



Special Report

Ecommerce Optimization: A holiday playbook for procrastinators

Just as shoppers often wait until the last minute to finish their holiday shopping, online retailers often find themselves behind on their holiday optimization.

Procrastinators need to implement ideas that don't involve long lead times for design, development or approvals. In the Ecommerce Holiday Playbook for Procrastinators web clinic with featured guest Linda Bustos, ecommerce analyst for Elastic Path, our team showed attendees how you can optimize your marketing before – and during – the 2009 holiday crunch time.

The playbook explored real examples and testing mock-ups based on pages supplied by the audience, and featured last-minute plays in five key areas:

1. SEM
2. Shopping Engines
3. Email
4. Landing Pages
5. Crunch Time/Post-Holiday

Procrastinators need to implement ideas that don't involve long lead times for design, development or approvals.

1. SEM: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

SEO: Add value propositions in meta descriptions and page title tags to increase clickthroughs.

A clear value proposition is the key to success in any optimization efforts. Online retailers sometimes overlook page titles and tags – but these are great places to market your company by focusing on your value proposition in these elements.

A high percentage of sales come from search engines, and even if you're not at the top, visitors will see your value proposition when they scan the titles and tags in their search results. Ensure you have pinpointed your value prop, and express it clearly every chance you get.



PPC: Bid on relevant holiday keywords, such as ...

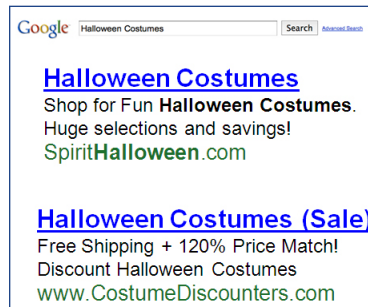
Holiday Terms:	Gift Terms:	Relationship Terms:	Sales Terms:
<i>christmas</i>	<i>gift</i>	<i>dad</i>	<i>after christmas sale</i>
<i>xmas</i>	<i>presents</i>	<i>mom</i>	<i>after christmas deals</i>
<i>chanukkah</i>	<i>idea</i>	<i>grandparents</i>	<i>after christmas bargains</i>
<i>kwanzaa</i>	<i>gift idea</i>	<i>girls</i>	<i>after christmas markdowns</i>
<i>holidays</i>	<i>gifts for</i>	<i>boys</i>	<i>december 26 sale</i>
<i>holiday</i>	<i>ideas for</i>	<i>teacher</i>	<i>post-christmas sale</i>
	<i>presents for</i>	<i>boss</i>	<i>after xmas sale</i>
	<i>presents for</i>	<i>teenager</i>	<i>boxing day</i>

These terms are drawn from [Google Trends](#) – which takes account of the top keywords each day. We went back in the archives and pulled the most common terms during holiday and post-holiday of last year.

SEM example

Search engine marketing can be optimized by focusing on the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence:

Conversion Sequence Element: Value Proposition



- The first ad doesn't give quantifiable reasons to click – cliché statements will not stand out.
- The second ad outlines specifically what is offered and handles two main concerns:
 - Will shipping make this item more expensive?
 - Is this cheaper somewhere else?
- The value is expressed in the URL of the second ad

SEM mock-ups

The team then optimized audience-submitted PPC ads:

Toe Socks For Everyone
Solid Colors, Stripes, & Sporting
Men, Women & Childrens Sizes
[Toe-Socks.net/Only-\\$1-Pair-Shipping](#)



Toe Socks Over 200 Styles
Stripes, Solids, Sporting All ages
\$1 Shipping - 100% Guarantee
[Toe-Socks.net/One-Dollar-Shipping](#)



While the original ad takes advantage of the URL to promote the \$1/pair shipping, the ad is missing the quantifiable breadth of selection and guarantee featured in the optimized version at right.

[Beef Jerky at Jerky.com](#)

The Top Rated **Beef Jerky** Site
Low Prices, 30% off, Fast Shipping!
www.Jerky.com



[100% Prem. Beef Jerky](#)

#1 Rated **Beef Jerky** Site 36 Flavors
Fast Free Shipping and Low Price
www.Jerky.com/Premium-Beef-Jerky

The original ad says “top rated” but a stronger quantifiable message such as “100% premium” better communicates the quality of the jerky. More factual information like “#1 rated” and “36 flavors” also get right to the point, while adding “/Premium-Beef-Jerky” to the URL also reemphasizes the value proposition.

[Colombian Emeralds](#)

Offering affordable luxury with
exclusive jewellery designs.
ColombianEmeralds.com



[Emeralds – Great Gift](#)

Affordable luxury and hand crafted
Free shipping on orders til Oct. 10
FreeShipping.ColombianEmeralds.com

The optimized version adds “Great gift” to capitalize on the gift-giving season. Differentiation is emphasized with “handcrafted” and free shipping with a limited time offer are added to incent the purchase.

2. SHOPPING ENGINES: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

Search engines will often direct users to shopping engines such as pricegrabber.com and shopping.com, and this area is sometimes called datafeed optimization. Datafeeds are how merchants provide their information to shopping sites – some will allow you to include your value proposition messaging in custom fields, so it’s important to customize your content for each engine to take full advantage of each opportunity.

1. Add free shipping, value proposition
2. Plan for increased bids during holiday period
3. Know when to turn down your bids (after shipping cutoff)
4. Sanity check data-feed accuracy
5. Pull non-holiday categories if budget is a concern

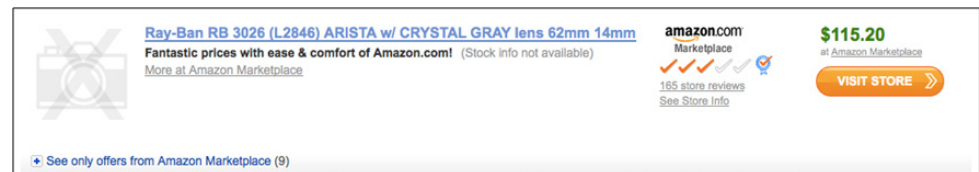




Examples

Shopping.com Category: Ray Ban Aviator Sunglasses

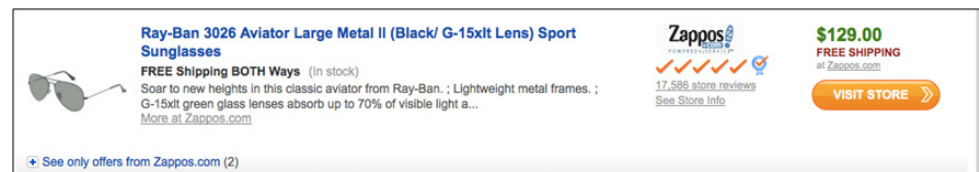
Not this:



This version from amazon.com does not feature an image and the description is lacking; for most customers to spend \$115, they will need to know a little more about the product.

There is also a lack of value proposition: why should someone buy these Ray-Bans from this site instead of another merchant? Do you offer free shipping, or free returns?

But this:



The Zappos.com version clearly shows the image and description, and emphasizes free shipping both ways. This is especially important for holiday shopping as many of your customers are buying for others and need the assurance that if the receiver doesn't like it, returns will be painless.



It's also important to note where the free shipping is promoted – in the description text, and also right between the price and call to action. As the visitor scans the pricing they will figure that into the price and perhaps pay a little more just because the shipping is included.

3. EMAIL: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

The goal of ecommerce email is not to sell but to generate interest in visiting your site. However, you must first get your potential customer interested in reading your email, with a strong subject line.

Stress the benefits of online shopping in subject lines:

- Save time
- Save gas
- Avoid lines
- More selection
- Hard to find items
- Gift finder tools

*The goal of
ecommerce
email is not
to sell but
to generate
interest in
visiting
your site.*

Subject line examples from holiday 2008:

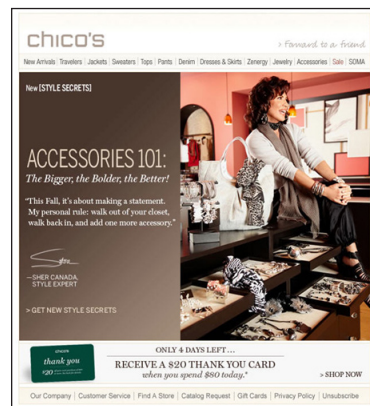
- Easy-to-Make Holiday Cards. We'll Mail Them.
- Avoid the Rush! Get Your Gifts Now, Save \$15 & Pay NO Shipping!
- Avoid the crowds - Shop from Home and get Free Shipping
- The Gift Guide Is Here: The Best Gifts at Even Better Prices
- Email Exclusive Free Shipping, No Threshold. Today Only!



Example

Subject line: 8 New Style Secrets + A \$20 Thank You

Conversion Sequence Elements: Value proposition, Friction



- The subject line promised eight new styles; the email only shows one. At least the \$20 gift is re-stated.
- Style expert is introduced in the body copy; no mention in subject line
- Two calls to action don't stand out
- No text links to PDA version and share with a friend easily missed

Subject line: The perfect fall sweater only \$19.50 + Free shipping

Conversion Sequence Elements: Value proposition, Friction



- Continuity from subject line to main content
- Value proposition is clearly restated in the first line and remaining copy. Main image also supports the value proposition
- No new elements introduced in the email body
- Two calls to actions are placed within natural eyepath
- Short and actionable text link, share with a friend and Facebook links within eyepath



Email – Audience-submitted example and mock-up of test recommendations

Email Analysis:



- The current headline gets lost in the banner.
- Also, the value of free shipping gets lost in the busy banner imagery.
- There are equally weighted multiple objectives competing for the visitor's click.
- Overall, the font style and color is very difficult to read.
- The calls to action don't look clickable.

Test Suggestions:



- Add an index to top of email and make the links clear and very clickable.
- Reduce to email to have to a single primary call-to-action. Also, the eye path leads to image; there is a link directly under it to click.
- Make the points of the primary body copy relevant to every collector.
- Re-emphasize free shipping and exclusive discounts.



4. LANDING PAGES: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

Once the traffic is on your site, you must have an optimized page to convert the traffic:

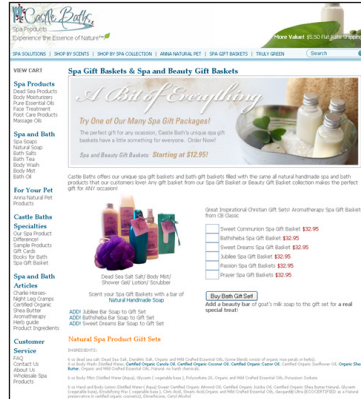
Address the FUDS (Fears - Uncertainties - Doubts):

- Clear link to gift guide
- Clear link to store locator
- Clear shipping cutoff link
 - Shipping policies, return policies, countries ship to
 - Customer service number (every page is a landing page)
 - Promote e-gift cards (never too late!)

Landing page - Audience-submitted example and mock-up of test recommendations

Landing Page Analysis:

Once the traffic is on your site, you must have an optimized page to convert the traffic.



- The gift packet banner is not clickable decreasing the effectiveness of this valuable real estate.
- The valuable “\$5.50 Flat Shipping Rate” promise is hidden in the top right corner.
- Adding a phone number contact, displaying some credibility indicators, and make the shopping cart more prominent should make the user experience easier.



Test Suggestions:



- Feature a holiday special product in the upper banner with a clear value statement and call-to-action.
- Make the shopping cart link more prominent.
- Add credibility indicators such as third party seals and security notifications.

5. CRUNCH TIME: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

The post-shipping cut off day is when you are going to transition into your next marketing strategy. But you don't have to abandon your holiday messaging or theme – simply shift to gift cards and gifts that your customers can pick up in-store.

Also consider promoting Upresent, a service that customers can use to send an e-card to their gift recipient, notifying that their present is a little late but they were not forgotten.



POST-HOLIDAY: LAST-MINUTE PLAYS

Once December 25 passes, it's time to transition to post-holiday messaging and offers. Start now to think about what kind of products you can feature for New Years, such as those suited for parties or resolutions. These are great to feature in your post-holiday email campaigns, PPC search terms and homepage merchandising.



Post-holiday/New Years landing pages – examples

Conversion Sequence Element: Friction



- This page showcases variety, but doesn't provide much assistance.
- Busy shoppers who aren't loyal to the brand may be overwhelmed by choices.
- This page ignores the motivated shopper: there is no "add to cart."
- The call to action is meant for the "browsing" shopper: it offers "details."
- Price is a good anxiety reducer when it matches expectations.
- The page layout is also somewhat confusing with horizontal scrolling at the top repeating the same content that's on the bottom.



Conversion Sequence Element: Friction



- This page guides the visitor to the purchase.
- If visitors are ready to buy and don't care about customization, they can add the gift card to cart instantly.
- If they want to customize, there are two clear choices between "your own" and stock designs.
- Rather than overwhelm the visitor with choices, the page does a good job of segmenting out different types of shoppers first.

Bottom line

For ecommerce sites, the holiday season can make or break the entire year. If you've fallen behind on holiday initiatives, use these last-minute plays, examples and test recommendation as a guide to increase targeted traffic, reach more potential customers, and boost your holiday ROI.

For hundreds of free test ideas and case studies, and information about the Conversion Sequence and our training and certification courses, visit MarketingExperiments.com.

For more ecommerce tips, tactics, ideas and research, be sure to visit (and bookmark) the excellent GetElastic blog.

