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EasyPost Ebook

The Complete Guide to Navigating Peak Shipping Season and What It Means for Your Online Business

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Preparing for the 2022 Online Holiday Season

The holiday season is becoming an increasingly important time for online businesses. According to **Insider Intelligence**, last year's holiday season saw the fastest year-over-year growth in the US in more than 20 years. While trends suggest that the market will dip slightly in 2022, we still expect ecommerce to play a major role in holiday shopping this year. Because of this, it's more important than ever to streamline processes and save money where possible to maximize profitability in 2022.

Prepare for incoming traffic by streamlining workflows

It's never too early to start preparing for the online holiday season. By streamlining your workflows early, you can ensure that your business can handle the influx of orders without any hitches.

Begin by taking a look at your website's structure. Is it easy to navigate, or are there elements that could be improved? For example, page speed, advanced search features, and a customer login interface can significantly affect how easily customers can find what they're looking for on your site.

Take a look at your order fulfillment process. Is it efficient and able to manage a large number of orders? If not, take steps to streamline your system as much as possible. This may involve automating certain tasks or outsourcing to a third-party fulfillment company.

Don't forget about customer service, either. During the holiday season, you can expect a higher volume of inquiries and complaints, so make sure that you have enough staff and that they are prepared to deal with incidents in a timely and efficient manner.

94%

of consumers would purchase more products after a favorable customer experience

Create a hassle-free customer experience

The customer experience is more important than ever during the holiday season. With so many options available, shoppers can easily take their business elsewhere if they encounter any problems. To avoid this, it's crucial that you create a hassle-free customer experience from start to finish.

To build the ultimate ecommerce customer experience, start with your web design. Make sure that it is easy to navigate and that product information is easily accessible to potential customers. A seamless website experience can go a long way in converting customers, starting with the moment your homepage loads and continuing through the checkout experience.

However, the customer experience doesn't end at checkout. After a customer completes a purchase, they should receive an email or text message with tracking information. If something goes wrong with an offer, have a process in place to resolve the issue promptly.

Customer experience often determines whether a customer will return to a business. A **Qualtrics** study found that 94% of consumers who rate a company's customer experience as "very good" say they are "very likely" to purchase more products from that company again in the future. By creating a hassle-free customer experience from start to finish, businesses can keep shoppers coming back for more – during peak season and beyond.

Surprise and delight with shipping and fulfillment options

In today's ecommerce environment, the more shipping and fulfillment options a business offers, the more competitive they appear. Shoppers expect orders to arrive quickly and without issue – sometimes even for free. To meet these high expectations, businesses need to stand out to shoppers with their shipping and fulfillment options.

Begin by evaluating your current shipping options. How quickly do the carriers you work with deliver your products? How do your rates compare to the competition? Are your customers satisfied with the overall experience? If not, it may be time to make some changes.

Offering alternative shipping options can help you stay competitive. Expedited delivery and in-store pickup are two increasingly popular options for consumers. If your business is able to accommodate these shipping methods, be sure to promote them prominently on your website and in your marketing materials.

With EasyPost's Shipping API, businesses of all sizes can upgrade their shipping and fulfillment systems with ease. Integrating with over 100 domestic, international, regional, and same-day carriers will create a shipping experience that meets the needs of both your customers and your business.

In addition to shipping options, packaging can go a long way in delighting customers. Custom packaging – such as branded boxes or tissue papers – can make your products feel luxurious and special. If budget allows,

consider upgrading your packaging to make a bigger impact with customers.

Create strategic holiday marketing and promotions

During the holiday season, everyone is competing for shoppers' attention. To stand out from the crowd, businesses need to create strategic marketing and promotional campaigns that grab shoppers' attention and encourage them to buy.

Every year the holiday season has been creeping up earlier and earlier, so don't wait until the last minute to start planning your campaigns. Review your plans now to be sure you're taking advantage of this opportunity to be creative in your advertising. Think outside the box and come up with ideas that will really capture shoppers' attention.

When creating holiday marketing promotions, your primary focus should be on motivating your customers to shop. Look at data for past promotions and consumer behavior to see what has worked well in the past. Use that information to guide your promotions to create campaigns that resonate with your shoppers.

For example, if your customers respond well to buy-one-get-one free campaigns, make sure you have that in your arsenal. Does free shipping attract their business? Give them free shipping options when they spend more.

Ramp up customer service and support

Along with an increased number of purchases, the holiday season also brings an increase in customer service inquiries. To be confident that your business is prepared to handle the influx of customer service requests, it's important to ramp up your customer service team in time for the seasonal rush.

To step up your game with customer service and support teams, start by refining your current procedures. What can be improved? Are there any areas that need to be streamlined? Will there be any changes to procedures for peak season? Give your team plenty of time to adapt to any changes so they're well-prepared for the holiday season. It may even be necessary to bring on additional customer service staff to help with the increased volume of requests.

Efficient customer service is especially important during the holiday season because shoppers are often under a lot of stress as they focus on gift-buying for loved ones, coordinating their busy holiday schedules, and making memories with their families. If they have a positive customer service experience with your business – one that reduces their stress in one area – it will go a long way in creating loyal customers who come back again and again.

What You Need to Know About Peak Shipping Season

How does capacity tighten during the peak shipping season?

During the busiest shipping season, capacity may be limited, which means prices will rise. Therefore, you should allocate a portion of your budget to cover unexpected expenditures associated with the peak shipping season. Before moving further, let's define peak shipping season, commonly referred to as peak freight season.

The period of the year when shops experience an increase in sales due to back-to-school and later holiday shopping is referred to as peak shipping season. The season starts in July, even if the peak is more concentrated during the holiday season from October to December. Under normal circumstances, you must be ready to spend extra to carry freight for roughly half the year.

Prepping early may allow your supply chain network to avoid the volatility and disruption that peak season swings could otherwise bring. BCG claims that the supply chain network and transportation industries still have tremendous untapped innovation potential in advanced analytics and artificial intelligence. If you're a shipping manager, you will need to balance implementing new software and technology with ensuring that present productivity and profit levels do not fall. In light of continuing worldwide disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is made considerably more difficult.

The ongoing trucker shortage and the need to locate enough drivers and vehicles to maintain your supply chain's peak capacity are additional factors that contribute to the capacity difficulties of today. Therefore, before the peak season rush, you must prepare by identifying at-risk activities, utilizing local parcel carriers more, and working on predictive planning.

The best way to prepare for the holiday rush

Be ready for website traffic

Most stores experience an increase in traffic throughout the holiday season. Use the traffic to your advantage and convert site visitors into paying clients. Make sure your online retail channels are ready to manage the influx of traffic before moving on.

It is crucial to ensure your website is equipped to manage the volume of traffic coming to it. First, determine your anticipated retail demands for the holiday season using historical data. Then, to ensure that high volumes of internet visitors won't cause your site to load slowly, work with the appropriate web developers and IT support.

Manage your inventory

Do you have enough inventory to meet holiday demand? To determine which items will need to be in stock or restocked immediately, conduct research on historical and current statistics on popular products.

To predict the amount of inventory required, collaborate with wholesale and 3PL partners. Remember to consider returns as well since they will impact overall inventory.

Plan your routes

To provide workers with the most effective route through the warehouse, you may aggregate or wave orders using your warehouse management system (WMS) based on many factors such as shipment schedules, destination, customers, and product attributes. This enables you to give orders with a shorter

50%
of consumers will purchase products on their mobile devices

turnaround time priority. Organize your warehouse for effective pick and packing by placing your most popular goods closest to the shipping stations.

Go mobile

A **third to half of consumers** will purchase products on their mobile devices. It's crucial to provide your customers with various tools and integrations that make buying simple while you're organizing for the next holiday season. Utilize your mobile traffic to its full potential with targeted marketing initiatives and a seamless and speedy purchase experience.

Make sure your website is mobile-friendly and that you accept payments with Apple Pay, Google Pay, or PayPal on mobile devices. Including mobile integrations on your website may significantly increase your holiday and ongoing sales. Use this time of year to make adjustments to your website that will boost mobile conversions.

Maximize Profits During Ecommerce Peak Season for Your Online Business

Use data to come into the holiday season well informed

Streamlining workflows, improving customer experience, and focusing on great holiday marketing tactics will help you prepare for peak season. As you move forward with those plans, tap into available data to ensure that the decisions you make are well informed. The right data will point to processes that can be optimized to reduce spend and increase your revenue.

For example, you need hard data on which carriers to use to get your parcels delivered on time. Shipping with only a few familiar carriers will limit your ability to freely navigate around unforeseen circumstances that delay delivery. Using data to determine carrier reliability will save you money while maintaining or even improving delivery times.

In addition, it's a great idea to review your **shipping and fulfillment data** from last year's peak season. Let those numbers uncover areas where you could be more efficient in organizing your warehouse, printing labels, handling returns, and more. Using data to drive change will streamline your workflows in the best way possible.

Make sure you have data channels set up to maximize your peak season efficiency and profits. Real-time inventory insight will keep products available to your customers. Predictive analytics can help you navigate and avoid delays. Tracking deliveries keeps your customers in the know and gives you the power to intervene when necessary. In short, make sure you have full visibility into your shipping and supply chain from order to delivery to keep things running smoothly for your customers.

Optimize for mobile shopping

Shopping on mobile devices **increased by over 15%** from 2020 to 2021, and that trend is poised to continue. Make sure to provide a smooth mobile shipping experience for your customers or they're liable to find a company that does.

What does it take to optimize for mobile shopping? First, make it simple for your customers to find the products they want,

add them to the cart, and complete their transaction – think user friendly. Do everything in your power to enable fast load times. In addition, keep customer information safe and secure. Perhaps most importantly, test extensively and be responsive to the feedback you receive.

Taking steps to ensure a positive mobile shopping experience for your customers will keep those orders coming in and help build a loyal customer base.

Keep your website loading times down and avoid crashes

In addition to fast loading times for mobile shopping, it's essential to keep your website optimized to load quickly. Conversion rates drop by 4.42% on average for every second of load-time delay, according to **The Daily Egg**. Keeping your load times down and avoiding crashes will have a significant impact on how many searchers turn into customers.

How to Manage Returns Efficiently

Making sure you have a good return policy in place can improve customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. Consider the following:

- Offer free returns

- Specify how long the return will take

- Make your return policy easy to understand

- Offer cash or credit refunds

Start experimenting with advertising and marketing

As mentioned above, peak season is a great time to do some creative advertising. You need to stay top-of-mind for your target audience, and that can be difficult with the inherent increase in traffic. If you are not doing it already, think about running a brand awareness campaign. Get your name out there to your target audience.

Speaking of your target audience, you need to understand exactly who that audience is. Take a close look who is purchasing your products, make sure your keyword strategy is on point, and set up some marketing campaigns targeted specifically to their needs.

Once you know your audience well, decide on some key incentives your customers will love and promote them aggressively. Social media posts, blog posts, and even videos will capture the attention of potential customers, and if you have a strong enough hook, they'll be excited to come back and make that purchase.

It's a good idea to increase your advertising budget during peak season when search queries will naturally be higher. Taking advantage of that natural boost in traffic will make your marketing dollars pack a greater punch.

Making data backed decisions, optimizing for mobile shopping, and kicking up your advertising a notch will help you maximize your profits during peak season. These tactics are a great way to take advantage of the increased traffic and sales that naturally occur this time of year.

Conversion rates drop by

4.42%

on average for every second of load-time delay

Ship Orders Safely and Efficiently During Peak Shipping Season

Work with a dedicated fulfillment and logistics partner

A fulfillment and logistics partner can provide you with the resources, expertise, and knowledge to ship products safely and securely. Third-party logistics providers offer a variety of services, including storage, fulfillment, and customer service. For many businesses, outsourcing to a 3PL frees up valuable resources to focus on other aspects of their business, while leaving logistics to those who know it best.

When choosing a fulfillment and logistics partner, it is important to consider their experience, capabilities and resources. You also need to understand their size, scalability, and location to ensure they have a robust infrastructure that can support your business. Also, ask about their technology infrastructure and customer service procedures to make sure they are in line with your requirements.

Alternatively, you could choose to keep your shipping logistics in house. This would give you more control over your shipping process, but it would also require more resources. The decision of whether or not to outsource your shipping logistics to a third-party provider is one that should be based on the specific needs and resources of your business.

Prioritize fast, free shipping

Customers have high expectations when it comes to fast and free shipping. In fact, 62% of shoppers expect orders to arrive in less than three business days when they select free shipping, according to X Delivery's **The State of Shipping Report 2022: Why Faster Shipping Matters**.

To meet customer expectations and stay competitive, businesses need to prioritize fast, free shipping. But how can businesses ship

orders quickly and offer free shipping during peak shipping season?

One way to do this is by requiring shoppers to spend a certain amount of money to qualify for free shipping. This helps to offset the cost of shipping and allows businesses to offer free shipping without sacrificing profitability.

Another approach businesses can take is offering free shipping on all orders, but charging for expedited shipping options. This would give customers the flexibility to choose how quickly they receive their order, while still providing free shipping as a base option.

It's important for both businesses and customers to be able to keep track of orders. Using EasyPost's Tracking API, businesses can provide customers with up-to-date information for their orders. This gives customers confidence that their orders are on the way and gives businesses the tools they need to ensure that orders are delivered on time.

62%
of shoppers expect orders to arrive in less than three business days when selecting free shipping

Consider the specific needs of cross-border shoppers

Cross-border shoppers have different expectations and needs than domestic shoppers, so it's important for businesses to take these into account when shipping orders. By considering the specific needs of cross-border shoppers, businesses can increase conversions and build loyalty among their international customer base.

One of the biggest challenges for cross-border shoppers is the inconvenience that comes along with international purchases. Between differing currencies, customs wait times, and potential shipping delays, cross-border shoppers often have to wait patiently for their orders to arrive.

To ease the inconvenience for cross-border shippers, businesses need to offer clear and concise communication throughout the shipping process. This includes providing tracking information so shoppers can see where their order is at every step of the way. Communication is key to keeping cross-border shoppers happy and ensuring that they continue to do business with your company in the future.

Manage Returns Efficiently and Earn Customer Loyalty

How returns affect customer loyalty

Returns can be the most difficult part of online shopping. Ideally, customers will buy your products, be thrilled with what they receive, and come back for more. That's a great fairytale, but reality looks a bit different: clothes don't fit, customers order by mistake, circumstances change, or a myriad of other issues can come up. In short, returns happen.

According to **Business Insider**, 67% of customers check out a company's returns policy before purchasing a product. In addition, when return policies are convenient, customer loyalty and revenue increase by 21%. Making sure you have a good return policy in place can improve customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases.

Improve your returns experience

So what does a good return policy look like? To start with, it's customer focused. Make it convenient from the user perspective. Customers have grown accomed to no-hassle returns, so it's a good idea to include the following in your return policy:

Offer free returns

Free returns are expected these days. Too many other ecommerce businesses are offering free returns for you to ignore the trend. If your return policy is costly, customers are likely to simply find someone else to buy from.

Specify how long the return will take

Customers want to know when they will get their money back so they can better manage their cash flow. Let them know when they can expect to see money in their account.

Make your return policy easy to understand

Simple is better. Lay out a step-by-step process to make it easy for your customers.

Offer cash or credit refunds

Give your customers the option to choose a cash refund or credit in your store. Most customers will likely choose the cash option, but when customers do choose store credit, it guarantees they will spend the return in your store.

A customer-focused return policy will enhance the customer experience and increase loyalty to your brand.

Enjoy Peak Shipping Season

Following this guide will help ensure that you're ready to navigate a successful peak season. By being proactive and planning, you can avoid disruptions to your operations and ensure your customers are satisfied.

EasyPost's API uptime

99.99%

the most reliable in the industry

Navigate this peak shipping season by using EasyPost. We have shipping APIs that will help optimize nearly every aspect of your logistics operations. With shipping, rating, tracking, address verification, insurance, and more, EasyPost removes the technical complexities so you can get back to growing your business. **Sign up** for free today or **get in touch with one of our shipping experts** to learn more.

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EasyPost's best-in-class shipping APIs provide end-to-end flexibility and more control over parcel shipping and logistics processes for e-commerce retailers, fulfillment centers, marketplaces, and enterprises. Founded in 2012, EasyPost has 200 employees and is based in Lehi, Utah.

For more information, visit **EasyPost.com** or email us at **sales@easypost.com**.