

Introduction

Marketing for the holiday season starts months before winter's first chill. Holiday success can make or break a retailer, as winter holiday sales comprise more than 80% of the year's total holiday sales (NRF).

A solid plan is key to phenomenal holiday results. Use these handy month-by-month calendars and tips to plan for the right holiday message at the right time. You'll find creative ideas and best practices for every stage of the holiday shopping season: planning, execution, and wrap-up.

For every month, we've included:

- Important dates
- Holiday shopping data
- Common messaging themes
- A cross-channel to-do list
- A design and content example and why it works

Whether you're reading this in August or December, happy holidays.

Table of Contents

- **03** August
- **07** September
- **12** October
- **16** November
- 20 Marketing Cloud Guided Tour
- **21** December
- **25** January
- **29** Conclusion

















AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

KEY DATES

August 5–21: Summer Olympics

August 21: Senior Citizens Day

August 25: Four months until Christmas

August 26: Women's Equality Day

STATS TO KNOW

- Eighty-two percent of consumers research products online before going into a store (<u>Salesforce</u>).
- Consumers spent \$626.1 billion during the 2015 winter holidays, followed by the back-to-school holidays, with a distant \$68 billion, and Mother's Day, with \$21.2 billion (NRF).
- Holiday sales in 2015 increased by 3%. Non-store holiday sales grew 9% to \$105 billion, though growth did not meet projections made by the National Retail Federation (NRF).

- All eyes will be on the Olympics. Product tie-ins with the globally watched event will be popular among sporting goods, clothing, toy, health, and fitness brands.
- Holiday messaging will be relatively low, with the Olympics, back-to-school campaigns, and niche holidays like Women's Equality Day taking the spotlight.
- Offers for super-early shoppers to peek at the best holiday picks might surface in August.

August To-Do List: Align and Organize

Email: Retailers <u>tracked</u> a 6.4% decline in foot traffic during November and December 2015. Foot traffic might be on the decline during this holiday shopping season, so prioritize email design and content now for December success. Email is the perfect medium to spark in-store foot traffic and capture online sales, so get your email templates ready to provide personalized content for both in-store and online audiences – and optimize everything for smaller screens.

Mobile: If you're not yet collecting phone numbers as part of an SMS campaign, consider doing so during both the back-to-school and holiday seasons. Because consumers are increasingly attached to their mobile devices, SMS can be the ideal driver for in-store offers, real-time alerts, and opt-ins to other channels, like email and social.

Social: Holiday 2016 will be the first real Snapchat Christmas. Sixty percent of 13 to 34-year-old American smartphone users are now snapping, and the platform boasts 10+ million video views a day. You can bet that every major retailer will be trying its hand at Snapchat this holiday – it's the hottest social network in the game. In August and September, take some time to grow your audience and test storytelling techniques.

Advertising: Social advertising is one of the most personalized and 1-to-1 tools in a marketer's arsenal. It works best when you've already established a solid organic social presence. When new customers visit your social pages via ads, they should see your account actively engaging with customers, providing useful content, and answering questions. Do some spring cleaning on your social accounts now.

Web: Is your website enriching what you already know about customers? Ideally, your website is collecting valuable data about customer preferences with every click. While it's still early in the season, begin enhancing your customer profiles with details like browsing behavior, purchase history, and attributes so your holiday messages will be even more relevant.

ALIGN ADVERTISING WITH EVERY CHANNEL

Your in-store interactions are 1-to-1. Are your ads? See how <u>Advertising Studio</u> creates highly personalized ads for social media, search, and display – all fully integrated with the customer journey.

American Eagle Goes Simple and Shareable for Back to School

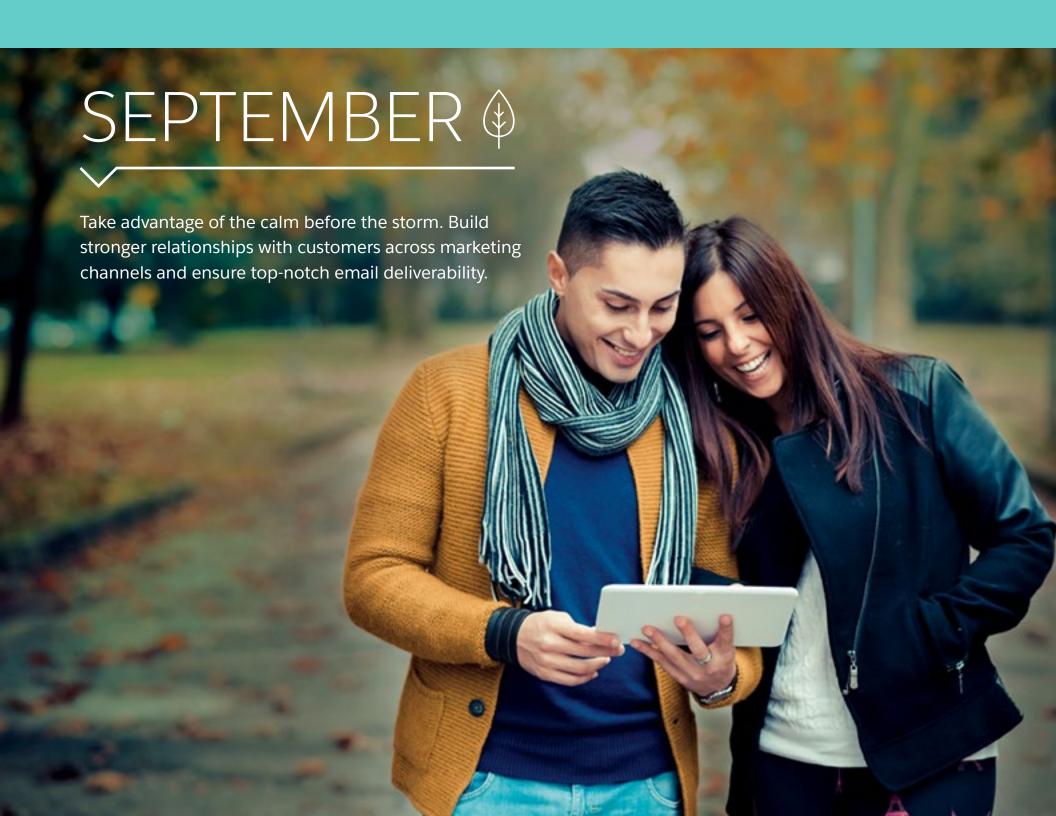
Instagram has taken over fashion. At New York Fashion Week 2016, brands live streamed runway shows and linked them directly to purchase pages.

Teen fashion purveyor American Eagle knows Instagram is part of its audience's daily routine, and it publishes a well-curated array of lifestyle photos on Instagram.

This back-to-school photo was a top #BacktoSchool post in August and September 2015. The photo's styling takes its cues from indie fashion bloggers and Insta-celebs instead of traditional commercial photography. The lack of models helps shoppers imagine themselves wearing the garments in an aspirational way. The overall feel plays to the organic, non-Photoshopped trend.









SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

KEY DATES

September 5: Labor Day (U.S.)

September 11: Grandparents Day

September 22: First day of fall

September 25: Three months until Christmas

STATS TO KNOW

- Twenty-two percent of consumers planned to give an experience-type gift in 2015, and 36.5% said they'd like to receive one. Those numbers jump significantly for Millennials: 36.1% of 18 to 24-year-olds and 35.4% of 25 to 34-year-olds planned to give a gift of experience (NRF).
- Mobile commerce accounted for an estimated 18% of total digital commerce in November and December 2015 (comScore).
- A total of \$12.7 billion was spent via smartphones and tablets during November and December 2015, up 59% from 2014 (comScore).

- End-of-summer and back-to-school messaging continues in September.
- Building engagement is common in August and September, as brands encourage subscribers to update email preferences and personal details so future holiday marketing is received and personalized.
- Early mentions of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and especially Halloween will surface.

September To-Do List: Strengthen Relationships

Email: More than 50% of all emails are now opened on mobile devices – and consumers will delete or unsubscribe if your emails don't work on mobile. Start meeting with designers to ensure every email is fully mobile, encouraging better engagement. Remember all those Apple Watch devices given last year as gifts? Ensure emails have a plain-text version that can be read on wearables, too.

Mobile: Mobile messages can be the perfect tool to bridge the physical and digital worlds. Use geofencing and location-based messages to drive engagement with your customers. If your brand has a mobile app, ask customers to opt in now to location-based tracking and push messaging so you can send hypertargeted offers when they're in your area during the holidays.

Social: Finalize your social-service game plan for those busy November and December days – and nights. True, <u>social media drove only</u> 1.8% of all holiday e-commerce orders in 2015. But answering or avoiding a question on social can make or break a sale. Not answering customers on social channels can lead to a <u>15% increase</u> in the churn rate for existing customers, and <u>more than half</u> of consumers expect a response on social media within an hour. Develop a plan for who will cover all those questions, leaving no channel ignored.

Advertising: As a marketer, your head is no doubt spinning with all the campaign types you could offer this holiday season. What will your biggest holiday launches or offers be? Advertising should play a key role in attracting more eyes to those messages. Also consider how advertising can give a boost to email, and vice versa, by targeting email subscribers on Facebook with the same message, and by using ads to drive customers to your email subscription.

Web: Show customers you know them well by using web data in targeted emails, ads, and mobile messages. Every holiday season, the stakes for personalization are higher. Currently, 61% of Millennials would share data regarding their preferences with a store or brand to receive better service, and 38% say it would help if a store knew about their online research prior to arriving at the store (Salesforce). Engage efforts to coordinate digital and in-store teams, so online data is integrated with the offline experience.

NEVER MISS A MOBILE MOMENT

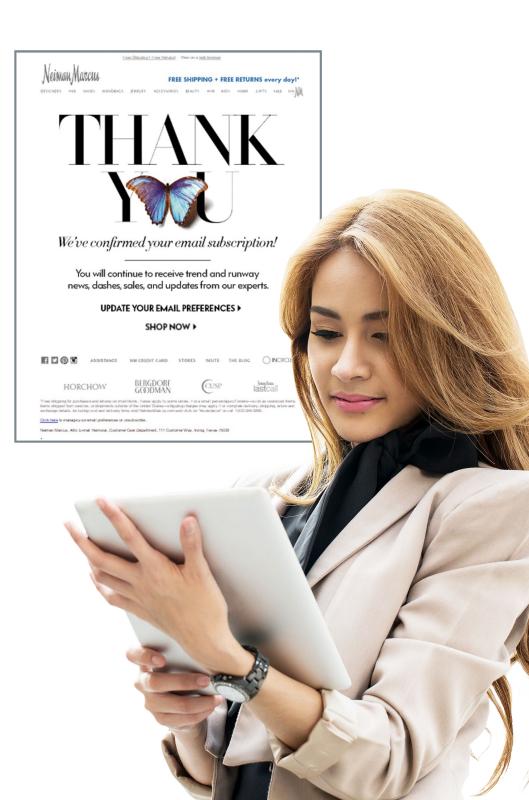
Reach the right person at exactly the right time – all while creating relevant messages across SMS and MMS, push notifications, and group messaging. See how <u>Mobile Studio</u> can help.

Neiman Marcus Wins Back Subscribers with a Click

In the months before the holidays, you want to build engagement with existing subscribers and win back any unengaged subscribers before they fall off the radar. The number-one thing to avoid is harming deliverability.

Luxury retailer Neiman Marcus provides a genius example of a preholiday win-back. Subscribers are warned in the subject line that their "subscription is ending," but they only need to open the email to renew.

Subscribers who open read a big "Thank You" – words you don't see too often in email marketing. The butterfly is animated, and the copy reminds customers why it's valuable to receive emails from Neiman Marcus. It's a win for a healthy email list, and Neiman Marcus can feel good about emailing those subscribers all holiday season long.





Run Your Marketing from Your Phone

Retailers are busier than ever during the holiday season. But you can't – and shouldn't – always be at your desk.

This year, Marketing Cloud is changing the game for holiday marketing with the Marketing Cloud Mobile App. With the app, you can:

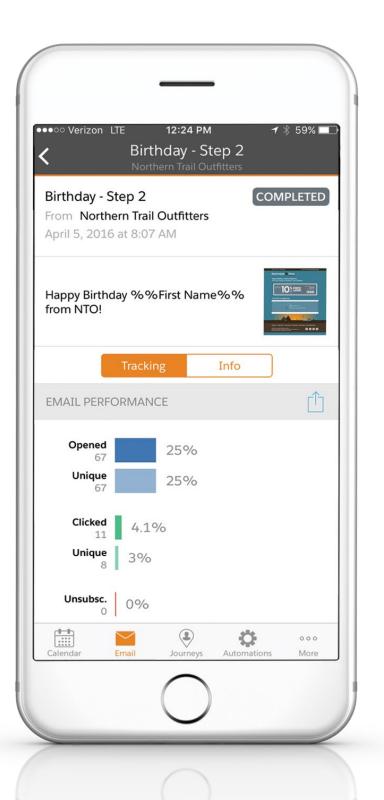
- Run campaigns from your phone instead of being tethered to your laptop.
- Initiate and modify campaigns while traveling or on the go.
- Share campaign performance details with managers and your team via text, email, Slack, HipChat, and more.

Learn more about the Marketing Cloud Mobile App.

"The speed of business is requiring marketers to move faster and have a pulse on our communication in real time. The Marketing Cloud Mobile App gives us a practical solution to managing our relationships with customers."

- Brad Rutta

VP of Marketing and Communications at Berkshire Hathaway





OCTOBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

KEY DATES

October 1: Breast Cancer Awareness Month begins

October 10: Columbus Day (U.S.)

October 25: One month until Black Friday

October 25: Two months until Christmas

October 31: Halloween

STATS TO KNOW

- Thirty-eight percent of Millennials believe it would help if a physical store knew about their online research prior to arriving at the store (<u>Salesforce</u>).
- Average spending per person over Thanksgiving weekend 2015 totaled \$299.60, with an average of \$229.56, or 76.6% of total purchases, specifically going toward gifts (NRF).
- Sixty-one percent of Millennials would be willing to share data regarding their preferences with a store or brand to receive better service (<u>Salesforce</u>).

- The majority of retailers will mention the holiday season in at least one promotional email by the end of the month.
- Many holiday-themed emails in October will focus on sneak previews of gift guides, new catalogs, and the year's most popular gifts.
- Although Halloween is a big focus, preholiday clearances will headline many October emails.

October To-Do List: Optimize and Build Expectations

Email: Consider segmenting your email list for those who only shop during the holidays versus those who shop year-round. In one example from lingerie brand Adore Me, powered by Marketing Cloud, an email campaign targeting once-per-year shoppers performed 21% better than emails sent to other customers. Often, your holiday-only shoppers will also buy completely different products than those who shop the site frequently. Revisit last year's holiday-only shoppers and make a list just for them.

Mobile: In October, make sure every call to action and customer journey works on mobile. Holiday promotions will help grow your mobile audience of SMS subscribers or app users – so use your established email channel to promote these newer channels so customers don't miss a thing. Spend time as a team testing mobile journeys from different devices and operating systems.

Social: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and now even Twitter pull the most relevant messages to the top of a user's feed. In the lead-up to November and December, post consistently on social but not too frequently. Focus on posting content that will receive positive engagement from your community. Help the algorithm trust you so that your future posts receive better placement.

Advertising: Rebrand and reskin to help your ads stand out, just like your brick-and-mortar locations use lights, garlands, and a seasonal soundtrack to create excitement for the holidays. Don't limit the look to only ads: Your emails and social profiles can benefit from holiday-themed design elements, photography, and decorated buttons, which should all be coordinated across channels. It's the holiday season, so don't be afraid to have some fun with it. As you build ads, leverage all of your CRM data to target existing customers. Provide customers an incentive to opt in to your mobile or email messaging program.

Web: Customers delete emails that are irrelevant or aren't catered to their interests, especially during peak holiday season when marketing noise is at a fever pitch. Enact a progressive profiling campaign in October so you can learn more about customers and use that information to better target the season's emails, SMS, push messages, and ads.

STRENGTHEN CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Your customers are social by nature. Tap into the power of social media in your marketing with real-time listening, publishing, and engagement. See how <u>Social Studio</u> powers social customer success

Express Uses Email to Promote Social Engagement

For today's mobile-centric shoppers, checking social media and email is part of the daily – maybe even hourly – routine. It makes sense, then, to promote social channels in email, particularly if your audience is photo-centric and socially savvy, like the customers of Express.

In this email, Express lays out its multichannel presence in a promotion with model Kate Upton. This email tells consumers, "We're everywhere that's important to you," whether that's Instagram, a blog, or Snapchat.

It's smart to cross-promote social and mobile channels in email. In October, remind customers of everywhere your brand lives online, so they can pick their favorite channels to engage with you.







AUGUST (SEPTEMBER (OCTOBER (NOVEMBER (DECEMBER (JANUARY (

NOVEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

KEY DATES

November 1: Holiday messaging takes off

November 8: Election Day (U.S.)

November 11: Veterans Day (U.S.)

November 23: Thanksgiving Eve

November 24: Thanksgiving Day/Gray Thursday

November 25: Black Friday

November 26: Small Business Saturday

November 27: Cyber Sunday

November 28: Cyber Monday

November 29: Giving Tuesday

STATS TO KNOW

- More than 151 million people said they shopped either in stores or online over Thanksgiving weekend 2015 (NRF).
- Customers spent \$12.7 billion via smartphones and tablets during
 Thanksgiving weekend 2015, up 59% versus a year ago (comScore).



- Between Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, and even Cyber Week, you have a wealth of messaging options. Invite subscribers to shop pre-Black Friday deals, shop your most popular holiday items, and buy now for free gift wrapping and bonuses.
- Other common November messaging themes include invitations to download your mobile app, join your social channels, or share your gift guide with friends and family.
- Increasingly, companies are proud to share their affiliations with philanthropic organizations. We'll see more companies begin drawing attention to these causes in November with holiday messaging.

November To-Do List: Engage in Every Moment

Email: In your emails, convey urgency and remind subscribers that they face a limited time to receive certain discounts and products. Countdown timers (showing one day left or only 300 units remaining) are effective tools in emails in late November. Stay flexible and keep an eye on the data. If something isn't converting the way you'd hoped, a link or list could be the problem, so stay in contact with your analysts.

Advertising: Because ads are quick to initiate and deploy, they're a great tool to make last-minute tweaks to your holiday strategy. If you find that an email or product page isn't performing with shoppers as well as you'd hoped, follow up the message with a social ad – we call that the stereo effect. Constantly check numbers with your teammates to make sure ads are reaching the right audience.

Mobile: When the shopping frenzy hits in November, mobile is the perfect channel to remind customers that they don't have to stand in line at a store to buy from you. Doorbusters still work for many companies, but today, e-commerce is just as important. Engage customers on smartphones via SMS, push, and mobile email whether they're out shopping or browsing at home.

Web: November will be one of the year's busiest months for web browsing. Using predictive intelligence, build content for every holiday shopper based on data collected as they shop your site. Redistribute that same message across all other channels, including email, mobile, social, and advertising. Your shoppers are increasingly using multiple devices, so show them that you know them regardless of whether they're using an iPad or a laptop to shop with you today.

Social: People feel a sense of pride in snagging the trendiest holiday gifts – increasingly so as Black Friday draws near. Use social media to communicate which products are trending, receive the best reviews, or are about to sell out. But don't forget to update customers when they actually do sell out – there's nothing worse than teasing people with something they can't have. Make sure you're always ready to react to customers quickly as they worry about not getting items by Christmas.

PERSONALIZE AND PREDICT FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL Increase conversions and engagement with personalized content and offers based on behavior. See how it's possible with Web Studio.

REI Shocks on Black Friday with #OptOutside

Outdoor retailer REI did the unthinkable in 2015 and closed its stores on Black Friday, instead encouraging employees and customers to "#OptOutside" and enjoy the outdoors.

REI announced the campaign on social channels and saw big returns: The campaign garnered 300,000 tweets over Black Friday week, doubling the <u>previous year's mentions</u> during the same period of time.

This campaign fit REI's outdoorsy brand perfectly. While closing on Black Friday doesn't make sense for most retailers – and the suggestion might even cause some of your colleagues to faint – the goal of authenticity and transparency on social rings true for all marketers.





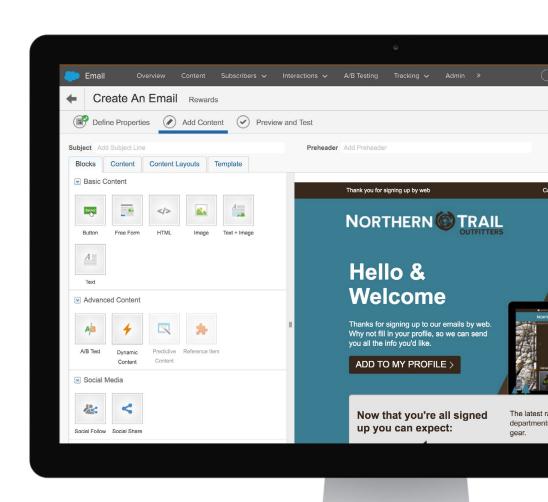
Marketing Cloud Guided Tour

Interested in how Marketing Cloud can transform your shoppers' experience with your brand? See its power in action with this hands-on experience.

With the Marketing Cloud guided tour, you'll explore new ways to unite your marketing strategy with sales and service through:

- An easy-to-follow interface
- Interactive product screenshots
- A helpful narrative
- Hints to grow your business

START TOUR





AUGUST (🖹

SEPTEMBER (4)

OCTOBER (1)

NOVEMBER 🕙

DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

KEY DATES

December 12: Green Monday

December 18: Free Shipping Day

December 21: First day of winter

December 24: Christmas Eve and Hanukkah begins

December 25: Christmas Day

December 31: New Year's Eve

STATS TO KNOW

- In 2015, when asked when they will purchase their last gift, one-third of consumers said sometime before December 18 though 10.2% planned to wait until December 23 (NRF).
- Shoppers who avoid physical stores during the holidays blame the crowds (82% avoid stores for this reason), traffic (61%), limited parking (48%), and convenience of online shopping (48%) (Salesforce).
- December 2015 retail sales which exclude automobiles, gas stations, and restaurants – decreased 0.2% seasonally adjusted from November (NRF).

- Free Shipping Day might be less important in 2015 than previous years. That's because these days, many companies offer free shipping all season long. In any case, free shipping resonates strongly with customers – so remind customers of it frequently.
- Pre-Christmas messaging can include holiday outfits, parties, hostess gifts, 12 Days of Christmas campaigns, and order-by deadlines for guaranteed Christmas delivery.
- On- and near-Christmas messaging usually features a season's greetings message from brands. You might also promote last-minute gifts in the form of gift cards and e-gifts.

December To-Do List: Maximize All Touchpoints

Email: The busiest season for email marketing is nearly over (at least until next year), but continue keeping an eye on performance data to drive decisions. Watch analytics throughout the month of December to ensure you're not sending emails to unsubscribes or inactives. Make a special note of design elements (like a new header image or CTA button) that convert particularly well, and capitalize on those for your final holiday emails.

Mobile: Text messages have a 98% open rate. Customers will expect coupons in December, and SMS is a great way to distribute them – but invite a two-way conversation instead of letting SMS become a discount machine. For example, allow customers to text in to answer a question, get more information about a product, or take a survey using a shortcode (see the example at the end of this section). Above all, respect the fact that this channel is personal and direct. Too-frequent marketing will earn you an unsubscribe – not what you want for Christmas.

Social: As Christmas draws near, people will turn to social to share photos of family and wish each other well. Your marketing should have the same warm vibe – not all selling, all the time. As a brand, remember to send some form of holiday well-wishes. Plan ahead and get creative with how you wish customers a heartfelt happy holiday. This could take the form of a short video or a humorous recap of 2015, which can be repurposed in email content.

Advertising: What subject lines, social messages, and products performed best in November? Your December ads should be a greatest-hits version of your holiday messaging. These ads will be guaranteed to garner excellent click-throughs and drive last-minute purchases. As always, don't advertise something people can't have. Cease ads when promoted products sell out or shipping dates pass the cutoff.

Web: Twenty-four percent of consumers avoid stores during the holidays due to seasonal employees with less knowledge (Salesforce). Use customer data from multiple sources – CRM, e-commerce platforms, web analytics, email, and beyond – to show customers you do know them. In the final days of the holiday season, provide personalized content and recommendation gift guides to tell customers you've been listening to what they've searched for and coveted all season.

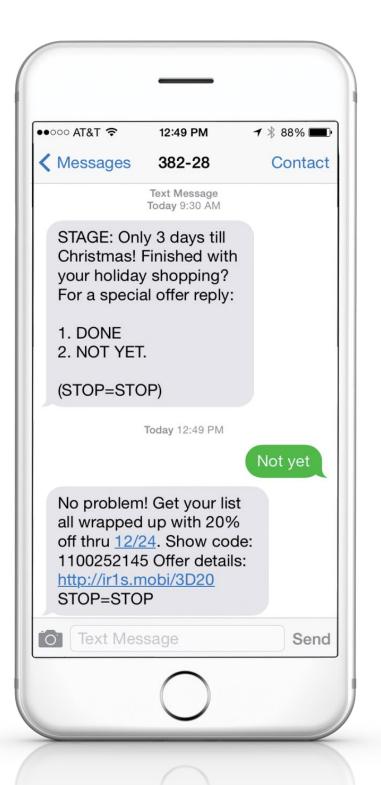
UP-LEVEL YOUR EMAIL MARKETING SOPHISTICATION Create highly personalized messages that drive action with subscribers at every stage of the lifecycle, from awareness to advocacy. Discover what Email Studio can do.

Stage Stores Engages Customers in the Season's Final Days with SMS

Stage Stores is the company behind discount fashion shops like Goody's and Bealls, as well as its own brand.

Customers can sign up year-round to receive text message updates and offers from Stage. During the holidays, Stage sent this smart text message, inviting customers to engage with the company further by answering whether or not their holiday shopping was complete.

This tactic does more than share a coupon code with hopes that customers will buy: It fosters a real-time, yet automated, two-way conversation, one affirming that the customer is an active and engaged SMS subscriber.







JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

KEY DATES

January 1: New Year's Day

January 9: The Marketer's Resting Day January 16: Martin Luther King Jr. Day

January 20: Inauguration Day

STATS TO KNOW

- The holiday season can account for as much as 30% of a retailer's annual sales (NRF).
- Shoppers claim to be retailer loyal, making the majority of their holiday purchases (75%) from merchants they have visited before (Deloitte).
- In 2015, omni-channel shoppers expected to spend 75% more than store-only holiday shoppers (<u>Deloitte</u>).

- After-Christmas sales and gift card redemption reminders will fill inboxes in January.
- Other popular themes include New Year's well-wishes, inspirational resolutions, offers for accessories matching popular gifts, and CTAs for holiday storage and organization products.
- Already missing the holidays? Check out <u>Brownielocks</u> for a slew of funny and offbeat holidays you can incorporate throughout the year (National Doughnut Day, anyone?). Choose one or two that fit with your brand and customers.

January To-Do List: Keep Engagement Strong

Email: Your email list probably swelled in November and December, but that number can dwindle sharply if you don't engage and retain new subscribers. Develop a strategy for keeping new subscribers engaged in January and beyond with loyalty initiatives and rewards, relevant content, and a preference center that allows them to decide which emails they receive, and when.

Mobile: Similar to email, you may have attracted a large number of new app downloaders or SMS subscribers during the holiday season. You don't want to lose these customers, so tread extra lightly in January, sending only push messages or SMS with the best offers and most personalized content..

Social: Social media is a breeding ground for creativity and innovation for brands. Collect examples of your favorite social campaigns from the 2016 holidays so you can draw inspiration in 2017. These examples might include organic social posts, short videos that were repurposed across a brand's digital channels like email and Vine, and perfectly targeted and timed ads. To build on your social strategy, consider building a community with Community Cloud in the year ahead. This community can serve as a new self-service hub and give customers a central place to connect and share enthusiasm for your brand and product.

Advertising: Do a full-circle review of your 2016 holiday advertising. Gather data on the most-clicked images, best copy, highest-performing channels, and overall impressions. Also note internal processes and communications that didn't work perfectly so they can be fixed. Build on this success as you refine your ad strategy for 2017.

Web: Take down the holiday design elements; it's time for a new year. Set up triggered emails so customers are notified if a product in their holiday wish list comes back in stock. Offer recommendations for products that would perfectly accompany what customers received over the holidays. In the year ahead, consider a refresh of your website that puts personalized content front and center on every page.

GET YEAR-ROUND MARKETING INSPIRATION

Learn best practices and real-life examples of what's working – and what's not – from your fellow marketers. Subscribe to our marketing podcast, the Marketing Cloudcast, today.

Vogue Recaps the Year with a List-Laden Email

Not sure what to talk about now that the holidays are over? Retailers can take a cue from this end-of-year email from Vogue.

In this single email, Vogue recaps major trends across all its audience's key interests: beauty, fashion, and celebrities. Glancing at the email provides a quick review of what happened in 2015.

Retailers should consider crafting a similar looking-back email for subscribers. Valuable lists might include best-selling or best-reviewed products, top trends in your industry, and even individual customers' journeys with your brand in 2016 – like what products they purchased, which stores they visited, and an inspirational preview of the year ahead.





Conclusion

Customer experiences during the holiday season can feel like a delightful gift or a lump of coal. With the tips and strategies in this calendar, you'll be fully prepared to make all your customers' holiday journeys a great one, no matter which channels they choose to engage with you.

From all of us at Salesforce, we hope your stocking is filled with abundant marketing ROI this year.







GET THE E-BOOK

GET THE E-BOOK

GET THE E-BOOK











The information provided in this e-book is strictly for the convenience of our customers and is for general informational purposes only. Publication by salesforce.com does not constitute an endorsement. Salesforce.com does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of any information, text, graphics, links, or other items contained within this e-book. Salesforce.com does not guarantee you will achieve any specific results if you follow any advice in the e-book. It might be advisable for you to consult with a professional such as a lawyer, accountant, architect, business advisor, or professional engineer to get specific advice that applies to your specific situation.