Holiday Hints:

A Guide to Holiday Marketing Success

Believe it or not, the time for holiday planning is here! The National Retail Foundation is predicting total sales for this holiday season to be $470 billion. While that is only a 2.2% increase over last year, it’s still a lot given the economic times we are in. So it’s best to get an early start to boost your sales and build solid momentum into the new year. We all know the holidays can be hectic and competitive. You can’t afford to sit back and wait for your customers to come to you. To help you prepare for the busiest time of the year, VerticalResponse, a leader in self-service marketing for small business, has complied some ideas to get you thinking and acting now, so you can start marketing to your customers and capturing every bit of business that you can for the remainder of the year.

Tip: Get Organized!
Don’t forget, VerticalResponse offers an Interactive Marketing Calendar to help you manage key dates. The Calendar Link is located in the top navigation bar in a VerticalResponse Account. You can easily input important tasks such as writing copy, uploading images or launching email campaigns.
Planning

If you haven’t already started researching and planning your holiday marketing campaigns, the time is now. It seems that holiday marketing starts up earlier and earlier every year. You don’t want to miss any opportunities to email your customers during the holiday season. As you think about ideas for your email marketing campaigns, it’s important to understand your customer’s behavior during the holidays. The more you understand your customers, the more likely your email campaign will be successful.

According to NRF/BIG Research, 20% of consumers start shopping for the holidays in October, 40% start shopping in November and 17% of consumers start in the first two weeks of December. You do not want to wait until December to start your marketing. Think about staging your holiday email campaign in three phases, with specific starting and ending points for your offers. Looking at your email campaigns in three phases allows you to change your marketing message as holiday consumer shopping behavior changes. Let’s take an in-depth look at these phases and what some marketing ideas are for each of them.

**When Consumers Start Shopping for the Holidays**

- **Before September**: 14.3%
- **September**: 6%
- **October**: 20%
- **First 2 weeks of December**: 16.7%
- **Last 2 weeks of December**: 4.7%
- **November**: 38.3%

*Source: NRF/BIG 2007 Research*
Phase 1: Early Bird Shoppers

Drive revenue early in the season and reach out to your loyal buyers, or anyone that purchased from you during the same period last year. You can count on these customers to buy again. It’s also good to use personalization to show that you appreciate your customers and understand their needs and interests. Get to know your customer’s names. Whether it’s greeting them by name in the store or personalizing the name field in an email, make doing business with you a memorable experience.

Be sure to take advantage of this time also to review your inventory. Doing this, allows you to understand which offers you can present and when you can present them, and easily accommodate before the holiday rush begins.

Ideas to get you going on your Early Bird specials:

- Extra 10% off with an expiration date
- Free gift with purchase while supplies last
- Buy two get one free on certain products
- Double points on frequent buyer cards with an expiration date
- Announce holiday hours

Tip: It is the season of giving and people love to buy when proceeds go to charity or are benefiting the environment. Be sure to highlight your giving and/or green spirit in your messaging.
Phase 2: In the Heat of Competition

During this phase you are right in the thick of competition for getting your message in front of your customers. According to the Email Experience Council 88% of major online retailers and 45% of offline retailers increased their email volume during the 2007 holiday season. Consumers are feeling the frenzy and are in need of ideas to simplify their purchasing decisions. Your offers need to stand out.

Creating emails that specialize in promotions by price range or recipient are viewed as time savers and worth opening. Make sure your message is heard and not overpowered by other advertising, try complementing your emails by sending a postcard with a discount offer or promo code to break through the clutter.

Put your own twist on ideas like these to get your customer’s attention:

- Top selling gifts under $xx
- Gift guides/ideas
- Discounts on product/service bundles
- Price ranges in the subject lines
- Recipient oriented offers ‘For Mom’
- New shipment has just arrived
- Free shipping
- Special holiday event announcement
- Coupons sent to purchasers
  - We appreciate your business and want to give you 10% off your next purchase

Tip: In a rush yourself? Need some holiday design assistance? Check out VerticalResponse’s pre-built holiday layouts and borders. Or, let us do it for you with one of our full service options!
**Phase 3: Last Minute Shoppers**

We know from the research and experience that a lot of consumers put off their holiday shopping till December. It can be a crazy and stressful time. Take advantage of this opportunity to reach out to all the procrastinators and last minute shoppers and make doing business with you as easy as possible. Let them know about your last minute holiday specials, such as free gift wrapping or gift certificates. Consumers like gift certificates/cards because they are convenient for both the giver and the recipient and take the guesswork out of buying gifts. They are also a good idea for businesses to offer because consumers often spend more than the face value of the card when they redeem them.

Other things to keep in mind during the holiday rush are be sure to communicate important dates (i.e. shipping) in order to meet service levels. This is also the time in the season to evaluate your inventory and promote items that will be more difficult to sell after the New Year. Don’t lose your momentum during this time, you want to end your year on a high note.

Ideas to keep business booming:

- Gift cards/certificates (online or paper)
- Free gift wrapping
- Extended holiday hours
- Extra 20% off order by…
- Almost sold out 5 units left!
- Announcing last day you can accept orders and still guarantee delivery
- End of year clearance sale

Regardless of which holiday phase you are in, it's essential that you consistently give your customers unique offers. Use your business strengths to help you stand out from all the competition.
Email Marketing Basics for the Holidays and Beyond

Build Your List & Brand

The holiday season is when you are probably in front of the largest number of people all year. Wouldn’t it be great to stay in contact with everyone all year long? This is a great opportunity to build your contact list.

Make a point to have your employees ask customers if they would like to join your email list, or sign the guest book. Other ideas include adding an opt-in form to your website or blog, or have a holiday drawing with customer business cards to win one of your great products or services.

Want to build your list even more? Beef up or start using Google AdWords. It’s important for you to be where your prospective customers are searching for you. What’s great about Adwords is you can really figure out what your customer acquisition costs are and limit your monthly budget spends.

Now that you have these new contacts you need to make sure that they and your current customers can recognize you. Start sending out regularly scheduled emails to your customers. Base the timing on your content, anywhere from once a week to once a month. Create your emails with your business look and feel. If you have something that works, make sure to keep it consistent.

Tip: If you have a good relationship with another business why not help each other out. In your store pass out each other’s coupons with special promo codes so you know where your coupon is coming from. Or trade business cards with your web address at the bottom. The more people who find out about you the better!
Email Marketing Basics for the Holidays and Beyond

Email Best Practices

The holidays can do more than put consumers into chaos, sometimes they can wreak havoc on business, too! This isn’t the time to slack on the basics. The holiday season means that your business needs to be on its A-game. Below are some reminders of basic best practices for email marketing.

**Forward to a Friend Link**

It’s often times forgotten, but you might pick up a few new customers from your current loyal ones just by asking for their referral. Always include a forward to a friend link in your newsletters, announcements, and promotions.

**Host Your Emails on a Web Page**

There is going to be so much email flying around the next few months you might see an increase in recipients’ spam filters stripping out images. If you include a link that says ‘Click here to View This Email in a Browser’ any recipient that is having issues can view your email as a web page.

**Alternative Text**

Another spam filter solution is making sure your mindful of the alternative text you give your images, this is the text that pops up when your images are either moused over or not displayed. For example, an alt tag for an image of a holiday gift basket might be ‘Holiday Gift Baskets under $30’ so that your recipients still understand the offer and are enticed to click to view the hosted version of the email or click to accept the images.

*Tip:* VerticalResponse can host your email on a web page for free! Just select hosted emails in the pull down of the Email Canvas Tool, or select the box in the Wizard Tool.
Email Marketing Basics for the Holidays and Beyond

Subject Lines

Subject lines are arguably the most important part of an email marketing campaign. According to a 2008 Holiday Survey by Return Path, 59% of people judge the value of each email message by using the subject line. If it doesn’t catch the eye of your recipient and doesn’t convey the right message, then you’ve lost a potential sale.

Don’t forget the basics of subject line writing:

- Stick to 40-50 characters - Most email readers have the default set so that anything beyond 40-50 characters in the subject line will not display
- Do not repeat your ‘From' label; It’s a waste of space. Remember, you’ve got only 40 characters to grab their attention
- Avoid all caps; Not only is this akin to screaming at your recipient, email readers may filter it into the junk folder
- Avoid excessive punctuation; Because this technique is often used by spammers, overuse of punctuation can be filtered
- Do not overuse the word ‘Free’, it’s the same reason as overuse of punctuation

Holiday Subjects Lines We Like

Salon or Day Spas

- Get Party-Ready Now - $35 for Mani/Pedi
- Holiday Rejuvenate: Spice Scented Massage
- Last minute shoppers: $35 Mani/Pedi gifts
- $20-$50 Gift baskets in stock

Restaurants

- Have (COMPANY_NAME)’s holiday party with us
- Appetizers for you and 9 friends on us
- Last minute: Give a $50 gift card this season
- Take a shopping break, come in for a drink
- Bring this coupon in for a free appetizer with purchase
- Shop at Sally’s and get a drink at Harry’s

Wineries

- Book now - 10 dates left for holiday parties
- Wine clubs: The gift that gives all year long
- Trio of wine under $50 with gift pack and card
- 40% holiday discount for wine club members
- Discounts and Free S&H for wine members
- 2005 Cab with our gift of Riedel wine glasses
**Bonus Thoughts: Social Media**

It’s hard not to notice all the recent activity around blogging, social networks, online communities and online video. Take advantage of these new channels to get the word out about your business and products. Be sure to update them with your seasonal messaging and offers.

- Blog about your product or service, including holiday promotions, then invite reviews and comments from your customers. If you don’t already have a blog, start one using TypePad, Blogger, or WordPress.
  - Add an opt-in form to your blog to capture sign-up data.
  - Be honest - this is critical, because if you lose your credibility online it will be next to impossible to restore it.

- Social networking sites; like Facebook and the VerticalResponse Marketing Lounge. (http://lounge.verticalresponse.com) Set up your own profile and post your products or services, include holiday offers and messaging. Set up a group about your company and services and invite your friends. Inbound links to your site may help you in the search rankings.

- Video - a great opportunity to increase back-links, social tagging, and increase your search rankings! Upload to YouTube, Facebook. Tag your videos with words that relate to your product or service and Email your friends to watch.
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Adding these tools to your business can help you get the most out of this holiday shopping season. The ideas don’t have to end here either. VerticalResponse is an active participant in social media with our award-winning blog, online community and Facebook page and group. We want to hear from you so we’ve created a Holiday Marketing group in our online community, the VerticalResponse Marketing Lounge. It’s a hot place for cool marketing ideas. (http://lounge.verticalresponse.com) Create a profile for you and your business then share your ideas on what works and what doesn’t with other small business professionals.

To learn more about how to send professional-looking emails, postcards, and online surveys that generate results, check out our live weekly demo or the ‘How to Do Everything’ section of our website under Education & Support!

The holiday season is such an important time for businesses, the customers you touch this season can impact your business now and on into the future. Stay on top of your marketing and don’t forget to have fun! Happy Holidays!