

# Everything HOLIDAY

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## Holiday Guide to Social Media

Whether they're early birds halfway through their list by October, or last-minute buyers just starting on Christmas Eve, the majority of holiday shoppers will approach their shopping armed with technology. In fact, **more than half of them** will use social media to learn about deals, research gift ideas, and find product reviews and recommendations.

What's more, **Bain and Company** found that customers who interact with companies via social media spend 20 to 40 percent more with those companies than non-engaged consumers.

Clearly, if you want the cash register to jingle during the holiday season, you need to spread some good spirits via social media!

### Holiday Tip

Begin your promotions early, and market them early. Many customers are early shoppers, so give them reason to visit your store or site instead of a competitor's.

Here's everything you need to know about getting your social media campaigns and presence holiday-ready this year:

## 1. What are my marketing goals this holiday season?

It's important to maximize your social media time investment by picking platforms that will put you in front of the holiday shoppers most likely to buy your products or services.

For most small businesses, it makes sense to start with the social media platforms that are most widely used — Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. You may also find specialized platforms that are of interest to your target customers. To evaluate the usefulness of each platform, consider key questions such as:

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- What value does the platform offer to users who may be your customers?
- Do the platform's attributes, tone, and audience relate to your business?
- Who uses this platform? (Most social media platforms make demographic information readily available for marketing purposes.)
- Will this platform be easy to use, allowing you to create the maximum impact in the short weeks leading up to the holiday season?

The top platforms each have different marketing strengths. For example, if you want to quickly promote a limited-time offer, like a Black Friday deal, Twitter or Pinterest are more immediate. For building on existing relationships, Facebook is a more relaxed, in-depth format.

## 2. Customer service that shines

Too often, customer service suffers during the busy holiday season. But it doesn't have to — social media can be a cost-effective and personalized way to ensure even unhappy consumers have a positive experience. Keep your customers' spirits bright by following these guidelines:

- Be responsive. Consumers are used to instant gratification. No matter how good your response is to an issue raised via social media, current and potential customers won't be impressed if that response took three days to show up online. Respond to complaints right away.
- Take complex issues offline. If you can solve a customer issue quickly and positively with a single post, go for it! Often, however, issues will be more complex, and it's better to take those offline. Doing so protects the privacy of the customer and allows you to focus on resolving their issue, rather than wondering how it will all look and play out online.
- Make every experience positive. Meet unflattering reviews and confrontational accusations with the same tact and patience you would afford someone asking a simple question or offering praise.
- Answer customer questions. Not everyone who contacts you via social media will have a complaint or problem; some will have simple questions about gift return policies, holiday hours, and so on. Answering those questions as promptly and cheerfully as you would respond to a complaint helps build your reputation on social media.

## 3. Social posts that sing

Maintaining a decent frequency and quality of postings can be a challenge, but it's essential during the holiday season. Plan on about six posts per week on Facebook, about 10 pins per week on Pinterest, and about 20 tweets per week on Twitter.

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That volume can stretch the creativity of even the savviest online marketer. In honor of the 12 days of Christmas, here are a dozen ideas for social posts that sing:

1. Use countdowns to build excitement. A post per day, counting down to the target holiday date, with an offer or deal each day can help keep your customers engaged.
2. Share some holiday cheer. The holidays can be a stressful season, so spread some fun. Think about daily tweets of silly holiday trivia, posts about local nonprofits that your company is supporting during the holidays, or your favorite G-rated holiday humor.
3. Share seasonal advice. Does your business have insight to offer on seasonal issues like the best way to light a home that would make Clark Griswold envious? Perhaps you're a rental store and can give tips on the items that make party planning easier when you rent them. Maybe you run a veterinary office and can speak about keeping pets safe, healthy, and happy during the holiday season. Post information relevant to your business that can make customers' lives better or easier throughout the holidays.
4. Give them great ideas. Generating fun, memorable, and unique gift ideas is probably one of the aspects of the holidays that many people find challenging. Help them out with posts about gift ideas. Remember, though, those posts shouldn't be just about your products and services. Incorporate other "news you can use" that doesn't have anything to do with your brand.
5. Post a special FAQ just for the holiday season. Your customers have questions, and not only about your business during the holidays. Create a post based on things they need to know to successfully navigate the holidays, such as when your store is open, how to calculate the size turkey they'll need to serve a certain number of people, when the post office and government offices will be closed, and so on.
6. Sweeten the holidays with sweepstakes. With all the gift shopping, decorating, and entertaining, Americans spend a lot of money during the holidays. Your customers would probably love to get something for free, so use social media to stage a promotional giveaway. Encourage users to enter their names and email addresses for a chance to win a prize.
7. Take a poll. Asking people what they think is a surefire way to get them to tell you! Your poll can be business-related ("Do you want us to stay open longer during the holidays?") or just for fun ("How do you feel about fruitcake?"). Engage users with a question that compels them to answer. You can sweeten the deal by offering a prize for whoever provides the most informative or entertaining response. Follow up by publishing the "stats" from your poll once it closes.
8. Take a walk down memory lane. Revisit past holiday content, such as photos of parties or promotions, helpful posts, etc. Link back to older content on your site.
9. Cross-promote a friendly business. Have a relationship with another business that's trying to promote its holiday products and services? Post a recommendation on each other's social media pages letting users know why you each love the other's products or services. Focus on what sets that business apart from the competition and how it can help make users' lives better during the holidays.

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10. Appeal to users' sense of charity. If your company supports a specific charity during the holidays, talk it up on social media. Post about what your organization is doing to support the charity and how your customers can help, too. Personalize it with quotes and insights from employees who participate in the charitable outreach.
11. Stage a photo contest. Whether you're looking to recognize creativity ("best holiday décor") or just have fun ("worst holiday gift you ever got"), encouraging social media users to share their own holiday photos is a great way to build engagement. Another approach is to offer your own photo and challenge users to caption it. Boost interest by offering a prize for the best caption.
12. Promote a flash sale or last-minute deals. For many holiday shoppers, time is of the essence. Capture the attention of early birds and highly motivated shoppers by publicizing flash sales on Twitter or Snapchat. Give hope to those who've waited to start shopping by offering last-minute deals on Facebook.

The holiday season is the most social time of the year. You can spread some cheer and stretch the power of your marketing efforts by using social media to engage with current and potential customers.

## **Festive Facts for Social Media:**

Sprinkle these ready-to-share posts across your social media pages.

- Some festive places to visit this holiday season include Mount Holly, N.C.; Holly Springs, Miss.; Snowflake, Ariz.; Santa Claus, Ind.; North Pole, Alaska; Noel, Mo.; Dasher, Ga.; Rudolph, Wis.; and Peace, N.D.
- Hanukkah first came to the White House in 1951, while President Truman was hosting the prime minister of Israel. The first official celebration wasn't until 2001 under President George W. Bush.
- While Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas (Is You)" holds the record for best-selling holiday song of the modern era, The Guinness Book of World Records lists Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" as the best-selling single of all time, holiday-themed or otherwise.
- Valentine's Day originated with the Ancient Roman celebration of Lupercalia, which involved whipping participants and sacrificing animals, all in the name of enhancing fertility. Not very romantic!

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