

Dear Reader:

Our **2005 Merchandising Calendar** is presented below. After the calendar itself you will find our supplemental notes, findings, and data. This includes **11 key points** to help you effectively apply the merchandising calendar to your own marketing.

In addition to providing an easy-to-follow guide that will enable you to plan well in advance for upcoming promotions, we have provided access to a wealth of research and tips that will further enhance your marketing efforts.

We hope you find this useful and that you will share your experience with us. Please send any feedback on this calendar to:

<mailto:feedback@marketingexperiments.com>

Thanks for your trust,





Dr. Flint McGlaughlin
Marketing Experiments Journal

PS. For more information about our research, or to become a research partner, click here:

http://www.marketingexperiments.com/research_call.cfm


2005 MEC Merchandising Calendar Legend


 **2005 Marketing Blueprint Step** – This symbol indicates an important marketing step as outlined in the MEC 2005 Marketing Blueprint. You can view the blueprint in its entirety here: http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing_plan.cfm

 **Related MEC Research Brief to Review** – This symbol indicates a comprehensive research brief that MEC has prepared that corresponds with one or more of the steps in the Marketing Blueprint. These briefs may be used as you review your current website










 **Important Holiday** – This symbol, combined with 'red' text indicates a major U.S., Canadian or U.K. holiday.













 **Holiday Related Activity** – This symbol indicates a suggested marketing activity that is related to major holiday.













 **Search or Pay-Per-Click Related Activity** – This symbol indicates a suggested search or pay-per-click marketing related activity.















 **Top Shopping Day** – This symbol indicates that in 2003 this day was one of the top 10 shopping days, as reported by the International Council of Shopping Centers.














 **Special Holiday Related Email** – This symbol suggests the time and theme for a special holiday related email.













January 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				Begin "Get What You Really Wanted Campaign" on eBay	 New Years Eve	1  New Years Day Begin Health & Beauty Promotion
2	3 Bank Holiday (U.K.)	4  Send Health & Beauty Email	5	6	7 End "Get What You Really Wanted Campaign" on eBay	8  Begin "Back to School Campaign" on eBay
9	10  Conduct a Competitive Analysis	11	12	13  Begin Valentine's Day Marketing on Site	14	15
16	17  Martin Luther King Jr. Day (U.S.)	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27  Conclude New Years PPC Promotion	28  Start Valentine's Day PPC Promotion	29
30	31					











February 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1  Send Super Bowl Email	2  Groundhog Day	3	4	5
6 Super Bowl	7  Optimize/Review Your Home Page & Landing Pages	8  Mardi Gras Day Email	9  Valentine's Day Email	10 Promote eGiftCards	11  Last Day to Ship for Valentine's Day	12
13	14  Valentine's Day	15  End Valentine's Day PPC Promotion	16  Review MEC Brief: Landing Pages Tested	17  Begin President's Day Sale on Site	18  Send President's Day Sale Email	19
20	21  President's Day	22	23	24 Begin Spring Shopping Season on eBay	25	26
27	28					














March 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1  Optimize/Review Your Website Copy	2  Review MEC Brief: Transparent Marketing	3  Review MEC Brief: Long Copy vs. Short Copy	4	5
6	7  Begin St. Patrick's Day Sale on Site	8  Send St. Patrick's Day Email	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17  St. Patrick's Day	18	19
20	21  Begin Easter Sale on Site	22  Send Easter Email	23	24	25 Good Friday	26
27 Easter Sunday	28  Implement/Review Your Website Metrics	29  Review MEC Brief: Web Metrics 1	30  Review MEC Brief: Web Metrics 2	31  Begin Summer PPC Campaign for summer product retailers		





April 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1  April Fool's Day  Send Entertaining Email	2
3	4  Optimize/Review Your Order Process	5  Send Spring Email	6  Review MEC Brief: Order Process Tested	7  Review MEC Brief: Abandoned Order Recovery	8  Review MEC Brief: Configurator Tested	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18  Optimize/Review Your Email Capture	19  Send Earth Day Email	20  Review MEC Brief: Email Capture Tested	21  Review MEC Brief: Email Capture Pop-ups Tested	22  Earth Day (U.S.)	23
24	25  Begin Mother's Day Sale on Site	26  Send Mother's Day Email	27	28	29	30



May 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2  Review/Optimize Your Offer Price	3  Review MEC Brief: Offer Pricing Tested	4  Review MEC Brief: Subscription Revenue Tested	5  Send Mother's Day eGiftCard Email	6  Last Day to Order for Mother's Day	7
8  Mother's Day	9	10	11	12	13  Begin Summer PPC Campaign for	14
15	16  Begin Memorial Day Sale on Site  Review/Set-up Comparison Shopping Campaign	17  Send Memorial Day Email	18  Review MEC Brief: Comparison Shopping Engines Tested	19	20	21
22	23  Victoria Day (Canada)	24	25	26	27	28
29	30  Memorial Day (U.S.) Spring Bank Holiday (U.K.)	31				

June 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6  Review/Optimize Pay-Per-Click Campaigns	7  Review MEC Brief: Overture Tested	8  Review MEC Brief: Avoiding Unprofitable PPC Campaigns	9  Review MEC Brief: Google AdWords Select Tested	10  Review MEC Brief: Small PPC Engines Tested	11
12	13	14  Send Father's Day Email	15	16	17	18
19  Father's Day	20  Review/Optimize Natural Search Engine Strategy	21 First Day of Summer	22  Review MEC Brief: Natural Search Engines Tested	23  Review MEC Brief: Google Page Rank Tested	24  Review MEC Brief: Dynamic Pages Tested	25
26	27	28	29	30  End Summer PPC Campaign for summer product retailers		

July 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		 Send Independence Day (U.S.) Email			1  Canada Day	2
3	4  Independence Day (U.S.)	5	6	7	8	9
10	11  Consider Implementing a Linking Campaign	12  Review MEC Brief: Linking Strategies Tested	13	14	15	16
17	18  Pursue Site Credibility Indicators	19  Review MEC Brief: Customer Ratings Tested	20  Review MEC Brief: Award Sites Tested	21	22	23
24	25  Optimize/Review Email Campaign	26  Review MEC Brief: Email Campaigns Tested	27	28	29	30
31						

August 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1  Begin Q4 Holiday Marketing Plan	2 Review 2004 Sales Data	3	4	5  Start Back-to-School PPC	6
7	8	9  Explore Alternative Channels	10  Review MEC Brief: eBay Basics Tested	11  Review MEC Brief: Yahoo Store Changes Tested	12  Review MEC Brief: Amazon Stores Tested	13
14	15  Start Back to School Sale	16  Send Back to School Email	17 Assess IT Infrastructure Scalability	18	19	20
21	22	23  Create an Effective Affiliate Program	24  Review MEC Brief: Affiliate Marketing Tested	25	26  End Summer PPC Campaign for traditional retailers.	27
28	29  Begin Labor Day Sale	30  Send Labor Day Email	31			

September 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5  Labor Day (U.S.)	6 Begin Customer Service & Fulfillment Assessment	7	8	9	10
11	12	13  Send Back to School eGiftCard Email	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23  End Back-to School PPC Promotion.	24
25	26	27	28	29	30  Start Halloween PPC Promotion	

October 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3  Begin Columbus Day Sale	4  Send Columbus Day Email	5	6	7	8
9	10 Columbus Day (U.S) Thanksgiving Day (Canada)	11	12 Yom Kippur	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 Halloween					

November 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1  End Halloween PPC Promotion	2	3	4	5
6	7 Holiday Promotions Review & Testing Day	8 Election Day (U.S.)	9	10	11  Veterans Day (U.S.)	12
13	14  Begin Holiday Theme on Site	15	16	17  Start Holiday PPC Promotion	18	19
20	21	22  Send Early Bird Holiday Shopping Email	23	24  Thanksgiving Day (U.S.)  Increase Bids for Christmas	25  # 1 Top Shopping Day Black Friday	26  # 9 Top Shopping Day
27	28	29	30			

December 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13  #5 Top Shopping Day	14	15	16  Send eGiftCard Email	17
18	19  #8 Top Shopping Day	20  Lower Bids for Christmas  #2 Top Shopping Day	21  #7 Top Shopping Day	22  Last Day to Order for Christmas  #6 Top Shopping Day	23  #4 Top Shopping Day	24  Christmas Eve eGiftCard Promotion on Site
25  Christmas Day	26 Boxing Day Begin End of Year Sale  #3 Top Shopping Day	27  Send End of Year Sale Email  #10 Top Shopping Day	28	29	30	31

MERCHANDISING CALENDAR - RESEARCH BRIEF

Topic: Merchandising Calendars - What are the major online retail seasons and how can you take advantage of them?

We recently released the audio recording of our clinic on this topic. You can listen to a recording of this clinic here:

Windows Media Audio:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?cmw>

RealMedia:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?cmr>

This research brief will answer the following questions:

1. What are the major retail seasons and how do they affect your marketing?
2. How can you take advantage of seasonal fluctuations? (11 key practices)

FINDINGS

1. What are the major retail seasons and how should they affect your marketing?

Black Friday is the day after Thanksgiving, not a day commemorating some historical disaster or military invasion. On Black Friday, consumers flood stores around the United States to begin their holiday shopping. Black Friday is so called because it is the typically the day that many retailers emerge out of the "red" and go into the "black" (profitability).

For years major brick-and-mortar retailers have planned their marketing efforts around traditional shopping seasons. There are dozens of different retailing seasons in the calendar year. Seasonality is one of the most important aspects of retailing.

Each season requires that the marketer offer specific products, pricing, and promotions to maximize revenue and profit. This allows the marketer to take advantage of the natural ebb and flow of retail spending that occurs throughout these periods.

The period from Thanksgiving to Christmas is typically the strongest time for most retailers:

Top 10 Shopping Days (Retail)			
Rank	2001	2002	2003
1	Sat, Dec 22	Sat, Dec 21	Fri, Nov 28
2	Fri, Nov 23	Fri, Nov 29	Sat, Dec 20
3	Sat, Dec 15	Mon, Dec 23	Fri, Dec 26
4	Fri, Dec 21	Sat, Dec 14	Tues, Dec 23
5	Sun, Dec 23	Sat, Dec 7	Sat, Dec 13
6	Wed, Dec 26	Thurs, Dec 26	Mon, Dec 22
7	Sat, Dec 8	Sun, Dec 22	Sun, Dec 21
8	Sat, Dec 1	Fri, Dec 20	Fri, Dec 19
9	Thurs, Dec 20	Sat, Nov 30	Sat, Nov 29
10	Sat, Nov 24	Sat, Nov 23	Sat, Dec 27



What You Need to UNDERSTAND: All of the top 10 shopping days occur in an 8 week period spanning Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Source: International Council of Shopping Centers

Online shopping mirrors these seasonal fluctuations, with slight variations due to shipping constraints. In 2004 Gift Cards were among the top-selling gift items and web retailers have never been better positioned to sell and deliver electronic gift cards.

Comscore reported that in 2004, fourth-quarter online shopping was up 29% over 2003. This growth was partly due to an increase in last-minute gift card and gift basket sales as well as local delivery offered from large retailers like Barnes and Noble.

The International Council of Shopping Centers publishes a monthly retail mall index that tracks total revenues per square footage across many of the U.S. retail shopping centers.

Monthly Retail Mall Index	
Month	Dollars per Square Foot
January	\$23
February	\$26
March	\$29
April	\$26
May	\$27

June	\$29
July	\$27
August	\$29
September	\$28
October	\$27
November	\$31
December	\$60



What You Need to UNDERSTAND: The month of December, compared to any other single month, generates double the sales per square foot of retail space.

Source: ICSC.org Monthly Retail Mall Index, 2003-2004

KEY POINT: Traditional retail statistics indicate that December generates the most consumer spending.

To illustrate the impact of seasonality on online marketing, we looked specifically at the conversion of pay-per-click search engine traffic in a number of different online business sectors. Here are the results of our ongoing testing:

Pay-Per-Click Conversion Rates by Season			
	Outdoor/Home & Garden Retail	Sports & Exercise Retail	Fashion Retail
Normalized Avg. Conversion Rate (12-Month Period)	0.42%	0.47%	0.77%
Summer Season Conversion Rate	0.47%	0.54%	0.70
Holiday Season Conversion Rate	1.10%	0.62%	1.03%
Avg. Improvement During Summer	11.35%	13.32%	- 9.97%
Avg. Improvement During Holidays	159.34%	31.08%	33.29%



What You Need to UNDERSTAND: With the exception of "Fashion", all three categories improved in both the summer months and during the holidays. As expected, the biggest gains were during the holidays, with "Outdoor/Home & Garden" conversion improving by nearly 160%.

KEY POINT: During peak seasonal periods, your marketing dollars will actually perform more effectively than during other periods.

An increased conversion rate during peak periods may mean that you can afford to bid more on certain well-targeted search terms. This will allow you to maximize your sales revenue during these important seasons.

2. How can you take advantage of seasonal fluctuations? (11 key practices)

Many retailers are in business all year just to be in business eight weeks out of the year. We have established that retail spending skyrockets during the busy holiday gift-giving season.

However, there are other peak shopping days throughout the year. Some major retailers may have as many as two-dozen official "seasons" during which they plan for and run specific campaigns.

Given the amount of data we have as online marketers, we ought to be better at capitalizing on seasonal trends.

During the course of our research we developed our own merchandising calendar. This may be a useful tool and we suggest you use it to more efficiently plan your marketing strategy this year. If you do not have the calendar, you may download it here:

<http://www.marketplacesnapshot.com/calendar.pdf>

Online giant eBay has also published a merchandising calendar that allows their seller community to know of trends in advance and prepare for specific seasonal promotions:

<http://pages.ebay.com/sellercentral/calendar.html>

Even if you do not sell on eBay, this may be a good resource to monitor what is selling online, and when to promote specific products.

KEY POINT: By planning specific email, search engine, and site promotion campaigns around peak consumer spending periods, you can maximize your online sales.

We've compiled **11 suggestions** for optimizing natural buying trends online:

1. Plan ahead. Use a merchandising calendar to help plan your marketing (see below).
2. Pay attention to product-specific seasonal trends. In addition to monitoring when online sales are peaking, try to determine which types of items are selling when. Focusing your marketing efforts around what consumers are looking for can be one of the best ways to improve conversion.

eBay provides a unique snapshot of what is selling in their marketplace:

<http://pulse.ebay.com>

3. Use "downtime" to get ready for the peak season. Often we have seen major retailers encounter site problems, customer service snafus, or major fulfillment problems during November and December. Plan ahead during your slower months to make sure you will be ready. If you want to build a new site or implement some new software plan to do it during the slower summer months. Don't wait until August to begin a major site overhaul.
4. Do not forget about the general "best practices" of web marketing. Often, making just a small change to your order process or changing the text on your home page can yield significant new revenues and should always take priority over a seasonal marketing campaign. Review our research brief archives for ideas.

<http://www.marketingexperiments.com/members/>

Be sure to review our recent 2005 Marketing Blueprint, which outlines a 15-step process for optimizing your marketing efforts all year long:

http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing_plan.cfm

5. Offer electronic Gift Cards. This will dramatically increase your ability to sell during the holiday season, even at the last minute. They can be delivered via email in seconds and are perfect for last-minute shoppers.
6. Take a walk through your local shopping center during the next holiday. Notice how they are displaying sale information, getting shoppers into their stores and working to increase the average purchase amount. Many of these tactics can also be applied online.
7. Diversify your offer(s) so that you always have product that is in season. Even non-retail products are subject to seasonal buying fluctuations. If all you sell is snow skiing equipment, you may be missing out on valuable purchasing activity during your off-season. For example, you might consider also carrying mountain bikes or water skiing gear.
8. Update the main sale or offer on your website to match the current season. This should be done on a regular basis, perhaps monthly. Shoppers who notice that your site and offers change frequently will be encouraged to return often.

You can learn these techniques from other sites that implement them well. For example, we have been impressed by Overstock.com's ability to keep their home page promotions fresh throughout the year.

9. Create a gift registry. This will ultimately spur holiday gift shopping. If you have merchandise that is suitable for a wedding registry, implement this as well. You may be able to use this registry technique to create a natural, viral sales attractor for your site.
10. Watch the big online retailers. Visit their sites often and note how they adjust their product selections, promotions, and offers throughout the year.
11. While retail businesses often benefit the most from holiday seasonal spikes, even service-oriented businesses can take advantage of seasonal trends by creating offers suitable for gift-giving. Tailor your own offers to meet the unique needs of your customers.

NOTES

SOURCES:

Top 10 Holiday Shopping Days

<http://holiday.icsc.org/2004/TopTenHolidayShoppingDays.pdf>

Global Ecommerce Growth Numbers:

http://retailindustry.about.com/library/bl/bl_em0320.htm

comScore Holiday Shopping Update - 12/30/04

<http://www.comscore.com/>

RELATED MEC REPORTS:

Linking Strategies Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mls>

Long Copy vs. Short Copy Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mlc>

Website Awards Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mwa>

Comparison Search Engines Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mcs>

DealTime Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mdt>

Yahoo! Store Changes Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?myc>

eBay Basics:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?meb>

Landing Pages Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mlp>

Order Process Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mdr>

Order Recovery Tested:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mor>

Transparent Marketing:

<http://meclabs.com/cgi-bin/pl/pl.cgi?mtm>

LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of our research, we have prepared a review of the best Internet resources on this topic.

Rating System

These sites were rated for usefulness and clarity, but alas, the rating is purely subjective.

* = Decent ** = Good *** = Excellent **** = Indispensable

eBay - Seller Central Merchandising Calendar ***

<http://pages.ebay.com/sellercentral/calendar.html>

Online Merchandising Strategies: Product Presentation Tools ***

<http://www.jupiterwebevents.com/webinars/0302tools/>

Effective Online Merchandising Techniques ***

<http://www.allen.com/cgi-bin/gt/tpl.h,content=25&>

Meaningful Merchandise ***

<http://www.clickz.com/experts/brand/brand/article.php/2247271>

Online Merchandising Tips from TigerDirect **

<http://www.clickz.com/experts/crm/traffic/article.php/3381101>

Tried and True Merchandising Works as Well Online as it Does Offline **

<http://www.internetretailer.com/article.asp?id=9404>

CBA Marketplace Merchandising Calendar **

http://www.cbaonline.org/External_Content/Merch_calendar.pdf?w=t

Take Online Merchandising Beyond Zoom In 2004 **

<http://www.forrester.com/ER/Research/Brief/Excerpt/0,1317,33235,00.html>

Best Practices for Online Merchandising **

http://catalogagemag.com/ecommerce/marketing_live_netmarketing_best/

National Retail Federation 53-Week Calendar **

http://www.nrf.com/content/default.asp?folder=services&file=finance_454.htm&bhcp=1

The Myth of Dot-Com Seasonality **

<http://www.fool.com/news/mft/2004/mft04122803.htm?source=eptyholnk303100&logvisit=y&npu=y&bounce=y&bounce2=y>

How Marketing Plans Work **

<http://money.howstuffworks.com/marketing-plan5.htm>

Four Critical Factors for Merchandise Optimization Implementation Success **

<http://retailindustry.about.com/library/weekly/02/aa020222a.htm>

Secrets of Online Merchandising **

http://fusionbrand.blogs.com/fusionbrand/2004/08/secrets_of_online.html

ReveNews.com - Merchandising **

<http://www.revenews.com/advice/chapter7.html>

ABOUT THIS EMAIL

Editor - Flint McGlaughlin
Writer - Jalali Hartman
Contributors - Brian Alt
HTML Designer - Cliff Rainer

This email is sent ONLY to registered members of MarketingExperiments.com.

.....
The Marketing Experiments Journal is published by
Dr. Flint McGlaughlin.

(c) Copyright 2005 Digital Trust Inc.
.....