

Black Friday Playbook



Table of Contents

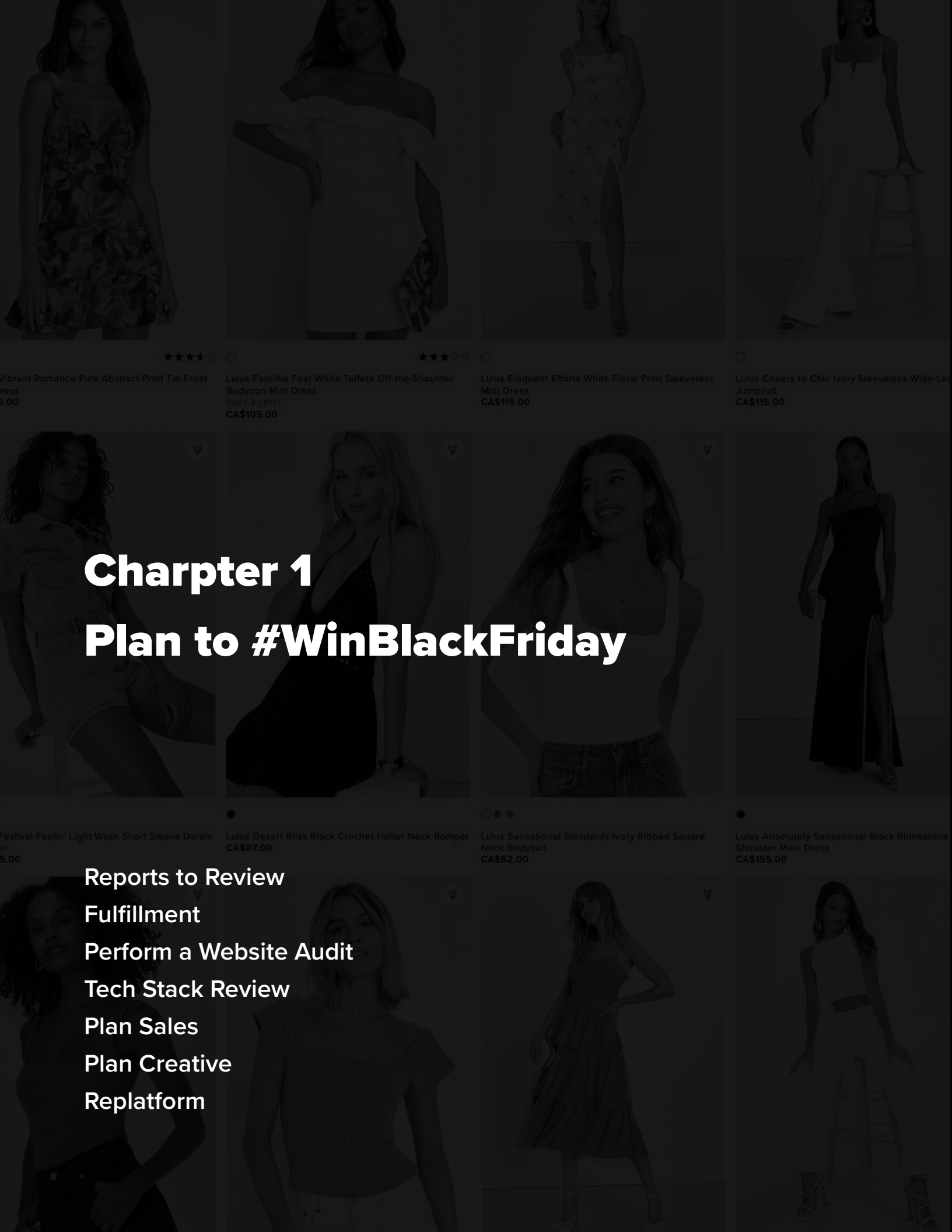
Chapter 1 Plan to #WinBlackFriday	2
Chapter 2 Streamline Merchandising	12
Chapter 3 Create Personalized Experiences	24
Chapter 4 On-Site Search	34
Chapter 5 Communication	40
Chapter 6 Post-Black Friday Planning	44

Are you ever truly “ready” for an event like Black Friday?

Even for veteran retailers, the magnitude of Cyber Weekend prep can be overwhelming. With so many elements at play, it’s hard to shake the feeling that you’ve forgotten something important.

To put your mind at ease, we’ve created the Searchspring Black Friday Playbook to set you up for a successful and stress-free Black Friday / Cyber Monday.





Chapter 1

Plan to #WinBlackFriday

- Reports to Review
- Fulfillment
- Perform a Website Audit
- Tech Stack Review
- Plan Sales
- Plan Creative
- Replatform

There is so much to prepare for Black Friday, it can be difficult to know where to start.

A great place to start is by reviewing reports from last year so you can build a Black Friday customer profile.

Compare last year's reports with year-to-date reporting to find common themes, identify trends, and understand fulfillment needs. The more you know, the better equipped you'll be to meet your shoppers' needs and deliver a high-converting experience.

Reports to Review

Popular Searches

- What terms did last year's Black Friday shoppers search for? What have customers been searching for throughout the year?
- Pull top search queries and review the product results that were served in response.
- Do shoppers repeatedly search for a product you don't carry? Consider stocking it this year.
- Review searches for synonyms that need to be added. For example, do shoppers look for "t-shirts" yet "crew necks" don't appear in results? Make sure your site is set up for optimal, relevant product discovery.
- Is "Black Friday sale" a top search term? Curate a dedicated landing page this year. Dig through your search query data and action the most common trends for this year.

Zero Search Results

- What are shoppers searching that bring them to a "no results found" page? Take steps now to make sure this doesn't happen again and set up synonyms or redirects as needed.
- If misspellings are an issue, implement autocorrect and "did you mean" suggestions.
- For search terms where you simply don't have a relevant result, look at other ways to optimize your no results page. Highlight your best Black Friday offers, suggest alternative products, or guide shoppers to your most popular categories.

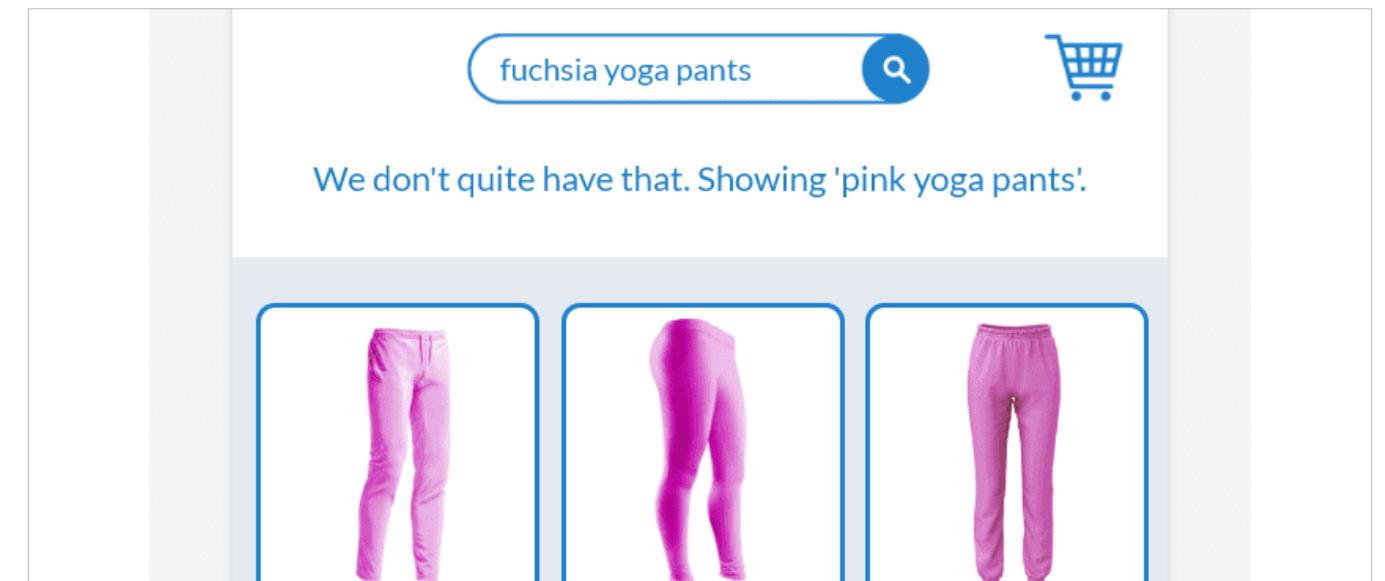


Image 1 : Zero search results

Category Insights

Which category pages did shoppers interact with most last Black Friday and throughout the year?

Dive into page views, time on page, bounce rates, exit rates, interactions, and page values for your top and bottom performing categories.

Identify quick wins that could boost under-performing areas and double down on the landing pages, messaging, and promotions that consistently resonate.

Find opportunities to adapt your merchandising strategy for a more engaging product display this year. Try boosting best sellers, top rated products, or your biggest discounts to capture shoppers' interest.

Breakdown

Show 10 entries

Collection Page	Requests	Products	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value	Actions
Collections / Shoes	1,900,548	2486	232,143	176,322	1m 39s	20,002	25.73%	21.43%	\$1.32	Create Campaign
Collections / Sandals	1,537,051	376	279,249	192,998	1m 27s	12,059	39.12%	20.64%	\$1.37	Create Campaign
Collections / Heels	1,003,545	1001	4,484	3,631	1m 46s	468	73.72%	22.44%	\$2.52	Create Campaign
Collections / New Arrivals	658,800	1598	115,313	89,833	1m 38s	12,594	41.32%	30.97%	\$2.09	Create Campaign
Collections / Booties	568,026	489	92,079	69,793	1m 37s	6,257	31.53%	18.91%	\$1.65	Create Campaign
Collections / Sale	559,850	528	88,513	72,935	1m 47s	4,407	39.25%	22.19%	\$1.39	Create Campaign
Collections / Clothing	489,801	826	3,476	2,744	1m 53s	358	70.39%	25.12%	\$2.81	Create Campaign
Collections / New Shoes	428,025	1219	65,226	48,728	1m 36s	4,301	39.41%	23.16%	\$2.13	Create Campaign
Collections / Resort	408,025	550	44,043	34,777	1m 20s	1,979	42.95%	17.61%	\$1.38	Create Campaign
Collections / Chunky Heels	408,025	492	64,732	51,478	1m 41s	1,646	50.12%	19.39%	\$1.58	Create Campaign

Showing 1 to 10 of 55 entries

Image 2 : Category insights

New vs Returning Visitors

Do your Black Friday shoppers consist of the same repeat customers you attract all year-round? Or do you experience an influx of new visitors at this time of year thanks to high-profile sales?

While a spike in fresh customers is always welcome, their lifetime value is limited if they never return post-Black Friday. Focus on ways to turn last year's seasonal shoppers into repeat customers if you want to extract maximum value from these visitors.

For loyal shoppers who return again and again, consider an extra special incentive to reward them at this time of year.

Conversions and AOV

How does your Black Friday average order value (AOV) compare with the rest of the year?

If it's significantly lower, this could be a sign you need to upsell and cross-sell more over Cyber Weekend.

Use product recommendations to surface personalized suggestions to shoppers. They might come to your site with one product in mind, and be pleasantly surprised to find you also stock other items on their holiday shopping list.

Impulse purchases are at an all time high during sale periods, so boost product visibility to increase cart values.

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

<p>Columbia Women's Columbia, Minx Shorty III Boot ★★★★★ \$99.95</p>	<p>UGG Women's UGG, Classic Ultra Mini Boot ★★★★★ \$139.95</p>	<p>Wolverine Men's Wolverine Boots, Floorhand 6 inch Waterproof... ★★★★★ \$99.95 Comp. at \$110.00 (Save 9%)</p>	<p>Columbia Women's Columbia, Ice Maiden II Boots ★★★★★ \$79.95 Comp. at \$89.95 (Save 11%)</p>	<p>Columbia Women's Columbia, Heavenly Omni-Heat Waterproof Boot ★★★★★ \$139.95</p>
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Best Sellers **On-Trend Athleisure** **Fall Preview**

Image 3 : Use product recommendations to surface personalized suggestions to shoppers

Fulfillment

Order fulfillment in ecommerce has a huge impact on the overall shopper experience.

Shoppers would like their orders to be delivered fast and, usually, for free. In fact, unexpected shipping costs or longer than anticipated delivery timelines are among the top reasons for shopping cart abandonment.

Use reporting and analytics to plan inventory levels, order new items shoppers are searching for, and determine year-over-year growth.

Use the following tips to ensure a streamlined experience:

- Be upfront about inventory levels.
- Keep shoppers informed post-purchase.
- Create a merchandising strategy to draw focus to available items.
- Upgrade your tech-stack to keep up with fulfillment demands.
- Make returns easy.



Perform a Website Audit

An ecommerce site audit is a review of your site and the shopper journey. It will reveal gaps in the user experience and pinpoint improvements to make.

This shouldn't be viewed as a box-checking exercise – site audits deserve dedicated attention and place on your marketing calendar.

Conclude with a plan to fix issues – findings are only useful if they are acted upon.

What to Review in Your Audit

Site Search

Review search reports for common queries. Are they accurate? Can shoppers find what they're looking for? Does the no results found page lead to a dead end? Shoppers who search are more likely to convert, so this part of the shopper experience is crucial. Shop your own site and have friends and family shop your site to make sure search results are clear and relevant and optimize accordingly.

Merchandising

Click through category pages to ensure the right products are on display. Are boost rules being taken advantage of? Banners? Badges? Geo-targeting? These merchandising features can help you deliver a better shopper experience.

Recommendations

Intelligent product recommendations drive up average order value if they're used effectively. Review products suggested to shoppers at each step of the journey. Don't show random or blanked product recommendations. Instead, display complimentary products, similar items, and what other shoppers' purchased.

SEO

Realistically, a site's performance on search engines deserves an audit of its own. From reviewing current rankings and identifying keyword gaps, to fixing issues with technical SEO, give plenty of time for this step. Make sure product descriptions are accurate, simple, and clear. Consider image and video naming conventions, and make sure to include captions and alt text. These are just a couple things you can do immediately to boost SEO value.

Site Speed

Page load times affect everything from user experience to SEO. This step is easy to check thanks to free online tools, but fixing issues takes time. Run speed tests regularly to stay on top of technical problems that can slow your site down.

Broken Links

As with site speed, broken links are a big no-no from both a shopper and search engine perspective. They are also common in ecommerce because of discontinued products or restructured categories. Luckily, it's very easy to find broken links that have cropped up since the last audit using online tools and Google Analytics.

Mobile

The majority of shoppers shop on their mobile device, so make sure your ecommerce site is optimized. Many retailers treat the mobile experience as a set-and-forget aspect of a site redesign or upgrade. However, as stores evolve or as new lines are added, check for impacts on the mobile version of your store.

Tech Stack Review

An ecommerce tech stack is everything used across teams to make your site run effectively and efficiently. Take the time early in the Black Friday planning process to determine if you need to upgrade or add tools to #WinBlackFriday.

The following are just a few tech stack needs you'll want to review before Black Friday:

Ecommerce Platform

Is the platform you're hosting your online store on still meeting your needs? Think about this and consider changing platforms if needed.

Reviews and Listing Management

Listing and review sites can be tough to keep up with. However, they are vital for ecommerce success. Simplify the process and tracking with review and listing management services.

Shipping / Inventory / Order Management

There are many options for ecommerce merchants to manage shipping, inventory, and order management needs. As sites grow, management of these pieces becomes more complex so it's important to invest in a solution.

Email Marketing

Every marketer will tell you the importance of email communication. It's absolutely required to nurture relationships and build customer loyalty.

There are many cheap and free options for those building their biz, but for those who require a more sophisticated email solution, invest in one that personalizes for higher conversion rates and to deliver a better shopper experience.

Search, Personalization, and Merchandising Solutions

Most ecommerce platforms have built in solutions for search, personalization, and merchandising, but they usually need a little help.

Search – Relevant search results increase conversions by 4x. Get an advanced search solution to optimize results

Personalization – Personalization includes everything from product recommendations to search results. Yes, native ecommerce platforms offer blanket recs (the same products recommended for everyone), but that is not a truly personalized experience. Shoppers today expect experiences tailored especially for them and, by accommodating this, your conversions will reach new highs.

Merchandising – With merchandising tools, you can customize filters, create your own category pages and campaigns, and automate processes with features like boost rules, inline banners, and geo-merchandising. Having control over the merchandising of your online store is essential to getting relevant products in front of shoppers and increasing AOV.

Plan Sales

Plan your Black Friday / Cyber Monday sales early so you can ensure inventory and create effective campaigns that increase revenue and average order value.

Below are some best practices to think about when putting together your Black Friday / Cyber Monday sales strategy:

Make it Personal

Your customers expect more than a generic, one-size-fits-all shopping experience. For repeat visitors in particular, your store should adapt to their preferences and buying patterns for a more personalized journey.

For example, just because you have a great deal on men's shoes doesn't mean you should push this offer on a shopper who shows an interest in black dresses.

To engage and convert, ensure your product recommendations are relevant to each individual customer.

Create Gift Guides and Landing Pages

For high profile events like Black Friday, it's a good idea to create dedicated campaign or category landing pages that you can direct all relevant search queries to. These campaign landing pages can – and should – be planned, designed, and tested well in advance of Thanksgiving.

Create gift guides for shoppers such as "Men's Gifts Under \$50" and landing pages featuring specific collections.

The easier you make it for shoppers to find what they need, the more they'll spend and the happier they will be, leading to increased customer loyalty.

Keep the Customer in Mind

One of the best tips we can give you is to put yourself in the customer's shoes.

How would you search on your site? What would you like to see as you search? Would you want to see new products first, best rated, top sellers, or A-Z for each category?

Once you work through these questions, optimize your site and plan sales accordingly.

Plan Creative

Planning creative goes beyond graphics that read “Black Friday Sale.” You need your creative and messaging to be completely omnichannel. Does your campaign work online as well as it works in-store? What about on social media? Your store’s mobile app? Various marketplaces? The key here is consistency across platforms.

Consider the following when planning Black Friday / Cyber Monday creative:

- In-store signage
- Merchandising banners and badges
- Campaign and collection landing pages
- Physical mailers
- Social media posts (Instagram, Instagram Stories, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok)
- Email
- Display Ads
- Marketplaces
- Mobile App
- Commercials

Replatform (if needed)

While performing your site’s audit, did you discover that it may be time for a new ecommerce platform? If so, act on this step early to ensure timely implementation and to get the rest of your tech stack up and running. If you wait too long to replatform, some providers may not have enough time to integrate and give you everything available to provide the best shopper experience.

Black Friday / Cyber Monday creative takes time and planning to be effective and should go through multiple rounds of approvals to ensure messaging and images are clear, engaging, and aligned.

In addition to providing all parties involved enough time to implement, replatforming several months before Black Friday gives you time to learn your new ecommerce platform and work out any kinks.

Sometimes, there can also be a lag in SEO after a replatform, which means your site might not be as discoverable as it should be. Give yourself plenty of time to get the algorithm working for you.



“My advice to anyone in ecommerce would be to think about the ease of the shopper experience and how to reduce friction. Technology like Searchspring can help shoppers find the products they want and get to checkout faster. This can all have a massive impact on reducing drop-off and lifting conversion rates.”

– Daniel McLean, Ecommerce Manager, Rip Curl

[Read more about Rip Curl](#)



Chapter 2

Streamline Merchandising

Landing Pages and Collection Pages

Gift Guides and Wishlists

Get Shoppers Talking: Pre-Launch Page

Personalized Merchandising

In-store and Online Merchandising

Merchandising Tools You Need

Geo-Merchandising

Landing Pages and Collection Pages

We already touched on the importance of planning creative for landing and collection/category pages, but that is just the first step in this important part of planning Black Friday / Cyber Monday. Essentially, planning these pages (and corresponding pieces) is part of planning your overall marketing and merchandising campaign.

What is a Merchandising Campaign?

A merchandising campaign is simply a strategic way to display products on your ecommerce site and relay information to shoppers. The goals are to engage customers, boost conversions, and improve the overall shopper experience. Merchandising campaigns support time-sensitive marketing and sales campaigns, and evergreen initiatives.

A Black Friday sale merchandising campaign might include the following:

- Boost rules display relevant products at the top of category and search pages.
- Banners communicate offers and info to shoppers.
- Badges draw attention to specified products.
- Geo-merchandising adjusts site messaging based on the shopper's location.
- Landing pages feature specific products.
- Collection pages (or category pages) feature a collection of products, ie: Men's Shirts.

All these features are just a few ways to encourage shoppers to complete a purchase.

What is a Landing Page?

Campaign landing pages hold valuable merchandising potential. Typically created for a short period of time, merchandised landing pages are used to curate seasonal styles, limited collections, or the latest sale.

Pro-Tip: Add some merchandising magic and pre-schedule your page launch for the perfect destination and marketing campaign clicks.

Make dedicated landing pages with the same products that are featured in email communications, social media posts, and display advertising. In addition to highlights on the homepage, merchandised landing pages give shoppers a relevant destination for campaign traffic – getting shoppers one step closer to conversion.

For example, Chubbies features collections on their homepage and guides shoppers to a landing page with items from that collection. This leads to a better experience for shoppers by cutting down on time searching.

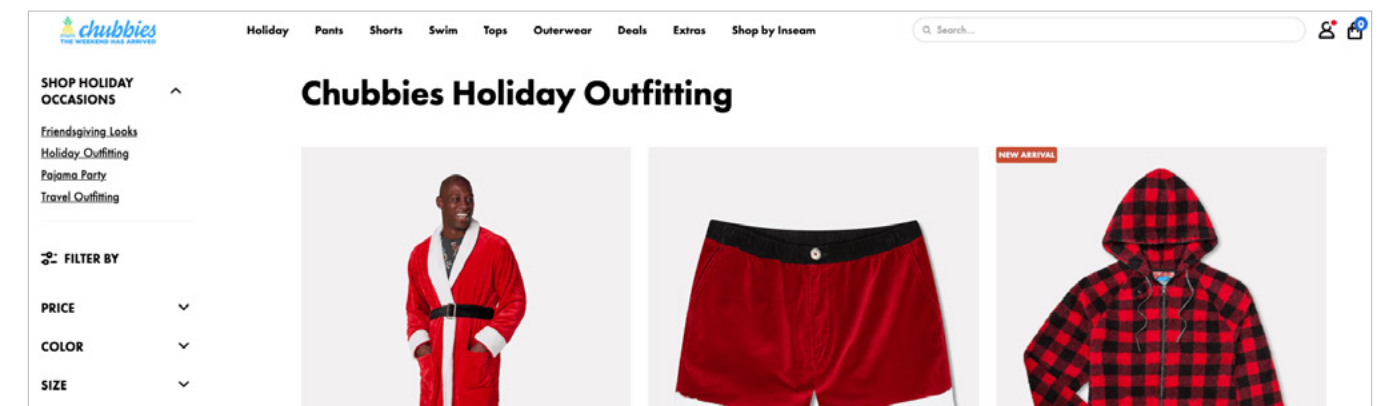


Image 4 : Chubbies holiday collection landing page

What is a Collection or Category Page?

Collection and category are exactly what they sound like: grouping products together by type or by what collection they belong to.

For example, an apparel shop might have category pages for women’s tops, men’s tops, and kids’ tops.

Collection and category pages can also be used to curate selections of different product types, like a “shop by room” page on a home decor store that groups a mix of furniture, lighting, and accessories for the bedroom.

To drive the most conversions, merchants should spend time focusing on optimizing collection and category pages to create a better shopper experience.

Use the following tips to get the most out of your collection and category pages:

- **Leverage Aesthetics**

Group products together in a way that is aesthetically pleasing on category pages. Rather than randomly sorting products that share attributes, make them look more appealing by placing products with similar styles next to each other in the product grid.

Take inspiration from [The Paper Store](#), which created this beautiful and helpful page to curate gifts for Mother’s Day. The page is more than a basic product grid, it shows subcategories and looks like a magazine to create a more engaging shopping experience.

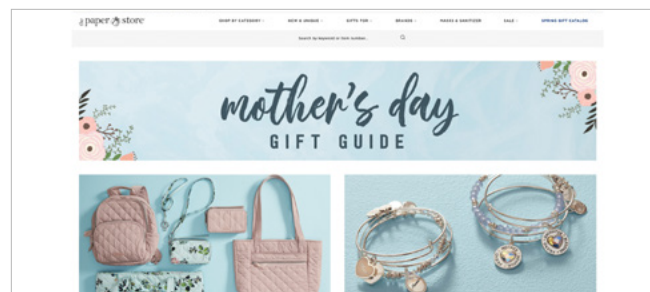


Image 5 : The Page Store leverages aesthetics

- **Arrange Complementary Products Together**

Display complementary products next to each other on category pages to boost your cross-selling efforts.

An online furniture store could create a category page dedicated to home office setups and feature a desk, chair, lamp, and piece of artwork that go nicely together in each row. Customers may end up adding more items to their carts than they had planned when they see how products can be used together.

On their cold weather gear page, [BTOsports](#) uses several arrangement techniques to encourage customers to buy multiple items. The sports retailer shows subcategories at the top of the page to highlight the various types of products customers can find there. It also strategically displays accessories, like snow goggles, next to big-ticket items, like jackets, to remind customers of all the gear they might need.

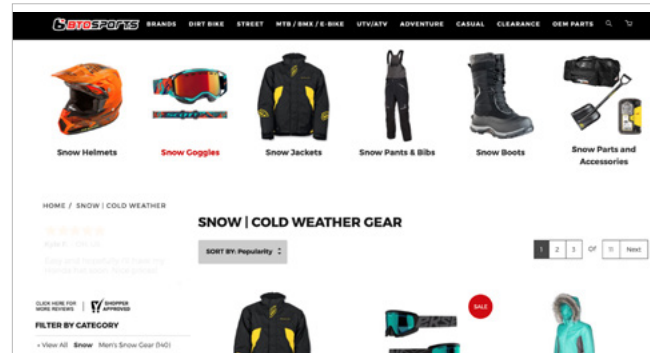


Image 6 : BTOsports arranges complementary products together

- **Use Badges to Grab Shoppers Attention**

Leverage badges to label products as “new,” “popular,” or “back in stock” on category pages to emphasize their popularity and make them more appealing.

By using merchandising badges that say “selling quickly,” you create a sense of scarcity and urgency that encourages customers to take action now, rather than waiting to make a purchase.

Fashion brand [Pink Lily](#) labels its bestselling items to grab shoppers’ attention and help products fly off the warehouse shelves.

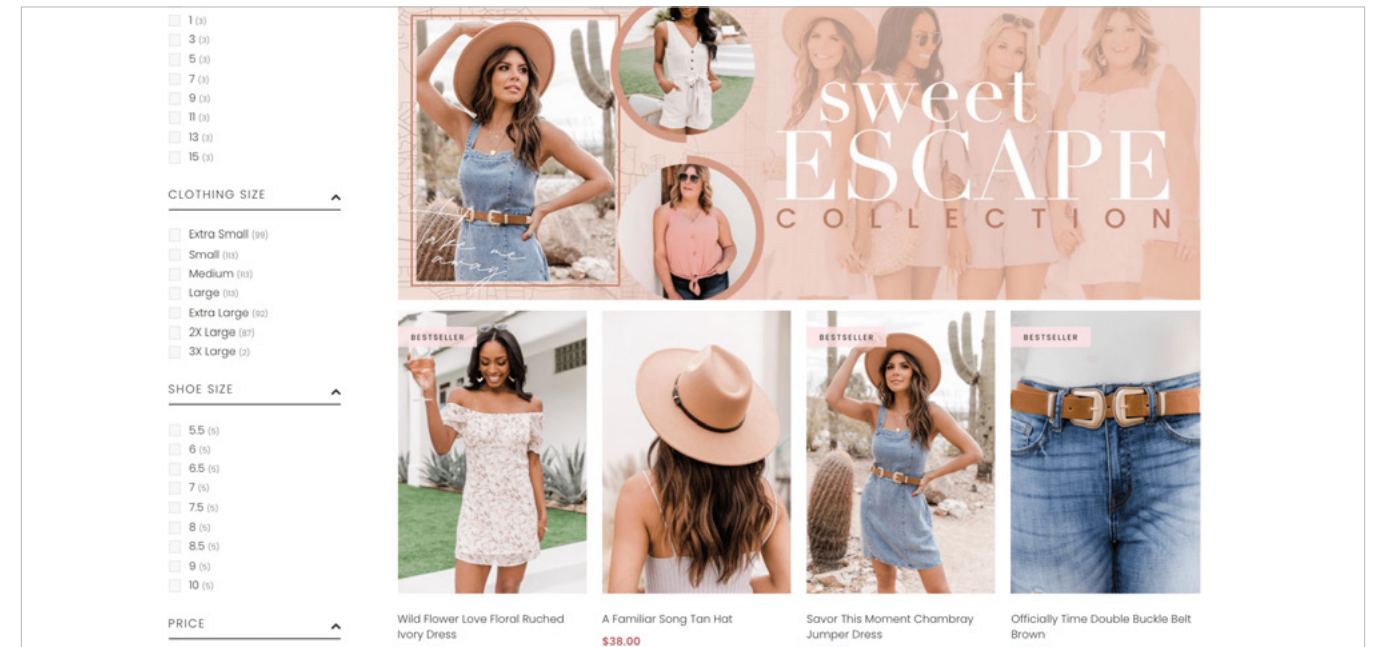


Image 7 : Pink Lily uses badges to grab shoppers’ attention

Gift Guides and Wishlists

By now you have pulled reports and done enough research to put together gift guides and wishlists. Use collection and category pages to guide shoppers to these pages. Communicate about gift guides and wishlists using a global merchandising campaign, inline banners, and custom filters.

Gift Guide Ideas:

- Men
- Woman
- Dogs
- Cats
- Gifts Under \$20
- Travel Accessories
- Cooking Supplies
- Fitness
- Specific Foods
- Technology
- Products for Home
- Car Accessories

Products to Include in Gift Guides:

- Specific Categories
- Trending Items
- Best Sellers
- Featured Products
- Exclusives

Within gift guides, include product recommendations like complimentary items, similar products, and what other shoppers ultimately purchased to improve average order value.

Get Shoppers Talking: Pre-Launch Page

Want to get shoppers talking before you even launch your Black Friday / Cyber Monday sales? Create a pre-launch page to create buzz and generate sales before the big day.

Use a pre-launch page to give loyal customers a sneak peek to big sales, offers, and exclusive deals.

Communicate your pre-launch page with personalized email, text messages, social media, and global merchandising campaigns featuring badges and inline banners.

A pre-launch page is a great way to spread excitement and offers incentive to buy now (and more later).

Personalized Merchandising

Personalized merchandising is more important today than ever before. Not only do shoppers appreciate a personalized experience, they expect it.

No two shoppers are the same, so why recommend or display the same products to everyone? If they stop in the physical store, they'd receive service based on what they are looking for as an individual. You shoppers deserve the same kind of care when they shop online.

Personalize merchandising by adjusting products they see first based on their unique preferences and behaviors. For a truly customized shopping experience, combine this merchandising strategy with personalized recommendations.

Two brands that do personalization really well are [Pearl iZumi](#) and [Peltz Shoes](#). Pearl iZumi makes personalized recommendations based on previous behavior, while Peltz Shoes takes it a step further with personalized search and merchandising.

In the example below, Peltz Shoes search results are based on the shoppers previous behavior. This shopper has a history of searching for athletic sandals, so a basic "sandals women" search returned results with sporty styles populating first – making the experience extra personal and relevant.

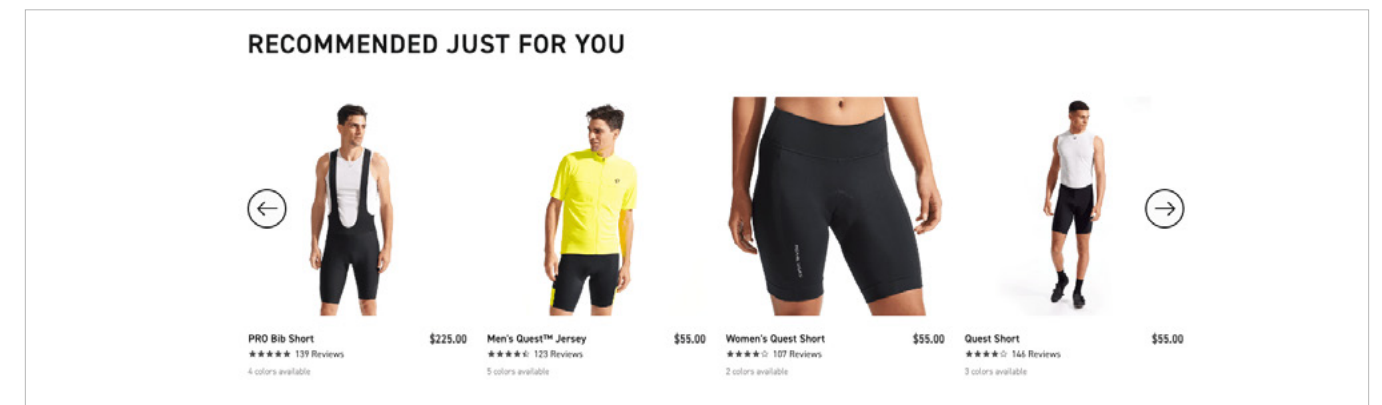


Image 8 : Pearl iZumi personalized recommendations

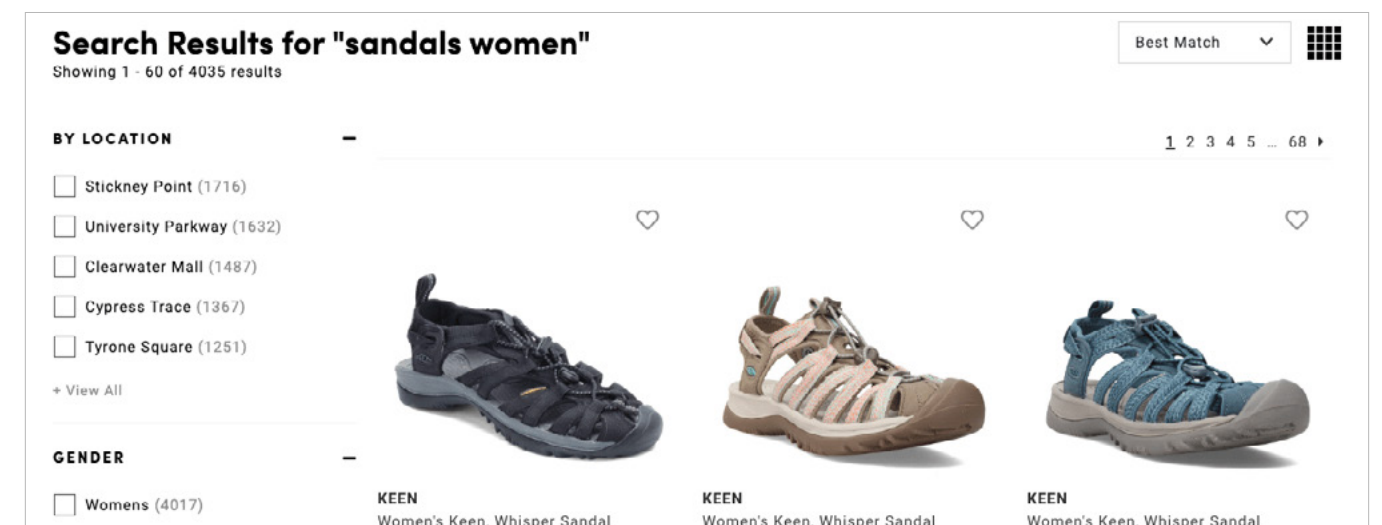


Image 9 : Peltz Shoes personalized search and merchandising

In-Store and Online Merchandising

We've already mentioned omnichannel merchandising and this section focuses specifically on in-store and online merchandising.

Style Your Homepage

While planning visual merchandising, think of your homepage as your in-store display window. Rather than placing racks of clothing in this prime real estate, clothing stores create eye-catching arrangements in their front windows. Instead of publishing white background product shots on your homepage, use editorialized photos to highlight new or seasonal products.

Give Context

It's also a good idea to put products into context online. Shoppers visiting a brick-and-mortar location can examine a product to determine if it fits their needs. They are able to see size, what it is made out of, weight, color, and more. Shopping online makes this a challenge and not being able to visualize the product in their space is a big reason why shoppers abandon their cart. Display images that show the product in real life. Let's say you run an ecommerce store that specializes in tableware. Why not stage a dinner party using your products and add those images to product pages?

This strategy doubles as a cross and upselling technique. When you highlight multiple products in a photo, customers become more likely to add items to their carts that they may not have originally been looking for.

This Black Friday / Cyber Monday, consider implementing the use of user generated content to put products into context. Feature customer photos on your product pages, either in reviews or in an "as seen on" section.

[Fabletics](#) does a great job of implementing this by sharing photos of customers wearing their workout gear.

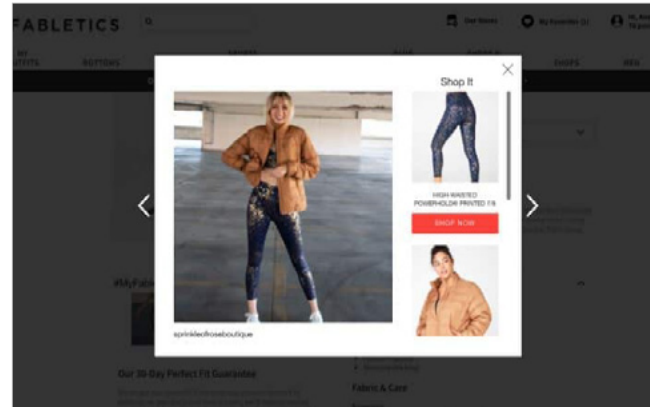


Image 10 : Fabletics shares photos of customers wearing their workout gear

Consistency is Key

Say you run a home goods store. A customer goes to your online store and sees a collection of Hanukkah-themed decorations, pillows, and tableware featured on the homepage.

Excited to see the seasonal products, the customer comes to the store in-person to browse the new arrivals. As they approach, they see the window displays are decked out with the same Hanukkah products featured online. The shopper goes home with what excited them in the first place and additional items they found while browsing the store.

A few days later, the customer regrets not buying a Hanukkah tablecloth they saw in store. They visit your website again to purchase the tablecloth and easily find it thanks to the featured collection on your homepage. As a result, you have effectively created a loyal customer who received an excellent, familiar experience.

Consider what would have happened if the same shopper had visited your store first and spotted Hanukkah products, but when they went to purchase the tablecloth online at a later time, found the website still highlighting Thanksgiving decor?

Promotions

If you're running a Black Friday or Cyber Monday sale that discounts all Christmas merchandise by 20% on your website, apply the same promotion in brick-and-mortar stores, third-party resellers, social media, and the mobile app.

Use consistent visual branding on each platform to promote the sale. Signage in-store should match the website and across social media.

When running a limited time offer or sale, schedule online campaigns accordingly. While an in-store promotion is relatively easy to set up for "one day only," there is more room for error online.

Avoid adding banners or adjusting prices on the morning a sale launches. This leaves room for mistakes or technical crashes when your site is probably attracting more traffic than usual. Schedule landing pages or campaigns to begin and end at specific times so you don't have to manually change everything at midnight and to ensure delivery of a consistent experience.

Product Recommendations

Let's say a customer visits your brick-and-mortar sporting goods store looking for tennis shoes. A sales associate shows the customer products that best meet their needs and offers suggestions.

The customer wasn't ready to make a decision in the store, so they visit your website a few days later. With a user-friendly site navigation, they quickly find the same products the sales associate pointed out. As they browse, product recommendations become more and more personalized as the personalization machine learns their preferences and behavior.

If the customer still doesn't make a purchase, take the online experience a step further and target them through retargeting ads so they're more likely to return to your site to make a purchase.

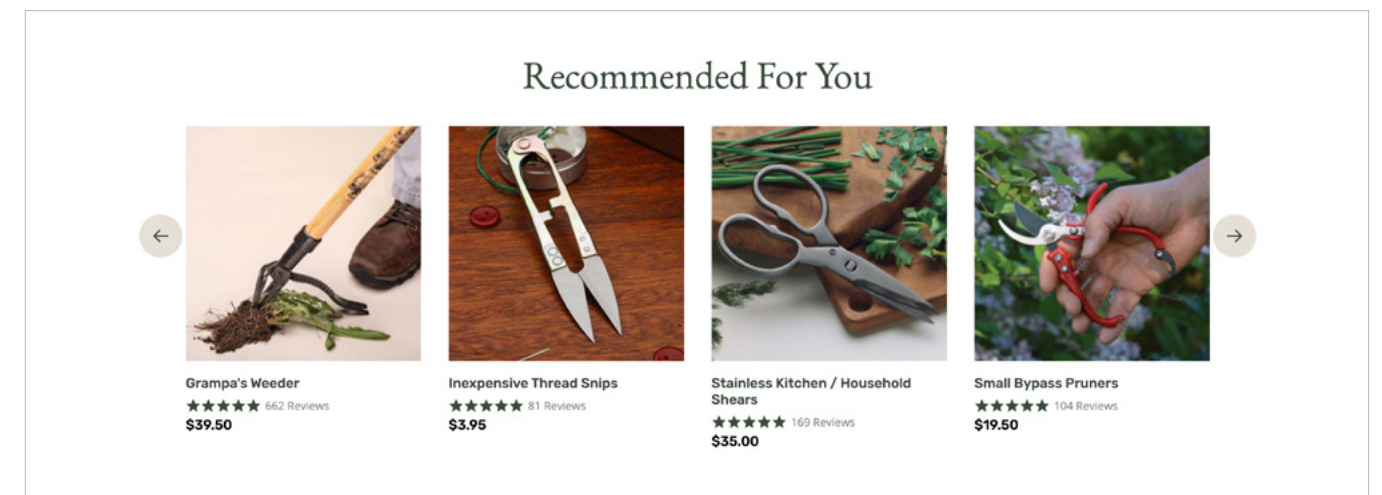


Image 11 : Garrett Wade personalized recommendations

Merchandising Tools You Need

Inline Banners

Inline banners are your chance to advertise and highlight specific products, campaigns, and collections throughout your online store. You can even promote events or other things going on within your company or industry. With flexible tools, you control everything, so the possibilities are endless.

[Mast General Store](#) goes above and beyond with their use of inline banners. They use them throughout their search results pages grid as a way to create an aesthetic. By utilizing inline banners to the fullest, they promote events, sales, and seasonal items in one easy swoop.



Image 12 : Mast General Store uses inline banners throughout their search results pages grid

Badges

Badges draw attention to specified products. Leverage badges to label products as “new,” “popular,” or “back in stock” on category pages to emphasize their popularity and make them more appealing.

By using merchandising badges that say “selling quickly,” you create a sense of scarcity and urgency that encourages customers to take action now, rather than waiting to make a purchase.

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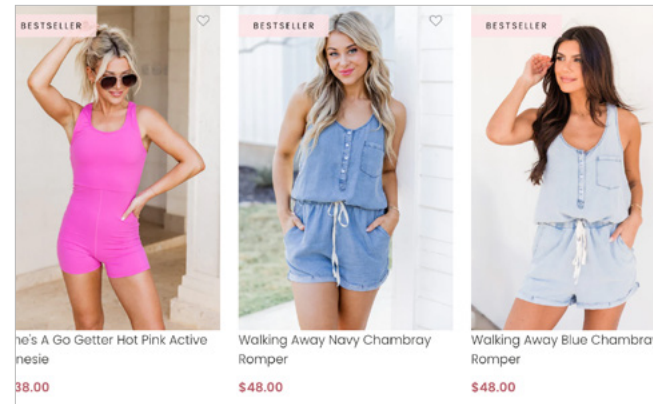


Image 13 : Pink Lily labels its bestselling items to grab shoppers’ attention

Boost Rules

Strategically boosting and pinning products to align with business goals is another helpful category merchandising trick.

For example, you could pin items that are on sale to the top of category pages to offload inventory after the holiday season. Or, you could boost your house brand or higher-margin products to increase profits. The possibilities are endless.

Just like you should strategically display certain products at the top of category pages, you should also deliberately hide products that could detract from the shopping experience.

Don’t waste valuable real estate on out-of-stock products. If shoppers are forced to scroll through endless rows of items that aren’t available for purchase, conversion rates suffer. Use boost rules to dynamically remove or push down these products from search and category pages.

Not only does this benefit conversions, it also reduces bounce rates and prevents shopper frustration.

Clothing boutique, Lime Lush, effortlessly pushes out of stock items to the bottom of the page to provide a better shopper experience to their customers.

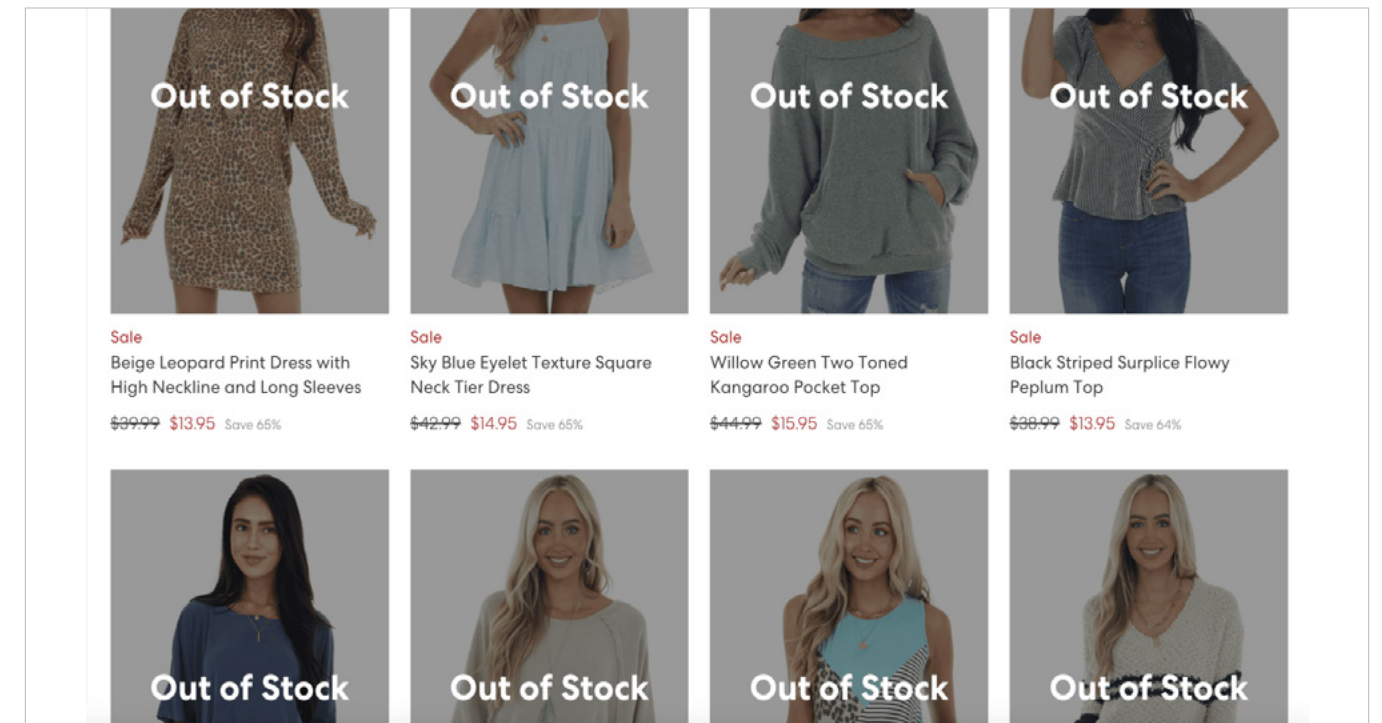


Image 14 : Don’t waste valuable real estate on out-of-stock products

Geo-Merchandising

In any given month, do your customers in Florida buy the same products as your customers in Minnesota? Whether you sell clothing, sporting goods, or outdoor furniture, your shoppers' preferences vary significantly by location. This is especially true if you sell in different states, countries, or even hemispheres.

Tailor product displays with geo-merchandising to improve product relevancy and increase the likelihood of a quick conversion.

Australian brand, St Frock also uses geo-merchandising to bring their global visitation to life.

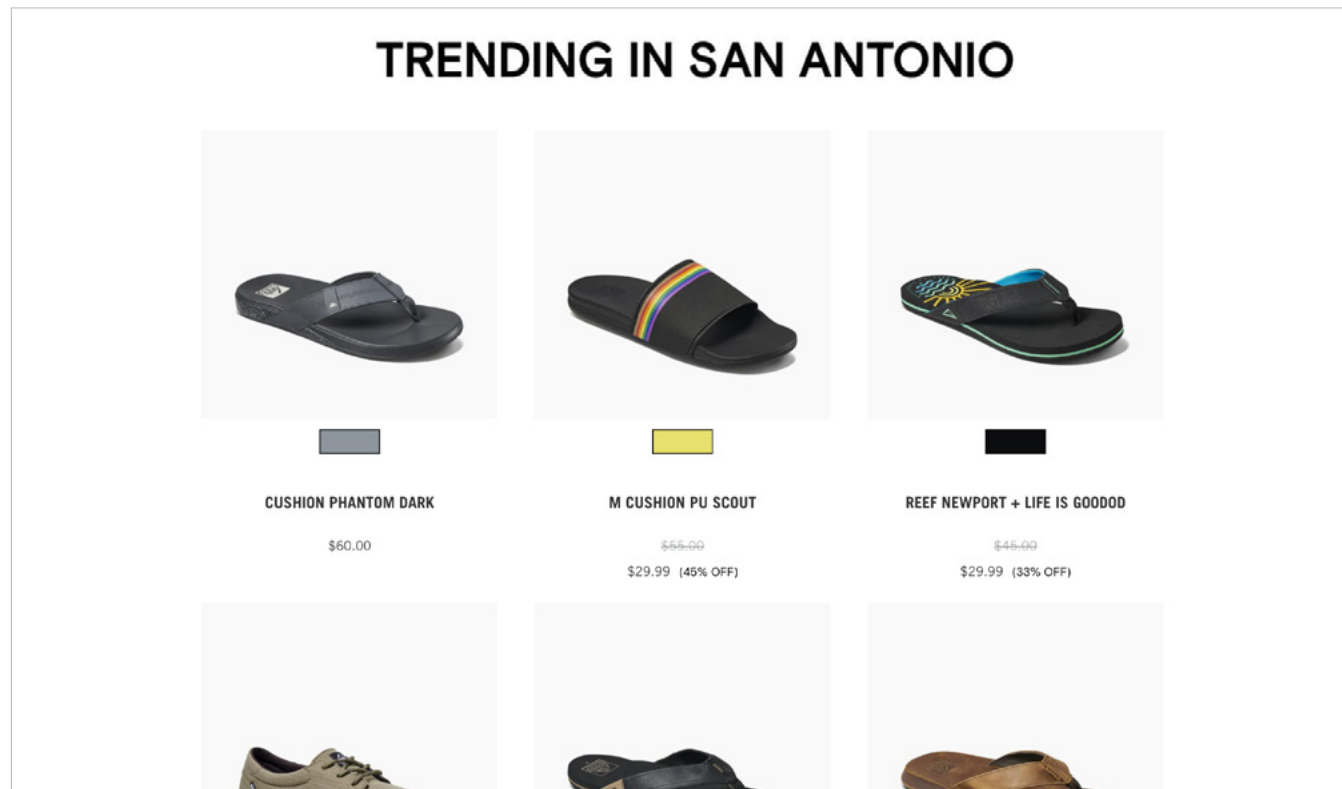


Image 15 : Reef tells shoppers what is trending in each city

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“We’re using geo-merchandising for the USA to automatically boost summer products during the Australian winter, and vice-versa. With the time we’ve saved from automated merchandising and boost rules, we’re further refining the search experience. We’ve gained deeper insights, improved relevancy, and now have more time for conversion and optimisation activities across the site. A/B testing also lets us reduce the amount of internal discussion around changes. The quality data we now have to back up ideas means we’re making more impactful changes to the shopper experience.”

– Matt Page, Head of Digital and Marketing, St Frock

[Read more about St Frock](#)



Chapter 3

Create Personalized Experiences

Personalized Product Recommendations

Artificial Intelligence

Personalized Email

Personalized Search and Merchandising

Personalized Product Recommendations

Personalized product recommendations are one of the most effective ways to boost conversions. They attract first-time buyers and encourage repeat customers.

However, not all recommendations are created equal. Most ecommerce platforms offer some sort of product recommendations, but they are typically blanketed – meaning they recommend the same products for each shopper based on a few simple rules set on the backend.

For product recommendations to be effective, they should be personalized.

An ecommerce tool that provides recommendations to shoppers based on behavior can turn your ecommerce site into a conversion machine.

Shoppers that click on recommendations are 4.5x more likely to complete their purchase. What's more, purchases with a recommendation clicked have a 10% higher order value and 54% of retailers report recommendations as a key driver of AOV.

Impulse buys are also more likely when shoppers receive tailored suggestions. 49% of consumers have bought products they didn't plan to buy as a result of personalized recommendations.

For example, one Searchspring client experienced \$8.7 million in added year-over-year revenue just from implementing personalized product recommendations.

Types of Product Recommendations

Don't show shoppers unrelated products under the guise of "you may also like." The first step to high-converting recommendations is understanding what's available.

- **Cross-Sell Recommendations**

Show products a shopper should consider purchasing in addition to the item they are viewing. For example, accessories that match the dress they are viewing or products often purchased together.

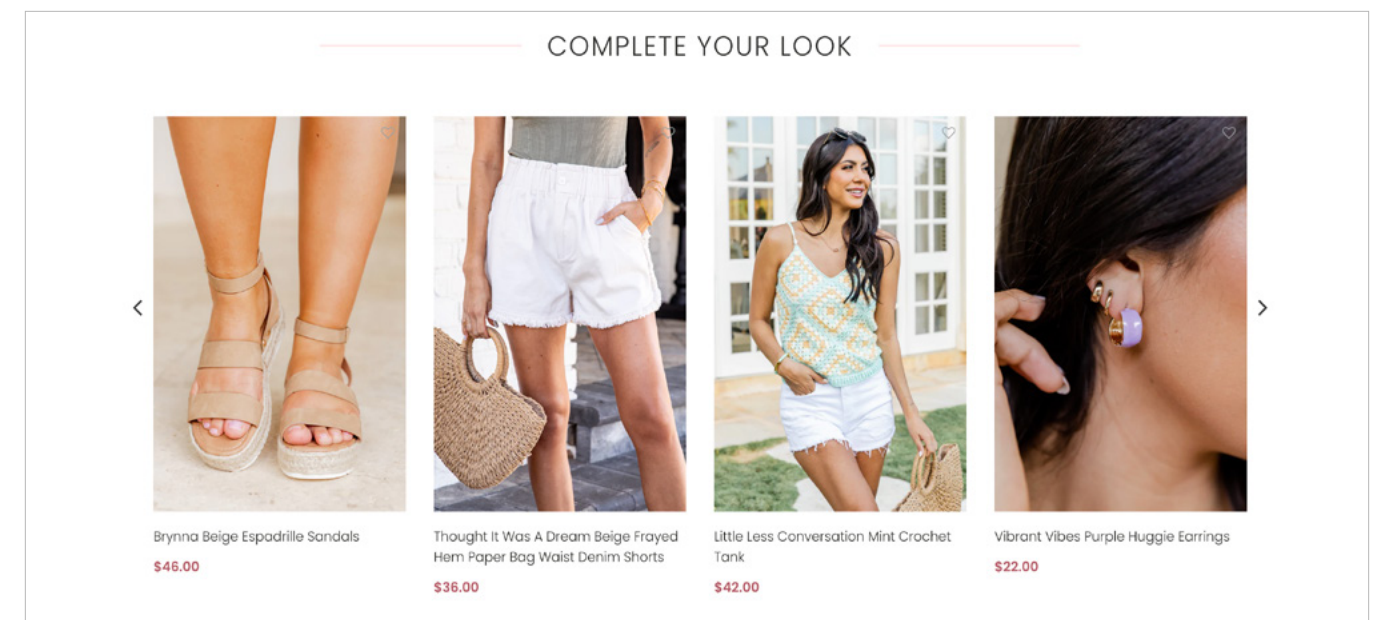


Image 16 : Cross-sell recommendations

- **Similar Recommendations**

Display alternatives to the item being viewed. Don't force shoppers to return to category pages to find more of the results they're interested in.

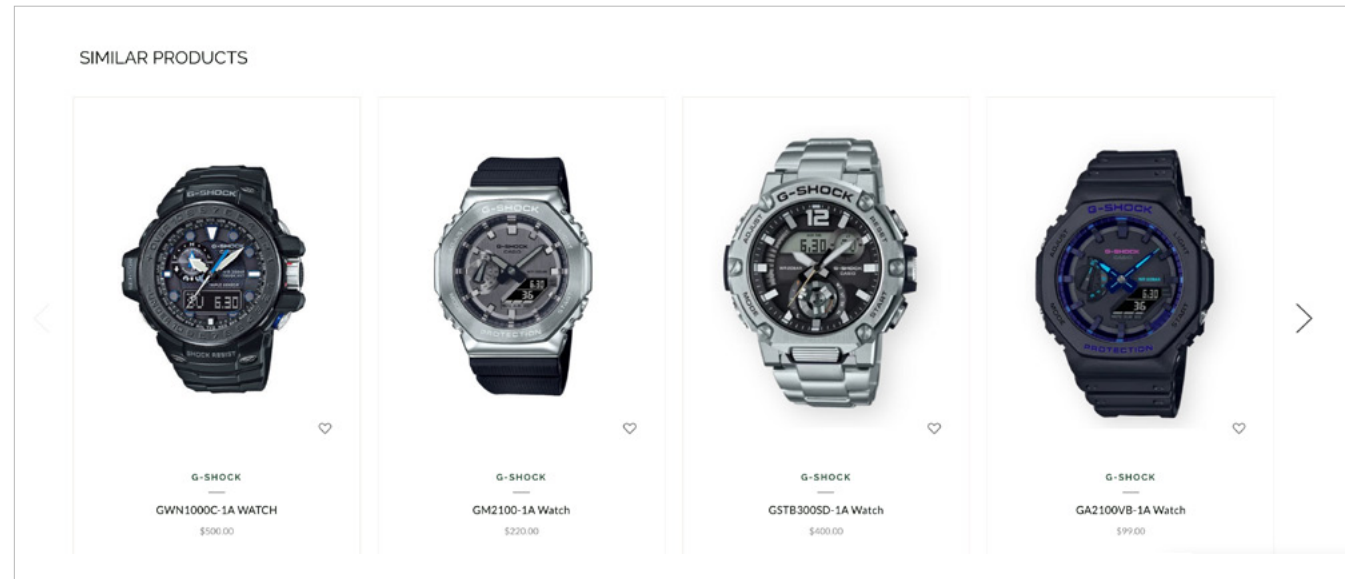


Image 17 : Similar recommendations

- **Personal Recommendations**

Highlight products a shopper is most likely to purchase based on order history or recently viewed items. Capture their attention with individualized suggestions.

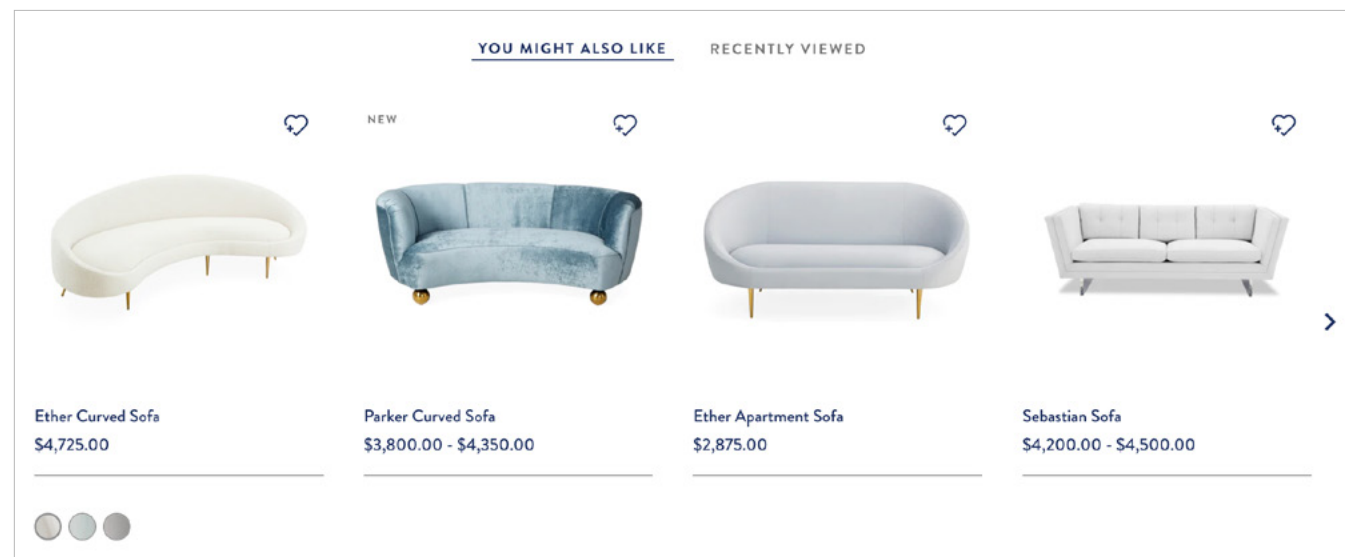


Image 18 : Personal recommendations

- **Trending Products and Best Sellers**

Display your most popular items or a specific category throughout the site. Target new visitors with products that are most likely to end in a purchase.

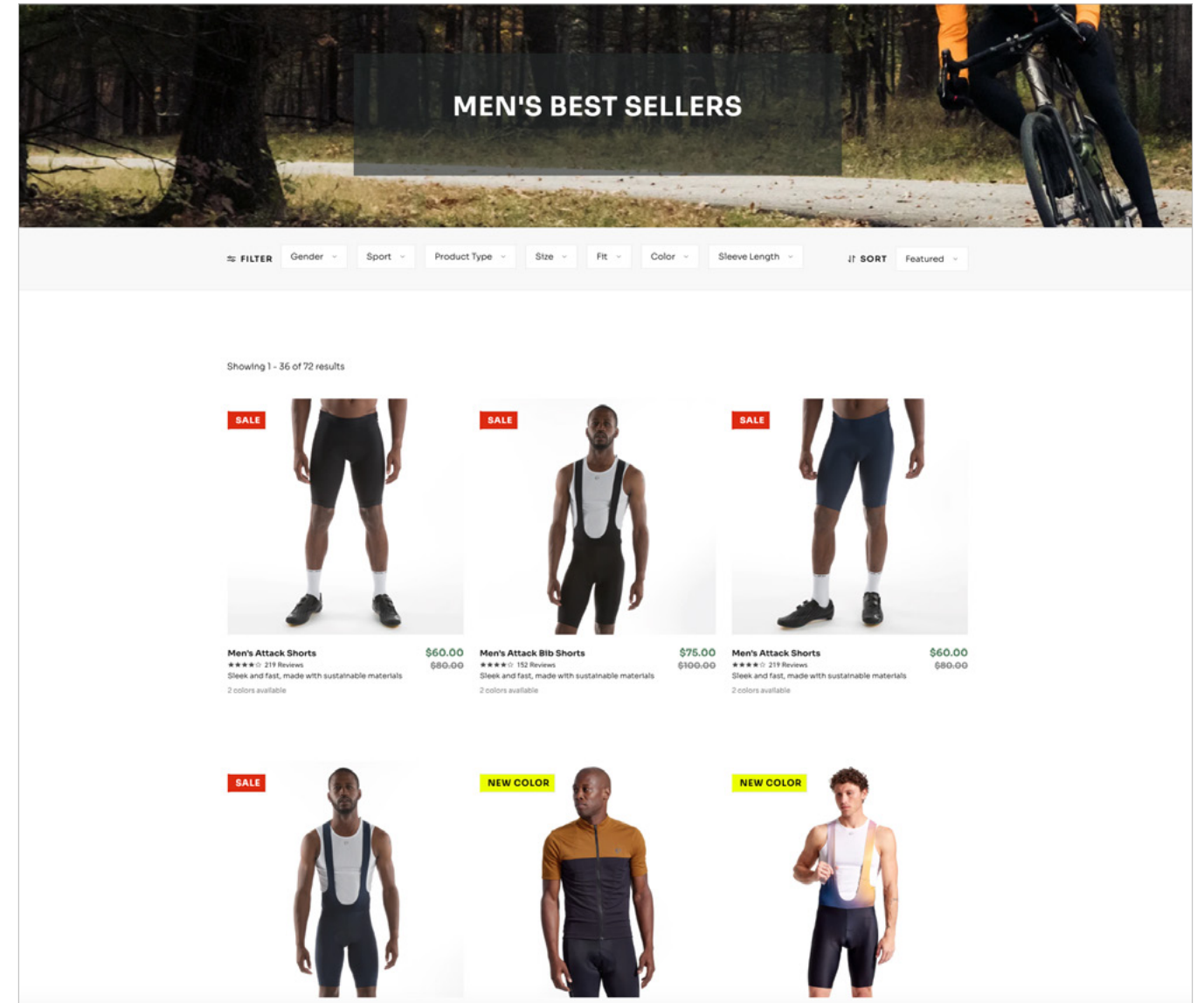


Image 19 : Trending products and best sellers

3 Tactics to Drive More Value From Product Recommendations

Get the right product in front of the right shopper at the right time for better conversion rates. To drive more value from Product Recommendations, try these tactics:

1. Upsell Higher Priced Products

When recommending similar items to the one being viewed, set a rule that prioritizes slightly higher-priced alternatives. This leads to higher cart values as shoppers are drawn to more expensive makes or models than they had first considered.

2. Highlight Must-Have Accessories

Cross-sell products that are typically purchased together. Imagine a shopper is on your site to purchase a suit jacket. Recommend matching trousers and a shirt and tie. You could persuade them to buy the full set. This can be applied to a wide range of products – from jewelry sets to electronics with add-on accessories.

3. Use Exclusion and Attribute Rules

Control products you don't want to display. For example, exclude out-of-stock products from recommendations. Drive shoppers to unavailable products and you will damage conversion rates. Use attribute rules to prioritize products or brands with higher margins to boost the bottom line.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence by machines. Programmed to perform specific tasks, AI is behind much of the technology we use every day – from predictive text to your phone's Face ID.

In the context of ecommerce, you should be familiar with two terms:

Machine Learning (ML)

A specific subset of AI, machine learning analyzes data to improve the performance and accuracy of predictive technologies over time.

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Another branch of AI, NLP refers to the ability of a computer to interpret and understand human language, and respond accordingly.

If the technical definitions seem complicated, don't worry. All you really need to know is how it applies to your ecommerce store, and why it's beneficial for your shopper experience.

How Common is AI in Ecommerce?

Artificial intelligence has become mainstream in the ecommerce industry:

- An estimated \$40 billion of additional revenue was driven by AI in retail in one three-year period.
- 35% of ecommerce marketers have already implemented AI technologies, and 38% have plans to do so.
- When asked which technologies will most improve the online customer experience, 34% of sales and marketing leaders said AI.
- 63% of consumers already use AI tools without realizing it.
- Its global market is expected to grow from \$4.8 billion in 2021 to \$31.1 billion in 2028.

AI is not only commonplace in online retail, it already drives enhanced shopper experiences and increased conversions. If you haven't yet deployed artificial intelligence on your store, you could be missing out.

What Role Does AI Play in Ecommerce?

Let's dive in. Here are four of the most common real-world applications for artificial intelligence in ecommerce:

• Product Recommendations

Personalized product recommendations leverage AI to track and analyze the behavior of individual shoppers. With this data, the technology displays hyper-relevant suggestions based on unique preferences and purchase history.

Whether it's tailored search and merchandising results, or product recommendations across your website and emails, AI equips you to effortlessly personalize the entire buyer journey.

• Site Search

Intelligent site search solutions rely on AI in the form of natural language processing. Also referred to as semantic search, this technology is able to interpret a variety of search terms and serve up results that reflect the intent of the query.

For example, NLP can distinguish between a search for 'black shoes' and 'black shoelaces.' A more basic solution, on the other hand, might produce a mismatched assortment of shoe-related results for both search terms.

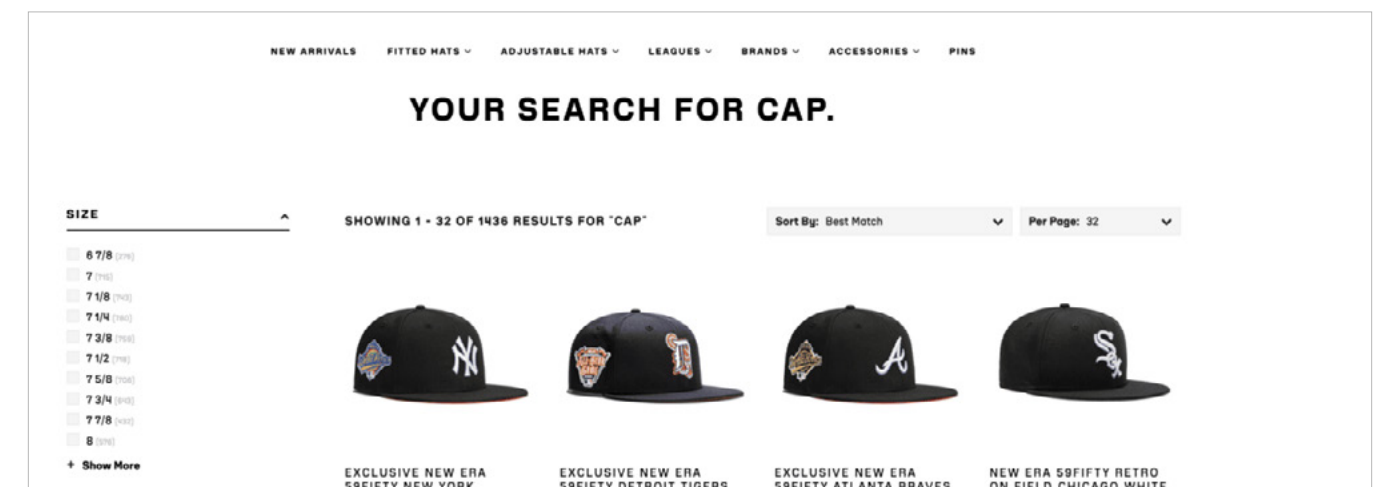


Image 20 : Intelligent site search solutions

- **Customer Service**

By providing instant resolutions to common queries, ecommerce chatbots reduce customer service labor costs while delivering a seamless support experience. Thanks to machine learning, chatbots also become more accurate and intelligent as they interact with your shoppers over time. In many cases, customers don't even realize they are interacting with a bot instead of a human.

- **Logistics and Forecasting**

AI can be used to forecast product demand, update inventory requirements, and even anticipate shipping delays. As with other AI use cases, it all comes down to analyzing real-time data, predicting outcomes, and taking action without the need for manual intervention.

Given ongoing supply chain disruption in ecommerce, artificial intelligence can alleviate many of the recurring logistical headaches faced by retailers.

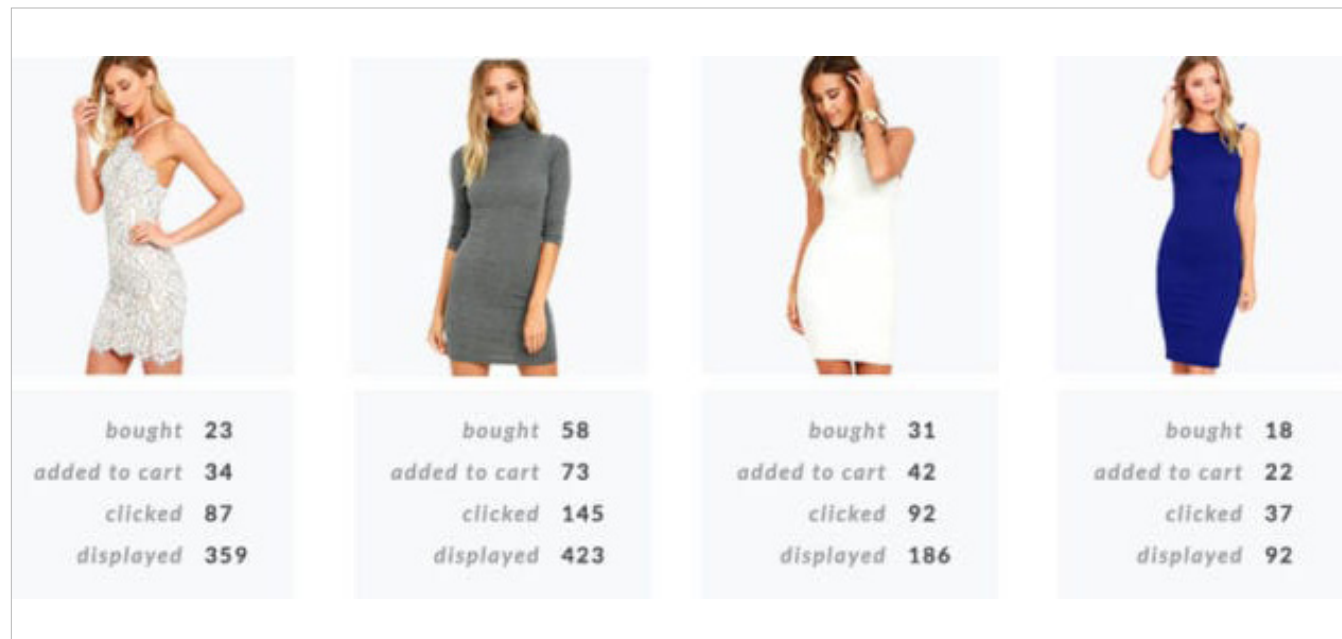


Image 21 : AI can be used to forecast product demand

Personalized Email

Email marketing isn't just for broadcasting information to customers. With the right strategy, email is one of the most reliable channels to drive ecommerce conversions and build lasting relationships with shoppers.

When creating an email strategy, ask:

Do I want to send friendly-but-generic brand updates? Or:

Will I deliver attention-grabbing, conversion-boosting pieces of content?

To serve up attention-grabbing, conversion-boosting emails, ecommerce sites need personalized email recommendations.

Personalized Email Recommendations = Increased Sales

The success rates of personalized email recommendations is undeniable:

- Personalized emails deliver 6x higher transaction rates.
- Personalized email marketing generates a median ROI of 122%.
- 59% of leading marketers say personalization increases email engagement.
- 71% of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized interactions, and 76% get frustrated when this doesn't happen.
- 55% of consumers say they ignore or opt-out of emails that lack relevance.
- Bland messaging and irrelevant content simply doesn't work with today's online shoppers. To cut through the noise, hyper-personalized, 1:1 email content is key.

“

“Searchspring ultimately allows us to provide a better user experience for our customers. The platform empowers us to have more control over our online stores, and it has had a huge impact on our search conversions... The level of support we receive really sets Searchspring apart from other vendors we work with in this space.”

– Airi Sutherland, Head of Digital, THE UPSIDE

[Read more about THE UPSIDE](#)

Tips for Conversion–Boosting Emails

It's one thing to deliver on-site personalization and product recommendations when a customer is actively browsing. But how do you translate this experience to the shopper's inbox?

- **Segment by Behavior**

The first step to personalizing email content is to segment your mailing list based on shopper behavior. For example, one segment could be visitors who browse but rarely buy. Target this shopper with best-seller recommendations to highlight the products that reliably convert.

On the other hand, high-spending, repeat buyers can be effectively targeted with recommendations for new arrivals and pricier products. Dynamic content is key to personalizing these recommendations at scale so each recipient gets “hand-picked” suggestions with a single email send.

- **Show More Products They Love**

Beyond general browsing, email can be used to resurface specific products individual shoppers recently viewed. Be careful not to spam customers with this approach, however. Set a rule to only send this type of email if a shopper has viewed a particular product more than once. Along with the specific item the shopper has shown an interest in, feature recommendations for similar products at various price points.

- **Trigger Emails at Critical Moments**

Timing is everything when it comes to personalized email recommendations. For the greatest impact, trigger email sequences in response to certain shopper actions. For example, if a customer reaches checkout but bails before they complete their purchase, send a cart abandonment email to remind them of the products they had their eye on. If a loyal customer hasn't made a purchase in a while, reach out with recommendations for products you know they love. Make sure to choose an email marketing solution that integrates with your ecommerce platform to leverage real-time data.

- **Don't Forget Post-Purchase Personalization**

A completed purchase isn't the end of personalization efforts. In fact, this is the perfect time to initiate a new email sequence. Start with a thank you note for the shopper's recent purchase and a discount code to encourage a return visit. If the customer isn't already a loyalty program member, suggest they join and explain the perks. Next, send product recommendations tailored to their purchase. Whether it's similar products from the same category, or complementary must-have accessories, this helps guide them to new, relevant products, generates follow-up sales, and builds a relationship with new customers.

Personalized Search and Merchandising

Personalized search and merchandising adjusts search results and gives your merchandising a lift by curating experiences for each individual shopper based on their unique preferences and behaviors.

Intelligent solutions learn about each shopper and apply data to search results and product pages so items appear in an order that reflects what the shopper has shown an interest in. The same results appear for every user, but their arrangement is personalized to the individual customer. The experience becomes more relevant, and shoppers find the products they want with minimal effort.

Searchspring client Peltz Shoes experienced a 12.9% conversion rate increase as a direct result of personalized search and merchandising.



“It was literally the flip of a button for us and the results were substantial. With the ease of use and clear jump in conversation rate, it was a no-brainer that adding Searchspring's personalized search and merchandising feature would produce results.”

– Cody Saporito, Marketing Director, Peltz Shoes

[Read more about Peltz Shoes](#)

Chapter 4 On-Site Search

- Autocomplete
- Synonyms
- Spell Check
- Zero-Results Pages
- Personalized Search
- Improve Relevancy and Product Discovery

Autocomplete

Before Black Friday, be sure to implement autocomplete on your online store. With autocomplete, you can predict shoppers' needs before they even finish typing their search query.

Autocomplete solves a number of problems for shoppers. First, it means they don't have to input a lengthy search term, which is particularly helpful on a mobile device. Second, it quickly suggests products in a visual drop down, which gets the shopper to their preferred result in even less time. Third, if you incorporate autocorrect, it eliminates the need to perform a second search following a spelling error.

Pro tip: Include product filters in your autocomplete dropdown so shoppers can further refine the previewed suggestions.

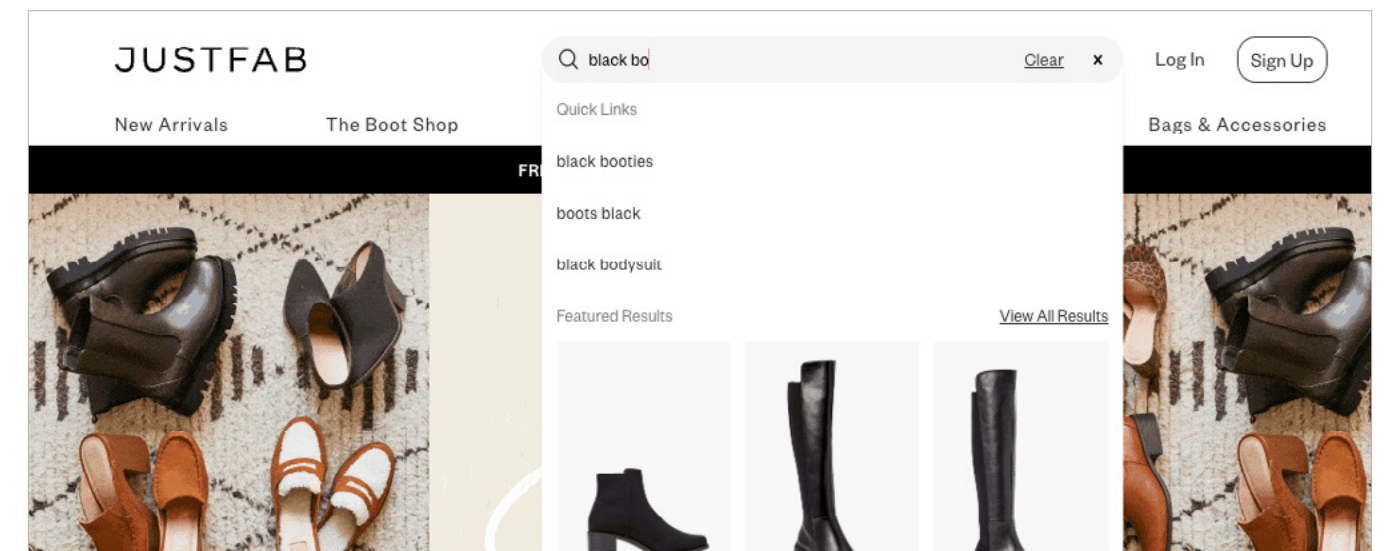


Image 22 : Autocomplete provides product suggestions and guides shoppers with just a few letters

Synonyms

Add synonyms to your on-site search results to refine product discovery by replacing commonly used keywords with terms that are similar in meaning. What does this mean? It means that people use different words to describe things. Whether it's regional or just two different ways to say the same thing (jumper vs hoodie), it's something all ecommerce sites need to account for.

For example, a “toboggan” may mean a sled to one shopper, while to another it's a knit hat.

With the correct synonyms in place, you will become more relatable to shoppers leading to increased conversions and customer loyalty thanks to improved product discovery.

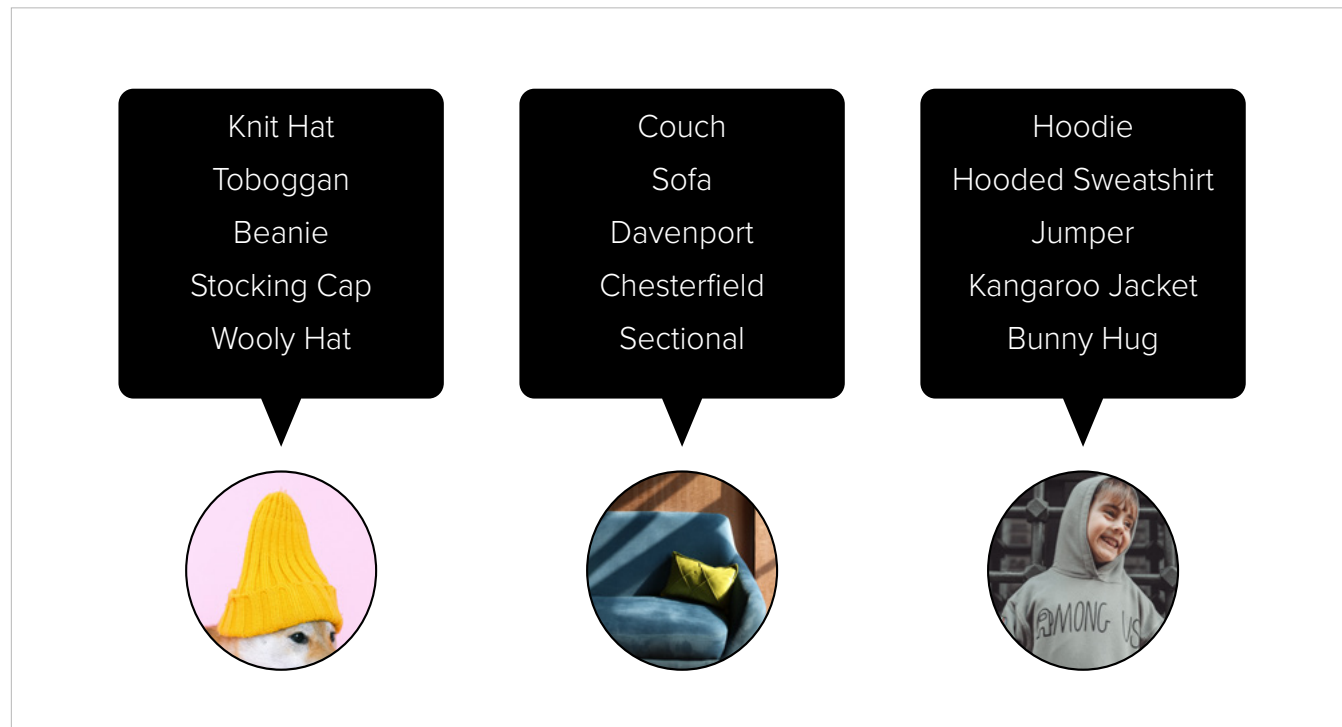


Image 23 : Add synonyms to your on-site search results to refine product discovery

Spell Check

Make sure your ecommerce site includes spell check. Spelling mistakes are one of the most common ways shoppers end up on zero-results pages and more often than not, a bounce.

With spell check, whatever a shopper types is automatically run through an algorithm of commonly misspelled words. Then, the corrected search is passed directly to autocomplete to function as usual. This way, your shoppers don't need to be winners of the National Spelling Bee to find what they're looking for.

Zero-Results Pages

Avoid “no results found” at all costs if you want to deliver a smooth user experience – especially when the stakes are higher over Black Friday / Cyber Monday.

If a shopper searches for a specific product that you don't carry, that doesn't mean their journey has to end. Optimize your no results found pages with suggestions for popular categories, similar alternatives, or helpful product finders to get shoppers back on track.

Your ecommerce reports tell you everything you need to know to avoid zero-results pages. Review reports to identify queries that led shoppers to zero-results. There are a couple likely culprits for these pages:

- Poorly configured search experience.
- You don't carry the product they're searching for.

Don't ignore the fact that you don't carry exactly what the shopper is looking for. Instead, guide them to what you do carry.

To fix a poorly configured search experience, clean up product data with redirects for common keywords, utilize “did you mean” suggestions, implement spell correction, and set up synonyms.

If you don't carry the searched for product, don't sweat it! The following can help combat zero-results and keep shoppers browsing your site:

- Promote best sellers and popular categories.
- Show similar items.
- Provide related content.

A great example of how to optimize a zero-results page is Moen. They take no-results as an opportunity to provide a great shopper journey in the form of customer support. By learning more about the customer's needs, they can ensure they recommend the perfect product and can craft a more personalized experience for higher AOV.

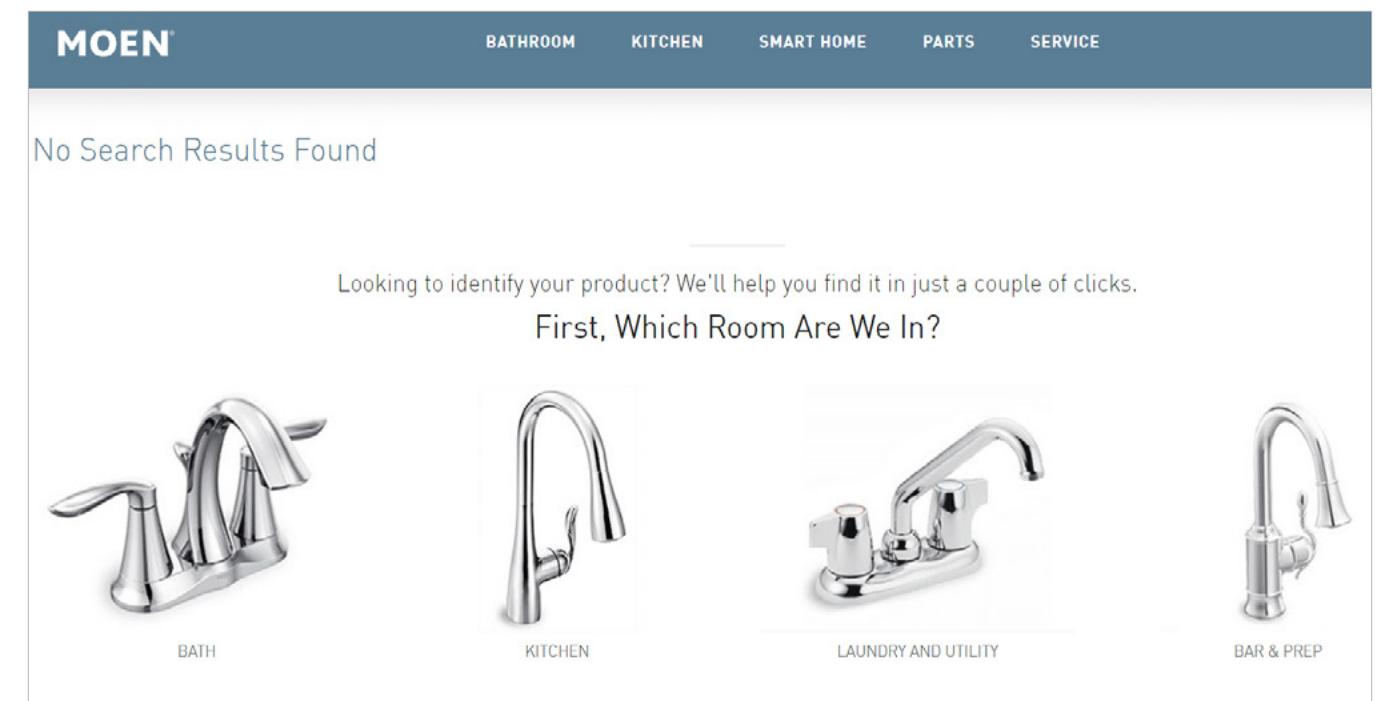


Image 24 : Moen takes advantage of zero-results to learn more about the shopper's needs and personalize their experience

Personalized Search

Take your search to the next level by personalizing it. Personalized search learns shopper behavior and serves search results based on actual behavior.

Shoppers on your ecommerce site should be treated as individuals (cause that's what they are).

Before Black Friday, invest in ecommerce tools that help you personalize the entire shopper journey.

Advanced ecommerce on-site search tools personalize on-site search results by placing tracking on your site to get to know each shopper. As customers shop, this artificial intelligence tool serves up relevant results when they utilize search. On search results pages, the most relevant products to that shopper show up first, while the rest of the products show up a little further down the page.

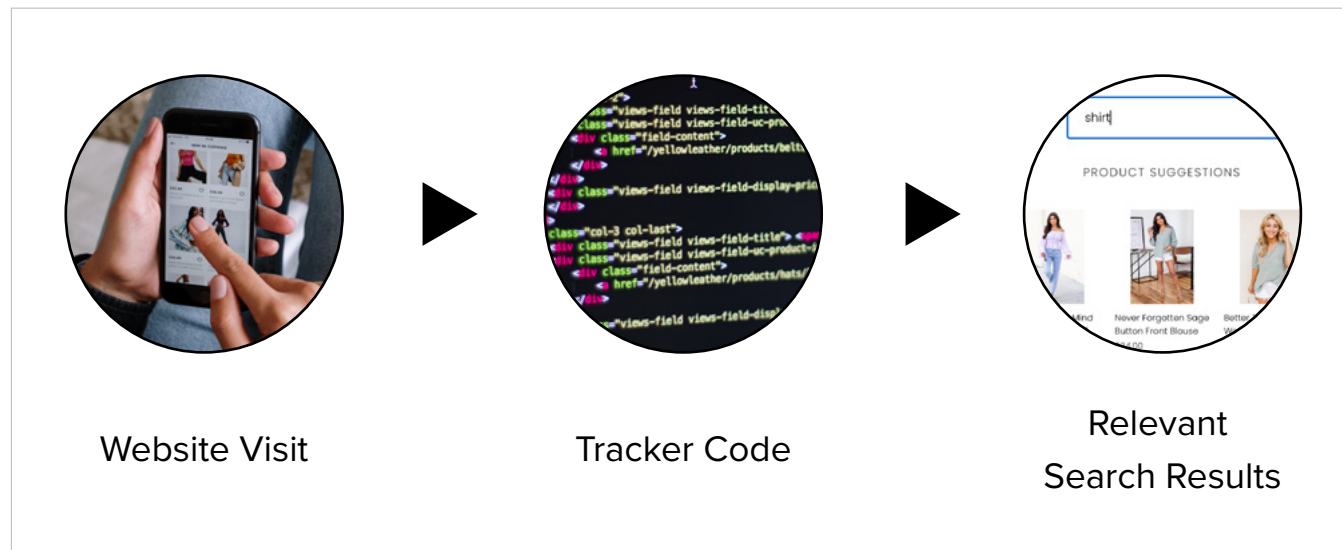


Image 25 : Personalized Search

Improve Relevancy and Product Discovery

This Black Friday, make sure to do everything you can to improve relevancy and product discovery.

Look at reports and insights to determine what shoppers search for on your site and where there may be some shortcomings.

Do shoppers look for black sweaters but receive results in multiple colors? Does a search for dress shirt return results for shirts and dresses? Can your search bar distinguish between a dress shirt and a shirt dress?

These small but important variations in language represent significant differences in shopper intent.

To focus on delivering accurate, hyper-relevant search results and avoid shopper frustration an intelligent solution that supports semantic search is key.

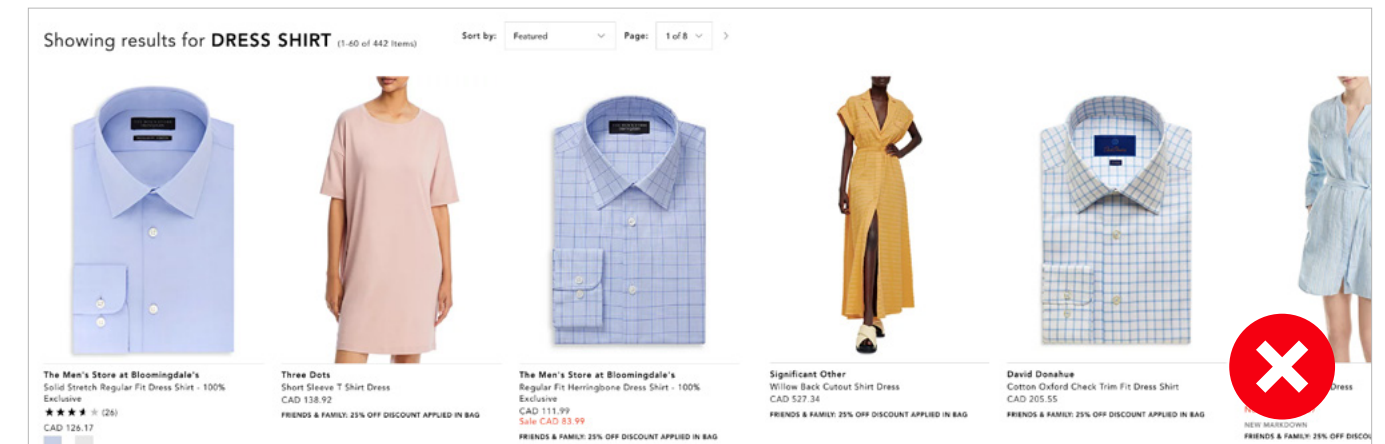


Image 26 : Website NOT serving relevant search results

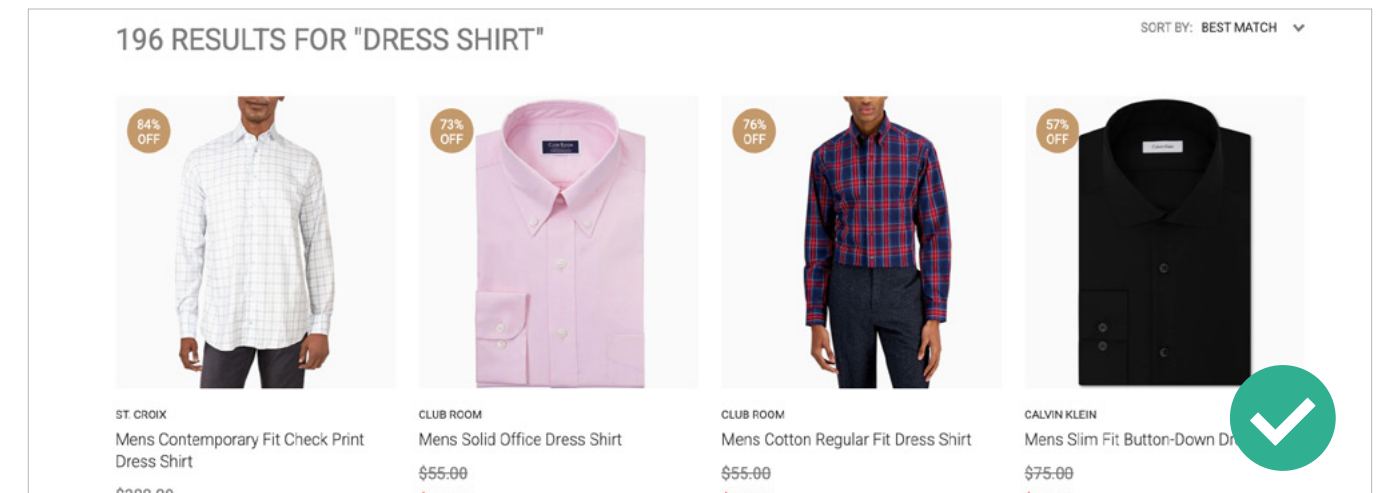


Image 27 : Website serving relevant search results

Chapter 5 Communication

Identify Audiences

Internal Communication | Customer Support

Site Support

Review Information Pages

Identify Audiences

The Value of Repeat Customers on Black Friday

At a time of year when every online retailer pours resources into customer acquisition, it can be difficult to stand out. As Black Friday gets closer, most shoppers are swamped by ads, offers, and emails. Unless they already have a relationship with a brand or their eye on a specific product, it's easy to become immune to holiday marketing.

Retailers that invest in customer loyalty all year-round, however, have a head start during competitive periods.

The stats speak for themselves:

- Increasing customer retention rates by 5% [increases profits by 25% to 95%](#).
- Approximately [65% of company revenue comes from the repeat business](#) of existing customers.
- 77% of consumers say [loyalty programs make them more likely to continue doing business with brands](#).

While building your Black Friday / Cyber Monday plan, it's important to remember that not all shoppers are created equal. The two types of shoppers you're likely to encounter are **new** and **returning**. However, it's not that simple. There are several more subcategories to consider.

Think of the following as you craft your audiences:

Who Are Your Shoppers?

- New Customers
- Returning Customers

How Did They Get to Your Site?

- Paid Messaging
- Recommendation
- Organic Search
- Direct

Who Are They Shopping For?

- Shopping for Someone Else
- Shopping for Themselves

What is Their Onsite Behavior?

- Looking for a Specific Product
- Just Browsing

With all new customers, you'll want to get back to basics since they may not be familiar with your site or products. Assume these shoppers don't know anything about you or what you're selling. Make them feel welcome and more comfortable with your product through articles and guides that help them through the buying process. Help them make an informed purchase and they'll checkout feeling confident – not only with what they purchased but also with your online store.

When it comes to returning shoppers, give them a personalized experience. In your Black Friday / Cyber Monday sales planning, show your appreciation to these loyal customers with sneak peaks and early access to sales, special discounts, and elevated loyalty points.

Internal Communication | Customer Support

Brief all internal teams on your Black Friday plans and campaigns. Yes, your marketing and ecommerce teams are already familiar with the details, but other departments should also be up to speed. **Plan dedicated briefs for the teams you lean on most during the busy period.**

Once you have defined your “new” and “returning” shopper journey, follow the best practices below to ensure a great shopper experience and create more customer loyalty.

- Build Customer Personas.
- Communicate Early – Check On Their Experience and Recommend Complementary Products.
- Personalize Your Interactions.
- Use Analytics as a Roadmap.
- Offer Customer Support.
- Be Creative.
- Honesty is Your Best Policy.
- Retarget So You Stay Top-of-Mind.

For example, your customer support team needs to know the specifics of your offers and promotions so they can address queries with speed and accuracy. Your IT team should also be prepared for an influx of site traffic with a full roster of support staff available over Cyber Weekend if technical problems arise.

Site Support

From payment gateways to inventory management systems, online retailers rely on a long list of external vendors. Even with the best tech stack in place, your entire Black Friday strategy can be thrown into disarray if just one system goes down.

Check-in with your vendors to confirm they are prepared to handle a spike in traffic. If an issue occurs, ensure they have a tried and tested process to get back online as quickly as possible.

Review Information Pages

Black Friday typically attracts a higher rate of new site visitors than usual. These shoppers are likely to seek out details of your return policies, shipping fees, and other key information before they purchase.

Ensure all of your FAQ pages are fully up-to-date and adjust their content for the holiday period as needed. If you anticipate delivery delays during the upcoming season, make sure this is clear.

As an added safety net, create contingency plans for a critical system outage. Plan for an increase in customer support queries and have draft communications ready to send in the event of a site crash or payment failure.

Use merchandising banners to highlight last shipping dates and encourage customers to shop early. Be transparent and keep shoppers informed to eliminate frustration or confusion.

Chapter 6

Post-Black Friday Planning

Email Strategy

Post-Black Friday Sales Planning

Email Strategy

You probably got a lot of new customers to your site during Cyber Weekend. Many of these shoppers were likely shopping for someone else. The good news is, this doesn't have to be a one-and-done buyer if you nurture the relationship properly.

Segment customers out and tailor messaging to them. If they purchased a woman's sweater on Black Friday, hit them up throughout the holiday season through email and retargeting with accessories that compliment the sweater. It may seem logical to recommend more women's sweaters, but chances are they only need the one for now. Reach out to them periodically throughout the year with similar items.

In addition to reaching out to shoppers with relevant product recommendations, there are several other reasons to keep up communication with Black Friday / Cyber Monday shoppers.

Here are some additional email and retargeting ideas:

- Thank you email
- Tracking information
- Additional care instructions
- Product review requests
- Abandoned cart
- Relevant content
- Sales / Promotions announcements
- Information about loyalty program

Post-Black Friday Sales Planning

If you created a collection or campaign for Black Friday / Cyber Monday, GREAT! Keep it up.

Here's some tips make sure these pages keep converting:

- Switch up your collections and campaigns so loyal/frequent customers see new items.
- Create a gift guide for each category.
- Boost best sellers and sale items.
- Provide relevant content – for example:
 - Put Together the Perfect Holiday Outfit.
 - Your Guide for the Ultimate Outdoor Christmas Decoration Display.
- Dash Away Dry Skin.
- The Host With the Most: Holiday Party Must-Haves.

When planning post-Black Friday sales, look at reporting to learn about what went right and where improvements can be made. Utilizing analytics will guarantee you have continued success throughout the holiday season and into the New Year.

Get to Know Your Shoppers

Black Friday / Cyber Monday may be the busiest shopping time of the year, but a high volume of sales will continue throughout December and into the New Year. Use Cyber Weekend data to guide your merchandising and personalization strategy. Prepare for post-Black Friday sales the same way you planned for Black Friday.

Search Insights

Use search insights reports to get a snapshot of your site performance and determine the following:

- What shoppers are searching for this holiday season with popular searches and specific terms.
- Products that are the highest-grossing.
- What converts (and what doesn't).
- Items you may need to order more of or might want to consider stocking.
- Synonyms that need to be set up.

Take the knowledge gained from search insights to understand your audience better and adjust the content on your site as needed.

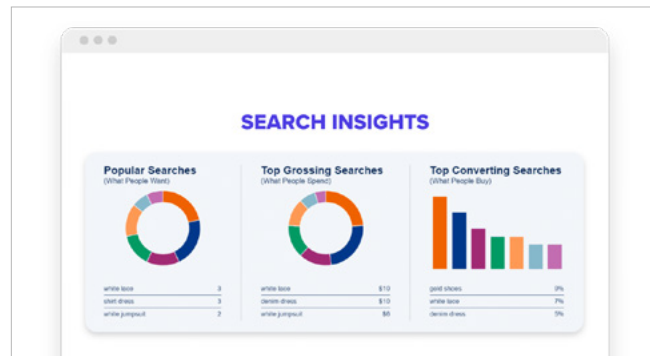


Image 28 : Search insights

Product Insights

Product insights give you a deep dive into specific product performance so you can merchandise accordingly.

- View your top-viewed products.
- Breakdown top grossing items.
- See top-transactions.
- Get a breakdown of each product view-by-view, click-by-click.

Analyzing product insights helps you set up and tweak your merchandising strategy. Maybe a product that you weren't expecting to be quite as popular flew off the shelves. Consider highlighting this product on your homepage or use boost rules to feature it on search and category pages. Provide this data to stakeholders to streamline messaging across teams and celebrate wins.

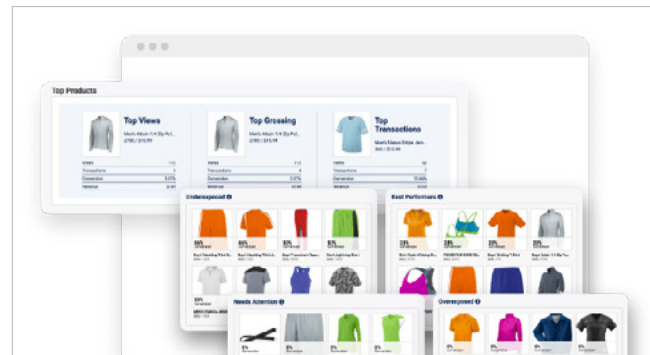


Image 29 : Product insights

Google Analytics

One of the most important tools in your ecommerce tech stack is Google Analytics (GA). Examine your GA reports to identify the following from Black Friday through Cyber Monday:

- Keywords
- What is trending
- Competitors keywords
- Number of website visitors (new, unique)
- Bounce rates
- Medium / Source
- How shoppers moved through your site

Use data from GA to provide a better user experience and optimize your site. If it took several clicks for shoppers to get to what they were looking for, figure out how to simplify their journey. Create campaigns / collection pages and product recommendations based on what is trending.

How to use keywords and competitors keywords:

- In product descriptions.
- To set up synonyms.
- Optimize zero-results pages with product descriptions.
- Find out what content works and doesn't work.

Keyword research can be performed with tools such as SEMRush, Moz, or Ahrefs. You can also get amazing Google Analytics snapshots through ecommerce reporting tools like Searchspring, which integrates with your GA account.

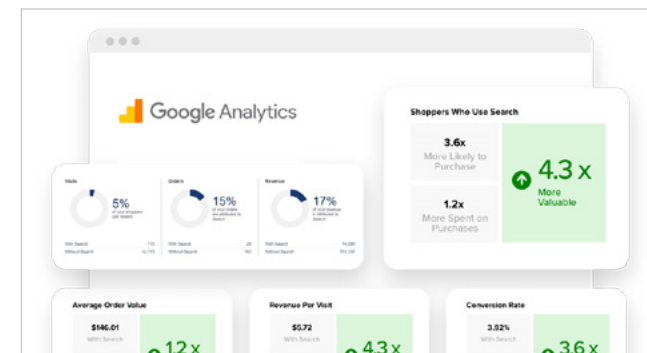


Image 30 : Google Analytics

Zero-Results Report

Zero results pages happen because you don't carry the product searched for and/or your site search isn't optimized to pull in relevant products. Native on-site search doesn't usually allow search configuration, but a good ecommerce search tool can help you remedy this situation.

Identify searches that resulted in zero-results pages so you can provide a better shopper experience.

Below are some ways you can avoid or get creative with the dreaded zero-results page.

- Take this opportunity to promote best sellers and trending products.
- Determine customer needs with a product-finder quiz.
- Offer "You Might Also Like" suggestions.
- Find out if they are searching for products or content.
- Give contact information so you can help them and add a personal touch.

Post-Black Friday, you'll likely have plenty of new customers to add to marketing nurture campaigns. Take care of these new shoppers to build their trust and loyalty in your brand. Be sure to keep taking care of your regular customers too and reward them for their continued support.

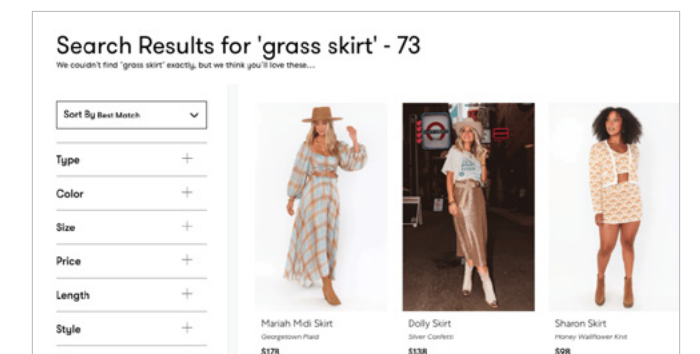


Image 31 : Show Me Your Mumu zero-results page

Black Friday Prep Wrap-Up

Now is the time to prepare for the busiest shopping season of the year.

The following is an abbreviated run-down of what we discussed in the Searchspring Black Friday Playbook:

CHECKLIST

- Review Reporting & Use it to Plan Sales
- Audit Your Ecommerce Site
- Additions / Changes to Tech Stack
- Personalize the Shopper Journey
- Streamline with Merchandising Tools
- Improve Product Discovery
- Get to Know Your Audience
- Ensure Consistent Messaging In-Store and Online
- Check in With Internal Team and Vendors
- Plan Post-Black Friday Loyalty and Nurture Campaigns

Deliver the Ultimate Shopper Experience

The pinnacle of the ecommerce calendar, Black Friday, is the busiest and most lucrative time of year for most online retailers. But, it's also the weekend that generates the fiercest competition.

In the battle for customers, you need more than discounts to stand out. As you target savvy shoppers and practiced bargain-hunters this holiday season, one thing is certain: you need an utterly effortless shopper experience.

The right ecommerce solutions make standing out from the competition a lot easier and helps you focus on creating a strategy that will convert shoppers well into the new year.



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#WinBlackFriday

