

How Multichannel
Sellers Will Crush The
2020 Holiday Season

The Ultimate Multichannel eCommerce Guide to the 2020 Holiday Season

At the climax of a transformative year for eCommerce, what's the secret to maximizing profits and beating the competition?

We think multichannel selling is the answer and we're prepared to back up our words. Now you can look at the data for yourself.

See why expanding your horizons to new platforms and new markets is the right approach for this unique fourth quarter. You're about to learn the answers to four pressing eCommerce questions:



[What's different about the 2020 holiday season?](#)



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What's different about the 2020 holiday season?

The ongoing global coronavirus pandemic is, of course, the defining feature of this year's holiday season. It's made its presence felt in every corner of our lives and eCommerce is no different.

Lockdown and social distancing measures have sped up the decline of traditional bricks-and-mortar retail, and some product niches are feeling the heat. US clothing sales were down **89.3% year on year in April 2020**; jewelry, tools, and travel product are also taking a hit. But it's not all bad news.

Some product niches are enjoying a considerable boom. Medical products are seeing a sales boost of nearly **500%** year on year. Sales of baby products are up nearly **380%**. Cleaning product sales have doubled.

It's not that people are buying less across the board; they're just buying differently. In particular, they're buying online:

146%

The US and Canada are seeing a 146% jump in year-on-year eCommerce orders

10%
THIS YEAR

eCommerce's retail market share in France grew from 6% in 2019 to 10% this year

30.7%
THIS YEAR

In the UK, eCommerce accounted for 19.1% of retail sales in 2019, and 30.7% this year

Different demographics are also reacting differently. Boomers and Gen X are less likely to change what they're buying, while Millennials and Gen Z are stocking up on essentials. Women are more concerned about the pandemic, but men are adjusting their shopping habits more.

One trend underpins all this data. Whatever the market, whatever the demographic, people are turning to eCommerce in their tens of millions. As the holiday season approaches, online retailers are preparing for what could be the most profitable period in history.

But of course, that will also make it the busiest for sellers. To look at how retailers are getting ready, let's examine the main attractions of the season; Black Friday and Christmas.



What's different about the 2020 holiday season?

The first thing to understand when trying to forecast the 2020 Black Friday weekend is that it's an event which enjoys huge year-on-year growth even before we consider the coronavirus eCommerce boom.

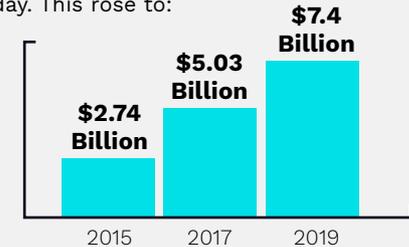
The fear of a second wave of coronavirus means 2020's Black Friday weekend could take place mostly, if not exclusively online. That's going to push those already impressive figures to astronomical levels.

Visionary eCommerce retailers are already taking a serious look at their processes and infrastructure to see if they're capable of handling that demand. They're A/B testing different promotions and marketing strategies to see what's most effective.

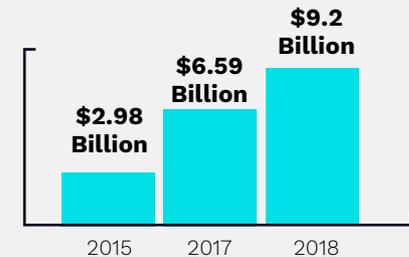
They're also investing in tools and training to make sure they can still provide satisfactory customer service. Because the job isn't over once Cyber Monday ends. Increased sales will inevitably mean increased enquiries and returns which must be handled in a timely manner to protect your business' reputation.

And, when all is said and done, Black Friday weekend is just one of two big eCommerce events this year

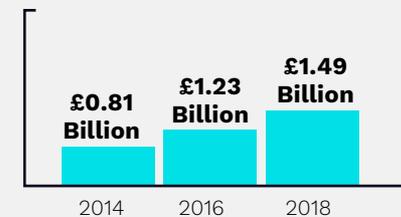
Early stats from 2013 show a total online spend of \$1.93 billion in the US on that year's Black Friday. This rose to:



And those are just stats for Black Friday, they don't include Cyber Monday when most eCommerce is supposed to happen. 2013's spend of \$2.29 billion became:



You might think Black Friday weekend is a uniquely American phenomenon, but you'd be dead wrong. We can, for example, observe the same steady growth in the UK market, with online spends of:



Christmas shopping

The 2020 holiday season is a year of selling to more customers from more places via more channels than ever. Now is the time to make that easier on yourself and your customer service team by assessing the tools you're using and making sure they're up to the task.

Black Friday weekend is massive for sales, but it still pales in comparison to the sheer iconic, cultural, and global clout of Christmas. People have been culturally conditioned all their lives to spend more around this period, which they'll do come rain, shine, or pandemic.

There's some crossover between the two events, of course. People typically take advantage of Black Friday deals to kick off their Christmas gift shopping. But as far as Christmas-specific shopping goes, we can make some confident predictions.

Firstly, a glut of **eCommerce businesses rushing to meet increased demand will lower the impact value of traditional marketing. It simply becomes much, much harder to stand out with your communications.**

To counter this, smart businesses are already encouraging user-generated content. Customers trust other customers more than they'll ever trust marketing; reviews, social media content, and open discussion are going to be the difference makers as people research their gifts.

Secondly, businesses **need to raise the visibility of their customer service channels.** For example, customers tend to prefer to communicate with brands on social media (where they already live) rather than a brand's own dedicated support channels.

Given that **48%** of shoppers say that a response to a review or question increases their chances of buying, you need to be proactive in the way you communicate. **But with so much extra traffic coming through your channels**, it's about more than just making time to have a chat.



Why are multichannel sellers heading for huge sales figures?

So, now we know three big truths about the 2020 holiday season:



People aren't necessarily buying less due to the pandemic, habits are just changing



eCommerce is going to win an unprecedented retail market share



Black Friday and Christmas are competing to be the biggest eCommerce event in history

The question is, how are you going to tackle this incoming typhoon of sales?

One answer is multichannel selling. This is when you sell in a mix of multiple places like Amazon, eBay, and your own site rather than pinning all your hopes on one channel.

If you're not selling on more than one channel yet, you're leaving serious money on the table for the holiday season. If you, or someone in your organization needs convincing; here are six reasons why multichannel selling is your most important strategic eCommerce decision of the year.

1 Meet your customers on their terms

It's a fatal arrogance to assume customers will come to you just because you've got a great product. Likewise, assuming loyal customers can't be lured away will also cost you big time. You have to go out of your way to be where your customers are already shopping.

Multichannel selling is going to win 2020 simply because it covers more channels and more platforms on more devices. Of those tens of millions of new eCommerce customers this year, everyone has a shot at buying from you regardless of which channel they use.

It's also worth noting that if you only sell on one platform, you're forced to move in whatever direction that platform decides. This could be disastrous for your business, so don't go putting all your eggs in one basket.

2 Reach further than the competition

If you're not multichannel selling, your competitors definitely are. Let's imagine for one moment that you have the most perfectly optimized eCommerce store on Amazon, but that's the only place you sell.

Even in this unlikely scenario, you're still going to be outsold by a business that has a moderate presence on multiple major channels, including Amazon. A strategy that does many channels well is going to outperform one that's slavishly devoted to perfecting a single outlet.

To effectively sell on multiple channels in 2020, take a strategic look at what platforms you maintain a presence on. Are you devoting time and resources to some nice-to-have features which could be better spent expanding to an entirely new channel?

3 Play the numbers game

Small, quick purchases might be made in the heat of the moment, but sometimes you've got to take a longer-term view. The majority of shoppers might take a look at your product, read some reviews, have a think about it, then go to look for some other products to compare.

If you're only present on one channel, that may well be the last you see of them. It's a big ask to expect people to remember your shop and come back to it for a product they might find elsewhere.

Presence on multiple channels lets you hit as many touch points as you can. And with repetition and successive interactions, you are more likely to win that sale..

4 Spread to international markets

Nowadays, with services like Fulfilment by Amazon it's easy to sell internationally. It stands to reason that entering an entirely new market opens up staggering opportunities in terms of ROI. Selling on as many channels as possible amplifies this effect.

Every platform has its own specific sites, apps, and services tailored for each market. Amazon.de is set up ever so slightly differently to Amazon.co.uk, for example. The more channels you're on, the more widely you benefit from this optimization, which the platforms do on your behalf.

You'll also appear more widely on price comparison websites and consumer review sites. Considering how easy the major channels are making international selling now, going multichannel is seriously recommended.

5 Become more than the sum of your parts

Speaking of letting the major channels do your hard work for you, it's fair to say that each has its strengths. Amazon can outspend most of the world in marketing. Wish boasts advanced recommendation algorithms. eBay is great with AI.

A presence on each channel nets you its benefits, and makes up for their respective weaknesses. Even better, each will feed you a subtly different mix of analytics which you can bring together in one report, or even on one dashboard if you've got the right multichannel eCommerce software, such as eDesk.

In short, being on two platforms is more than twice as effective as being on one, and this effect scales. The influx of new customers in 2020 is also good news, since it means a boost for every platform to some degree.

6 Build your brand's authority

The world's most iconic brands have become dominant by being everywhere. On every other billboard and bus stop, their presence was subtly beaten into us over years and years.

Multichannel selling lets you replicate this effect in the digital sphere. Your business appears again and again over time, even when the customer might not buy from you at first. Next time, they might choose differently and go with someone they've seen before.

All those new customers turning to eCommerce this year present a major brand-building opportunity. If you're the first business they click with, you could win a number of lifelong advocates.

What challenges will multichannel sellers face?

So far so good, but even with a strong strategy built around multichannel selling, success isn't about to be handed to you on a plate. There's hard work ahead and challenges to overcome if you want to get the most out of the holiday season.

There are six big dragons to slay this year, and they're all about scale. More customers and more sales mean more of everything you normally have to deal with in order to keep your business running.

When you're fine-tuning your multichannel selling strategy, pay particular attention to how your business can react to these half-dozen growing pains.

Multichannel support

Opening up new channels of communication and sales means you've got to keep an eye on them. If you're not careful about the tools you're using, you could end up with a sprawling mess of logins and interfaces.

Meeting SLAs

More channels means having to get to grips with the expectations of each one. It can be challenging to standardize your approach so that all your processes are meeting the most demanding SLAs.

Avoiding negative reviews

All that extra customer service piling up can make it easier to miss a case here and there. If you don't stay on top of your workload, negative reviews could start piling up.

Providing an excellent customer experience

The sheer number of new customers turning to eCommerce in 2020 means you might not be able to devote your usual attention to each one. Especially if you stick to your traditional customer service processes.

Answering pre-sales queries quickly enough to close sales

Answering customers' questions before they've even made a purchase can help you to convert a sale. It could be tricky to stay on top of pre-sales enquiries this year with all the extra orders.

Multichannel pricing

Competing on price is a common battle. More channels naturally means more prices to keep track of. Staying on top of multichannel pricing takes careful planning and the right software.

How can multichannel sellers handle the 2020 holiday season?

Again, look at what unites all those potential problems for multichannel sellers. It's about learning to cope with more. Now is the time to look at your business and see if it's up to the challenge:



Examine your supply chain, is it capable of handling demand? Does it run the risk of disruption from the pandemic?



Can you physically carry out that scale of fulfilment and shipping? Do you need to hire more staff, or could you take advantage of a service like Fulfilment by Amazon?



Is your marketing budget spread strategically across the right channels to greet your audience? Are you tailoring your message to the subtleties of each platform?

Then there's your customer service team. Are they familiar with each channel you're using? More importantly, are they up to the task of handling all those interactions? You could just hire more staff, but that's not an approach that can scale.

What you really need is to give them better tools.

eCommerce help desk software

Having specialist eCommerce help desk software that's geared towards the specific needs of your product niche is probably going to be the single wisest investment you make all year. Remember, when **January rolls around you'll be taking all those new customers with you into 2021.**

Many eCommerce businesses will see transformative growth overnight, so you need to start looking for the right tools now. All these features will be more or less essential in handling the kind of sales influx some businesses can expect:

If your eCommerce help desk software is hitting those eight notes, you're guaranteed a beautiful customer service symphony in this, the busiest holiday season ever.

Native eCommerce integrations are your first priority. You need software that works seamlessly with the platforms and channels you sell on, and with the software you use. Generic help desks are no good, you'll end up paying for apps and plugins to make everything work. Get a specialist eCommerce help desk, like eDesk.

Marketplace support needs to be broad. Look for a package that supports more than just the usual eCommerce suspects; Amazon and eBay. As you grow, you'll evolve, it might make sense to branch into niche marketplaces like Allegro or CDiscount. You need the confidence that the software you're using will support that growth.

Communication channel support is just as vital. A customer might email you one day, tweet you the next, and message you direct on Amazon that evening. Not only does the software you use need to support all those channels, it needs to let you bring all communications together in one clear place.

Clear order management will make life easier for your customer service team. They need to know the details they need to handle a case are right there at their fingertips. This happens easily when your software can play nice with your chosen inventory management and fulfilment program.

Time-saving features like templates, suggested automatic responses, and customizable snippets aren't just nice to have. They're going to make all the difference when you're handling an unprecedented number of customer service questions this year.

End-to-end case support, letting you handle pre-sales enquiries as easily as complaints and returns, is also something you need to nail at scale. Cautious customers need their minds put at ease before they make the jump and buy. Prioritizing these enquiries lets you get customers over the line fast.

Caseload management features make sure your team can collaborate and respond to the most pressing questions, and do so within your SLA. The ability to handle fiddly jobs like invoicing with one click can also drastically streamline their workload.

Live chat and translation features add extra tools to your team's arsenal, letting them go the extra mile to drive sales. Being able to respond to questions live provides a great experience, and translation helps you branch out into global markets without hiring dedicated language speakers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This has been a crazy year, one that's brought big changes and accelerated the digital transformation of retail. One thing's for certain, there's no going back. **24% of people say it'll be at least six months** or more before they consider returning to a traditional retail store.

That means doubling down on eCommerce, and multichannel selling is the way to do it. For the relatively small investment of entering a new channel, you're increasing your share of the biggest new customer base ever.

By equipping your customer service team with the right tools to handle the rush, you can revolutionize your business. What better way to set yourself up for what will be, we hope, a brighter 2021.

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