

The Definitive Guide to

HOLIDAY



Email Marketing

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Believe it or not, the holidays are right around the corner. Last year most retailers started their holiday marketing in mid-October.

Think about these stats from the Retail Email Guide: Last year, top online retailers boosted their year-over-year email volume 21% in November and December, with spikes coinciding with several record-breaking ecommerce days, including Cyber Monday and Thanksgiving Day.

Because of email's ability to engage customers with relevant messaging at the right time, our retail client data shows that open rates and clickthrough rates hold steady during the holidays, despite the added volume, and that click-to-conversion rates increase significantly. There are positive signs that the 2011 holiday season will be another banner year for email marketing.

When it comes to [email marketing](#), it's never too early to start preparing for the holidays. That's why we created this *Definitive Guide to Holiday Email Marketing* to set you up for success all season long. With a little planning, you'll be well on your way to a stress free and profitable holiday.

Make Your List & Check it Twice

Being aware of important dates and deadlines is crucial during the holiday season. For instance, did you know Cyber Monday (the Monday after U.S. Thanksgiving), is the most popular day for retail email with nearly 71% of retailers sending at least one email on this day? By planning your communication in advance you can help your messages stand out in the inbox and avoid missing any opportunities.



Columbus Day:
Monday, 10/10/11

Thanksgiving (Canada):
Monday, 10/10/11

Halloween:
Monday, 10/31/11



Daylight Saving Time Ends:
Sunday, 11/6/11

Veterans Day:
Friday, 11/11/11

Thanksgiving (U.S.):
Thursday, 11/24/11

Black Friday:
Friday, 11/25/11

Cyber Monday:
Monday, 11/28/11



Hanukkah:
12/20-12/28

Winter Begins:
Wednesday, 12/21/11

Christmas:
Sunday, 12/25/11

Boxing Day:
Monday, 12/26/11

Kwanzaa:
12/26/11-1/1/12

New Year's Eve:
Saturday, 12/31/11



New Year's Day:
Sunday, 1/1/12

Martin Luther King Day:
Monday, 1/16/12

Now that you've got the important dates, mark them on your calendar and **check them twice!** You don't want to miss these opportunities to get your customer's attention during the holiday season, so it's wise to plan your communications now by creating your **Holiday Mailing Schedule.**

2011 Holiday Mailing Deadlines

Other important dates to keep in mind include order and mailing deadlines. We've recapped the top ones, but remember to check with your provider to ensure you have the most up-to-date deadlines, as dates are usually subject to change.

United States Postal Service to Anywhere in the U.S. by Christmas

Letters & Cards



Priority Mail®



Express Mail®



Parcel Post®



2011 USPS Holiday Mailing Deadlines for International Mail

Addresses to countries in...	Letters & Cards	Priority Mail®	Express Mail®	Global Express Guaranteed®
Canada	Dec 9	Dec 12	Dec 16	Dec 20
Asia & Pacific Rim, Australia & New Zealand	Dec 9	Dec 9	Dec 15	Dec 16
Mexico	Dec 9	Dec 9	Dec 15	Dec 20
Europe & Caribbean	Dec 9	Dec 12	Dec 15	Dec 19
Middle East	Dec 9	Dec 12	Dec 15	Dec 16
Africa	Dec 2	Dec 2	Dec 10	Dec 16
Central & South America	Dec 2	Dec 2	Dec 10	Dec 19

USPS Holiday Mailing Deadlines for Military APO/FPO Addresses:

Zip Codes

AE ZIPs 090-092,
AE ZIPs 094-098,
AA ZIP 340,
AP ZIPS 962-966

Letters & Cards



Priority Mail®



Express Mail®



2011 FedEx Holiday Shipping deadlines:

US

FedEx SameDay: 12/25

FedEx First Overnight: 12/22

FedEx Priority Overnight: 12/22

FedEx Standard Overnight: 12/22

FedEx 2Day 12/21

FedEx Express: 12/20

FedEx Ground: 12/16

FedEx Home Delivery: 12/19

US to Canada:

FedEx International Next Flight: 12/22

FedEx International Priority: 12/22

FedEx International Economy: 12/21

FedEx International Ground: 12/14

VerticalResponse Postcards Holiday Submission Deadlines:

***Note:** Postcards must be completed in your VR account and approved for printing by these dates.

Halloween



Thanksgiving



Christmas



New Years



TIP

There are many free and easy ways to create a plan. Most email services have calendars (e.g., Google Calendar), and the VerticalResponse email tool also has a free calendar. It can help you manage key dates for your holiday promotions, and allows you to easily input important tasks.

4 Phases of the Holidays:

1 Holiday Phase 1: Early Birds

Early bird shoppers are organized consumers who know what they want.

This group is looking for deals and want to beat the avalanche of holiday shopping to come. They're shopping now!

To find this audience, reach out to your most loyal customers and let them know about your early bird holiday deals. You can also target your seasonal customers by emailing anyone who purchased from you during the same time last year. You want to contact these people as soon as possible, so pencil in an email (or two!) to this audience in October.

Appeal to the Early Bird Shoppers:

- Offer a time sensitive deal (i.e., Save 20% before Nov. 1)
- Create urgency with a "Limited Time" offer
- Offer a free gift with purchase while supplies last
- Announce special pre-holiday hours
- Invite them to beat the rush and save

2 Holiday Shopping Phase 2: Primetime

Holiday shopping enters the period of peak orders and revenue highs from early November to mid December, as the primetime shopper starts spending.

Competition can be tough during this time, so make your emails stand out in the inbox.

Here are some ideas:

Send a Thank You Email:

Thanksgiving (11/24) is during the middle of the primetime shopping period.

Use it as an opportunity to give thanks to your customers for supporting your business. You don't even have to include an offer (but you can if you want to) – it's been proven that a simple "thanks" goes a long way toward increasing customer loyalty. Your customers will thank you in return by giving you their patronage this holiday season.

In Store Only Promotions:

Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, is famous for being the biggest shopping day of the year. Send an email telling people to come into your shop for a one-day only offer or early doorbuster promotions.

Online Only Promotions:

Create an online only promotion in honor of Cyber Monday (11/28), which is said to be the busiest day for online shopping. Send out a promotion code in an email and direct people to your website where they can redeem their discount.

Email Series:

Create a series for Hanukkah (12/20-12/28/), or the 12 Days of Christmas (12/25), and present a new gift idea each day.

FUN FACT:

Last year, more than 83% of major online retailers increased their email volume during November and December.

3 Holiday Shopping Phase 3: Last Minute Shopper
Research and experience show that many holiday shoppers wait until the last minute to make purchases. This period of holiday shopping is called the “Last Minute Frenzy,” and starts mid-December. Schedule a few emails in December that’ll speak to this audience.

Get Attention by Mentioning Benefits:

- Guaranteed delivery by X
- Last-minute gifts for under \$50
- Extended hours for more holiday shopping
- Upgraded shipping and gift wrap

Give Shoppers Ideas:

Last-minute shoppers appreciate anything that makes holiday shopping easier. Draw these shoppers to your store or website by tailoring your offers to meet their needs. The best way to do this is by offering easy, last-minute gift suggestions.

Get Last-Minute Shoppers to Your Store or Website:

- Most popular products list
- Top 10 gifts under \$20
- Gift cards and gift certificates
- Offer an extra 20% off
- Free gift-wrapping and/or free shipping

4 Holiday Shopping Phase 4: Bargain Bounty
Late December through the New Year marks the Bargain Bounty period.
 Keep in mind that just because the holidays are over, it doesn’t mean the spending and shopping has stopped. Plan to send a few bargain bounty emails touting your end-of-year sales and discounts.

A Few Ideas:

- Holiday clearance sale
- Post holiday sales
- Stock up for the new year and save
- Return that ugly sweater from nana and get what you want

Don't Forget Your Email Basics

You've worked hard on your marketing all year, so don't drop the ball on your email basics during this busy time of year. Remember the following key points for email success:

- ❑ **From Line** – How people recognize you. Keep it consistent (usually company name).
- ❑ **Subject Line** – Gets your email opened. Keep it 40-50 characters or less.
- ❑ **Preheader text** (Secondary Subject Line) – Great for mobile readers.
- ❑ **Image Alt Text** – Gets your readers to enable images if they're turned off.
- ❑ **Balance of Images & Text** – 80/20 rule (80% text to 20% images).
- ❑ **Copy** – Break up into small chunks (generally 3 lines or less).
- ❑ **CTAs (Calls to Action)** – Tell your readers what you want them to do.
- ❑ **Length** – Start short and link to website, blog, or landing page with more content.
- ❑ **TOC** – Use a Table of Contents to move reader through longer emails and newsletters.
- ❑ **Scanability** – Bullets, short chunks of copy, headlines and subheads.
- ❑ **Links** – Lead readers to more content, on your website, blog, etc.
- ❑ **Text links vs. Button Links** – Test this to see what gets a better click through.
- ❑ **Forward to a Friend Links** – Gain new subscribers.
- ❑ **Social Media “Badges” and Links** – Grow your subscriber list and engage with your audience in new ways when they connect with you on social media.
- ❑ **Social Sharing** – Expand the reach of your messages, grow your list & reach new people.
- ❑ **Facebook Like Button** - Allows readers to “Like” your email or your Facebook page.
- ❑ **Check Links** – Click on each link to make sure it goes where you want it to.
- ❑ **Proof Read** – Remember to spell check, too.
- ❑ **Preview In Multiple Email Readers** – View in email clients like Yahoo! Mail, Gmail, Outlook, Hotmail, AOL, etc.

As usual, your holiday email marketing should be relevant, timely, and valuable for your customer. And keeping important dates and holiday shopping patterns in mind will help you to target products, services, and offers to your customers at the right time. After this you'll be ready to ring in the New Year (and some big sales)!