



## Marketing for real (and retail) holidays: Should you do it? How? Also, when?

Holidays have become the holy grail for many businesses, and Black Friday is the mother of them all.

In 2018, Adobe reported that Black Friday's online sales alone [totaled \\$6.22 billion](#). More than 165 million people shopped over the course of last year's Thanksgiving weekend and spent an average of \$413 each.

Black Friday—and its partner Cyber Monday—has become a [global phenomenon](#) that's inspired a three-week frenzy of retail activity. Largely thanks to Amazon, [even countries that don't celebrate Thanksgiving](#) have embraced it, including Mexico, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Spain and India.

Does your business want to get in on multi-billion-dollar holidays like this one? It's worth considering. Here are the 5Ws—who, why, what, where, when (and how) of marketing for holidays:

## Who?

B2C companies are the most natural fit for marketing around retail holidays. Consumers love a deal and have been trained to expect them at certain times of the year. And now we're seeing B2B companies also leveraging holiday promotions for the same reasons. Businesses are increasingly demanding the same experiences that consumers are offered. Holiday marketing is anybody's game.

## Why?

The main reason retailers engage in holiday marketing is to create a bump in sales volume. People are primed to purchase during holiday seasons and often pick up more than just the sale item they came in-store or logged on to buy.

But more than just a sales promotion, "holidays" like Black Friday have become part of the zeitgeist. Midnight doorbusters, cyber deals and limited supply promotions that inspire people to line up around the block are all part of the excitement. Companies have the power to create sales mania and consumers feel the thrill of getting away with retail murder. Like it or not, Black Friday has become a cultural touchstone of modern life.

To willfully ignore these events means your business is missing out on opportunities to help build brand awareness and affinity, not to mention risking losing ground to aggressive competition. If your company abstains from retail holidays, it can easily get left behind. Even if you don't see a huge increase in immediate sales, a great holiday marketing campaign can help drive greater awareness of the brand over time.

## How?

There are a few best practices when holiday marketing, including:

### **Identify your customer segments**

Build customized promotions for your target customers. A good example of this is back-to-school marketing that retailers do in stages with two distinct segments.

- Students are looking for deals on school supplies in August and September, so it makes sense to run sales promotions for those customers. They are extremely price sensitive and react very positively to sales and promotions.

- Educational institutions are looking for similar items in the spring when their budgets are released. They're less concerned about sales and more about acquiring things that are the right fit for their education objectives.

One promotion is about discounts and the other is about options and fit. Marketing is tailored to address the desires of each segment.

### **Increase usual marketing efforts—and try new ones**

There's nothing wrong with dipping your toes into holiday marketing simply by increasing your typical activities around the high seasons. Promote organic posts on social media, invest in paid advertising across channels, bump up email marketing and look into performance marketing with paid digital/display advertising.

Conversely, you might try more traditional advertising. There's been a surge in 'out of home' advertising on billboards and in print publications in an attempt to break through the digital clutter, particularly around the holiday season. Here at Zendesk, we've been experimenting with this ad strategy to drive a deeper awareness of who we are and who we serve.

### **Be unique, show empathy, surprise and delight**

Sometimes a great holiday marketing campaign doesn't involve a sales promotion. A clever marketing activation that empathizes with consumers can build brand loyalty and affinity. A good example is Chase Bank's pop-up lounge rolled out in malls in the thick of holiday shopping season. Cardholders have the exclusive benefit of escaping the madness with a place to sit, relax and enjoy a cup of coffee. It demonstrates empathy by acknowledging the conditions their customers are operating in and provides a delightful surprise they appreciate.

## **What?**

The nuts and bolts of a great holiday marketing campaign are as unique as the business that's offering it. But it pays to start with the financials to understand what's possible. Discounts are king, but it's important to work with your analytics team to run scenarios that will help decide what level of promotion the business can bear. There needs to be enough of an uptick in business to compensate for the promotions and that takes data, math, guesswork and a good gut instinct.

If the numbers simply aren't there to offer a doorbuster, be creative about how you can participate. Create an interesting narrative on social, through an existing email newsletter or on your website that ties in with the holiday.

While it's true that consumers are trained to look for deals, they're also often overwhelmed and fatigued by the mania and can appreciate a good joke or some well-placed empathy.

## When?

How far out you start planning a holiday marketing campaign will depend on the size and scope of the activities. Many larger companies begin four to five months (or more) in advance with brainstorming and doing the math on what promotions are possible. The earlier you start, the more likely you are to come up with ideas that are different from the competition and have the potential to break through the marketing noise of the season.

In large organizations, marketing and sales departments are the biggest drivers of these campaigns, but they will need to consult with other teams. Here at Zendesk, our [Black Friday](#) sales event involves the email, web, digital advertising, paid search, PR, social media, creative, content, analytics, and translation teams. And that's just within marketing – the effort is also supported by a wide range of cross-functional teams, from finance to operations to sales and beyond. We began by sharing the concept of the promotion and the messaging, then asked each area to present ways they could activate and promote the campaign across their particular marketing channel. Everyone likes to be creative in their own discipline, and we have found that this approach helps our marketing be more creative, versus forcing every marketing team to promote the campaign in a one-size-fits-all way.

## Bonus: Measurement

Like most marketing efforts, it's folly to measure success by immediate sales alone. It's sometimes hard to quantify the upside that a campaign like this contributes to brand awareness, affinity and loyalty. A good holiday campaign can tick all three boxes in the long-term. A good leading indicator of this is engagement, within and outside your marketable universe.

Even if you decide to sit on the sidelines during this year's Black Friday, pay attention to the promotions, activations and conversation brands bring out for this retail high holiday. With millions of consumers and businesses (and billions of dollars) ready to spend, the stakes couldn't be higher.