

Black Friday Playbook: Marketing Strategies

Proven strategies for Black Friday & Cyber Monday
e-commerce marketing in 2023



Introduction

The e-commerce industry is coming off a record-breaking 2022 holiday season, bringing in an estimated \$9.2 billion, up 2.3% from 2021, according to [Adobe Analytics](#). For 2023, sales are expected to be just as significant for online retailers looking to end the year on a strong note.



Quick Fact

The average cart price for Black Friday/Cyber Monday sales is \$101.
(source: [Shopify](#))

With Black Friday and Cyber Monday rapidly approaching, e-commerce retailers can refine their approach in order to fully maximize these major sales opportunities. In fact, many of these tactics can help businesses long after Black Friday and the holiday season has ended and set them up for success in the new year and beyond.

In this playbook, we'll explore several different strategies for retailers to take, with input from some of our trusted partners. These include when to kick off Black Friday efforts, surfacing the right products for new customers, improving the checkout experience to encourage further sales, targeting loyal customers with special deals, and more.

- ✓ **Timing Black Friday efforts strategically.**
- ✓ **Optimizing checkout for more sales.**
- ✓ **Showcasing the right products for all customers.**
- ✓ **Rewarding loyal customers with special deals.**
- ✓ **Segmenting email & SMS lists intelligently.**
- ✓ **Using AI to manage inventory efficiently.**
- ✓ **Adjusting quickly to buyer intent and increase holiday sales.**
- ✓ **Using Black Friday hype to tease new, full-price lines.**

Cut Through the Noise with “Black November”

For the past few years, it has become more acceptable to kick off your Black Friday efforts earlier, or across several different days designed to appeal to different subsets of bargain hunters. Some benefits to expanding beyond one or two days for Black Friday sales include:

- **Standing out in a sea of Black Friday announcements.** Customers will be inundated with emails, SMS messages, and app push notifications in the days leading up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. By starting earlier, businesses can send communications when their inboxes aren't quite so cluttered, making it more likely that they will visit their store to cash out on savings.
- **Increased chance of repeat customers.** The earlier a Black November sale begins, the greater the possibility of repeat customers looking for bargains. Instead of shopping just one or two days during this period, the customer may return multiple times seeking out deals. If a business has the resources, this is a great opportunity to offer new different deals, discounts, or bundles across each week or even each day in November.
- **More opportunities for testing and pushing specific product lines and bundle offers.** All eyes are on retailers this time of year because people are looking for deals. Alongside them, you can also introduce new product lines or concepts at the same time. More on that later in this playbook.



Aside from expanding the sales period into the greater month of November (or before), there are specific days businesses can highlight to customers as opportunities to shop at a great discount, including:

- **Small Business Saturday**, immediately following Black Friday, is an excellent excuse for e-commerce stores without a huge corporation behind them to encourage sales that support small and/or local business owners.
- **Cyber Monday**, originally imagined as the online counterpart to what legacy Black Friday sales usually entailed (i.e., waiting in line outside brick-and-mortar stores). Just like Black Friday has expanded, Cyber Monday can become Cyber Week, pushing special sales messaging to the end of the month or into early December.
- **Giving Tuesday** (immediately following Cyber Monday) is another way to engage customers through the appeal of charity. When e-commerce businesses partner with a charity to donate a portion of their proceeds to the cause, it can lower the buying threshold by making people feel they are doing a good deed alongside buying something. Even with a percentage of the sales going to a cause, businesses can still make hefty sales on Giving Tuesday.

Ensure Proactive Recommendations to All Users – Returning, New, and Anonymous

Consumers dislike the thought of their privacy being invaded by businesses; however, they expect a certain degree of familiarity with their tastes and preferences when visiting e-commerce sites. That means that standard fare recommendations such as “trending,” “new,” or “previously purchased” will only accomplish so much when it comes to achieving the best customer experience.

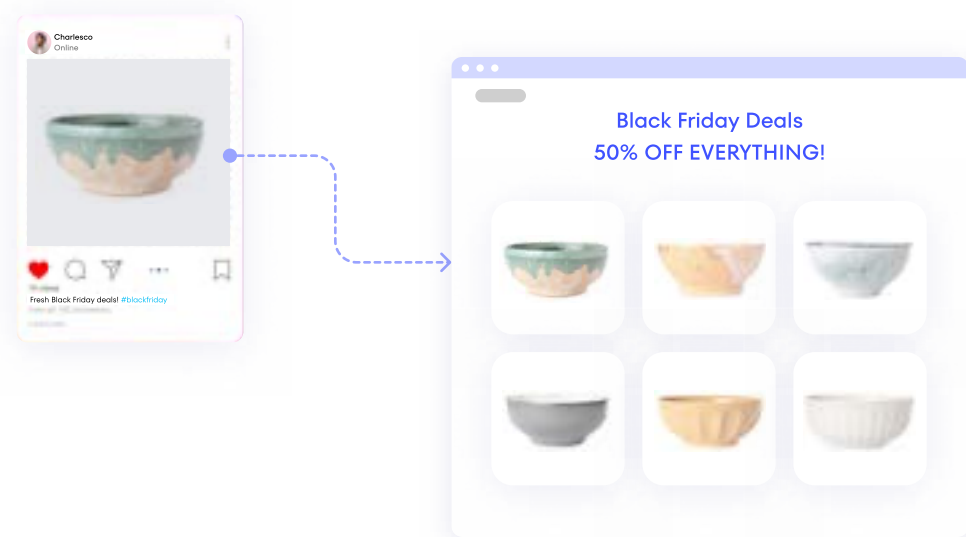
Many retailers solve this problem with [behavior-based recommendations](#), instead of personalization tactics that use demographic information. Whereas third-party data contains personally identifiable information such as age, gender, and location, behavior-based recommendations prioritize the onsite behavior of a user. That means their clicks, scrolls, cart adds, favorites, and so forth hold more weight than who they are as a person. For returning customers, this means that a plethora of historical data can be used in conjunction with their current activity on the site. However, behavioral data can also be gleaned from the first handful of actions taken on the website, meaning even new or anonymous users will get the same highly personalized experience.

Getting the most relevant recommendations in front of a customer as quickly as possible is a tactic that can serve e-commerce well all year long, but particularly when more than half of customers visiting a site on Black Friday or Cyber Monday may have never purchased from a store before.

Create a Dedicated Black Friday Landing Page

Consider the following scenario. It's Black Friday weekend. A consumer is browsing on social media and comes across an ad for a sale, promoting a 50% discount on selected products. They click on the ad, eager to see which products are being offered, but when they arrive, there's no immediate or obvious signal of discounted products to view. Frustrated, they exit the site.

To avoid this scenario, it's important to deliver a cohesive experience across digital channels. Consider creating a dedicated Black Friday landing page that aligns with specific marketing campaigns. Businesses should ensure that any discounts or sales being promoted via social media posts or paid ads match those on the landing page, so that consumers are getting exactly what they expect when they click through to the site. The ability to easily identify the offer that attracted them in the first place can negate the chances of a bad customer experience. Providing a consistent cross-channel experience like this increases the chances of converting browsers into buyers. —contributed by [Swanky Agency](#)



Adapt Quickly to New Holiday Buyer Intent

The holidays are a unique time of year. More than any other time, shoppers are buying for other people more than themselves.



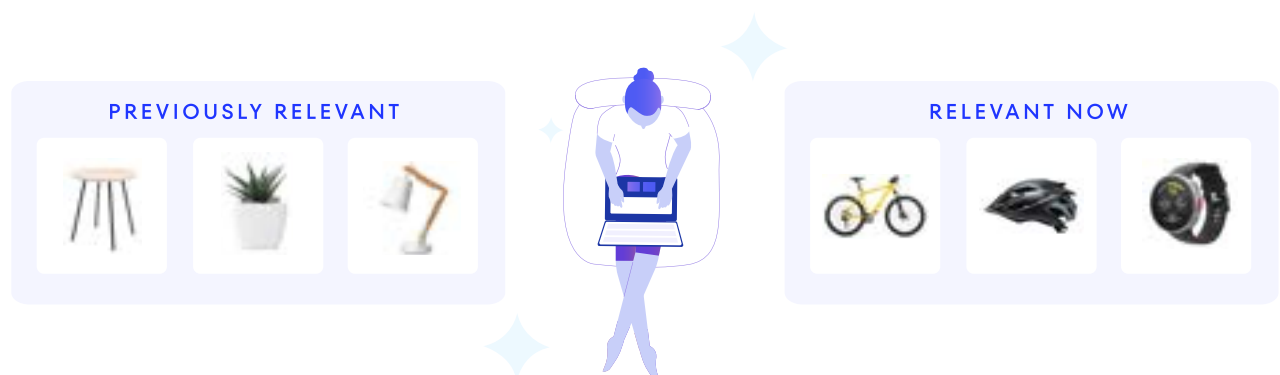
Quick Fact

In November 2021, U.S. consumers spent \$136 billion online, a 9% increase over the previous year.
(source: [Salesforce](#))

While using a customer's Black Friday and Cyber Monday behavior for retargeting efforts can be a vital way to promote delayed conversions, it's also important to remember that historical behavior may be irrelevant to certain subsets of the Black Friday shopper base.

Being able to quickly adjust recommendations to the tastes of a user who has never visited a site before or only visits very infrequently will enable e-commerce businesses to make the most of even their least loyal customers. This requires an AI platform that is able to rapidly relearn, as well as assign an accurate "score" to a user's behavior that is not reliant on what they've done in the past.

Effectively leveraging first-party data is especially crucial in circumstances such as these because it not only pushes the most relevant items to a new or infrequent user faster, but also creates a connection between the brand and the customer quicker.





Leverage Black Friday Traffic to Build Hype for New Product Launches

While bargain hunters will be out in droves on Black Friday, it's also an opportunity to get customers excited about new product line launches. Alongside the discounts and sales they'll be expecting, retailers can also drop an exciting new product line at regular price, generating more long-term interest in the brand as well as boosting AOV.

To launch this tactic, a retailer might send out an email teaser about the new product line around the timing of Black Friday, as well as a reminder when the sale is live, [much like apparel retailer Represent did](#).

If offering discounts and sales still seems like the winning approach, newer or full-price products can be displayed alongside Black Friday sales items on the site. The retailer should ensure, however, that it's clear on the landing page exactly what is full-price and what isn't to avoid customer frustration.

Consider These Strategies to Get the Most Out of Upselling & Bundling

Bundling and upselling can be a boon any time of year for retailers, but they're especially helpful in boosting sales to the next level during Black Friday, as long as there's a bit of strategic planning done ahead of time. Some ideas to maximize bundle and upsell opportunities include:

- **Turn shipping costs into profits.** If a retailer is offering a discount on a bundle containing multiple of the same item, and it costs the same to ship three of those items versus six, the Black Friday deal should be centered around buying six items. This saves the business money on shipping but increases the customer's spend.
- **Incentives based on minimum spend.** When offering bundle, cross-sell, or upsell offers on Black Friday, retailers should consider adding additional benefits to the dollar amount spent. For example, spending \$50 might grant the customer free shipping, while spending \$75 would score them an additional 10% off, and so on.
- **Retarget familiar audiences who haven't bought yet.** Leverage your existing audience of folks (or lookalike audiences) who are familiar with your brand but have not purchased yet with Black Friday bundle and upsell deals. Someone who browsed a retailer's site in August but wasn't motivated to buy might be once an intriguing discount or bundle offer is presented to them via ad retargeting, driving a conversion and adding them to your customer list.

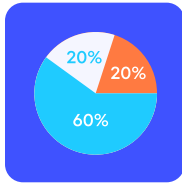


Quick Fact

"My favorite offer for Black Friday is a high discount combined with a high average order value offer. If you're selling a \$20 product, try to build a bundle that sells for a total of \$100 after a 30-40% discount. When you increase the AOV, you can afford to give a bigger discount on the product." –Nik Sharma, [D2C Marketing Guru](#)

Use the 20-60-20 Rule for Conversion-Driving Email & SMS

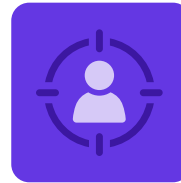
When it comes to holiday email and SMS marketing, a comprehensive strategy can ensure success. One way to achieve this is through the following: segmentation, goal-setting, and hyper-personalization.



Segmentation



Goal-setting



Hyper-personalization

Segmentation is crucial and can be achieved using the 20-60-20 rule. This entails categorizing the 20% of your lowest lifetime value customers, the 60% who are average buyers, and the top 20% who are the most valuable customers (MVC). From there, you can further refine the groups by examining products purchased, interests, demographics, and other factors.

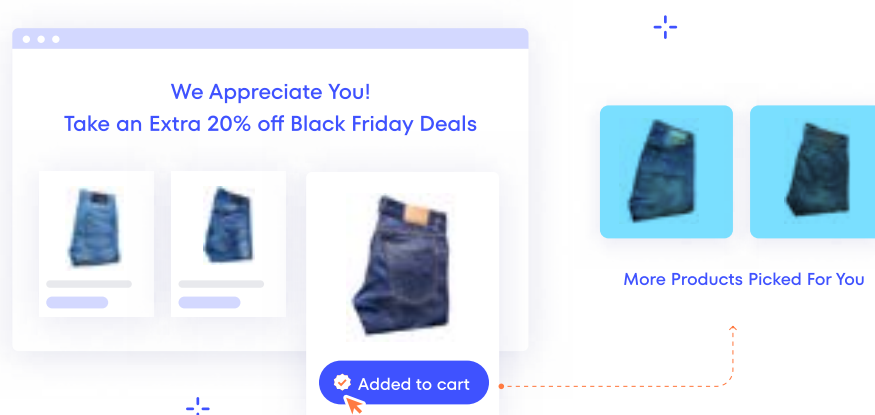
Once you have identified your MVC, it is essential to set goals for acquisition, optimization, and retention. By leveraging your MVC, you can convert new contacts into paying customers, optimize the customer journey to move them up the value chain, and retain shoppers in their current tier.

Finally, hyper-personalization is key to delivering a unique and appreciated experience to each shopper. By utilizing the data you have collected, you can create highly personalized emails and SMS communications that speak directly to the individual, thereby maximizing conversions and enhancing customer loyalty. –contributed by Jimmy Kim, CEO & Founder, [Sendlane](#)

Introduce Specialized Deals to Loyal Customers

While an average customer or brand new one will expect deep discounts on Black Friday, it's also an excellent opportunity to show the most loyal customers some love by offering them specialized deals and discounts. Because the most frequent customers are likely to spend the most, it's in a business' best interest to make those loyal shoppers feel special with added discounts or benefits.

E-commerce retailers should make use of highly targeted email campaigns that also factor in omnichannel personalization. For example, an email to a list of a business' most loyal customers could add an additional discount code or offer on top of a standard discount for Black Friday. Providing early access to Black Friday deals or additional incentives based on customers sharing with a friend can drive even more conversions. These emails can be further maximized by highlighting recommended items to the customer based on their previous purchases, cart adds, or other onsite behavior. The one-two punch of a bonus discount along with recommending items most relevant to the customer's interests are likely to drive higher value conversions.





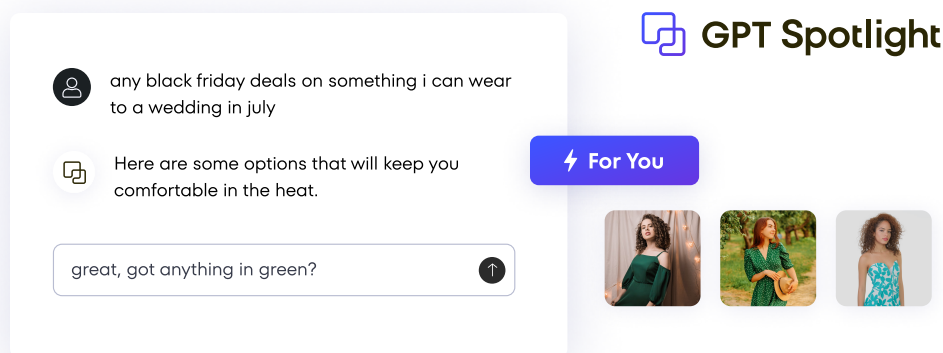
Quick Fact

"There is a lot of inbox clutter surrounding BFCM. Sending out an email campaign that creates a calendar reminder for the customer is one of the most successful approaches I've seen. It helps by getting your customer's attention outside the already stuffed inbox." –Mya Gupta, Director of Client Success, [Tomorrow Agency](#)

Leverage ChatGPT Technology to Help Boost Sales

E-commerce businesses can leverage ChatGPT technology to enhance sales and conversions during Black Friday. ChatGPT, as a powerful AI language model, can be deployed in various ways to improve customer engagement, provide personalized recommendations, and streamline the shopping experience.

ChatGPT can serve as a virtual assistant to handle customer inquiries, providing real-time support and answering frequently asked questions. By automating responses, businesses can handle a higher volume of customer queries, reduce wait times, and ensure prompt assistance, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and increasing the likelihood of making a purchase. These can include questions around shipping times or returns, or even soliciting feedback and reviews live from customers. ChatGPT technology like [GPT Spotlight](#) can also assist customers in finding the right products during Black Friday by engaging in interactive conversations. Users can describe what they're looking for in a much less limited way than they would with a traditional search engine, and GPT Spotlight can provide tailored search results, refining the options based on price range, features, or specific criteria. This interactive search experience helps customers discover relevant products more efficiently, leading to improved conversions.





Be Extra Transparent About Shipping Timelines

Establishing clear shipping timelines and easy order tracking for your customers is key to building customer trust and loyalty. By sharing this information, businesses can boost conversions during the hustle and bustle of BFCM.

Transparency is key. Retailers should ensure shipping timelines are communicated loud and clear on their site and product pages. Posting estimated delivery dates front and center, based on realistic shipping times, can help a business stand out, particularly if customers are shopping for a specific occasion. If possible, retailers should coordinate with warehouse and shipping systems to post exact dates.

Businesses should keep customers in the loop with regular updates. Sending out automated shipping confirmation emails, complete with tracking information and estimated delivery dates, should be a baseline. Encouraging customers to track their packages through your site or a third-party service will keep them feeling in the know. *—contributed by Sarah Gallagher, CEO, [Sellry](#)*

Take Advantage of the Impulse-Buying Mindset with Seamless Bundling & Checkout Experiences

Black Friday and Cyber Monday put shoppers in an impulse-buying mindset. Because they've been conditioned to expect significant discounts, they're more likely to buy items that were only moderately motivating at other times during the year. There are certain steps a store can take to ensure that the checkout experience is so seamless that they buy even more and even return on non-sale days.

First, the checkout experience should be audited to ensure that it runs smoothly and that there aren't any hiccups that could annoy customers and cause them to abandon the cart. Adding a one-click buying option to speed up the process with dynamic buttons from options like Apple Pay, Shop Pay, Google Pay, or PayPal is one way to discourage cart abandonment. Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) options like Klarna or Afterpay are also an increasingly important method of getting customers to pull the trigger by allowing them to pay for their purchases "layaway" style. In fact, the BNPL market is expected to grow 26% annually from now until 2030, according to [Grand View Research](#).

A highly optimized checkout experience is also a great opportunity for businesses to increase the average order value (AOV) through bundling and upselling. For a bundling strategy, consider presenting customers with items that make sense based on what they've already added to their cart. For example, if they're purchasing a soccer ball, a retailer may consider recommending accompanying soccer cleats or shin guards to go along with the order. For upselling, retailers can make recommendations similar to cart adds but that are of better quality or a higher price point.

Use Intelligent AI to Manage Inventory

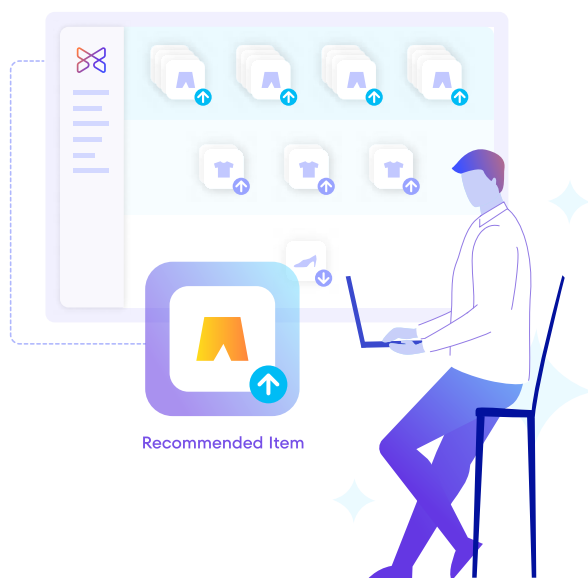
When a retailer has a decreased inventory of certain items, the risk of upsetting customers with out-of-stock products is high. Conversely, a surplus of a given item in the inventory is also a going concern that should be addressed on a regular basis.



Quick Fact

The worldwide cost of inventory distortion – including stockouts and overstock – is an estimated \$1.1 trillion. (source: [IHL Group](#))

Now, retailers can use Black Friday as an inventory management event by prioritizing high-inventory items in recommendation carousels. The ability to customize which items are surfaced to Black Friday shoppers based on their availability as well as their relevance to a customer's taste is a powerful combination that can help assuage inventory concerns. For example, while a traditional recommendation methodology might allow for suggesting items that are in surplus to any and everyone, more advanced AI technology would only prioritize those overflow items to users who have an interest or preference for that type of item. Similarly, less plentiful items can be deemphasized as recommendations, even in spite of a user's preferences.





Leverage Amazon as a Helper Instead of a Competitor

Focusing on Amazon as a friend instead of a competitor during BFCM can have surprising payoffs. Due to some recent updates as well as the Buy With Prime program, it's become far more viable to integrate Amazon and D2C approaches this year. The reality is it is very rare that a retailer will be able to "beat" Amazon for attention around this period with their Prime Day offerings which have become nearly a yearly cult event.

However, with the Buy With Prime button now being available for many retailers that sell omnichannel, it may be in a business' best interest to get BWP installed onsite and build a joint marketing plan alongside the Amazon team to drive the traffic and excitement to their owned channel. [The process is fairly simple](#), and therefore, those that get it set up in the next 30 days will have months to prepare for the "big day" and capture some of this traffic in a higher margin vs. relying on the lower margin transactions directly on Amazon. —contributed by Jared Shaner, CRO, [Trellis](#)



Use Black Friday Behavior to Drive Other Holiday Sales

Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales bring out two types of shoppers: those looking for deals for themselves and those who are looking to do some quick, cost-effective shopping for their loved ones ahead of the holidays. Regardless, the onsite behavior of either type of shopper can provide valuable data to an online retailer in the days and weeks following Thanksgiving weekend.

Retargeting these customers via email, SMS, or in-app and reminding them of items that piqued their interest but they didn't ultimately purchase could lead to a delayed conversion. The messaging in these efforts will be important – "Let your loved ones know what you still want for Christmas" or "Don't forget that gift for mom and dad!" are examples of ways to prompt a customer to remember the items they perused but didn't buy either for themselves or a loved one.

Additionally, these highly personalized reengagement efforts can come with a discount offer similar to the one they might have received on Black Friday or Cyber Monday, just to further encourage conversions and increase brand loyalty.



Quick Fact

"I strongly recommend that Shopify Plus merchants take advantage of the platform's new customer segmentation feature. Go to the "Customers" tab, select "High Predicted Spend Tier," and identify those who haven't made a purchase since the summer. This group is a crucial target audience for Black Friday and beyond!" –Mikko Rekola, Chief Evangelist, [Woolman](#)



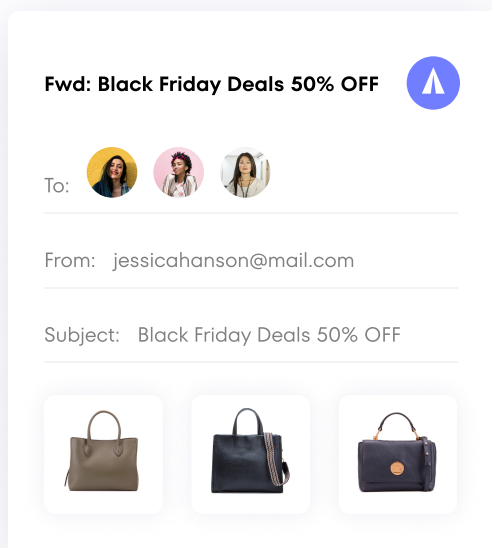
Create Urgency with These Meta Ads Strategies

Your remarketing campaign can be an extremely valuable channel for Black Friday. Here are a few tactics for making the most of your Meta Ads campaigns:

- **Leverage competitors' traffic activity with Meta Advantage+ catalog ads.** You can use your competitors' traffic to your advantage through the Meta ad platform. While you can't directly retarget visitors to your competitors' domains, you can strategically show ads to users who have recently shown a buying signal for products like yours. With all of those potential customers going to competitors' sites, this can be a worthwhile investment for Black Friday.
 - **Show bundles to cold audiences.** Bundles - with each item discounted - are a fantastic way to drive conversions from new users who are particularly inspired to get a timely deal.
 - **Optimize ad text for urgency.** Phrases like "Today only" or "12 hours left" or "Ends at midnight" can drive urgency for the user. The onus is on the body text: Create time-bound CTAs and don't mince words!
- contributed by Dale Wilson, Solutions Engineer, [adQuadrant](#)

Multiply Sales Opportunities with a Solid Customer Referral Program

Ensuring a customer referral program is in place before Black Friday can set up a multiplier effect for businesses. One customer can refer two friends to your brand, those two customers can refer six friends, etc. You're most likely going to have increased traffic and sales on BFCM, so the effect of that multiplier can be even greater during the holiday season and set your brand up for a successful 2024.

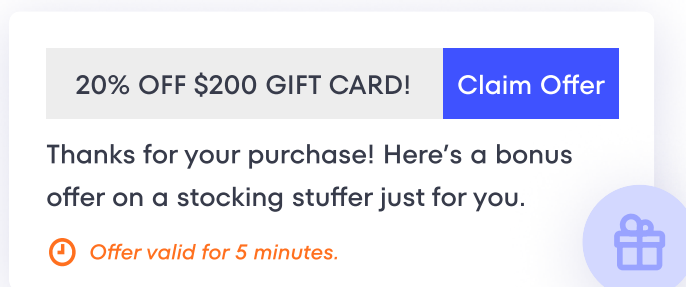


Send personalized messages about the program to customers that are more likely to refer their friends, such as 5-star reviewers or NPS promoters. Let your happy customers be your best marketers this Black Friday. Referrals are a low-cost acquisition channel with high ROI.
—contributed by Lindsay Kolinsky, Director of Marketing, [Okendo](#)

Entice Customers Post-Checkout with Gift Card Offers

Amidst the frenzy of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, when many shoppers are in gift-giving mode, brands have a unique chance to connect with both customers and their gift recipients through post-purchase gift cards. Yes, gift cards. Gift cards can be more than just a gift during the holidays.

The post-purchase phase is a critical part of the customer journey. Consider offering a discounted gift card immediately after checkout, accompanied by a timer to create a sense of urgency.



By presenting customers with this exclusive time-sensitive offer, brands can tap into customer FOMO, prompting them to take action swiftly and add the discounted gift card to their cart.

This strategy not only boosts the AOV during the initial purchase but also plants the seed for a subsequent visit to use the gift card. Customers feel a sense of exclusivity, knowing they have access to this limited-time offer, while the brand can plan for future sales beyond the height of BFCM.

—contributed by Lucas Ballasy, Partner & CXO, [Barrel](#)

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