Google

Peak season playbook

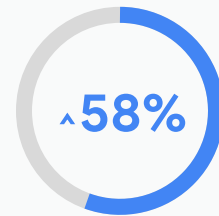Helping ecommerce merchants make the most of the busiest season

Are you ready to capture the comeback this 2021 holiday season?

Due to COVID-19, consumer behavior has taken on a new shape that's resulted in unpredictable buying patterns. Retailers initially held out hope that this would be a temporary shift — but they now acknowledge that the pandemic has forever altered the retail landscape. Here's what to know and do to make sure your ecommerce business is ready.

^58%

The trend toward researching and shopping online continues to grow. As of June 2021, 58% of U.S. holiday shoppers said they will shop online more this season than in previous years.[1]

Three key trends to help you connect with shoppers in 2021 and beyond

1. **While in-store shopping rebounds, online shopping continues to play a substantial role in the customer's buying journey.**
   Searches for "available near me" have grown globally by over 100% in the last year.[2]

2. **Shoppers are taking an online/offline hybrid approach to their shopping.**
   9-in-10 in-store purchases last year began with holiday shoppers searching online ahead of time.[3]

3. **There is an extended shopping period this year.**
   Some consumers have already started their online shopping for 2021. As of June, 31% of U.S. shoppers had already started their holiday shopping.[4]

This holiday season will be a one of peak demand and a critical time to connect with shoppers.

This four-week playbook shows how Google and Shopify can help you to prepare for any peak season moment and get in front of customers at decision-making moments across the shopping journey.

The playbook is divided into week-by-week planning sections that include tips to help you tap into Google's free tools – and use Shopify's Google channel to connect with millions of shoppers who are searching for products like yours this holiday season.

Get ready now to win your next peak season moment.

Win peak season moments with this easy four-week playbook

S   M   T   W   T   F   S

Week 1: Enhance website and marketing strategy

The goal
Uncover new opportunities to improve your ecommerce website and reach more customers.

How to achieve it
Tap into free Google tools like Grow My Store, Google Trends, and Market Finder to help you understand how to optimize your website and marketing strategy.

Weeks 2 & 3: Get discovered

The goal
Get discovered with Shopify's Google channel.

How to achieve it
Use Shopify's Google channel to set up free listings and run a paid Smart Shopping campaign.

Week 4: Optimize for peak moments

The goal
Optimize for peak moments and reach your sales goals.

How to achieve it
Understand your optimization opportunities and make the most of big moments.

Grab new sales opportunities

Peppermint Cycling Co. uses Smart Shopping campaigns to keep women riding

When in-person events were stalled in 2020, Peppermint, a women's cycling brand, turned online to Shopify and Google to reach customers and drive sales. With Shopify's Google channel they were able to easily sync their products to Google Merchant Center in just a few steps. Then they opted to run a Smart Shopping campaign through Google Ads to reach their sales goals.

"As a new brand we have so many new digital projects to implement. So being able to trust an algorithm to do the work for us allows us to be able to spend more time on other projects."

– Annabel Dufour, Peppermint, Web Manager

Key stats   **4x**   **+20%**
Return on ad spend   New customers reached

Week 1
Enhance your website and marketing strategy

As you start preparing for peak season moments, this first week focuses on getting your website ready and doing research to understand what global customers are looking for.

Here are suggested actions for checking your website's health, understanding your customer, and expanding your markets.

Action 1

Check website health

As consumers spend more time online, they have higher expectations from their ecommerce websites and apps. Having a quality website builds trust with your customers.

Grow My Store is a free Google tool that analyzes your website's customer experience and offers practical tips on how to improve. Use it to see how your site benchmarks compared to retailers in the same industry, plus find tailored insights on market and consumer trends to help reach new customers.

^**15%**

Mobile sites that loaded in two seconds or less had a 15% higher conversion rate than the average mobile site.[5]

How to use Grow My Store

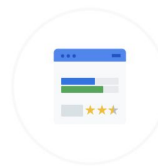Enter the website URL and receive a personalized report in just a few minutes based on a range of factors, including:

- ✅ Product information
- ✅ Personalization
- ✅ Flexible fulfillment
- ✅ Customer service
- ✅ Security
- ✅ Mobile
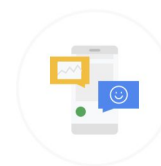
Why is it relevant to you?

Tailor made consulting report
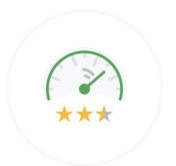Receive a fast, comprehensive report on your website

Competitors' benchmarking
Find out how you compare against the industry average

Customer insights
Discover what your shoppers look for and expect when buying

Performance optimisation
Improve your website for your clients with new go to market solutions

Simply request your free report at **g.co/GrowMyStore**

Understand customers

You can use Google Trends to learn more about historical trends and real-time shopper behavior. Use this data to identify seasonal spikes and adjust content and promotional strategies to maximize sales.

Google Trends lets you see what people are or aren't searching for across Google Search, the Shopping tab, Google Images, and YouTube.

How to use Google Trends data

Identify growing interest in products and search terms to **inform products to promote** ahead of a peak season moment

Learn what your target market is searching for and incorporate those topics into your **SEO and content marketing strategy**

Compared breakdown by region

Color intensity represents percentage of searches LEARN MORE

☐ Include low search volume regions

For example:

- What should you call your next product?
- How are your customers' shopping habits changing?
- How is demand changing for the products you offer?
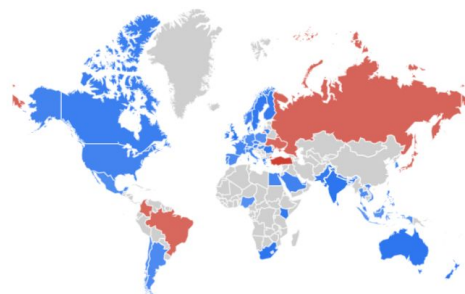- What are your competitors doing?

Pro tip
To brush up on how to use Google Trends, set up subscriptions for Google Trends alerts on topics and searches in your region.

Action 3

Join the global marketplace

The internet has made it possible for many small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to reach international audiences. You can grow your business with help from Google's Market Finder to identify potential new markets and find new shoppers all around the world. Use this tool to collect consumer and market data and discover promising markets for products and services leading up to a peak season moment.

> **Did you know that 75% of global shoppers used a Google product in the past week to help with shopping?[6]**

How to use Market Finder

- ✅ Discover regional markets before going global
- ✅ Understand new demand trends and reach new audiences
- ✅ Adapt your business to local markets
- ✅ Get tailored recommendations and explore consumer insights

With a better understanding of demand trends, you can optimize your marketing strategy and investments for a given peak season, adapting quickly to local markets using insightful market data.

Pro tip
Use Market Finder to deliver insights like the disposable income of potential customers and their online behavior.

Once your online store is ready, it's important to make sure you have an understanding of consumer trends and how they impact marketing strategy. The next step is getting that store to show up when and where people are looking for their products – with help from Shopify's Google channel.

Weeks 2 & 3
## Get discovered with Shopify's Google channel

You've taken the recommended steps to improve your website and reach more customers. Now you're ready to use Shopify's Google channel to reach hundreds of millions of high-intent shoppers searching and browsing each day across our properties, including Search, YouTube, Gmail, and the web.

What follows are three tips to set you up for success.

Tip 1

Upload your products to Google — right from your Shopify dashboard

Using Shopify's Google channel makes it even easier to upload your products to Google.
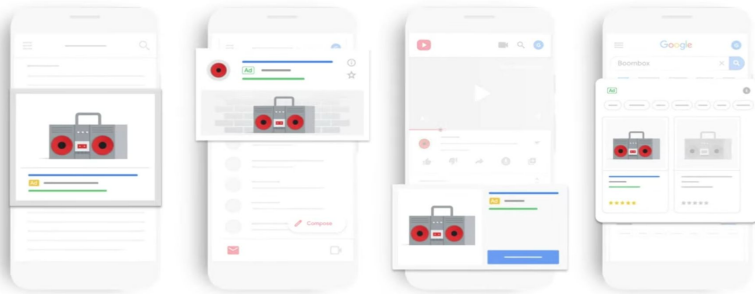
1. List products for free on Google

You can have products appear in unpaid product search results in surfaces across Google (like the Shopping tab, Search, and Images) by participating in free product listings. If you've already submitted product data through Shopify's Google channel, you may be automatically opted in. The richer the product data, the more surfaces will be eligible to show products.

2. Reach more customers with a paid Smart Shopping campaign

Smart Shopping campaigns are paid ads that help you reach shoppers across Google networks, including YouTube, Gmail, Search, and the Google Display Network. To set up a Smart Shopping campaign, you simply need to sync your products and set a daily budget. Google uses real-time signals to optimize your campaign and chooses the best time and place to show products to shoppers.

Regardless of budget, you can get your products in front of shoppers searching for them.

Optimize your product feeds from your Shopify dashboard
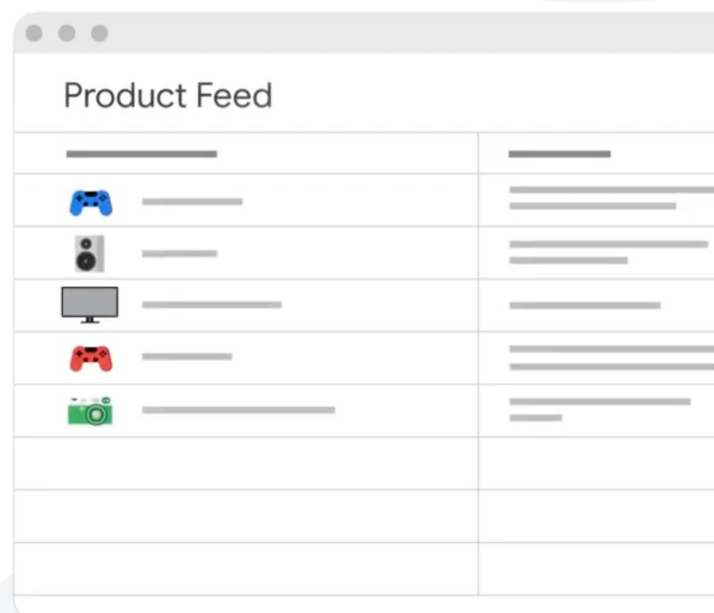
Product feed explained

A feed is the required data source that Google Merchant Center uses to display products across Google networks. Your feed setup impacts when your ads show along with how and to whom they are displayed.

Make sure all products available for sale on your website are present in the feed. Always populate all relevant attributes in your feed. The more information Google has about your products, the easier it is to match ads to relevant searchers.

Start by making sure you have the required feed attributes set up. Once that's done, it's time to focus on two ways to create the biggest impact on performance: title and Google product type.

Up next are suggestions on how to create the best title and product type.

Build compelling product titles

You can write a product title numerous ways, but the key to success is to write one that resonates with the right audience. Here are three easy steps to help you create engaging messaging for your titles.

Step 1

Make a list of the search phrases someone might use when looking for the product.

Step 2

Round out the list with a little competitive investigating. How are competitors describing their products?

Step 3

Head to Google Trends. Plug a list of potential titles into the tool to get a sense for what's most popular in the target market.

Naming structure for titles

Brand + Product type + Attributes

For example:

- Bestop Supertop w/ 2 Piece Soft Doors & Clear Windows – Jeep Soft Tops, Tan, 58" 47" 35"

- Samsung 88" Smart LED TV with 4K 3D Curved Screen (UN88JS9500)

Keep in mind, nearly every element of a title (and even the product description) can be optimized using this method.

Build the best product type

Google uses product types to understand what merchants are selling and to match ads to relevant searches. We recommend going at least three levels deep when building product types. For example:
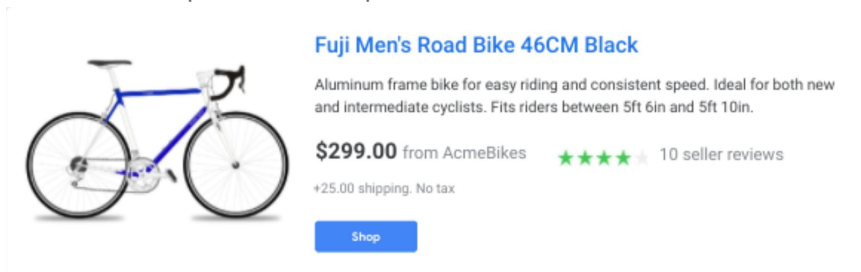
Apparel > Women > Dresses

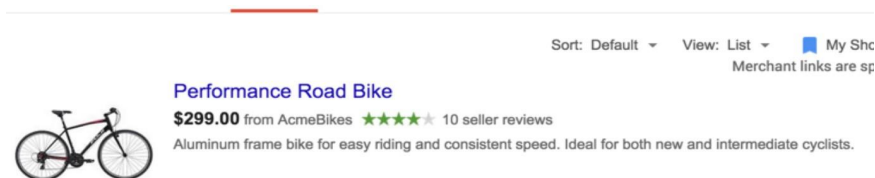You can always access and update product types directly within your Shopify dashboard.

How to bring products to life online

👍 This optimized Shopping ad features the brand name, a more detailed product description, and a clear call to action.

Fuji Men's Road Bike 46CM Black

Aluminum frame bike for easy riding and consistent speed. Ideal for both new and intermediate cyclists. Fits riders between 5ft 6in and 5ft 10in.

$299.00 from AcmeBikes   ★★★★☆ 10 seller reviews

+25.00 shipping. No tax

Shop

👎 Now compare that with this less optimized Shopping ad.

Sort: Default ▾   View: List ▾   🔵 My Sho
Merchant links are sp

Performance Road Bike

$299.00 from AcmeBikes ★★★★☆ 10 seller reviews

Aluminum frame bike for easy riding and consistent speed. Ideal for both new and intermediate cyclists.

Tip 3

Test and learn to prepare for peak season demand

Be ready to capture increased demand by testing the pricing waters before the peak season spike. Here are a few simple do's and don'ts to maximize sales with your budget.

Do's

- **Adjust your budget to catch increased demand.** Higher traffic during a peak season moment means more opportunity for sales. Having a sufficient budget allows the algorithm to maximize conversion value.

- **Review your sales goals.** Determine your sales goals and what return on ad spend (ROAS) you anticipate getting.

Don'ts

- **Never over-restrict the daily budget.** If Google's algorithm doesn't have any volume initially, the system can't get the traffic and sales needed to make decisions.

What is ROAS?

ROAS is your return on ad spend. It's the amount of revenue your business earns for each dollar you spend on advertising.

Successful budgeting example

Samantha sells beaded bracelets worth $25 per purchase. She wants to achieve $2,000 in sales per day through Google during her sale. Her testing showed her that Google is able to get her a purchase for $7. She will make a 300% ROAS. In this case, because her ROAS is positive, we recommend a $670 budget per day to achieve her sales goal of $2,000 per day.

Week 4

Optimize for peak moments
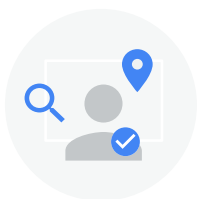
Whether the next peak season moment is a big holiday, an upcoming flash sale, or a new product drop, it's important for you to assess your optimization needs ahead of time, then set your strategy.

Optimizations don't have to take up the bulk of your time. Experience the freedom to focus on your business while Google's technology automatically helps you find customers who are more likely to buy and spend more.

Check out two tips to help determine the ideal approach for reaching your sales goals.

Tip 1

# Adjust budgets for big holiday moments

Be the first to arrive at the holiday party by adapting campaigns early to capitalize on increased holiday search queries.

Simple suggestions to keep campaigns healthy and successful during the holiday

1. Adjust budgets to match search growth surges during holiday peaks.

2. Take a look at historical performance to find when traffic peaked, such as during Black Friday. Raise the budget caps to capitalize on increased demand.

59%
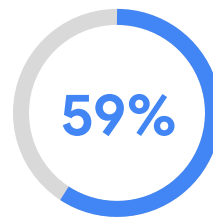
Over half of U.S. consumers planned to begin holiday shopping in November last holiday season.[7]

22%
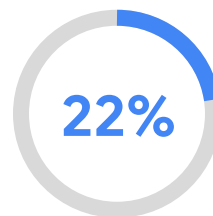
Nearly one-quarter of U.S. consumers planned to start holiday shopping as early as October in previous holiday seasons.[7]

Pro tip

Check the Opportunities tab in Merchant Center for more ways to increase clicks. If you're not already using Smart Shopping campaigns, you can reach more shoppers with Shopping ads on YouTube and image search by enabling search partners for standard Shopping campaigns.

Tip 2

Allow for a learning period

We recommend you wait at least 14 days before making changes to your Smart Shopping campaign. This allows Google's algorithm time to learn where to best show your products. Smart Shopping campaigns use machine learning to automatically optimize your holiday merchandise and top performers.

Want to go deeper?

Check out our resources for retailers or chat with your agency marketing professionals if available.

With the tips, tools, and recommendations included in this four-week playbook, you're ready to seize your peak season moment.

Sources

1. Google commissioned Ipsos COVID-19 tracker, U.S. n-506 Online consumers 18+ who will shop for the holiday season. June 17–20, 2021.

2. Google Data, Global English, Feb 26–Apr 25, 2020 vs Feb 25 - Apr 25, 2019.

3. Google/Ipsos, "Holiday Shopping Study", November 2020–January 2021, AR, AU, BR, CA, FR, DE, IT, MX, NL, ES, SE, U.K., U.S., CL, CO, PE, BE, NO, FI, DK. Online survey, Base varies by country n=842 to n=2664, Holiday in-store purchase occasions (Online 18+ who shopped for the holidays in the p2d). November 2020–January 2021.

4. Google commissioned Ipsos COVID-19 tracker, US n-506 Online consumers 18+ that plan to shop for the holidays, June 17–20, 2021.

5. Google/Verto, U.S., "Why Mobile Site UX Matters," analysis of a sample of the highest reaching mobile sites in terms of monthly unique visitors across Finance, eCommerce, and Travel using Verto's Syndicated Data in 2017, n=254. March 2018.

6. Google/Ipsos, Global Retail Study, Feb 2019. Base: Total sample (n=14206) Global (excl. China) online 18+ who shopped in the last week. Countries included: AR, AU, BR, CA, CZ, FR, DE, IN, ID, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PL, PT, RU, SA, ZA, ES, SE, TR, UA, UK, US, AE, VN.

7. The NPD Group conducted an online survey in September 2017 among a U.S. representative sample of NPD online consumer panel members. The survey was completed by 3,785 individuals aged 18 and older. Brand Keys surveyed 11,625 shoppers and Prosper surveyed 7,349 consumers Oct. 3–10 for the National Retail Federation.