



The Experts' Guide to Black Friday/Cyber Monday

How to get the most ecommerce sales out of the holiday season

Contents

3

Intro

4

Maxing out Your International Holiday Strategy with a “Multi-” Approach

BY BIGCOMMERCE

9

How to Optimize Your Product Pages for the Holidays

BY SHOGUN

15

Shipping and Packaging

BY SHIPSTATION

22

Getting the Site Prepped & Secure

BY REWIND



Intro

**The Peak Season.
The Main Event.
The Big Show.**

There is no bigger time of the year for brands than the holiday shopping season. For many ecommerce retailers, specifically those with products purchased as gifts (like clothing, jewelry, and luxury items), the bulk of their yearly revenue comes from the months leading up to the new year.

Black Friday/Cyber Monday (aka BFCM) is a goldmine opportunity and there is a lot at stake. According to Adobe Digital Insights, the five-day period from Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday accounted for almost **\$1 in every \$5 spent** with online retailers, and the number is similar for brick-and-mortar stores.

But the trade-off for this opportunity is a very crowded playing field. BFCM is boisterous, competitive, stressful and just plain B-U-S-Y for retailers. So with this guide, we show you how to best prepare for the “Big Show”. Your time should be spent putting out products not putting out fires.

Maxing out your international strategy with a **"multi-"** approach

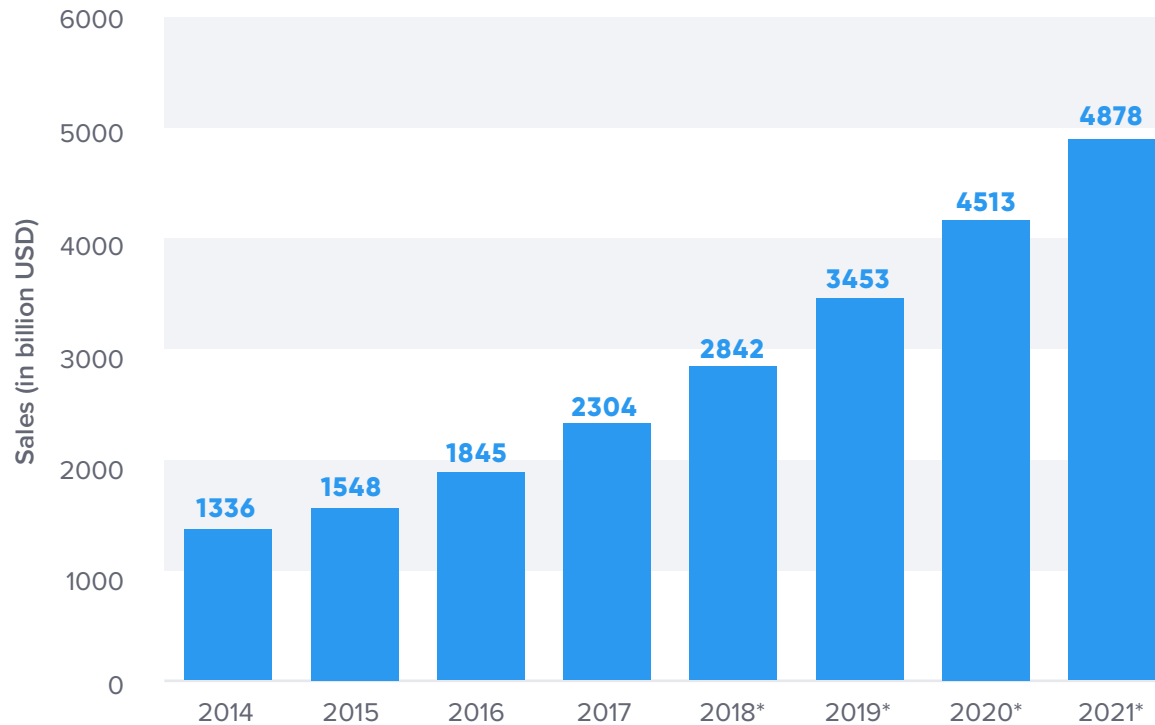
BY BIGCOMMERCE

In today's world of online sales, having a functional ecommerce site and easy buyer's journey are now just table stakes. You need more innovation and broader strategies to truly grow your brand. A lot of that strategy lies in international expansion.

Many medium and large retailers have traditionally been fearful of expanding into global marketplaces since cross-border technology didn't recognize the demands of larger catalogs and SKU counts. But recently, more robust technologies and strategies around international expansion

have emerged. Companies are now making the move into untapped markets such as Asia and other continents. This has resulted in record levels of continuously growing revenue for online retailers.

Retail Ecommerce Sales Worldwide from 2014–2021 (in billion USD)



Source:
eMarketer © Statista 2019

Additional Information:
Worldwide; eMarketer; 2014-2017

A **2019 study** concluded that global internet penetration exceeded 50% in 2016, and internet users are growing by an average of more than one million new users every day. The numbers are hard to ignore:

There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9%) versus January 2018.

Global ecommerce spend has grown by 14% year-on-year.

So what key elements do ecommerce brands need to have in place to succeed internationally?

1. Multi-Currency: Offering a cost that is familiar to the visitor

If you're thinking of expanding your global reach, your very first step should be finding a way to offer multi-currency support. With multi-currency, shoppers who land on your website can pay for items using the currency that is native to their region.

For example, a visitor from Peru browses items on your site. Your site recognizes the region that they're from and modifies the currency displayed — in this case, the Peruvian Nuevo Sol (PEN).

Another way to solve for international visitors is by setting up a different website for each region. With a multi-site approach, vendors can also tailor the on-site user experience and content to be flexible based on the country.

2. Multi-Language: An uncomplicated buyer's journey

This helps create a stronger foundation and edge against competitors, as you build your international market. The tricky part about multi-language is that it needs to be done well. Otherwise, it results in an even more clunky user experience, which can cause a spike in abandons and bounces.

Brands often skip over a translation approach (having the website automatically translate depending on where the visitor is from), and instead opt for standalone regional sites — a “multi-site approach”, as mentioned above. With a multi-site approach, a .com site will likely have completely different content compared to a .pe or even .uk site. While this will be a heavier lift for developers, it results in a better user experience for shoppers.

3. Multi-Channel: Reach your customers in as many ways as possible

**Remember that borders
can't contain a poor
customer experience.**

66%

**of customers switch
brands due to poor
customer service**

55%

**of customers are
willing to pay extra
for a guaranteed
positive experience**

source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/50-important-customer-exp_b_8295772

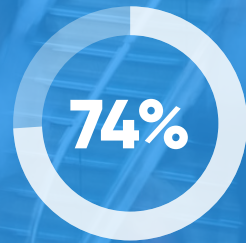
When you set up an ecommerce store, you usually go into one channel first: either a standalone website, brick-and-mortar or a marketplace like Amazon or eBay.

When you're purchasing something online, the experience is a bit different.

You may browse for an item on a standalone website, hop over to a marketplace to do some brand comparisons, and then head to the in-person store across the street. This is called a multi-touch journey — and shoppers may convert at any point.

According to a survey of American shoppers:

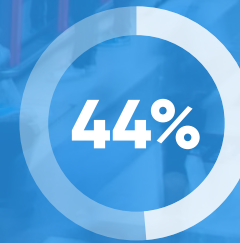
source:
2019 Omnichannel Retail Report



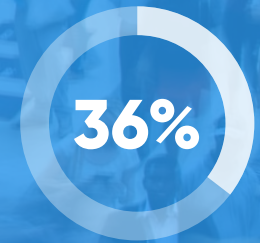
shop at large
retailers



shop at
ecommerce
marketplaces



shop at web
stores



shop at category-
specific online
retailers

To make sure you catch the sale regardless of the conversion point, you need to have a multi-channel approach. This is especially true if you have multiple buyer personas.

The **2019 Omnichannel Retail Report** by BigCommerce confirmed that buyers across several age groups are shopping from multiple sales channels.

If you're interested in international expansion, you'll seriously want to consider using a multi-channel strategy. After all, customers in different regions prefer different channels — what works in the US may not work for Asia or the UK.

You need to do research to discover what marketplaces you should turn to depending on the country.

Multi-channel efforts should be one of your top considerations during holiday preparations. When it comes to the holidays, buyers tend to shop last-minute, so many turn to Amazon's fast shipping to make sure the stockings are stuffed.

One in three people also travel during the holidays, and many prefer to travel light. With a brick-and-mortar or big-box retailer presence, your products can be available for a pit-stop before the festivities.

Final Tips...

The full localization process involves more than just multi-currency, multi-language, and multi-channel. Your shipping, customer service, and email marketing strategy all need to align with international customer expectations and guidelines.

Fortunately, once you expand internationally it is easy to scale the process for new countries, and you won't need to re-do many assets year-over-year. It's a tremendous amount of work getting your international strategy in line but once you do, the payoff is big as online retail slowly takes over the world.

BigCommerce for Multi



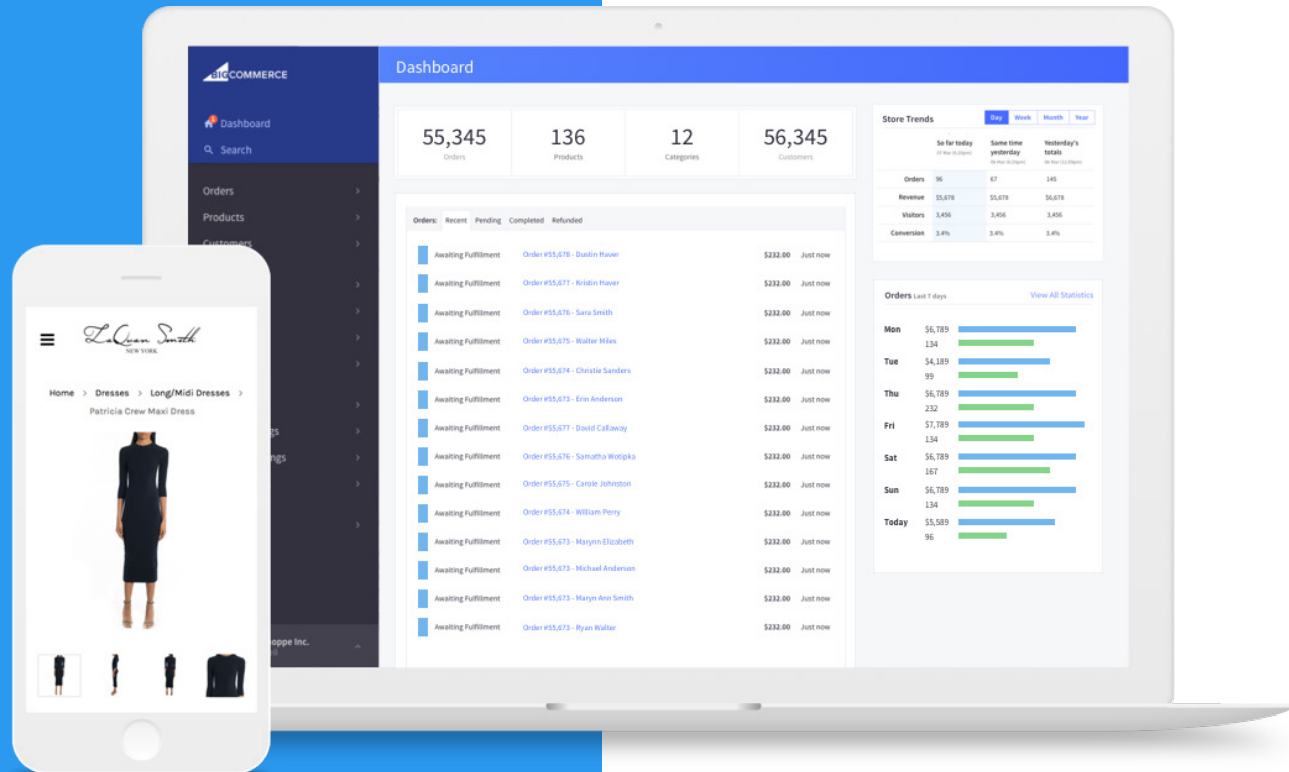
At BigCommerce, our partner and app ecosystem enables users to create a tailored “multi-” ecommerce experience.

Pre-built integrations with Amazon, eBay, Facebook, Instagram, and more, allows you to sell everywhere it matters from a single dashboard.

Our catalog API allows stores to sync inventory from 3rd-party channels to the back end, and then off to your ERP or tech stack as needed.

Plus, with our robust selection of point-of-sale partners, BigCommerce brands can merge online and offline sales with ease.

Interested in learning more about BigCommerce? Visit us **online**.





How to Optimize Your Product Pages for the Holidays

BY SHOGUN

The holidays are a noisy time of year for ecommerce brands. Everyone's running promotions. Email inboxes are overloaded with discounts and deals. And the chaos peaks during BFCM.

So how do you stand out and tell your brand's story when shoppers are inundated with messages during the holidays?

Look to the optimized product page. Simple, user-friendly product pages that follow a few best practices and share the right info and images can convert more sales and earn new customers during the busiest time of the year.

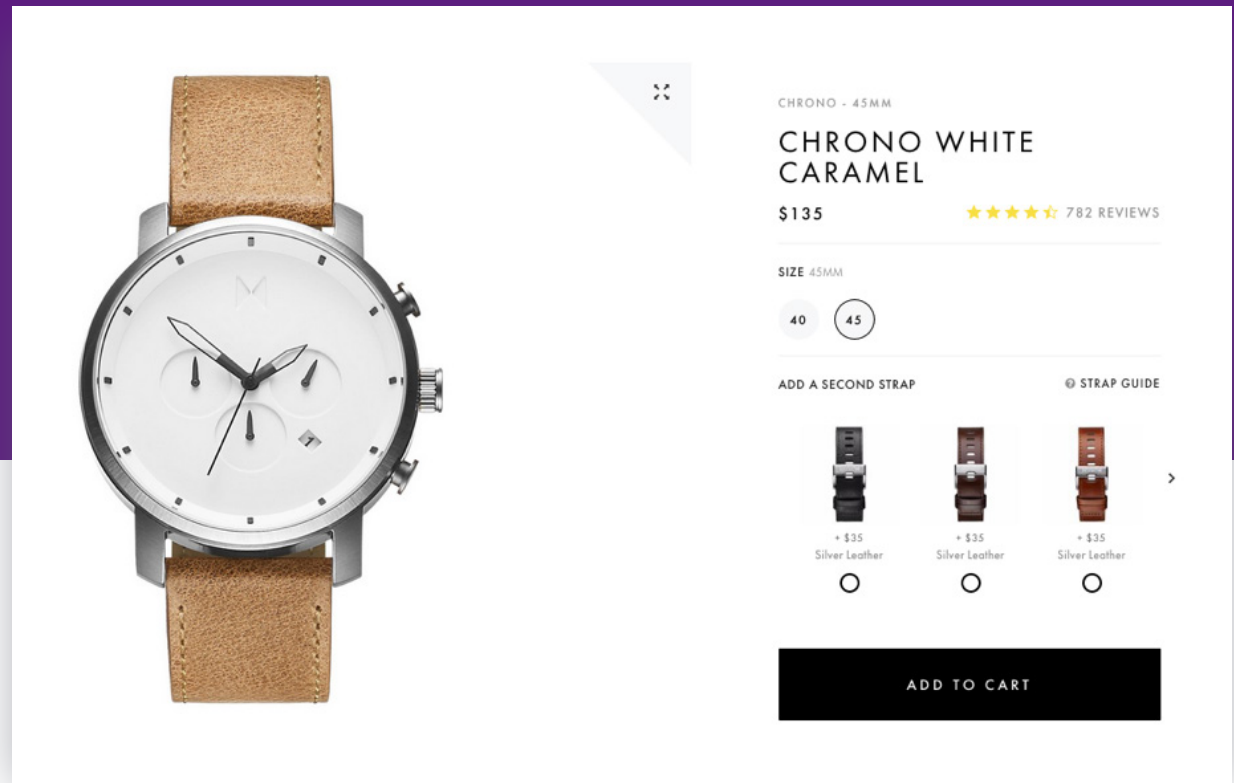
Three Ways to Optimize Ecommerce Pages

1. Create a Large, Clear Call-to-Action

Distraction is the enemy when it comes to online shopping.

With this in mind, be sure to minimize interference to the conversion path on the product page by making CTA buttons simple, large, and attention-grabbing. They should pop from the page and make the next step in the process extremely easy to find and follow.

This is especially important for busy holiday shoppers and mobile visitors who are viewing via smaller screens.



Make sure the CTA is easy to find and click (and conduct some user testing to ensure it's a friction-free experience.) You'll also want to consider elements like the placement of different assets on the page, whitespace, and button copy.

If you don't want to work from scratch, consider using a tool like **Shogun** to build out your product pages following these best practices.

That's exactly what **MVMT** watches did in the example above. With plenty of whitespace that allows design elements on the page to breathe, a large, obvious CTA button and minimal distraction, they've constructed a product page wherein a potential customer can go from browsing to purchase in less than a second.

2. Include Contextual, Compelling Images & Video

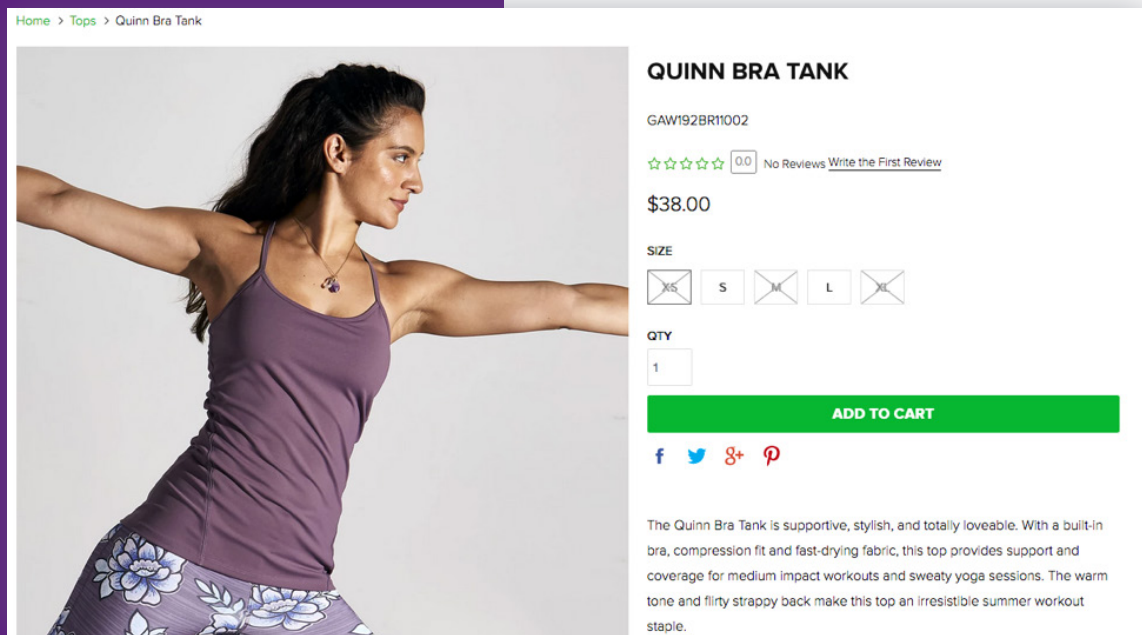
Images and videos are especially important in the online environment where buyers can't touch and feel the product.

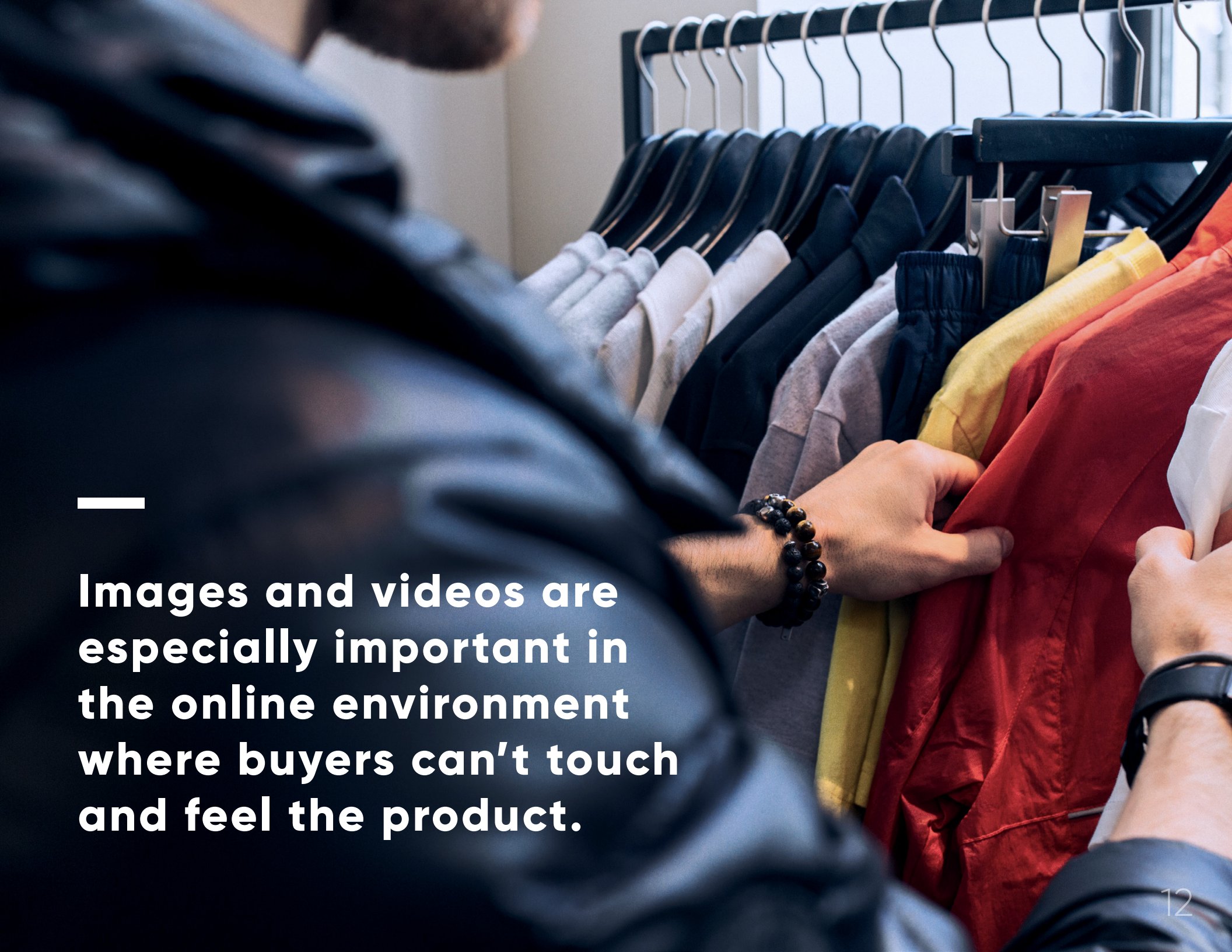
That's why it's a good idea (especially during the holidays) to go beyond mere mock-ups or white background shots

to show your products in action so the buyer can picture him/herself using it, too. Doing so adds context to the product, which is especially important for fashion, accessories, and beauty items.

GAIAM does a nice job of this with the product pages for its yoga clothing. By showing the items on a model doing the activity it's intended for, a buyer can see how the product will look in action as well as how it lays when worn.

Show your products in action so the user can picture themselves using it.



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hands and arms as they browse through a rack of clothing in a store. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a beaded bracelet. They are touching a red garment on the rack. The rack is filled with various items, including a yellow shirt and a dark blue shirt. The background is out of focus, showing more of the store's interior.

—

Images and videos are especially important in the online environment where buyers can't touch and feel the product.

3. Ensure Your Pages Are User-Friendly & Mobile-Optimized

Mobile shopping is on the rise.

According to **eMarketer**, by 2021 mobile purchases will account for 54% of all ecommerce sales. Translation: Mobile shoppers aren't just in research mode anymore. They're buying—and they're especially buying during the holidays.

If you've ever personally tried to buy something on a mobile device, you know there's nothing more frustrating than a poor mobile experience. It's wise to make sure your product pages are constructed with a **website building tool** whose templates are mobile-optimized. You should also conduct user testing to find points of friction, areas for improvement, or spots in which product pages aren't entirely mobile-friendly (and make changes from there.)

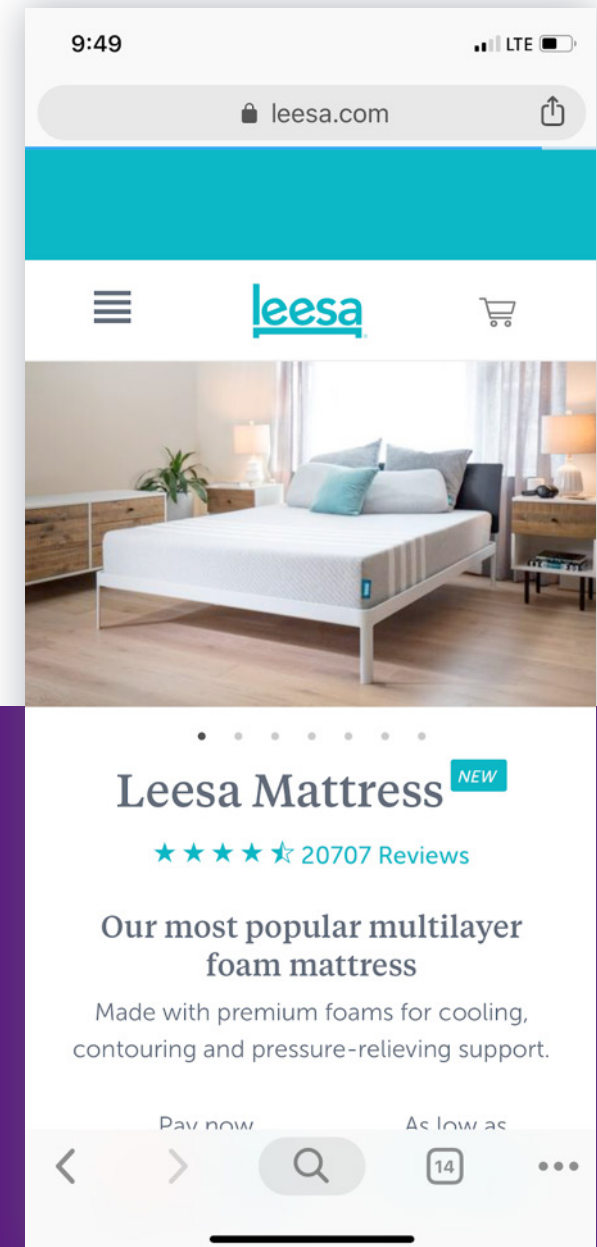
When Leesa Mattresses introduced 100% mobile-friendly, optimized landing pages, they saw:

35%

increase in conversion rates

25%

increase in average order value



Optimize Product Pages, Win More Holiday Sales

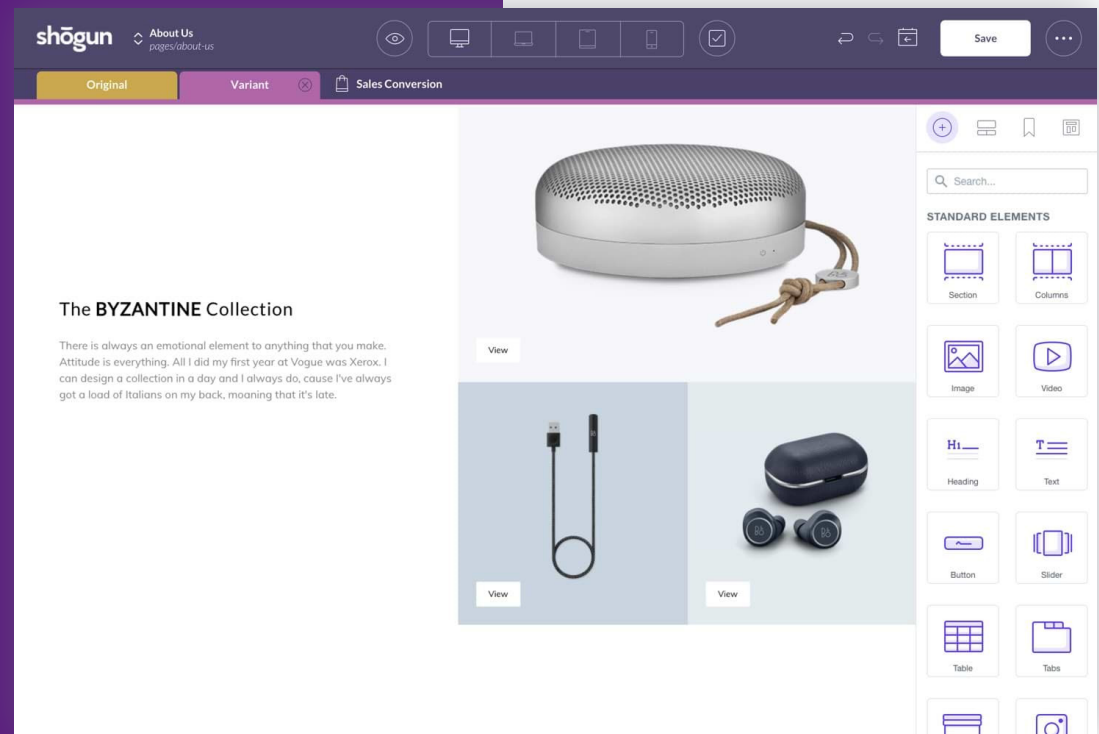
shōgun

With optimized product pages, you can make sure your product pages are in prime selling mode during the holiday rush. Take the tips here and put them to work for your business.

May your CTAs be large, your images contextual, and your site mobile-friendly. If you can do those three things, you'll make it easy for shoppers to spend their money with you.

About Shogun

Shogun lets you build, measure and optimize your entire eCommerce storefront.



Shipping & Packaging

BY SHIPSTATION

With all the madness during BFCM, shipping and packaging are sometimes treated as afterthoughts. But this part of the experience can be a huge factor in converting first-time customers into repeat customers. In fact, **ShipStation** performed a survey in conjunction with Kickstand and found that 80% of consumers said

the shipping portion is what stands out most in their online shopping experience. This is likely because it is the final touchpoint with a brand. As we move into the holiday season, making strong impressions during the shipping phase, can easily turn shoppers into long-term customers.

How to turn sustainability into a brandable opportunity and drive sales

Customers want more sustainable options. A decade ago, we referred to this trend as “going green.” Now there is a bit more urgency and familiarity when people talk about environmentally-friendly businesses. These days, eco-friendly packaging is commonplace and not as niche. In fact, a Nielsen study found that:

81% of consumers feel that companies should invest more into environmentally conscious materials. Packaging is a good first step towards this.

Nuud Care is one DTC brand that is thinking of sustainability at every step. Their small shipping boxes are completely recyclable and the tube that contains the product is made of sugarcane - a plant-based plastic that actually helps to reduce CO2 emissions during production.

Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.

There are tons of places to source boxes made from recycled cardboard, but these can be more costly. And, ultimately, recycling boxes adds an extra step. So why not take a look at used boxes? This doesn't require dumpster diving behind a Costco. There are many economical options out there to purchase bulk quantities of used shipping boxes.



Poly Mailers

Poly mailers are, above all else, an economical packaging option that don't take up much space and are easy to quickly pack. While boxes of similar dimensions can cost upwards of \$1.25 USD per unit, most poly mailers, even recycled ones, are about \$0.11 USD per unit if you buy in bulk. Mailers are also easy to customize with your unique branding. If you are concerned about the environmental impact of shipping with plastic bags, there are options for 100% recycled poly mailers. And if you buy a minimum of 1,000 of them, the price per unit is very reasonable—about \$0.27 USD per unit.



\$1.25

Mailer Boxes



\$0.27

**Recycled
Poly Mailers**

It's what's on the inside that counts: Brown Paper fill

Plastic, styrofoam and packing peanuts have been industry standards for decades. An eco-friendly alternative for filling your parcels could be brown paper void fill. Here are the two main types:



Kraft Paper Void Fill

Kraft paper is manufactured on a giant roll, similar to butcher paper or wrapping paper. You pull it out, stuff it into the box around the item, and once the item stops jostling, you tear it off and close the box.

source: econenclose.com



Crinkle Paper

Alternatively, you can use the crinkle paper void fill as an alternative to packing peanuts. Their major function is to reduce and absorb shock in transit.

source: suppliesforgiftbaskets.com

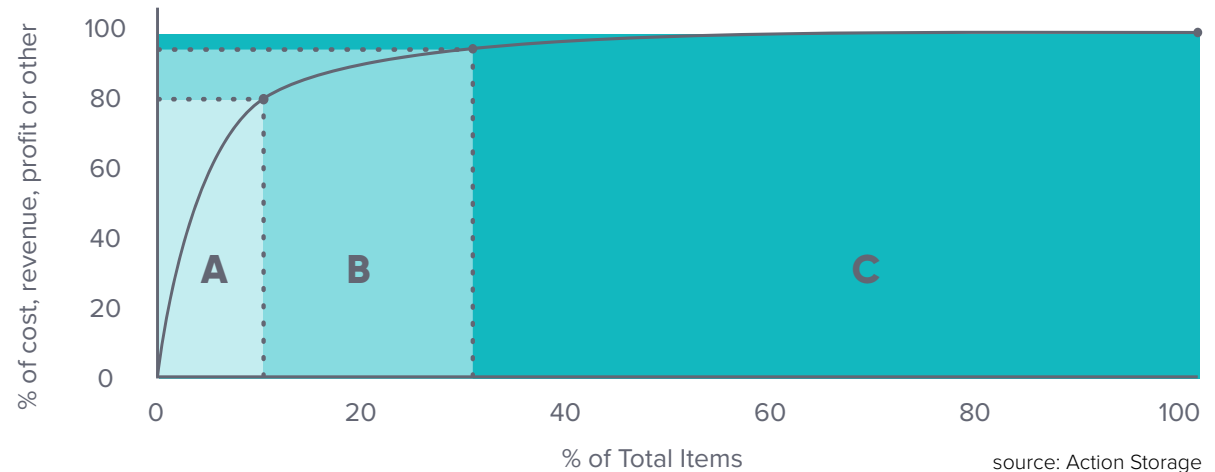
Workflow Strategies

People envision Black Friday shopping as people running through stores pulling items down off the shelves. This is particularly true of warehouse workers. It can be a madhouse. However, there are strategies you can put in place to reduce the amount of foot traffic and chaos around the warehouse.



Use ABC Analysis

ABC Analysis is the idea that 20% of your inventory makes up 80% of your sales. These higher demand items should not be interspersed across your warehouse. High-demand items need to be at the front of your warehouse where you can easily access them.



Group A

These are your highest demand items. They should be closest to the shipping area, with the most popular of these items on the middle shelves for the quickest and easiest picking.

Group B

These are less commonly sold items. They are in the middle rows. Perhaps it's the offseason for them, too. Move your more summer items here during the holiday rush.

Group C

These are your items that are not performing as hot. Think of this as the section where you keep items you can easily unload to wholesalers or a discounted online marketplace like Jet.com. This area may also be near receiving so it can store backfill for your group A items.

Use Batch Shipping

Batch shipping is a great way to fulfill a lot of orders at once. Instead of preparing an individual order—over and over again—bulk printing a group of orders' picklists, labels and packing slips saves a lot of time and energy. Batching is common in shipping software and a hallmark feature of them. Combined with automation rules, batching can make shipping be the easiest and quickest part of your day—instead of an overlong ordeal.

Prepare for Returns

It may not be the most glamorous subject, but the way a company deals with returns drives sales. In a recent poll ShipStation conducted with KickStand, we found that 72% of responders' online purchases were directly impacted by a company's return policy. And while returns may negatively impact your bottom line, increased sales from informed customers are a major positive. But what makes a successful returns strategy, and how do you offer it to customers?

Customer-Initiated Returns

Return shipping has a long way to go before it is as convenient as ordering online. However, something like a returns portal lets customers print a return label simply by entering pertinent order info; such as their order number and postal code. There's no need to even speak to a customer service representative. However, if you do wish to validate any return request, do not provide the returns portal URL with a customer until they contact you.

Increase your Returns Window

During the holiday rush, customers buying on BFCM sometimes buy based on deals. But they also want to make sure that the recipient can exchange the gift if needed. Most companies extend their returns window through to the end of January.



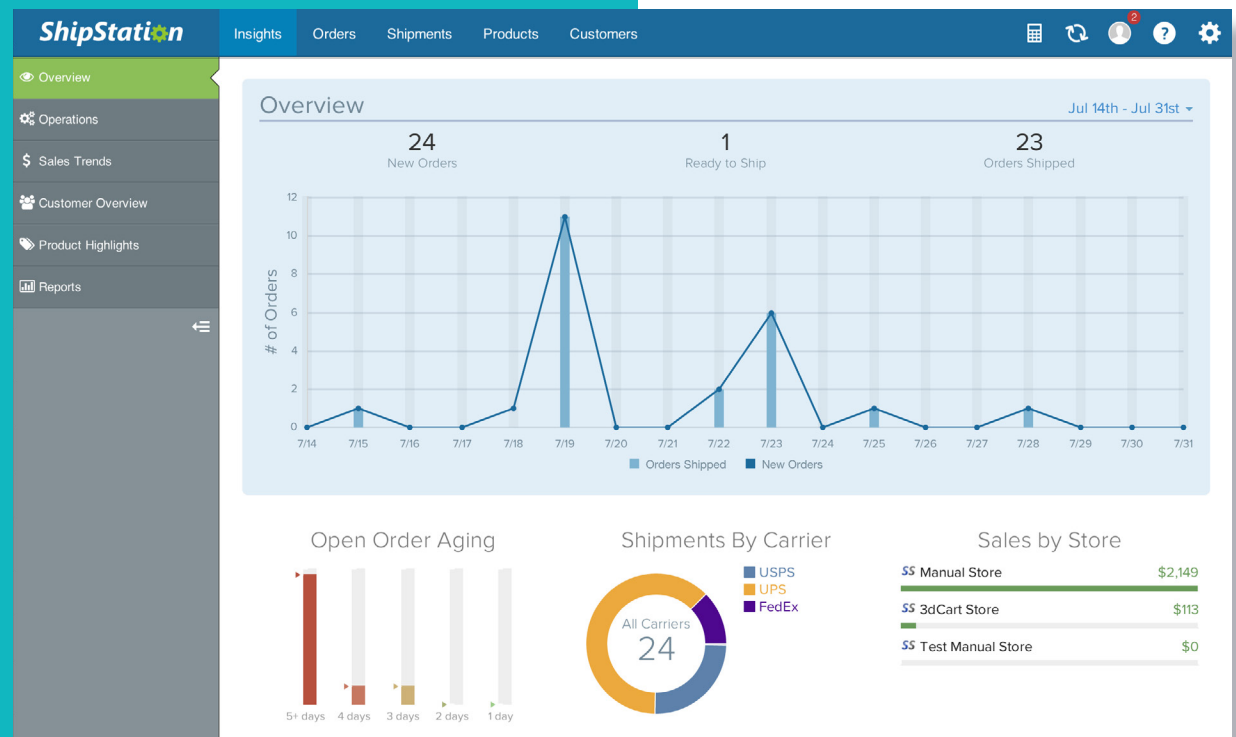
Shipstation



ShipStation is the leading web-based shipping solution that helps ecommerce retailers import, organize, process, and ship their orders quickly and easily from any web browser. ShipStation features the most integrations of any ecommerce web-based solution with over 150 shopping carts, marketplaces, package carriers, and fulfillment services.

ShipStation's many integration partners include eBay, Jet, Miva, PayPal, Amazon, Etsy, BigCommerce, WooCommerce, Shopify Plus, Squarespace, Volusion, and Magento. ShipStation also integrates with carriers such as FedEx, USPS, UPS, Canada Post, Australia Post, Royal Mail, and DHL. ShipStation has sophisticated automation features such as automated order importing, custom best practice rules, product profiles, and fulfillment solutions that enable its users, wherever they sell and however they ship, to be

exceptionally efficient at shipping orders. ShipStation is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Stamps.com (Nasdaq: STMP). For more information, visit www.shipstation.com.

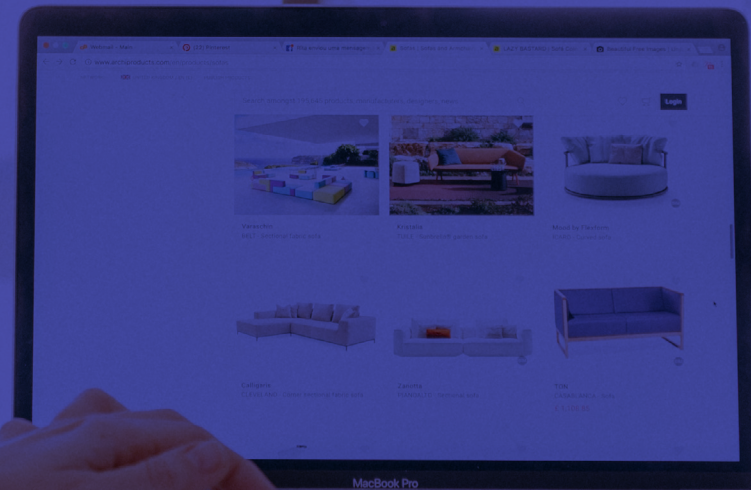


Getting the Site Prepped & Secure

BY REWIND

We have talked about getting your site ready for the global economy, how to fulfill the sheer volume of orders and optimizing your key product pages. However, the backend of your store needs attention as well. If your site isn't ready to handle the high influx of traffic, you can miss

out on major sales. This is exactly what happened to one of the world's fastest-growing fitness brands. One small error with a third party app lost them around \$150,000 in sales; in just one day. Here's how to get your site technically ready for Black Friday/Cyber Monday.



Keep the Store Tidy

Envision this:

You saw your dream shoes on Instagram.
You saved up the money.
You made the long trek to the store.
Your anticipation builds as you walk through the door.
You can physically feel these new shoes on your feet.
You hit the aisle ready to start your new shoe life...

And you see this ►



This can easily take the wind out of your sails. You may even spend your money elsewhere. It's a negative customer experience that could have been prevented.

First, survey your website to ensure your images are recent and of high quality. Fix

any blurry, dated or broken images. Just like our real-world example, a lack of access and information about products drives up abandonment.

The same goes for broken links. To fix this you can use 301's to redirect shoppers from your 404's.

Your online store has no racks, tables or stands but creating a "neat & tidy" experience for customers is still essential.

Keep the Lines Moving

Waiting is the worst. Customers feel it so intensely that long lines cost the retail industry **billions of dollars** every year. Online retailers have to be even faster than bricks and mortar stores.

Half of online shoppers expect your page to load in **under two seconds** or they will bounce.

That is money you are leaving on the table, by simply not keeping your load times in check.

Check your site load speed with a free online tool like **Gtmetrix**. If your load speed isn't optimal, GTmetrix will provide you with a detailed list of recommendations on what to change, such as optimizing your image sizes for web or reducing redirects. Having too many plugins and apps can also slow down your site speed.

Add Payment Options People Trust

As more of our lives move online, people are continually cautious with where they spend their money. Make sure your PayPal, Amazon Pay, Apple Pay, and any other payment options are functional and working properly across your funnel. Without these trusted methods installed (and properly working), shoppers may move on to a competitor.



Revisit Third-Party Integrations

It's not uncommon for an online store to have eight to ten different integrations. They obviously make life way easier but every so often these apps can wreak havoc, even the ones sitting idly in the background. **This is exactly what happened to GymShark on BFCM.** Their site was down for eight hours before they were able to restore it. (We will talk about how they handled the problem a little later).

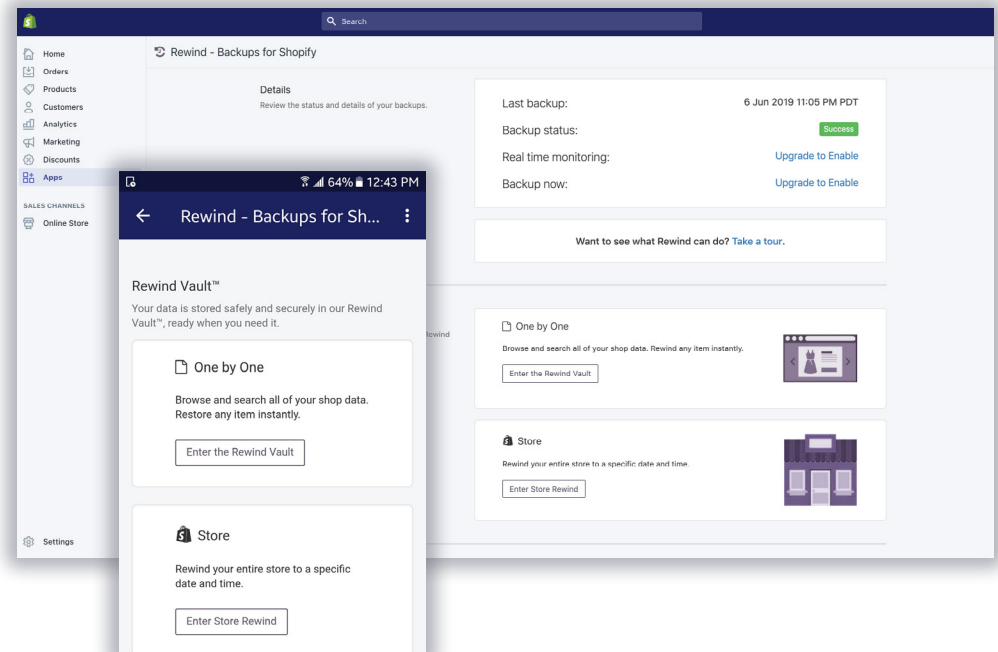
So how do you avoid this? First, check the apps tab of your ecommerce platform and any integrations outside of that to create a list of all the apps embedded into your site. Figure out which ones you really need, the apps you can do without or ones not being used at all.

And initiate a “code freeze” at some point, say maybe five days, before the start of BFCM. In other words, no one can make any changes to the site (unless something is broken) or install any new apps. This significantly reduces the chance of something breaking your site and you scrambling to get it all working again.

Back-Up Your Store

You've spent months prepping your website with new content, products, and collections for the holiday season. But what if someone on your team accidentally deletes the wrong collection? Or a third party app changes all your prices? What you wouldn't give for your very own time-machine. One where you can go back to set things right...

Although your own De Lorean would be incredible, we were actually thinking about Rewind. The Rewind app is like an insurance policy for this exact scenario. It can automate backups of your store so you can just set it and forget it. Get Rewind in the **Shopify App Store** or **BigCommerce App Store**.



Gymshark

On Black Friday of 2015, the Gymshark website (then built on Magento) went down for **eight hours straight**. Customers took to social media to express their disappointment and Gymshark was on damage control during what should have been their most profitable weekend of the year.



It's estimated this outage cost the burgeoning brand \$143,000 in lost sales and erosion of trust among its customers.

Gymshark's IT Director Seb Mills said the disaster was caused by an app integrated with their Magento store (one of the key causes we talked about earlier).

Cloud-based platforms like BigCommerce or Shopify take extensive precautions to ensure their servers won't fail and to maintain 99.98% service availability. But here's the thing; they will NOT use that same backup to recover a single account to a previous point in time. The platforms have what we like to call a macro-backup of their entire system. This covers you for incidents on their end like a data breach. They will do a great job of keeping your data secure, and they will walk you through some manual steps to rebuild your content.

But, they are not able to rebuild the store and content for you.

After researching all the methods to bring a store back online, Gymshark decided that nothing compared to Rewind. Seb Mills said, "Since each of our stores is a replica of the others, (we thought) it would be simple to sync one store to another. But that sync would take 12 hours – that's a lot of sales lost."

Cloud-based platforms like BigCommerce or Shopify have macro-backups of their system but they will not use their backup to recover a single account back to a previous point in time.

“

Our online stores are the heartbeat of the business. Rewind gives us peace of mind that our stores are backed up on a daily basis.

—SEB MILLS, IT DIRECTOR AT GYMSHARK



Safe, Automatic Backups

Rewind is the leading online backup service for SaaS applications, including Shopify, BigCommerce, and QuickBooks Online. Since 2015, Rewind has been on a mission to help business owners quickly recover their cloud data after a disaster. Thousands of business owners and brands trust Rewind to safely backup millions of items. To learn more, visit the **Rewind** website.

© 2019 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED BY THIRD BLINK SOFTWARE INC.

