The 2019 Holiday Ecommerce Guide

Maximize Conversions & Boost End-of-Year Sales
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Online holiday spending keeps going up. In 2018, spending increased by 16.5% to $126 billion, and those numbers are expected to grow. When using the right strategies, that industry level growth should translate to increased sales at individual ecommerce stores too.

We at Bolt and Sellry have compiled the most effective strategies for customer conversion to help you unlock that growth. Read on for our five tips on how to win at increasing customer conversion this holiday season.
LEVER #1

Optimize for mobile

Mobile dominates ecommerce. Users demand a mobile-first experience. For the first time last year, more than half of customers’ browsing sessions during Thanksgiving weekend take place on mobile devices. Yet, only 31% of ecommerce sales that weekend were made on mobile. That means that sites that cater to mobile browsers have a massive advantage at catching customers where and how they actually shop.

Some simple fixes can make your website more mobile-friendly:

1. Direct attention to action. Reduce popups for mobile, and condense menus and extra information into collapsible content blocks where possible. Make calls-to-action clear, well-colored, bold, and easy to act on.

PupSocks uses a clear CTA to direct customers to their most popular products. Menus and popups are minimized to funnel customers toward a purchase.
The Watches.com product page clearly calls out current sales and directs customers to add a watch to their cart. Detailed specs and reviews are collapsed below in case customers want more information.

2. **Simplify the checkout page and purchasing process.** Too many options or redirects at checkout get in the way of customers making purchases and lead to lower conversion rates on your website as a whole. A fine-tuned checkout page can dramatically increase mobile engagement and conversion rates and help you attract and retain customers that have poor mobile experiences with your competitors.
A complex, six-step checkout process with its own "progress bar." Way too much!

3. **Simplify your mobile website design.** When it comes to mobile features, less is often more. Each additional feature on your mobile site can potentially bottleneck your customer conversion. Only present extra features that help encourage customer conversion, and even with these, be discerning.
The “Call Us” and “Support” features on Best Made Co.’s mobile site serve a clear purpose in helping to support customers in the purchasing process, and even so, they are tucked away in the website menu.

4. **Develop “thumb stopping” content.** Blockbuster product shots and snappy copy have the potential to deliver much greater value than overly architected, complex mobile experiences. You are competing with Instagram feeds and other highly engaging, visual content easily accessible on your customers’ devices. Developing content with engaging images and captions that promote your brand can make a big difference in maintaining your customers’ attention beyond the initial page load.
The content on TRUWOMEN's mobile website is vibrant and engaging while still placing focuses on their product.

How to Start:

1. Get rid of popups and sidebars on your mobile site.

2. Make calls-to-action clear, well-colored, bold, and easy to act on.

3. Simplifying the checkout page by streamlining options and reducing the number of page redirects.
4. Come up with a mobile site strategy that focuses on simplicity, act on it step by step, and track the impact that optimizing each step in the purchasing process has on your conversion rates and overall sales.

5. Develop content for your mobile site that is compelling enough to slow down your customers’ scrolling and encourage them to engage with your products.
While focusing on obtaining new customers should always be part of your ecommerce strategy, when it comes to your advertising spend, a thoughtful retargeting strategy to people who have expressed interest in your product in the past can have game-changing results.

There are a variety of different options for retargeting people who have expressed interest in your brand. These can include retargeting ad pixels, newsletter promotions, 1:1 IP retargeting, and more. Start with a small budget for focused retargeting efforts, and improve and iterate your strategies over time. When done thoughtfully, retargeting should result in higher conversion rates than generally targeted advertising campaigns, since customers are further along your brand awareness funnel.

Retargeting can and should look different throughout the funnel. While you can use social retargeting for customers who browsed your site, you should take more targeted action for customers who showed intent to buy.

Customers shopping on their phones or tablets often abandon at the point of purchase. (This is especially true if your purchasing flow is not optimized for mobile — see above.) Here's where abandoned cart notifications (emails, SMS and/or Facebook messages) are critical. We've seen abandoned cart emails double recovery rates for online stores.
How to start:

1. If not already done, install Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Google Analytics tracking code to enable retargeting. Set aside small budgets for retargeting campaigns on audiences created by tracking pixels. Use a test and learn approach to figure out what works, and increase budgets on effective channels once your KPIs have demonstrated scalability within the ad campaigns.

2. Create a few email campaigns for captured lead emails, and A/B test across approaches. Measure for engagement metrics (open and click-through rate), as well as metrics that ultimately show conversion (% customers recovered) to track success.

3. Set up abandoned cart emails to recover customers with high intent.

4. Experiment on strategies to both learn from and recover one-time customers. These customers may offer you valuable feedback, while also being your best candidates for loyal, repeat purchases.
LEVER #3

Increase site performance

Optimizing for mobile goes hand in hand with site performance at large. Poor site performance and slow load times have dramatic impacts on your conversion rates and organic traffic.

Research over the past few decades has shown that customers do not tolerate slow load times. A few seconds can have single or double-digit impacts on the percentage of potential customers willing to complete a purchase on your site.

Each additional second of load time results in 7% fewer sales. A test of Levi’s, Allbirds, and Macy’s PayPal checkout load times was conducted with 132.5 Mbps download speed (very fast) from Bolt’s San Francisco office. Average load time for Bolt was calculated across all Bolt Checkouts over a 30 day period. How does your load time compare?
Search engines have also developed their algorithms to deliver the best and quickest web results to their audience. Website speeds - both on desktops and mobile devices - strongly impact where your website ranks on search engines. You may have the best Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy, but unless it includes continuously monitoring and improving your website speeds, it is unlikely to be fully effective.

Since the holidays typically attract an influx of shoppers, it's even more critical that you ensure your online store can handle the uptick in traffic to your site. Even a second of downtime can be detrimental to your online store this holiday season, costing you thousands of dollars in lost sales or worse --- damaging customer trust.

There are many free resources to help you measure web speed and site performance. This page speed tool from Google will tell you how you stack up against competition and offers tips for making improvements. You can also follow our guide for measuring checkout load time using Chrome Developer Tools.
The best ecommerce sites invest heavily in performance across mobile and desktop. Amazon's cart page and checkout take 1.6 seconds to load. See our guide on measuring checkout load time to test your own.

How to Start:

1. Use the Bolt guide for measuring checkout load time using Chrome Developer Tools.

2. Use Google's page speed tool to determine how your site stacks up against competition.

3. Act on the tips offered to make page speed improvements.
LEVER #4

Remove gates

Websites that are effective in converting customers are designed as funnels. They guide customers from interest, to intent, to purchase. Too many ecommerce sites have hurdles that interrupt customers somewhere along that journey. Gates are blocks in the shopping experience where customers are forced to input information or take an action.

A classic example is a required customer login. Even some of the best brands make this mistake. Requiring customers to register for an account can result in a 30% dropoff in conversions. And since the average internet user has 27 online account logins, making customers remember their account and password is inconvenient even for your most loyal returning customers.

This checkout page requires customers to log in to or create an account before completing their purchase which can result in a 30% drop in conversions.
A guest checkout experience allows new customers a seamless way to purchase.

Account login gates can be especially detrimental to mobile conversion, where speed and convenience are necessities.
The answer here is to map out your customer’s shopping flow and remove any gates that interrupt their buying experience. Another way to think about this is based on the behavior model coined by BJ Fogg, founder of Stanford’s Behavior Design lab. BJ Fogg’s behavior model says that a behavior requires motivation, ability, and a prompt. While a customer’s level of intent (motivation) may be fixed, you control how easy it is (the ability they have) to complete a purchase. For that reason, your site should make it as easy as possible to buy your product this holiday season, with prompts along the way that spur customers to action.

How to start:

1. Remove pop-ups that require customer information before they can enter / explore your site.
2. Remove account registration before purchase if possible.
3. Make sure you provide a guest checkout experience.
4. Minimize the number of unnecessary inputs collected at checkout.
5. Remove CAPTCHAs or other security checks that don’t significantly deter fraudsters.
LEVER #5

Master the repeat purchase

Don't treat returning customers as strangers. Returning customers are your most valuable assets: if they continuously have a great experience with your brand and product, they are the contenders most likely to convert. Delivering them a great, personalized experience helps you to continue earning their business and can convert them into a network of evangelists.

How to start:

1. Show customers personalized recommendations or custom content based on previous browsing. One study found that personalized product recommendations lead to a 320% increase in conversions and a 113% increase in average number of items in cart.

2. Build a 1-click checkout experience for returning customers for lightning-fast repeat purchases

3. Offer subscription purchasing options. A 2018 McKinsey study found that subscriptions can provide meaningful opportunities to build a personal connection and loyalty with customers, while building steadier streams of revenue and greater customer lifetime value for your business.
To help you monitor your performance with returning customers, you may also choose to invest in tooling to track customer behavior. Segmenting new vs. returning customers can help you optimize the tunnel for both groups, and luckily, it is pretty easy to segment your customers and compare their engagement on your website using Google Analytics.

Conclusion

The holidays provide an amazing opportunity to increase sales. Planning ahead and taking steps to perfect your site conversion now can lead to larger returns in the months to come. There are many tools and tips that can help incentivise your customers to make more and larger purchases with your company. Following this guide will help you focus your resources and take advantage of some of the strategies that will make the biggest difference in customer conversion rates during the 2019 holiday season and beyond.

About Sellry
Sellry is a 12-year-old, full-service electronic commerce agency. We specialize in helping brands grow by building unique, engaging purchasing experiences, implementing high-ROI technologies, and minimizing operational costs.

Learn more about Sellry at http://sellry.com

About Bolt
Bolt is a better-than-Amazon checkout experience for the rest of the internet, with 100% fraud protection built in. Online businesses like Dita and HUF Worldwide use Bolt to boost checkout conversion and approve more good customers.