

Customer Q&A.

Holiday Prep with UglyChristmasSweater.com.



Industry
Ecommerce

Site
uglychristmassweater.com

About

- Founded in 2012
- Located in Walled Lake, Michigan

UglyChristmasSweater.com is a family-owned holiday clothing company based in Walled Lake, Michigan. Founded in 2012, they've made big business out of selling Christmas sweaters that push the limits of taste and style.

In the years since the company was founded, loud, over-the-top Christmas sweaters have enjoyed a renaissance of sorts. Part holiday cheer, part tongue-in-cheek humor, UglyChristmasSweater.com has been at the heart of this growing trend and has seen exponential year-over-year growth with a huge spike in business that begins as soon as the holiday season stirs to life.

To find out what the company does to get ready for the rush and how they've been able to keep up with a constantly-growing stream of website traffic, we sat down with Director of Web Strategy Hiral Patel to get the full scoop.

Tell us a bit more about your role?

I'm really a jack of all trades. I deal with the marketing side, servers, the website, just about every area of the website operation. I definitely have a front row seat for our holiday rush—from the preparation all the way through the end of the season.

When does that rush typically begin to pick up?

We start to see traffic increase pretty much from the beginning of November

all the way through Christmas. By Thanksgiving, traffic is up significantly, and then between December 15-18 we see our largest peak—it's a traffic increase of something like 500 percent from the end of October to mid-December.

Based on that timeline, when do you guys start preparing?

We always try and start getting things in order at least two months before our peak, so in our case, that's early to mid-October. That's when we start upgrading our servers, doing some internal tests, sending traffic to the site. In the early preparation stages, we'll try and overload the site and see how it responds.

Because we're a seasonal business, we always want to have the major things done well before Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Green Monday. We basically say to ourselves, "Hey, we could grow traffic to our site by an additional 30 percent this year. What resources do we need to increase in order to handle that?"

How has this process worked in the past? Have there been hurdles?

We've definitely had to work with different hosting providers. We simply outgrew our first provider and moved to another one last year, which had us on their highest, top-tier dedicated server. We noticed some issues, but overall, it was working.

Then, on Black Friday of all days, we ended up having some serious performance problems and decided to start looking for a new option.

We had heard about WP Engine and we liked the custom, dedicated plan our account manager was able to set up for us. We ended up migrating our entire website over in less than two days, which was a flawless process, and we were able to finish out the holiday season strong and handle all the major traffic that was coming in.

Did you gain anything from that experience?

The big lesson we took away was that just because a platform is labeled “dedicated” it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re getting the best—we learned that firsthand.

With WP Engine, we felt the options were presented to us in a more upfront way. We started with a mid-level dedicated solution but knew from the start that we would want more power for our busy season. Our account manager made solution recommendations based on our historical traffic and helped us choose the right higher-tier solution when the time was right, and we plan to do the same thing this year.

With our previous providers, we never felt like we were presented with the ability to tailor our plans so specifically. At WP Engine, our account manager made sure to understand our needs and armed us with the right information so we could make the best decisions for our business.

It sounds like “Dedicated” can mean different things, depending on the provider?

That’s right. I think people have the misconception that when they get on a dedicated plan—even a “managed” dedicated plan— everything is going to be automatically taken care of. There are a lot of things that can impact a server, from memory to the hard drive, and when we were with other dedicated providers, they sold us the server but then told us “you manage it.”

The thing is, we’re not server managers, we’re developers, we run websites, we’re marketers. We’re not here to manage a server and try and figure out why some script is causing the site to crash or the server to crash.

When we came to WP Engine, all of those issues were taken care of. Our account manager and solutions engineer looked at our traffic and our data, they saw exactly how we were using bandwidth and helped us adjust our servers for our specific needs.

Are there other guidelines you can offer people who are planning for a big eCommerce rush?

I would definitely recommend testing everything well ahead of time to make sure your site can handle higher levels of traffic. Start at least two months prior to the major date or season you’re preparing for.

Do your tests, make sure everything is running, and then get your staff on the backend of your site and have them take care of things like product updates. What’s going to happen during your peak season is that you’re not only going to have higher website traffic, you’re also going to have internal staff using up a lot of resources. Try and get as much of that out of the way before your peak. I recommend setting a time, well ahead of your rush, where everyone will be on the backend making changes.

Then make sure everything runs smoothly, and once your backend work is done, and your testing is complete, come peak season, even if there are some glitches, you’ll make it through.

Any final thoughts? Big takeaways?

I would definitely recommend finding a hosting provider that can offer a real, managed dedicated solution. If you use WordPress, make sure they have WordPress-specific expertise. Look for really speedy customer service that’s available 24/7, because you might need to reach out at 3 a.m. before Black Friday starts, and if you do have to make resource adjustments, you’ll be able to do it quickly. We’ve found all of those things with WP Engine.

The last thing I’d recommend is to not forget the wrap-up. Plan for post-rush returns, and set time aside, once everything has settled, for you and your staff to look over the metrics, see how you did, and actively look for areas to improve. We usually do a review in February, and once it’s concluded, we start planning for the next year.

WP Engine fast facts.

Founded in 2010 | 80K+ Customers in 136 Countries | Supporting 500K+ WordPress Domains
Serving 2B Page Views/Day | Largest Customer Success Team in WordPress, Available 24/7/365