

SALSIFY | Guide

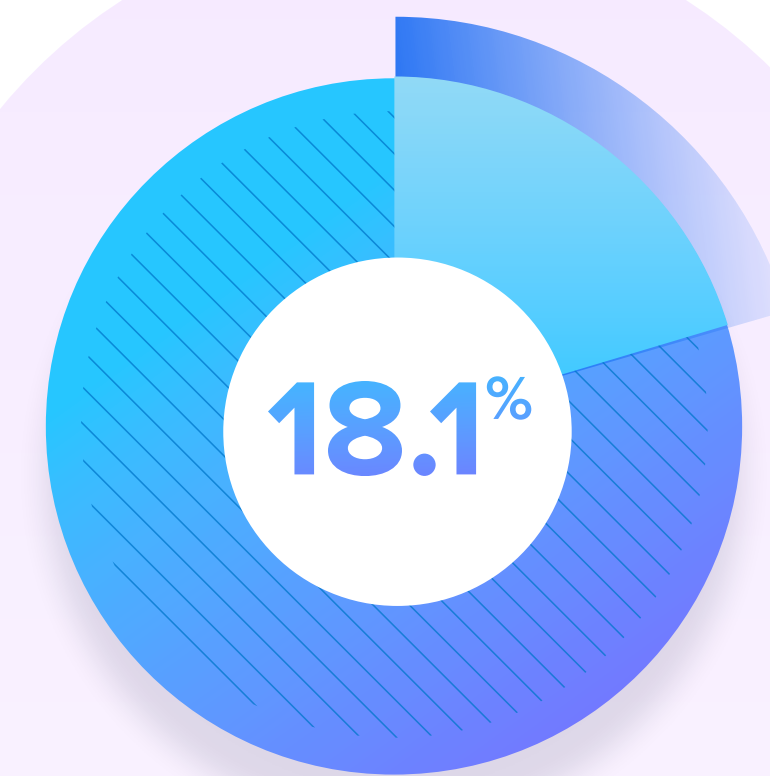
# The Complete Digital Shelf **Guide to the Holidays**

# A Complete **Digital Shelf Holiday Guide**

U.S. retail ecommerce sales are expected to reach **18.1% of all retail sales by 2024**, according to eMarketer. Brands that succeed in a post-pandemic world will learn to compete effectively on the digital shelf.

But as this holiday shopping season moves closer, everyone in the industry has the same question: How will shopping habits change amid COVID-19? This spring, shoppers stocked up on household essentials like toilet paper and disinfecting wipes. This summer, consumers adapted to stay-at-home orders with increased purchases of furniture and home goods.

As we enter the holiday season, it's apparent that COVID-19 will have an enormous impact on how, where, and when consumers shop. This digital shelf holiday guide will help you understand the state of commerce, expected trends, and ways to effectively prepare for the season.



U.S. retail ecommerce sales are expected to reach **18.1% of all retail sales** by 2024

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## Section 1:

# Holidays 2020: **State of Commerce**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, ecommerce sales have increased — with many shoppers completing online purchases for the first time. While there are still many questions about how this crisis will impact the market, the holiday season has historically been a battleground on the digital shelf.

U.S. retail sales grew by 3.4% during the 2019 holiday season, with online sales increasing by 18.8%, according to **Mastercard SpendingPulse**. From online marketplaces and retailers to direct-to-consumer (D2C) channels, digital commerce is expected to meet record highs.

Deloitte is forecasting holiday retail sales this year to rise **between 1% and 1.5%**, equating to between \$1.147 trillion and \$1.152 trillion. Ecommerce sales will grow by 25% to 35%, year-over-year, representing between \$182 billion and \$196 billion — dramatic growth compared to sales increasing by 14.7% in 2019, according to Deloitte.

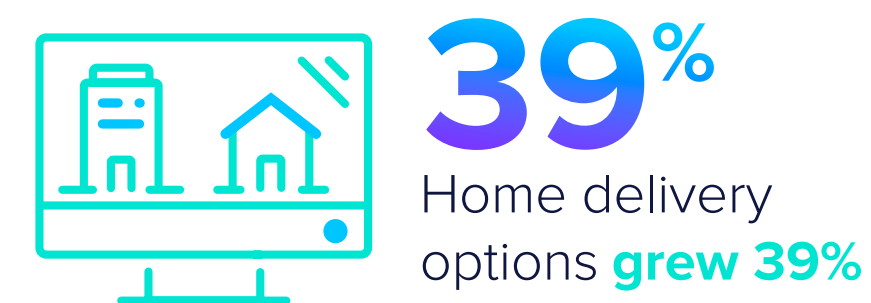
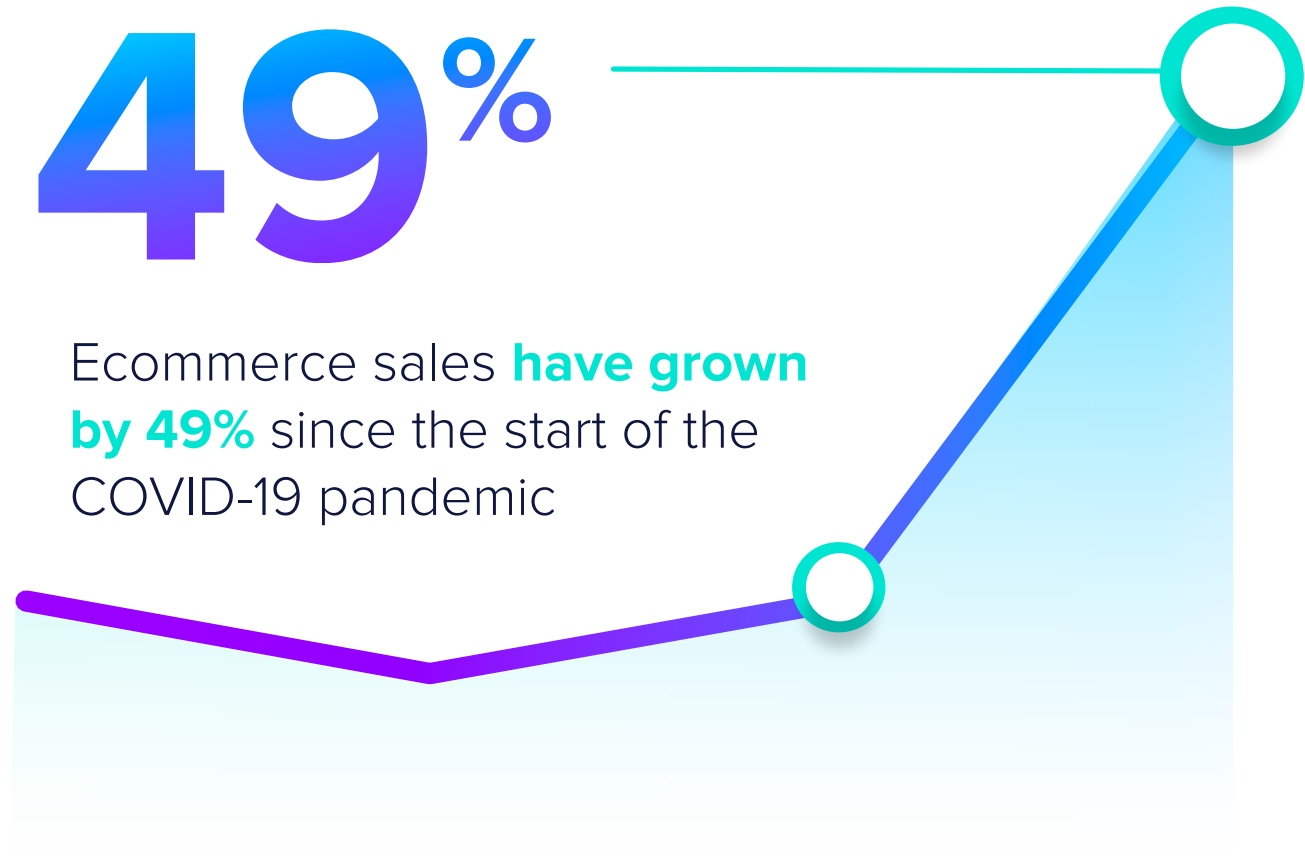
As consumers move into the 2020 holiday shopping season, many things will be different. More than ever, preparation is essential for brands to adapt to new demands and markets with an effective and streamlined go-to-market process.

Here are the five key themes of commerce in 2020.

# Even More Holiday Shoppers **Are Going Digital**

Ecommerce sales have grown by **49%** since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Nielsen, and click-and-collect and home delivery options are also up 95% and 39%, respectively. Between temporary store closures and customer safety concerns, shoppers have shifted to online channels at unprecedented rates — with some shopping online for the very first time.

The ongoing pandemic will likely urge even more shoppers to complete their holiday shopping online or through other “contactless” options, such as in-store or curbside pickup. A recent Think with Google survey found that **47% of shoppers plan to shop online or with contactless options to prioritize safety this season.**



# Holiday Shopping Is **Starting Sooner**

“Let’s face it: Historically, deal hunting and holiday shopping can mean crowded events, and this isn’t a year for crowds. That’s why our biggest holiday deals will be available earlier than ever, so you can shop safely and conveniently without worrying about missing out on deals that usually come later in the season,” Target posted on its site, highlighting its plans to **kick off its holiday shopping season in October.**

As major retailers like Walmart, Target, Best Buy, and others make the move to remain closed on Thanksgiving and start their sale seasons sooner, brands must be prepared to meet the demands of a longer holiday shopping season.

Customers will start shopping sooner, and brands must move quickly to meet this new timeline.

# Omnichannel Shopping **Has Newfound Importance**

For those who plan to visit brick-and-mortar locations during the holiday shopping season, planning ahead will have newfound importance this year. One of the most consistent commerce trends year-over-year has been the use of online search before visiting a physical store.

Even before the start of the pandemic, the overwhelming majority (88%) of shoppers **start every in-store shopping journey with an online search.**

In addition to starting their holiday shopping sooner, consumers may also pre-plan every shopping trip to minimize their time spent in-store. According to Think with Google, most shoppers (67%) also plan to first confirm in-store availability before walking through the door.





## There's a 'New Normal' to Navigate This Holiday Season

The majority of **holiday purchases in 2019 happened online (58%)**, and brands must be prepared to meet the predicted spike in digital commerce. Understanding how buying behaviors may shift this year is the first step to navigating this “new normal,” and embracing digital transformation is essential for taking advantage of this unique opportunity.

**58%** **58% of holiday purchases**  
in 2019 happened online

## Create Engaging Content Experiences

One of the most hotly debated commerce questions in 2020: **Will these new shopping habits be lasting?** While it's yet to be seen how many shoppers keep these habits after COVID-19 ends, experiences may be the key to developing lasting habits.

Lackluster digital shopping experiences hurt growth, as missing product information, shipping delays, and other product-experience issues can limit your chances of nurturing long-term relationships with new and existing customers.

Permanent adoption will require brand manufacturers to ensure consistently positive and engaging digital experiences. The holiday shopping season will be an exceptional opportunity for your brand to provide engaging digital content experiences that could help you develop lasting brand loyalty.

## Follow these tips to ensure your product detail pages (PDPs) are ready for holiday shoppers:

- **Write detailed product descriptions and bullet points** that answer frequently asked questions about your products clearly and concisely.
- **Highlight several editorial images (at least 5–7) in a gallery** to show customers detailed views of what they're buying and how they can use your product.
- **Use additional content features, such as comparison charts, videos, and graphics**, to engage shoppers and help them make final buying decisions.

## Meet Your Customers **Whenever** They Decide to Shop

As more shoppers go digital, brand manufacturers must embrace new retail channels, such as direct-to-consumer (D2C) and marketplace opportunities. As shoppers make their way across the digital shelf, they expect their interactions with your brand to be consistent and engaging wherever they decide to shop.

To win this holiday season, you must be able to tell your brand story to win customer loyalty across all of your priority channels. To accomplish this, you must equip your ecommerce team with a system that allows you to store, manage, and transform accurate and channel-ready product content with speed and agility.

## Holiday Winners **Will Embrace** Digital Transformation

A set-it-and-forget-it model doesn't work for modern commerce, as the requirements of the digital shelf change constantly — from trends and market shifts to retailers, shoppers, distributors, and more.

Continual optimization is vital to stay ahead of the competition. For example, gain an edge with insights into the keywords and search terms that rank every holiday season (keyword intelligence and search trends report coming up in the next section). By embracing digital transformation, your team can be ready to adapt to whatever the season holds.





# How Will COVID-19 Impact the Holiday Shopping Season?

While search trends this spring and summer focused heavily on adapting to life in a pandemic, there are many unknowns about how or if shoppers will change holiday buying behaviors.

As we move closer to the start of the shopping season, will searches focused on cleaning (e.g. disinfecting wipes, toilet paper) and a new home-based lifestyle (e.g., desk) shift to the traditional holiday searches? The upcoming holiday shopping season is now a wildcard.

Major retailers like Walmart and Target announced they will not allow in-store shopping during the usual Thanksgiving- and Black Friday-timed sales. These announcements, the implementation of social-distancing measures, and restrictions on retailers nationwide all point to an anticipated tidal wave of online shopping activity this holiday season.

“Major retailers like Walmart and Target announced they will not allow in-store shopping during the usual Thanksgiving- and Black Friday-timed sales.”

# Top Holiday Shopping Keywords

Your product category determines your SEO opportunities for the holiday shopping season. We identified the top unbranded search terms for 10 of the most popular product categories.

Product Category	Top 10 Unbranded Search Terms
Apparel	bras, christmas pajamas, luggage, mens socks, clearance, mens sweatpants, clearance under 5.00, mens jeans, womens boots, ugly christmas sweater
Consumer Goods	toilet paper, paper towels, dog food, laundry detergent, candy, ham, turkey, eggs, cat litter, coffee
Electronics	tv, laptop, tablets, laptops, 2gb microsd, desktop computers, wireless earbuds, camera, TV, headphones
Food and Beverage	candy, ham, turkey, eggs, coffee, butter, candy canes, cereal, bread, sugar
Furniture and Home Goods	christmas trees, curtains, desk, microwave, air fryer, rugs, tv stand, mattress, christmas lights, area rugs
Home Improvement	heater, space heater, humidifier, handheld shower head, shower head, extension cord, air purifier, electric fireplace, heaters, water
Personal Care and Beauty	shampoo, toothpaste, makeup, electric toothbrush, body wash, nail polish, gift sets, toothbrush, hair dryer, clearance, hand soap
Pets	dog food, cat litter, dog treats, cat food, dog bed, dog toys, Dog Training Collar, cat toys, dog training collar, cat tree
Sports and Outdoors	bikes, trampoline, treadmill, air mattress, tent, bike, basketball hoop, basketball, trampolines for kids, skateboard
Toys and Baby	hoverboard, board games, games, electric scooter, toys for girls 3-6 years, scooter, kitchen play set, diapers, car seat, baby wipes



# Tips to Get Ready for the 2020 Holiday Shopping Season

## Review Holiday Keywords and Search Trends

To maximize potential revenue, review holiday search keywords regularly. Analyze possible SEO opportunities specific to your category and portfolio of products. Optimize product content accordingly with these holiday search keywords to enhance holiday product discovery.

## Review Holiday Keywords and Search Trends

As holiday shoppers search for the perfect gifts online, help them picture how the products can be used with engaging content. Enhanced content, which includes image galleries, videos, comparison charts, and more, can help shoppers find the information they seek about your products and make final buying decisions. Enhanced content can also help increase conversion by an average of 10% across product categories.

# Rising and Falling Holiday Search Trends

While seasonal trends have a significant impact on holiday shopping terms, there are many keywords that emerge year-after-year. Within the gift-giving and entertaining product categories, the following are the rising and falling unbranded terms to help you prepare for the upcoming season.

Readying the home for entertaining holiday guests has represented a significant portion of consumer wallet share in the past. While it's yet to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact these sales, understanding historical trends can help you prepare.

### Rising Gift Category Trends

These gift-giving search terms were new or increased in popularity during the 2019 holiday shopping season.

- 2gb microsd
- trampoline
- ugly christmas sweater
- scooter
- smart tv
- kitchen play set
- matching family christmas pajamas
- gift sets
- basketball
- video baby monitor

### Rising Entertaining Category Trends

These search terms for products in the entertaining category were new or increased in popularity to the 2019 holiday shopping season.

- microwave
- air fryer
- rugs
- mattress
- gaming chair
- vacuum
- mini fridge
- turkey
- christmas outdoor decor
- candy canes

### Falling Gift Category Trends

These product search terms were popular in the 2018 holiday shopping season, but declined in 2019.

- drone
- slime
- laptop computers under 200
- cell phones no contract
- mens slippers
- boys pajamas
- pajamas for women
- socks
- exercise bike
- womens tops

### Falling Entertaining Category Trends

These product search terms were popular in the 2018 holiday shopping season, but declined in 2019.

- storage bins
- toaster oven
- shower curtains
- milk
- baking soda
- olive oil
- honey
- christmas candy
- popcorn
- coconut oil

## Section 3:

# How to **Drive Holiday Sales**

For successful sales campaigns this holiday season, brands must rely on creative product content to help drive sales online and off. **Ninety-four percent of shoppers abandon a site or just give up shopping if they can't find the product information they need.** Some of the most exciting holiday campaigns this season will rely on a catchy core concept, detailed and **rich product content** to demonstrate that theme, and effective syndication of that messaging across the relevant retailers and digital platforms.

In this section, we will explore four key areas to get right so you can win this holiday season: organizing your people and processes, building a communication strategy for your priority retailers, leveraging insights to boost product discovery, and closing sales with compelling product content.

## Organize People and Processes — ASAP

Digital commerce moves at an incredible speed, and the holidays only accelerate this pace. Preparing your program — and ensuring you have the right people doing the right things in the right way — can be a unique challenge.

Organizing the three following internal operations pieces as far in advance as possible can help give you time to outthink your competition and react to market shifts and buying behaviors quickly. Between publishing new product SKUs and the need to update or refresh content, the holidays are a heavy lift for ecommerce teams.

The sooner you organize your people and processes, the better equipped your team will be to manage the holiday season with speed and agility.

### Step 1: Centralize and Weaponize Product Data

Ensure all of the information you need to operate efficiently online, such as content, inventory, pricing, etc., is centralized and easily accessible for everyone on your team.

### Step 2: Organize Your Ecommerce Strike Team

Someone on your ecommerce team must be responsible for every moving part of the digital shelf. A strong starting point for most teams is ensuring coverage for four essential tasks:

1. Writing and editing product copy;
2. Organizing technical processes and systems;
3. Managing retailer relationships; and
4. Leading and coordinating efforts across departments and stakeholders.

### Step 3: Remove Decision-Making Barriers and Align Departments

Marketing should be involved in content creation and product detail page (PDP) branding, IT should enable easy access to product data, and sales should ensure strong relations with your retailer contacts. Even teams like legal and logistics should be ready to act as soon as your team identifies issues.

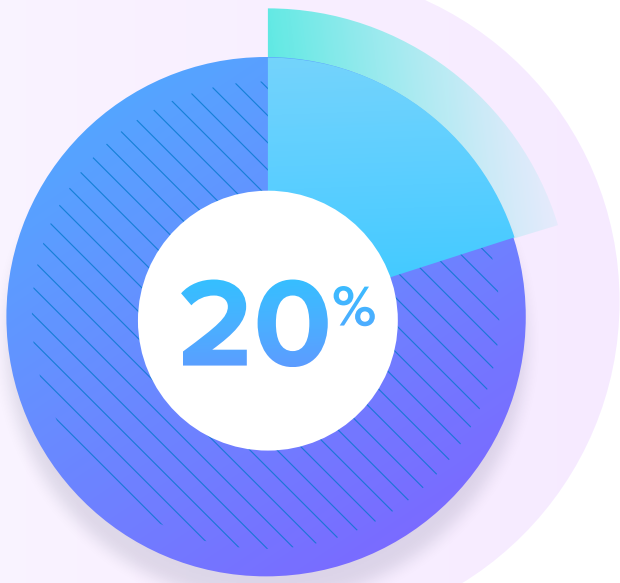


# Build a Communication Strategy for Priority Retailers

Every retailer has unique requirements that are continually changing. Keeping up with these shifts is time-consuming, and especially challenging during the holiday season when speed is essential. Your brand needs a strategy for managing demands from and communication with all of your priority retailers during the holiday rush.

Holiday sales represent nearly **20% of total retail industry sales** every year.

Source: *National Retail Federation*



With so much profit at stake, retailers want to have the best merchandise front and center for the holidays. These three steps can help you ensure your products rise to the top.

## Step 1: Prepare to Navigate Changing Content Requirements at Scale

Put a process in place to adapt to new retailer requirements quickly. You need the ability to refresh product content before the holidays are in full swing. The sooner you can set up new holiday items, the better.

By capturing some early sales and reviews, you'll better position your new product on the retail search engine results page (SERP) during November and December.

## Step 2: Decide on Your Priority Retailers

Amazon is an obvious choice, but traditional retailers and digital upstarts see lifts in traffic and sales during the holidays too. Rank your sales channels based on how they perform for your most important holiday SKUs. This prioritization will help your team focus on what matters when requests are coming in from all sides.

## Step 3: Build Your Amazon Battle Plan

One of the most crucial elements during the holidays is managing inventory properly on Amazon. Many shoppers will use the site as the first stop for research, and if you're losing the buy box to third-party (3P) sellers of your SKUs — or you're ranking on the second page of the search results — you will lose revenue. Amazon rewards keyword relevance and page conversion.

Develop an understanding of your most critical sales channels and invest in teams and technology to help you navigate the requirements it takes to win on each retailer, including developing a holistic view of your product page performance.

# Boost Product Discovery by Turning Insights Into Action

A majority of shoppers (87%) begin their buying journey with a search, according to [Salesforce](#). Whether that’s with a traditional search engine or on a retailer website, the onus to make your products discoverable is the same.

Your brand has an opportunity to influence that initial interaction if you take time between now and Black Friday to hone in on your product page performance and capitalize on search engine optimization (SEO) opportunities and more to boost your product content.

Consumers use a wider array of search terms during the holiday shopping season. Historically, November and December see an increase in the number of top retail search terms compared to other months. Update your content to include new and holiday-focused keywords.

## Step 1: Determine Seasonal Terms for Your Products

Think like your customers as you audit product titles and descriptions. Phrases like “great stocking stuffers,” “games for families,” “gifts for women,” “gifts for men,” etc. tend to see a spike over the season. Make sure your content is aligned with these spikes in holiday terms.

## Step 2: Incorporate the Voice of Your Customer on Your PDPs

Customer reviews are full of the keywords and terms that the average shopper uses to describe your products. Empower your team with insights capabilities, which gives them the ability to easily monitor and review this customer feedback. Then, regularly refresh your product content to reflect how shoppers actually speak and think about your products. Leveraging the voice of your customer will help improve your product page search results.

## Step 3: Analyze Competitive Data for Top Keywords

There are several ways you can generate suggested keywords for your industry or product type. You need insights about what terms your competitors are using and which terms currently match your product pages so that search algorithms will rank your product higher in relevant searches.

Being found on search leads to being bought. Include relevant holiday keywords across all of your SKUs to improve your visibility during the holiday season.

## Close Sales With Compelling Product Content

Refreshing the content on your product pages is a necessity for the holidays — not just to drive discoverability but also to help close sales. More shoppers are making considered purchases around the holiday time, and they want the confidence that the item will arrive on time and be what they expected.

Leverage engaging and optimized titles and product descriptions, as well as enhanced content like image galleries, videos, comparison charts, and graphics, to build trust and win holiday sales.

Engaging product content can drive conversion and sales, with brands in most categories seeing an [average 10% increase in conversion by using enhanced content](#). Giving your customers the information they demand about your products will help you build trust and boost sales.

### Step 1: Include Relevant Search Terms in Product Descriptions

The longer your product descriptions, the more product info they contain, and the more shoppers can learn about the items you sell. But don't just make them long for the sake of it. Include extra attributes about your products, detailing the specifics of those items. This step is particularly important if your products are often compared to your competitors.

### Step 2: Make Product Pages Scannable

Don't just show packaging shots: Go big on lifestyle imagery, videos, and marketing copy that turns your products into the crux of a happy holiday — not just a commodity. Help shoppers envision how they or their gift recipient would use the product. Images should reinforce the holiday themes.

### Step 3: Consider the Full Buying Experience

Your product page is one touchpoint amid a whole series of research that could take place online and in-store. Shoppers expecting a tailored, immersive, and curated experience and are more likely to trust brands that are consistent across every touchpoint. Build loyalty with helpful information and considerate post-purchase customer experience.



## Section 4:

# How to Optimize PDPs for Holiday Sales

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## Boost Digital Shelf Sales **This Holiday Season**

Holiday retail sales this year are expected to **rise between 1% and 1.5%**, equating to between \$1.147 trillion and \$1.152 trillion. Ecommerce sales will grow by 25% to 35%, year-over-year, representing between \$182 billion and \$196 billion — dramatic growth compared to sales increasing by 14.7% in 2019, according to Deloitte.

With shoppers going online in record numbers and the holiday season starting sooner this year, it's critical for brands to evolve their capabilities to meet the increased demand on the digital shelf.

Here are a set of best practices we've put together to help you prepare. Drive sales by getting your team organized, improving your processes, and creating better product pages and experiences for shoppers.

## Assemble Your Holiday Strike Team

With COVID-19 forcing contracted timelines and resources, you need best-in-class, cross-functional coordination to develop top-quality product content and deliver it to the appropriate channels.

Garrett Bluhm, former director of ecommerce at Hylands, named four essential components of the optimal product content team:

- **A leader** with a strategy and the will to drive it.
- **A scrappy technician** who understands each system requirement.
- **A content workflow manager** who can handle the content aspect of ecommerce.
- **A maintenance process** with everyone involved.

## Streamline Your Product Content Workflow

While every organization is different, you may have labor-intensive, time-consuming steps in your current product content workflow. The struggle often centers around bringing disparate sources of product information in your company into alignment in a single source of truth.

For example, product titles, descriptions, feature bullets, and images may be scattered throughout spreadsheets, legacy systems, or even employees' emails and heads.

“Look for the friction in your process. Then, focus your efforts and your investments on removing those roadblocks,” said Rob Gonzalez, co-founder and CMO at Salsify.

## Launch new products in time for the holidays:

- **Establish guidelines and timelines** for gathering and delivering content elements.
- **Identify who's responsible** for wholesale pricing and retailer-specific pricing for new items.
- **Collect extended product attributes** — the technical and category-specific details that set your product apart from competitors.

## Update content for your holiday merchandising plans:

- **Revisit current listings** to audit content for optimized performance.
- **Gather and update** new product imagery, copy, and operational data.
- **Make new product information available** to sales teams and other internal stakeholders.

## Get Specific With Product Titles

Potential customers use your product's titles to decide at-a-glance if they want to read further. **While each retailer has its own specifications, here are a few tips to improve your product titles:**

- **Use identifying attributes**, such as colors, product materials, sizes, and genders.
- **Use standard language keywords** to grow traffic (e.g. "red" not "cherry").
- Include the product **brand names**.
- **Include version or style numbers**, especially for electronics and other gadgets.
- **Always display product types** (e.g. variations like "t-shirt" versus "tshirt" can make a difference).

Jason Bell, group strategist at Tinuiti, says, "Titles are an important part of how your product information ranks in search. Titles have a character limit of 150 characters — 70 displayed and 150 searchable) — so choose wisely."

## How to complete search engine optimization (SEO) keyword research:

- **Step 1:** List out keywords your consumers might use for each product.
- **Step 2:** Use the Google Keyword Planner tool to identify additional terms.
- **Step 3:** Check competitor ranking for keywords.
- **Step 4:** Look at trends from last year's holiday season for key holiday phrases (e.g. "Gifts for Mom," "stocking stuffers").

## Anticipate Shopper Questions With Product Descriptions

Fifty-three percent of shoppers say they always do research before they buy to be certain they're making the best choice. Provide them detailed product descriptions to answer their product questions. Also, make sure to answer unanswered questions in the Q&A section on high-priority product pages.

Buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS) sales increased by 259% year over year in August, with **smartphone sales accounting for 40% of online sales so far in 2020**, according to Digital Commerce 360.

Bell suggests that you test keywords in product descriptions to learn about your customers' search behaviors. You have the months leading up to the holiday season to formulate and prove product **content hypotheses**.

## Here are some things to try to capitalize on holiday sales:

- **Expand your product descriptions:** Longer descriptions that include more attributes often see a rise in product page visits.
- **Include feature and benefit bullets:** Provide customers with an accurate list of your products' features and benefits.
- **Tell a story:** Illustrate your products' use cases with an engaging story or example. Be accurate and authentic to your brand's voice.



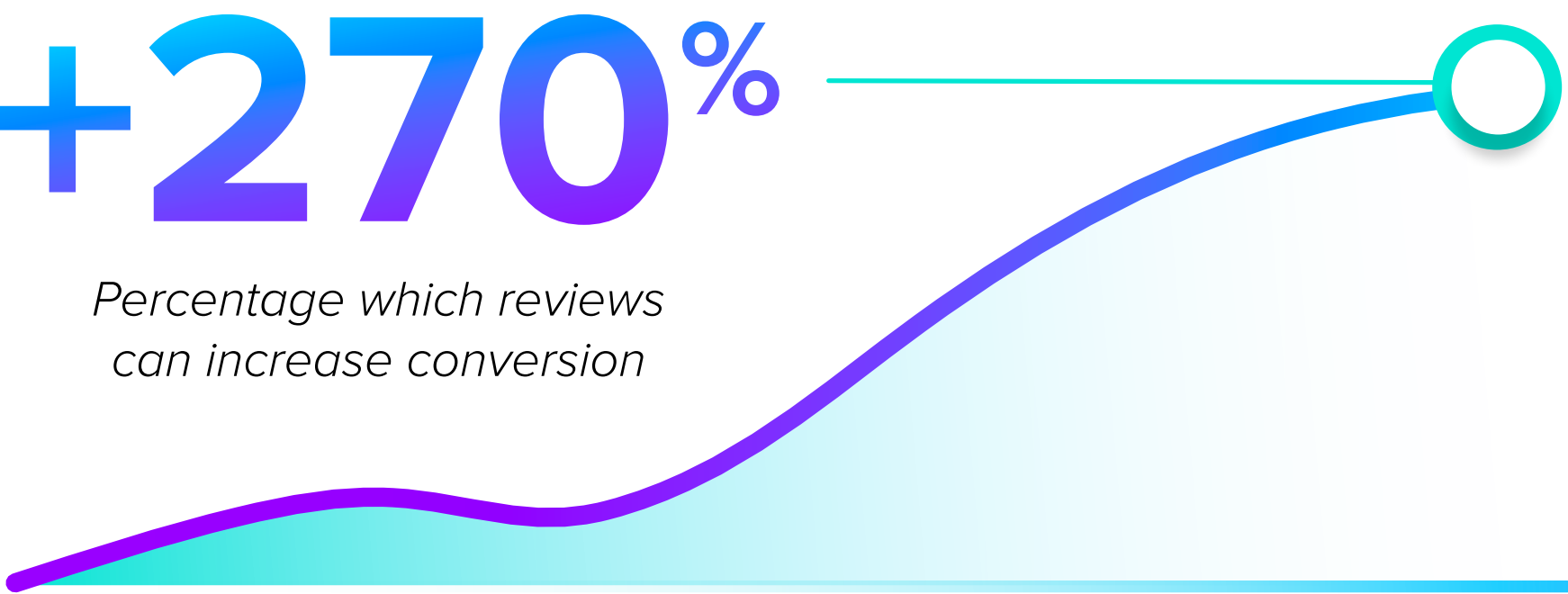


# Leverage Customer Reviews

Displaying reviews can increase conversion by 270%, according to Spiegel Research Center and PowerReviews.

## Power-up on customer reviews with five steps:

- 1. Extend the value of good feedback:** BazaarVoice and PowerReviews can help you curate reviews and syndicate that content across all your online retail partners.
- 2. Respond to reviews when appropriate:** Publicly addressing your reviewers can be a powerful way to build loyalty. Shoppers are more likely to make a purchase if they read helpful brand responses to reviews.
- 3. Use your customers' words:** Text in consumer reviews can provide a broad set of keywords for your marketing copy. Consider incorporating customer reviews into your extended product descriptions.
- 4. Increase click-through rates:** Display star ratings or powerful quotes alongside calls-to-action in order to build a stronger case for specific products.
- 5. Make it mobile:** Ensure your mobile-optimized site includes reviews so consumers can access them anywhere.



# Provide Relevant Information in Search Results

According to McKinsey & Company, the best-performing companies are “providing rich product information and content that also helps deliver [favorable] search results.”

Anand Vora, business development manager at LinkedIn and former strategic partner development manager at Google, agreed. “Digital is the new retail battleground, and product data is what’s driving success,” he said.

Buyers are doing more research before making a purchasing decision. Provide them detailed product descriptions to answer their product questions.

## Power-up on customer reviews with five steps:

- **Get set up on Google Manufacturer Center,** a portal that allows brand manufacturers to submit product data feeds directly to Google, and get access to search performance metrics at the product level.
- **Plan your merchandising based on regional insights.** Browse the trend data on Google Shopping Insights to see search patterns by topic, geography, device, and time.
- **Optimize for Product Knowledge Panels listings.** Google aggregates product information available to serve it as Knowledge Panel boxes appearing to the right of consumers’ search results. Make sure feature details and high-quality images are available on your best performing product pages.



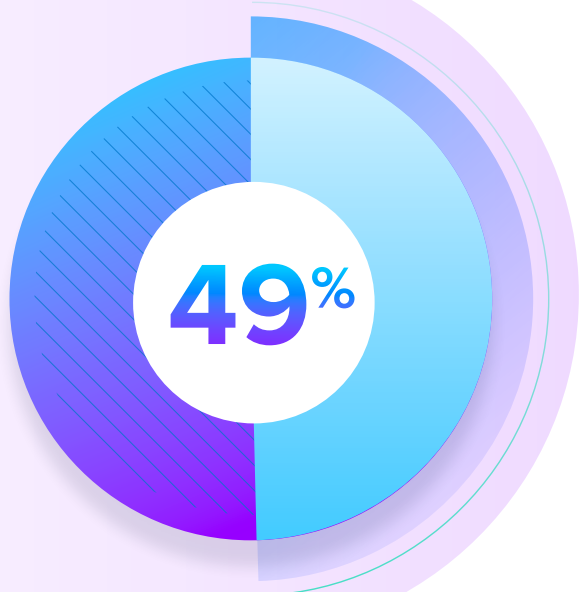
# Improve Your Amazon Pages

Last holiday season, the number of items delivered with Prime Free One-Day and Prime Free Same-Day Delivery nearly quadrupled compared to the same time period the previous holiday season. According to eMarketer, roughly half of shoppers start their search on Amazon.

Melissa Burdick, co-founder and president of PacVue, recommends optimizing your Amazon strategy with these three steps:

- **Budget for a Q4 promotional plan:** Amazon typically releases Q4-specific opportunities (like gift guides) by late summer/early fall. Start planning your budget and internal resources so you are ready.
- **Boost your search rank:** The ability to get on the first page of search results will guarantee higher sales during the holidays. Build traffic to your products with rich content and paid Amazon Marketing Services.
- **Improve your customer review score:** Respond to any less than three-star rating reviews on the detail page, answer questions under “Customer Questions and Answers,” and add enhanced content and images to help customers understand your products better.

49% of shoppers  
start their search  
on Amazon.



## About Salsify

Salsify empowers brands to win on the digital shelf by delivering consistent and engaging product experiences — wherever customers shop. Our integrated platform helps brands improve business agility, achieve faster time to market, and increase sales and market share.

See How it Works