

10 Site Optimizations to Prepare for the Holidays

Get ahead of the rush





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Introduction:

Prepare your site for holiday traffic.

If you thought “now” was too soon, studies show the eCommerce holiday season is starting [earlier than ever](#). Savvy online store owners know this and usually finalize their store preparations by the end of October.

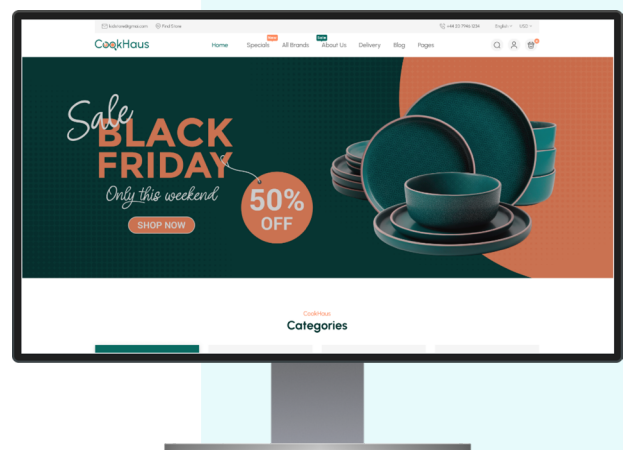
Waiting until the last minute to make changes to your site is risky, especially if you experience a surge in traffic or another unexpected issue that results in downtime as opposed to higher sales when the holiday season is peaking.

But failure to optimize at all can also leave you feeling left out as holiday sales rack up and headlines about another “record-breaking eCommerce season” roll in, without much impact on your bottom line.

Here are several tips to help you boost sales and make this holiday season the most successful yet!

Don't know where to start?

No problem. You can prep your online store for sales success with these eCommerce optimization tips! Here are several tips to help you boost sales and make this holiday season the most successful yet!





1. Detect what might be slowing down your site

A faster website reduces bounce rate and helps search engine rankings. A slow site results in poor user experience and lost sales and conversions. How slow is too slow? [According to studies](#), 47 percent of consumers expect to wait no longer than two seconds for a web page to load.

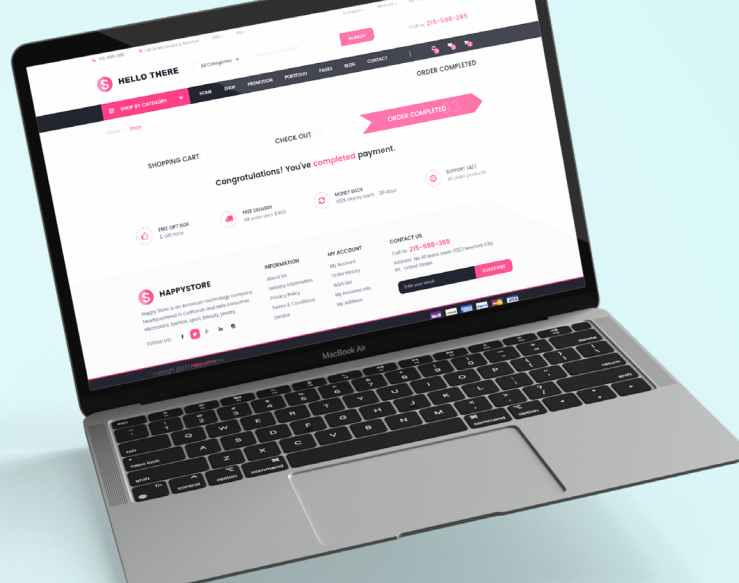
Try running a speed test to determine how fast certain pages of your site load. You can go to [webstestster.wpengine.com](https://www.webstestster.wpengine.com) to get WordPress®¹-specific tips regarding how to improve and optimize your site for faster page load times. For all types of websites, [Google PageSpeed Insights](#), [GTMetrix](#), and [Pingdom](#) all offer free speed tests for your site.

Things like [caching](#), [optimizing images](#), using a CDN, and [more](#) can all help you attain faster page load times for a smooth user experience that results in higher sales this holiday season, and you won't even need the help of Dasher, Dancer, Donner, Blitzen, et al.

Quick tip

It's a smart idea to run a diagnosis of your site to detect roadblocks you can fix before the holiday shopping season starts.

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2. Combat the causes of shopping cart abandonment

The process of checking out plays a vital role in the completion of a purchase. Shopping cart abandonment—an instance where the user adds a product to their cart but doesn't complete the purchase—occurs more than [70 percent](#) of all online shopping instances. Think of it like Santa stopping at your house and not leaving any presents under the tree.

When it comes to the checkout process, **strive for simplicity**. Don't make users create an account before the purchase. Don't surprise them with unexpected shipping fees. Don't make the shopping cart hard to find, or force users to backtrack to alter their cart. A smooth checkout process means an easy-to-navigate interface, without any roadblocks or confusing messaging.

Check out these other essential tips on [how to reduce shopping cart abandonment](#) so this holiday season is joyous for both you and your visitors, creating loyal fans.

And of course, if you do decide to make changes to your site's checkout process, be sure to test those changes far in advance. It would be a shame to streamline the checkout process only to find something breaks during peak shopping season. So, start early!

Quick tip

Many factors play a role in an abandoned cart, but many of them can be avoided with a few simple tweaks.

3. Brainstorm ideas for a holiday marketing campaign

It's never too early to start thinking of unique ways to spread the word about your products and brand. There are many creative things you can do and it all starts with forming a promotional calendar and well-thought-out ideation list.

You'll first need to decide which channels you want to hit. If your marketing team is small, you may decide to focus on only a few things and do them extremely well. Or, if your marketing team is bigger, a fullblown campaign may be feasible.



Here are some marketing collateral ideas to consider:

- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Blogs
- ✓ Video
- ✓ Graphics
- ✓ Giveaways
- ✓ Email
- ✓ Landing pages
- ✓ Print ads
- ✓ Digital ads (Facebook, Google, etc.)

In need of inspiration? To get started, check out these [retailers who nailed it with their holiday campaigns.](#)

Quick Tip

Even if your marketing campaign is a huge success, it's all for nothing if your site can't scale, which leads to our next piece of advice for an eCommerce holiday season that's merry and bright.



4. Ensure your site can handle large amounts of traffic

Can your site stay speedy amid a barrage of visitors? Scalability—your site’s ability to handle an increased number of site visitors—can make or break your eCommerce shopping season.

To ensure your site can scale, it’s important to run tests to figure out how many users your site can handle at once (learn more about “load testing” [here](#)). If you find your site can’t scale as needed, you may need to change your infrastructure and [hosting](#).

For more information on scalability, see this guide: [Scaling WordPress for High Traffic Websites](#).

Quick Tip

High traffic puts stress on your servers—if tons of people are visiting your site and it crashes, think of all the sales you’ll lose, the support tickets you’ll receive, and the upset customers your business will have to deal with.



5. Optimize for mobile

Optimizing for mobile has long been considered table stakes. As devices have continued to evolve, eCommerce sites have had to prioritize a flawless shopping experience on all screens.

In addition to that, eCommerce stores must now incorporate a deeper level of personalization, as shoppers expect tailored experiences—regardless of the type of device they’re using. Ignoring this can lead to missed opportunities and frustrated customers.

Optimizing for everyone isn’t just about accommodating various screens; it’s about understanding each user’s unique needs and crafting a seamless, personalized journey that leads to higher conversions. Use these tips to enhance the user journey across your entire site:

- ✓ Ensure your website is optimized across all platforms
- ✓ Speed up load times with a CDN, caching, and image optimizations
- ✓ Perform a plugin audit to ensure optimal performance and security
- ✓ Simplify your site’s navigation menu to help users find products easily
- ✓ Showcase products with high-resolution images and multiple angles
- ✓ Use recommendation engines/plugins to suggest products based on user behavior and preferences
- ✓ Make sure the checkout process is seamless



Quick Tip

Looking for additional eCommerce resources to get your store ready for the holiday rush? Check out this session from WP Engine’s DE{CODE} conference: [Building WordPress eCommerce at Scale](#) and make sure to [visit our site](#) to learn more about our [WooCommerce hosting](#)!

6. Harden your site's security

It never hurts to take additional precautions for your site's security. Here are some actions you should always take to reduce the risk of security vulnerabilities so your store is safe from Grinchies this holiday season, and trusted by visitors.

SSL certificates:

Be sure to monitor the expiration date of your SSL certificate. This communicates to the customer your site is secure and instills trust in those who might be skeptical about entering their credential information.

Display security badges at checkout:

Adding a security badge to your store's checkout page can instill trust in a shopper who might be fearful of data theft and the security of your site. The checkout page should clearly communicate the security measures you are taking to ensure secure checkout process.

Change password(s):

You should change your password periodically and follow [best practices for password creation](#). Brute force attacks by hackers can guess an easy password, store it, and not use it for some time. Even if you're not aware your password was stolen, changing it periodically will ensure a thief doesn't have the opportunity to use it.

Proactively update WordPress core, plugins and themes:

Update outdated components of your WordPress site as soon as a new version is released. Within your dashboard, you'll see a notification whenever your site is due for an update.



For additional advice on hardening the security of your site, read our ebook, [Prevention is Better Than the Cure: Securing Your Sites With WP Engine](#).

7. Refine product pages

The way you display products on your site can make or break a sale. Going the extra mile to get your product content optimized will make a huge impact on the user experience and sales this season. Here are a few questions to ask yourself about your products and how to market them:

Are products shareable?

Consider adding social share buttons to products, such as a Pinterest share button, as multichannel platform placement can help your products reach a larger audience.

Does product photography accurately show what the product is?

Can you zoom in and see the product at all angles? Product images should be clear and sharp, using an identical or themed backdrop across the board. A common cause of returns is if the product looks different (e.g. color) than what's displayed in the photo, so keep this in mind as you're shooting and editing pics.

Are product descriptions keyword rich?

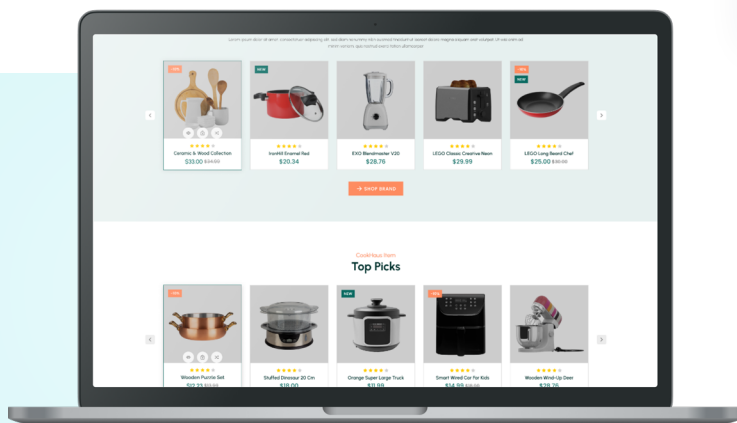
A lack of text and description is a missed opportunity for SEO. An elaborate, well-written description can entice a purchase, as well as draw traffic to your store. Should I make a video? It could help to show the product in action. Some reports say that after seeing a product video, visitors are [144 percent](#) more likely to make a purchase than those who did not see the video.

Do products contain reviews?

[Seventy percent](#) of buyers look for a review before purchasing a product. It might be time to implement a review system for products and start asking loyal customers to leave their reviews.

Quick Tip

A product shown at different angles and in different settings makes it look more enticing and will vastly up its chances of being sold.



8. Focus on customer service

It would be a shame to lose sales just because customer service is lacking. This season you might consider staffing up or hiring an intern to help with customer support.

This means you should have community managers or customer support representatives checking social media daily (yes, even on weekends) to ensure no questions go unattended. This is especially important during a Black Friday or Cyber Monday sale when maxing sales is crucial to your bottom line.



Quick Tip

You might even scale up your support, offering 24/7 availability.

9. Create content that sells

Tying in with tip No. 4, there are many ways to create compelling content. But most importantly, the content you create should focus on your products, incentivizing a purchase.

You can segment products by gender, age, or another trait (e.g. a “what to buy for her” or “what to buy for him” guide can help shoppers looking for gift ideas. It’s all about personalization). You can also create blogs and customized emails containing your products. For instance, if you own a candle company, you could feature “the holiday scent collection” on the homepage, write a blog about the top 10 holiday candles you sell, and then include a link to that content in a customer email. The creative possibilities are endless when you’re coming up with holiday-specific marketing ideas, so make creativity a priority as you enter the holiday season.



Quick Tip

Consider a “what to buy” guide to streamline customers’ shopping intentions towards a certain type of product.

10. Encourage impulse purchases

An impulse purchase is one that occurs without pre-planning. According to studies, impulse purchases account for [40 percent](#) of all money spent on eCommerce sites. Here are some top ways to encourage a spur-of-the-moment sale.

Allow for in-store pickup

One way to encourage an impulse purchase is to offer in-store pickup, where customers can purchase online without shipping fees, and pick the product up in-store. This gives you the opportunity to capture a customer's email, and in return you have a better chance of creating a returning customer to your online store.

Offer a deal-of-the-day:

To stimulate extra spending during the holidays, try offering a discount on a specific product for a duration of 24 to 36 hours a few times a week.

Make sure your site is aesthetically pleasing:

Site design plays the most crucial role in impulse shopping. Setting the mood is extremely important during the online shopping experience. You want shoppers to stay on your site, not be in a hurry to leave it. If a shopper is on your site longer, there's more of a chance they'll make a spontaneous decision to buy something else.

Distinguish products by categories:

Studies show the majority of money spent on impulse purchases are a result of navigation via category links. In addition, using category links makes users three times more likely to continue browsing for more items once they've found the initial product they were looking for.

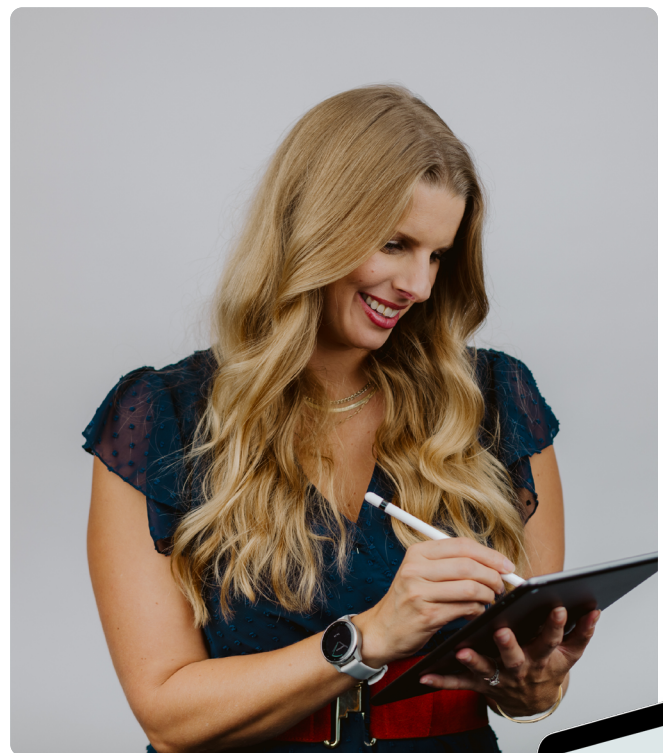




For eCommerce stores, the holiday season can be a make or break. These steps can help you dramatically improve your bottom line, as well as enrich the user experience, landing you on the nice list, not the naughty one.

For additional ways to improve the quality of your eCommerce site, see our eCommerce hosting plans.

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