success.*

## PART 02 —

# Delivering a Strong Brand Presence

Priorities have shifted and customer behaviours have changed. Understanding who your customers are (today), aligning with their priorities, and accommodating their needs is key to delivering a great experience.

## Strong First Impression

Customers have more choice than ever and know if a brand doesn't suit their needs they can easily go elsewhere. When you attract new users this holiday season it's important to engage and convince them to stay and look around.

New visitors will make an assumption of your brand, products, and services purely based on the look of your website. It only takes 0.05 seconds for a visitor to form an opinion and decide whether they'll stay or leave.

## Delight your Customer

Positive experiences are what customers gravitate towards every time they shop; they want to feel at ease whilst browsing a site with a brand they relate to. Research shows not only will a great experience drive sales and loyalty, but that customer will go on to share their experience with friends. These same customers will shout even louder if they are not happy. As demand rises during the holiday season the potential impact on your business from offering a bad experience intensified.

**"72% of customers will share a positive experience with 6 or more people. On the other hand, if a customer is not happy, 13% of them will share their experience with 15 or even more."**

- Space 48

## Optimise Site Speed

Customer expectations are particularly high during the sales seasons. Users will become frustrated with laggy page loads and won't wait around for fear of missing out. You need to remove any technical issues that negatively impact site speed. November and December are the two busiest months of the year for many retailers and your site must be able to handle increased traffic.

## Engage and Inspire

It is important to guide customers at every step of the journey so you can influence purchase decisions and increase sales. There will be many customers struggling to find that perfect gift.

You can do this through design and getting the hierarchy of content right and intentionally placing helpful content blocks and visual signposts. Remove any distractions and be clever with the images and colour combinations you choose so the pages don't feel cluttered and overwhelming. CTAs should be prominent and clear, don't give too many choices that will lead to analysis paralysis.

## Know your Customer Segments

Make it easy for your customers to shop with you and deliver a unique experience to each customer using all the available data. Use a personalisation engine to help tailor the content and products you serve based on the recipients browsing and purchase history.

## Drive Product Discovery

There's always going to be a sense of urgency with Black Friday and similar shopping events. Customers want the best deal possible. If your customers don't find that on your website quickly, they'll leave.

- Review your navigation to make sure it's easy to use and the category structure makes sense.
- Customers often don't know the exact terms for their search queries. They'll type in whatever word or phrase makes sense to them. Spend time optimising your site search so your synonyms and recommendations align with holiday keywords and seasonal product trends. Cover all bases and optimise the results page with popular categories.
- On the product page show alternative product recommendations for an item if it is out of stock.

In summary the holiday season is going to be a different one this year. People will discover and buy more online than ever before. Make sure you are always collecting customer data and measuring success.



*This section was contributed by Space 48. Space 48 is a UK-leading CX and ecommerce platform agency that delivers stunning, technologically superior websites for global retailers.*

## PART 03 —

# How to Optimise Your Ecommerce Store for the Holidays

To make the most out of increased traffic levels and soaring demand, you need a holiday strategy complete with all the trimmings. **It's never been more important to optimise your ecommerce store for a seamless on-site experience.**

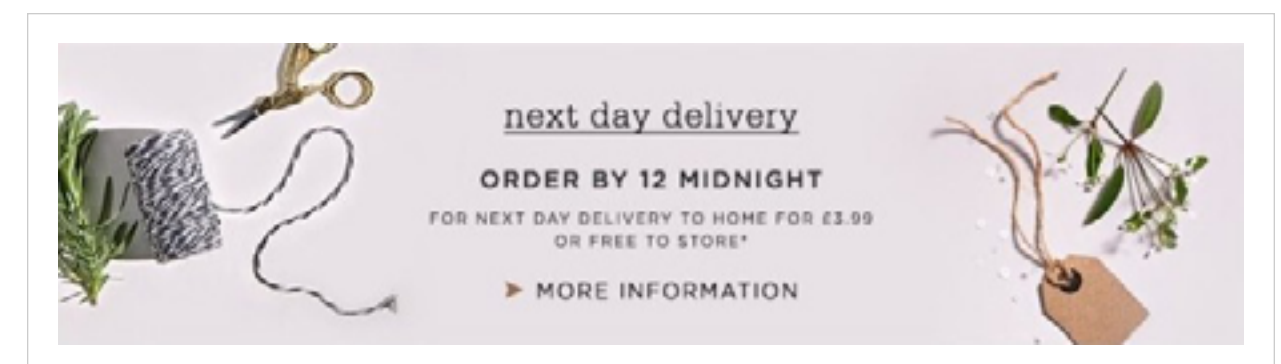
Not sure where to start? Kick-off your holiday prep with these simple strategies:

## Create Dedicated Holiday Landing Pages

Give customers that festive feeling when they land on your ecommerce site with **a dedicated holiday landing page that matches users' search intent.**

Try out these tactics to create an optimised landing page with plenty of aesthetic appeal:

- Use **high-quality holiday-themed imagery** to spark those festive feels and put customers in the mood to buy.
- With [research](#) suggesting that sales and discounts will be the biggest driving factor of 2020 holiday season purchases, make sure to **prominently display promotions.**
- **Highlight delivery information** so shoppers know exactly what to expect post-purchase.
- Guide shoppers through the gift-buying process with **clear calls to action.**



## Provide Personalised Product Recommendations

When you consider that **product recommendations can [increase conversion rate by 288%](#)** after just a single interaction, you can't afford to leave them out in the cold this holiday season.

**Leverage user-specific data from returning customers** — such as past purchases and viewed products — to provide tailored recommendations they won't be able to resist.

**Don't just limit product recommendations to your product pages.** Try welcoming shoppers to your homepage with a personalised message, including holiday offers tailored specifically to them.

## Build Trust with Social Proof Messaging

Consider how you can enhance the shopping experience for customers who are new to the ecommerce landscape and perhaps apprehensive about buying online.

One way of connecting with new customers and gaining their trust is by implementing social proof messaging, in the form of real-time trend alerts, bestseller badges, and purchase counters.

## Up your Customer Service Game

Make sure your contact details are easy to find on all of your pages. If customers can [find the answer to a question themselves](#), they're less likely to require your help and more likely to view your store in a trustworthy light.

As traffic increases, so will customer queries. With this in mind, consider expanding your customer service team for the holiday season, especially for the BFCM weekend. More agents means more questions answered, quicker response times, and satisfied seasonal shoppers!

Try to automate answers to common questions wherever possible. Not only does this save time and monotony, it ensures customers are receiving quick, on-brand responses to queries, helping to establish confidence in your brand.

Talking of automation, **implementing a live chat tool** on your ecommerce site will not only reduce response times and increase customer satisfaction, it could also [decrease cart abandonment, boost average order value, and increase conversion rate](#).

## Make it Easy to Check Out

Holiday shoppers are looking for a checkout process that's as speedy and straightforward as possible. A long and convoluted checkout experience will have your brand crossed off a customer's nice list in an instant.

You can simplify your checkout process and boost conversions by:

- Implementing a one-page checkout (or using a progress bar to guide users through multiple pages).
- Offering a convenient guest checkout option.
- Only asking for the most essential details, and never asking customers to provide the same information twice!
- Using autofill software to quickly retrieve stored information from returning customers.
- Getting rid of any distractions that could interrupt the checkout journey.
- Don't forget to continuously A/B test your checkout process to measure which tweaks have the biggest impact on your conversion goal.

## Wrapping up

With a bumper holiday period on the cards this year, it's time to start prepping your online store to deliver this sale season. Use these strategies to optimise your ecommerce site for conversions and deliver a seamless user experience.

And remember, customers aren't just for Christmas, they're for life. Continue to nurture relationships long after the festive season is over, whilst continuously tweaking and testing your site to deliver an optimised online experience all year round.



swanky

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*This content was contributed by **Swanky**. Swanky is a leading Shopify Plus agency specialising in web design, ecommerce migrations, marketing, and growth strategies.*

# How to Deliver a Great Unboxing Experience

We know that you have put time and effort into perfecting your products to deliver the best possible experience for your customers. No doubt, creating a fantastic product that matches the requirements of your clients is the first thing that needs to be accomplished. But, when your customers order a product online, it has to be delivered. The first thing they encounter is not your product, but the packaging it arrives in. First impressions are critical for creating a positive tone that affects the customer's experience with your product. When you start on a good note, your customers are more likely to enjoy the product that comes within the packaging. A bland, generic choice of packaging delivers an unsatisfactory unboxing experience which can ruin the hard work you have put into making your quality product.

## Giving The Right Impression

Would you risk having your efforts go to waste just because you couldn't take the time to choose better packaging for your products? No matter what product you send to customers, your efforts deserve to have an equally excellent presentation.

The solution to your troubles is to opt for a personalised, customisable packaging option that not only matches the requirements of your customers but also helps you deliver a more pleasant unboxing experience that can set a positive tone from the very start. An additional added value is a straight focus on sustainability and eco-friendliness.

## Creating the Perfect Experience

At [DS Smith ePack](#), we help businesses to design and develop [customised and bespoke packaging](#) that highlights the beauty of your products and create an engaging customer experience which will ensure a positive first impression.

Almost all our packaging range is made of corrugated cardboard and paper, giving you the opportunity to send your goods with eco-friendly credentials. Delivering a sustainable company message that all customers want to see. [DS Smith ePack | UK Packaging Supplier | Next Day Delivery | DS Smith ePack](#)

We believe that any product is considered incomplete without the right packaging to go along with it. When you invest in customised packaging options for your products, you are telling the customer that you value the whole order experience and love, not just your product but the entire service you provide as a company.



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*This content was contributed by **DS Smith ePack**. DS Smith ePack is the one-stop-shop for your ecommerce packaging with a strong focus on sustainability and turning ecommerce boxes into brand ambassadors. Use **SHIPSTATION10** for 10% off active orders.*



CHAPTER 02 —

# How to Optimise Your Product Pages for the Holidays

PART 01 —

## How to Prepare Your Product Pages for a Successful Holiday Season

It may not be the first strategy brands and retailers think of when preparing for peak seasons. But when it comes to improving revenue potential, optimising product content is one of the most important steps you can take.

After all, it's not just what you list that leads to sales. More often than not, how products are described is what ultimately compels people to buy. Product titles, descriptions, images, keywords, and categories can all make a big difference in end-of-year holiday sales and revenue.

Roughly [one-third of digital shoppers](#) use product pages as a research tool when making buying decisions, and they have high expectations for what those pages should include. The more robust your product details are, the better positioned you'll be to capture attention, rise to the top of search results and ultimately drive more purchases.

Online sellers have been known to [increase sales as much as 100%](#) during popular shopping holidays after optimising product content.

But while virtually [all brand marketers](#) agree quality product content is important to digital sales growth, many still overlook some of the most essential elements. By leveraging several tricks of the trade, you can help ensure you're getting as much as possible from your product pages and listings this season.

### When to Optimise Your Product Content

The sooner you begin to focus on optimising your product pages, the better. In fact, getting into the habit of regularly optimising content throughout the year will help ensure your product pages are peak-season ready, without having to do a heavy lift all at once.

Any Q4-specific keywords and promotional content should be ready to go by mid- to late October, and then updated as needed well into late December. This will help ensure you're ready to reach both early planners and procrastinators throughout the season.

## How to Optimise Your Product Pages

When crafting your product content, start by thinking like a consumer. What are holiday shoppers looking for? How will they search and explore? Then optimise your product pages by focusing on:

### — Keywords

Consider the search terms consumers are likely to use during the holidays — and not necessarily how you refer to a product internally. Providing detailed, accurate keywords that closely match consumers’ queries will help attract purchase-ready holiday shoppers to your product pages.

### — Titles

The words included in your product name, or title, is what holiday shoppers will see first. Make sure each one is accurate and offers your most important keywords.

### — Descriptions

When writing your product description, don’t simply copy and paste generic text. This is the place to highlight information that’s likely to resonate with holiday shoppers, such as different ways a product can be used or gifted.

### — Titles

Your product photos are the first elements to catch shoppers’ eyes as they search and scroll, and the last thing they’ll likely look at before clicking “Add to Cart.” Make each one count.

### — Bullet Points

Spending time on bullet points can be a great way to provide additional information consumers need to make holiday purchasing decisions. Use simple, informational phrases to help make your products stand out from those of competitors.

## Product Page Optimisation Best Practices

Product content optimisation can seem like an overwhelming process at the outset, but it doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing proposition. By taking it one step at a time, you can make incremental changes that together help get your products in front of the right holiday shoppers, at just the right times.

Based on the experiences of thousands of brands and retailers selling on hundreds of global channels during peak seasons, the e-commerce experts at ChannelAdvisor have identified several best practices that can help make this process a profitable one:

- When crafting product titles, start by researching the character counts for each channel you sell on. Then streamline the process with a template to fit those limits, such as {{Brand}} {{Gender}} {{Product Description}}.

- When updating product descriptions for marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay, place the most compelling information at the beginning of the description. Then use clear, concise language so it’s easy to skim.
- Aim for a minimum of four images per product, and use different angles and views to showcase various features and selling points.
- Provide highly specific details in your bullet points, such as compatibility with other items, to help drive holiday sales.

If you’re optimising product content for multiple retail destinations and ad networks, another option is to use a [product feed management tool](#). This tool can be used to transform raw product data into optimised listings that are automatically adapted to meet the requirements of individual merchandising, marketing, and advertising platforms. It also helps ensure you don’t miss out on high-revenue holiday sales due to manual errors.

Above all, remember that your content can be the difference between a product that stands out and one that gets overlooked. There are no sales associates to help guide the path to purchase online. But with the right components in place, your product pages can be one of your most powerful resources for increasing holiday sales and revenue.



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*This content was contributed by our solution partner **ChannelAdvisor**. ChannelAdvisor is a leading ecommerce cloud platform whose mission is to connect and optimise the world’s commerce.*

# UX Enhancements for Every Product Page

A product page has a simple goal for your business; make sales on a specific product. But for your users, a supercharged product page does two things:

1. Enables the user to understand what a product is.
2. Enables the user to qualify if the product is right for them.

We found when retailers meet these goals, users are more likely to complete a sale and be happy with the product they receive. So, price, size, specification, user reviews, and shipping time are all important attributes to display. But in what order? How? Where? And how do they help a user to 'qualify' a product?

Here are 5 key features our specialist ecommerce UX team use to optimise product pages before Black Friday.

## Product Titles and Descriptions

Titles and descriptions should be a concise but complete explanation of your product. For your title, include keywords and branded terms to boost the visibility of your product in search engines.

Descriptions must be thorough and original descriptions that reflect your brand and the product. But don't display an essay. Break up this additional text by using bullet points and interactive accordions and icons to make information easy to identify and quick to access.

## Product Images

Images and videos are essential to building trust and an understanding of a product, particularly as your customer can't hold it in real life.

Utilise multiple well-lit images and videos to display your product from every angle and in every colour or size variation available. Include more angles to show off the features and quirks of your items from its primary use, to the finishing touches.

Your image display window should allow the user to zoom in and pan around to get a closer look at specific attributes and read small text. Use a feature that lets them do this using a mouse or

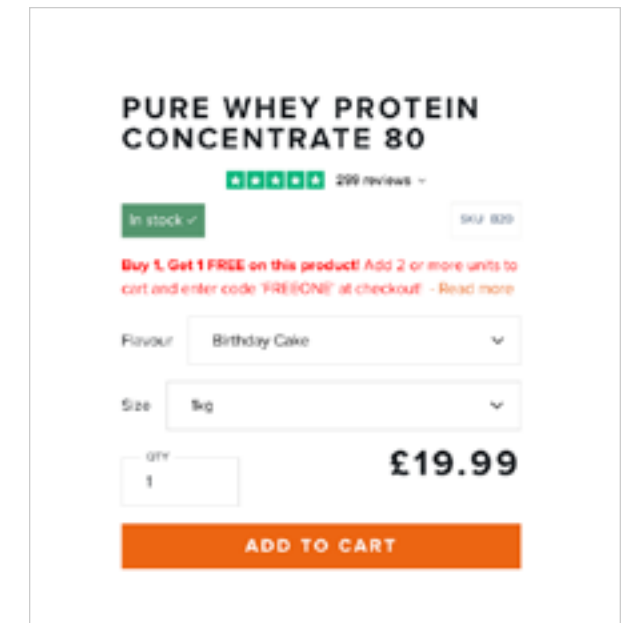
keyboard to ensure all users can access the image set.

A product photo that uses the background to display additional information, while a pan-over zoom allows you to read the small text.

## Displaying Variants

If your product comes in a variety of colours, sizes, flavours, or editions, displaying all of these variations from one product page will enable the user to better qualify the version that is right for them.

Map the imagery, specifications, and stock availability of each variation to display when the option is selected, treating the selected variation as the new primary product on the page.



## Customer Reviews

Social proof is the act of using influence to encourage others to undertake a similar activity. Testimonials, good or bad, show engagement and a worthwhileness that will make potential customers listen up.

Display star ratings and featured quotes higher up the page to instantly inform your user of the popularity of the product. If you feature products that rely on personal preference or situation to work, e.g. skin products, display additional information about the reviewer to help customers understand if the review relates to them.

Leave no detail ambiguous and you'll have conversion-ready customers through Black Friday and beyond.



*This content was contributed by SuperCharged Commerce. SuperCharged is an innovative digital agency that accelerates the growth of ambitious retailers.*

# Optimising the Checkout Experience

Holiday shoppers are on a mission to find the perfect gifts for everyone on their list. And they're not afraid to search outside their go-to haunts to find what they're looking for. [Insights from Google data](#) tell us that 61% of shoppers are open to buying from new retailers during the holiday season. This presents a huge opportunity for you to bring in and—more importantly—convert some new customers.

During this busy time of year, shoppers are looking for anything that makes their holiday to-do list easier. One way you can ease that burden is to make their buyer journey seamless. In this chapter, we're focusing on how you can optimise the last, but arguably most important, stage of that journey: their checkout experience. In fact, when asked by [Digital Commerce](#) what would lead them to buy even more online in the 2020 holiday season, 24% of respondents said: a more efficient checkout. Make checking out as frictionless as possible, so they can get in, get out, and get on with their merry-making.

While checkout page optimisation might not be as eye-catching as creating a slick homepage, it can make a huge difference in your holiday sales. Here are some tips for keeping those carts from being abandoned and making sure your holiday shoppers go the distance.

## 1. Make it Easy

It's a universal truth, but one that often gets overlooked: the more you make people do, the more likely you are to lose them. Every field you make someone fill in and every decision they have to make is another point of friction. Your checkout page should be a minimalist's dream. Make sure all the fields you require customers to fill out are absolutely essential. If you don't need it, cut it.

## 2. Do the Work for Them

Along the same lines as above, don't make them fill out their name and address for the millionth time. Address validation solutions can both speed up the checkout process and reduce input errors. If you're selling internationally, another point of data validation is to make sure your platform can recognize IP addresses and offer the correct currency at checkout.

## 3. Show They Can Trust You

While people are increasingly comfortable shopping online, the fact remains that there are a number of disreputable sites out there, not to mention data hacks on reputable ones. This puts conscientious consumers on alert when shopping with new sites. Your checkout page is a clear place for them to drop off if they are at all concerned about how secure your business is. Display your authenticity clearly with an SSL certificate or mention your brand's secure shopping experience. Clear returns policies, terms and conditions, and customer support contact info can also help them feel more secure in their purchase.

## 4. Don't Distract

Your checkout page is not the place for unnecessary bells and whistles. You don't want anything that can sidetrack the shopper from their primary purpose: completing the transaction. You may even want to lose the header and footer from your main site. Include only the information necessary for purchase and to demonstrate trust.

## 5. Give them Options

Different customers will be loyal to different payment providers. The more payment gateways you can provide, the more likely you will be able to meet their needs. This includes not only major credit cards, but also Paypal, Amazon Pay, and Apple Pay. You might also offer solutions that allow customers to pay for purchases in installments. In addition to payment choices, give them plenty of options for fulfillment. Offering different shipping speeds and costs and even buy-online-pick-up-in-store options can make sure you capture both the frugal early bird and the last-minute shopper.

By making these updates to your checkout page, you can ease the last stage of the buyer's journey for weary holiday shoppers. The easier you make it for them to complete their purchases, the more you'll see an increase in your sales. And that's sure to put some good cheer in any merchant's holiday season.



*This content was contributed by BigCommerce. BigCommerce is the easiest way to build, run, and grow a better online business.*

## CHAPTER 03 —

# COVID's Impact on the Holidays

## PART 01 —

# Your Q4 Guide to Amazon Shipping (Amazon Shipping UK)

With the holidays just around the corner it's important to sort out your shipping plan. From October to December you may experience an un uplift of sales leading to an increase in shipments to be collected. To ensure your shipments arrive in time, use our Q4 guide to help you get all your parcels to your customers in time for the holiday season.

### **More Volume Than Expected?**

#### **Prioritise**

If your number of shipments to be collected is higher than your forecasted volume, Amazon will not be able to collect them. To protect you from going over your forecasted volume, Amazon may restrict your ability to print labels and recommend that you use an alternative shipping provider for the excess volume.

#### **Weekend Collection**

Weekend collections will help you process orders received during the weekend to alleviate any pressure on Monday. During peak periods, it will be mandatory for shippers sending more than 300 packages per day to enable their weekend collections. If you do not ship your forecasted volume over the weekend, Amazon will not be able to arrange additional vehicles on Mondays to collect it.

#### **Morning Collections**

Similar to weekend collections, morning collections will help you spread your pickups throughout the day during your busiest periods. It will be mandatory for large shippers to enable their morning collections, specifically on Mondays. Amazon Shipping will coordinate morning pickups between 09:00-13:00 to collect a percentage of the day's packages.

#### **Ahead of Packing?**

Please remember that orders received after 2pm are due for collection the following day. Do not give these orders to drivers ahead of the dispatch date as this will affect the forecasted volume and delay the sortation and delivery to your customers.

**Key points:**

- Finalise your Monday forecast by November 5.
- Manage your demand during peak by reviewing your forecast daily and staying within the capacity secured.
- Labels and packages must follow Amazon requirements.

**Key dates:**

- **20<sup>th</sup> October:** Review and validate your 13 weeks volume forecast
- **27<sup>th</sup> November (Black Friday):** Business as usual



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*This content was contributed by Amazon Shipping UK. Amazon Shipping is a fast and reliable shipping service that picks up parcels 7 days a week across the UK.*

**PART 02 —**

# A Holiday Shopping Season Like No Other

Questions about the impact of COVID-19 still linger. As some regions see numbers stabilize, others are witnessing surges with looming thoughts about a second wave as the world awaits approved vaccinations. It's making demand difficult for retailers to predict.

Amid this uncertainty, retailers still need to prepare. In order to position their business for success this holiday season, the new year and beyond, retailers need to optimise their ecommerce and cross-channel customer experience. Read on to explore the strategies and tactics that will ensure your business' success this holiday season and beyond.

## Optimise Ecommerce and Cross-Channel Experience

As online orders continue to surge across most categories, many businesses are prioritizing their ecommerce channel, whether they're a traditional retailer that has already embraced online ordering or they're just starting to sell direct-to-consumer. Retailers must ensure their online channel is efficient and engaging for customers in order to be competitive.

## Optimise for Mobile

With more holiday shoppers opting to shop from their phone over venturing out to the store, providing a mobile-friendly experience throughout the customer journey is key to hitting your holiday goals. Having a mobile ecommerce site that uses responsive design is no longer enough—merchants need to improve site speed, navigation, and checkout experience (digital wallet integrations help with this) to drive mobile conversions. In other words, mobile-first commerce design is crucial.

Make mobile checkout easy by:

- Providing clear, visible access to the shopping cart from each page on your site and allow customers to easily add or remove items.
- Offering the ability to checkout as a guest and place that option prominently above the options to sign in or create an account.
- Showcasing the return policy to provide shoppers with better peace of mind.
- Making the checkout process as quick as possible—break it up into multiple pages with a progress indicator at the top, minimize the total number of form fields and present the right keyboard for each field (i.e. the numeric pad for credit card numbers or zip codes).

### **Pick Up/Buy Online Pick Up In Store**

The “buy online, pick up in store” (BOPIS) option has gained traction in recent years, largely thanks to customers who don’t want to wait or pay for shipping. But social distancing in response to COVID-19 has led to a spike in customers opting for BOPIS. This holiday season, with inevitable last-minute shopping, it’s likely to be the perfect storm for BOPIS. Ensuring you have options for your customers to pick up their items at your store location will help reduce lost sales.

Prioritize the Customer Experience. Most ecommerce platforms make toggling to in-store pickups as easy as clicking a check box, but a successful BOPIS program demands more consideration than flipping a switch. A poorly planned BOPIS program is worse than none at all if it results in a poor customer experience, so take every step possible to make picking up orders as efficient as possible.

**“Make it convenient: shoppers don’t want to wait in line behind people making returns at a service desk or walk to the end of a store for their purchase - especially if they’re trying to practice social distancing.”**

Even if you lack the resources or floorspace for pick up lockers or a designated BOPIS counter, you can create a special line for pick ups or prioritize BOPIS customers at your sales counter. If at all possible, appeal to customers to be mindful of social distancing practices by offering curbside pick up with a dedicated BOPIS number so employees can respond quickly.

Also consider “buy online, return in store” (BORIS). BORIS also allows you to resell bulky or heavy items that are difficult to ship back to a warehouse. Most of the same order and inventory management processes drive both BOPIS and BORIS solutions.

### **Train Employees on BOPIS Processes**

Customers are most likely to use BOPIS again if the turnaround is less than two hours. In order to meet that expectation, employees must move quickly to find the item, check it in at the pick up counter and alert the customer that it’s ready.

Depending on your back-office systems, store managers may be taking on additional responsibilities to accommodate BOPIS sales. Set expectations for managers and allow for additional staff as needed. Store managers should encourage customers to make additional purchases through upsell merchandising and marketing strategies when they enter the store.

Beyond your store employees, businesses can expect to receive increased calls to customer service lines asking about the service and inquiring about order status. Train support representatives to be able to look up order information and explain the process.

### **Bridge the Online and In-Store Gap With Email and SMS**

In addition to in-store signage, marked parking spaces, and website banners, email marketing is a powerful tool to spread awareness. In order to improve the BOPIS experience, send a triggered email or SMS message when customers choose the BOPIS option at online checkout to include detailed instructions for how they should pick up their purchases. You may also reinforce expectations for the pickup timeline and remind them to bring identification to verify their order.

Finally, trigger an email or SMS message when a pickup is ready. This last touch allows for upsell opportunities before the customer arrives at the store.

This holiday season may be different than any other in many ways, but with the right preparations, your business will thrive.

## **ORACLE NETSUITE**

*This content was contributed by Netsuite. NetSuite is the #1 cloud ERP providing a unified business management suite encompassing ERP/Financials, CRM and ecommerce for more than 22,000 customers.*

# Conclusion

The 2020 Holiday season may come with unprecedented challenges, but it's important to remember that your customers are going through unprecedented times too. Capturing their attention, meeting their needs, and delivering packages is how you'll deliver this holiday season.

With the help of ShipStation and our partners, these holiday strategies will help you get the most out of this year's retail holiday season. For more information on how to have a successful holiday season, check out our Holiday Resource Hub on [shipstation.com](https://shipstation.com).

## About ShipStation

Every day, tens of thousands of ecommerce retailers rely on ShipStation to solve the day-to-day challenges of importing orders and processing shipments. The trusted leader in shipping software since its founding in 2011, ShipStation helps online sellers scale their businesses and deliver exceptional customer experiences, with an intuitive online solution that allows them to efficiently ship orders—wherever they sell and however they ship. The multi-channel and multi-carrier platform offers the most integrations of any e-commerce solution, with more than 300 partnerships with leading shopping carts, marketplaces, carriers and fulfillment services, including FedEx, USPS, UPS, Amazon, Shopify, and BigCommerce. ShipStation is headquartered in Austin, TX and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Stamps.com (Nasdaq: STMP). For more information, visit [shipstation.com](https://shipstation.com).



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