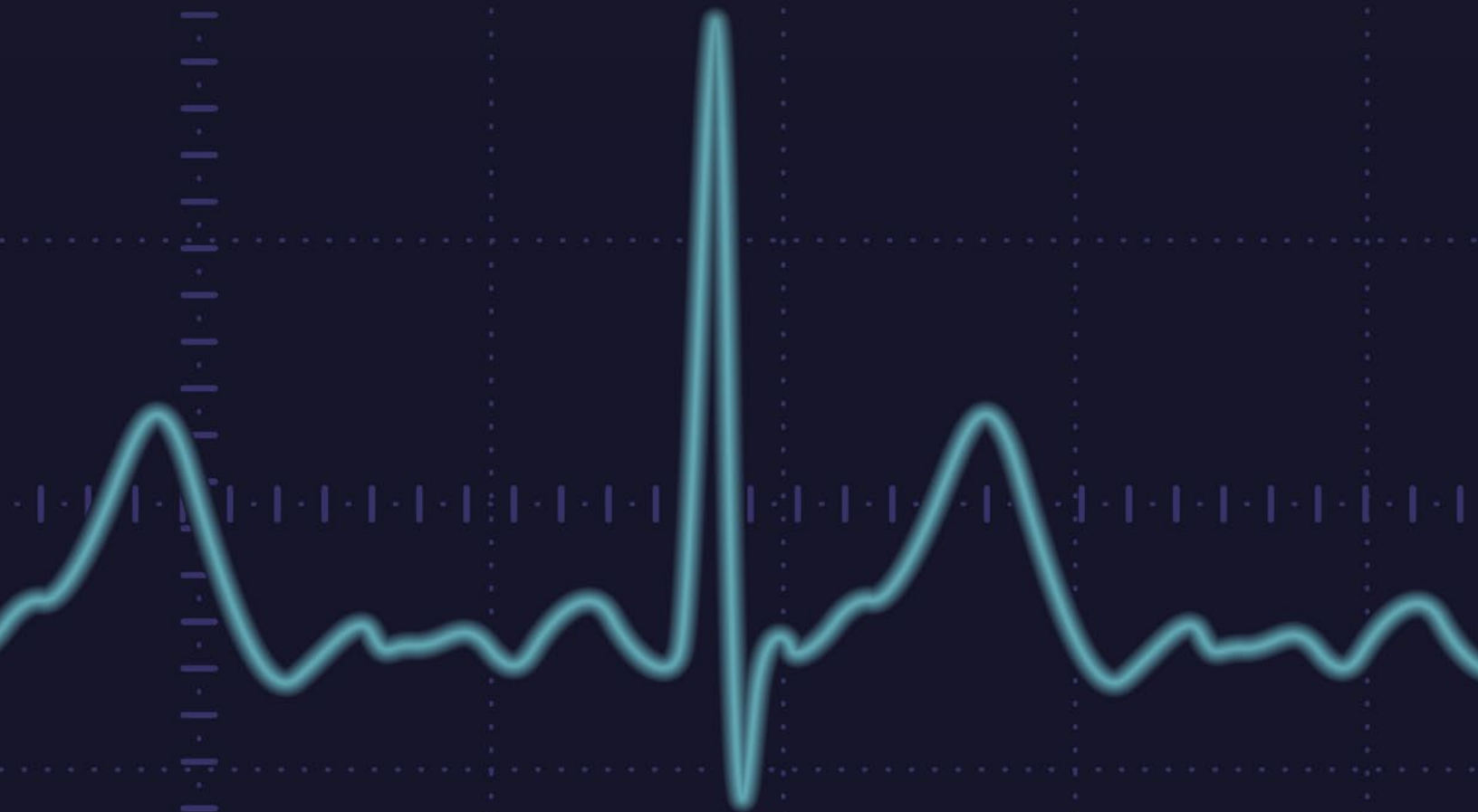


**shopify** *plus*

The Future of Commerce Starts Here

# The Black Friday- Cyber Monday Health Check

Find Out Whether Your Site Will Flatline or Flourish



“*Shopify Plus has made preparing for Black Friday and Cyber Monday half the work as when we were on Magento. We always had to spend considerable amounts of energy and time scaling our servers up manually and stress testing for what we thought was going to be our max traffic loads. We were wrong a few times and left tons of money on the table.*”

**Brian Lim**

**FOUNDER OF  
EMAZING LIGHTS**

# Executive Summary

The ultimate test in ecommerce is Black Friday-Cyber Monday. To win, your online store will have to perform flawlessly under extreme conditions. But each year, high profile site crashes and failures make it clear that even merchants who have spent significant time and treasure preparing haven't prepared effectively. The result is millions of dollars in lost sales and shoppers less likely to trust or do business with you in the future.

To prevent this from happening to you, we've created the **Shopify Plus Black Friday-Cyber Monday Health Check** to help you assess your site's vitals, discover whether it's equipped to handle the ensuing traffic spike, and to provide the key insights necessary to outperform. In addition to prescriptive fixes and insight from top performing merchants who know exactly how to survive and thrive during this period, use this guide to bulletproof your site before, during, and after Black Friday-Cyber Monday and to intelligently position your brand for tomorrow and beyond.

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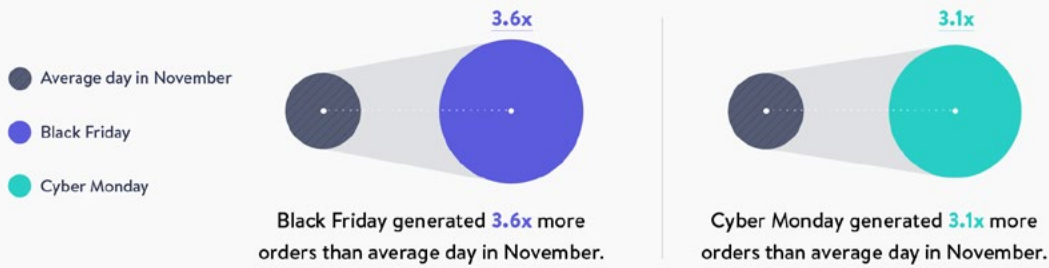


# Introduction

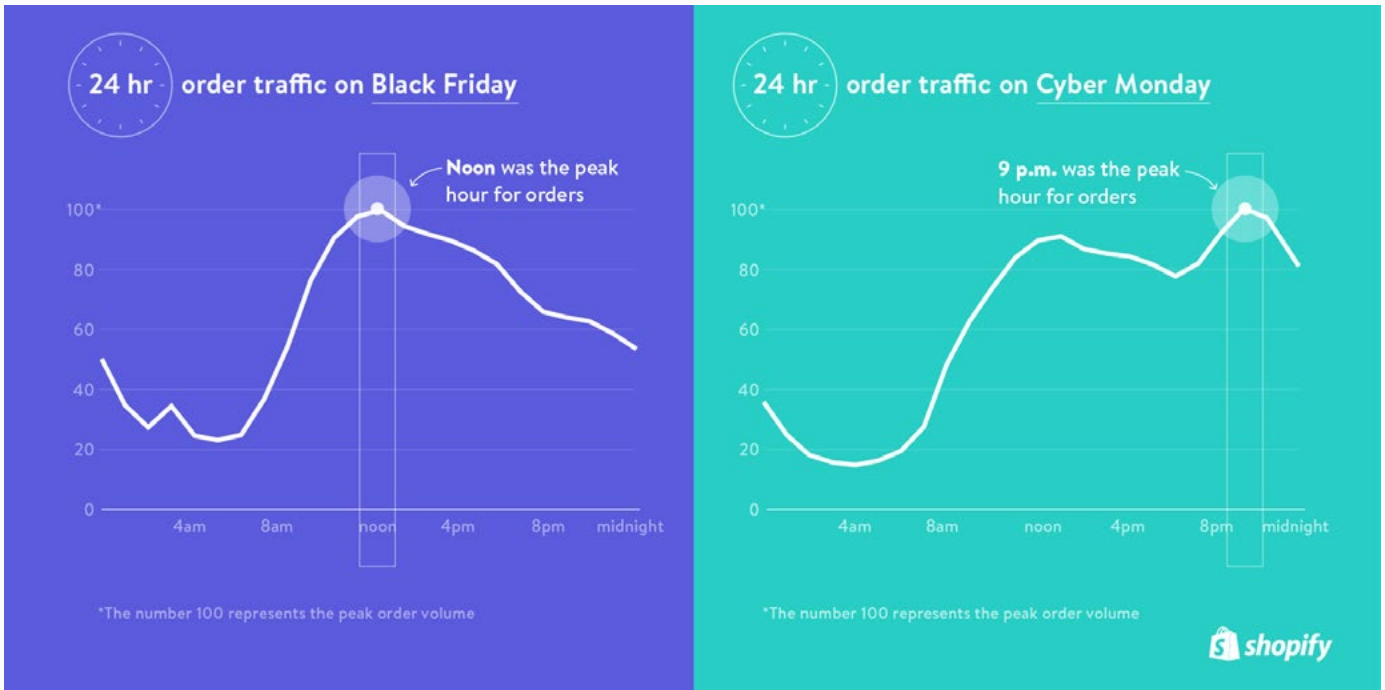
There's a virtual line already starting to form outside your store chock full of shoppers eagerly awaiting the Black Friday-Cyber Monday deals you have in store for them. In fact, customers spent **\$540 million by 10 a.m.** during Cyber Monday 2016. This indicates the moment your Black Friday-Cyber Monday deals are live, you can expect a tidal wave of site traffic:

## A Massive Spike in Orders

Here's how Black Friday and Cyber Monday compare to an average day in November.



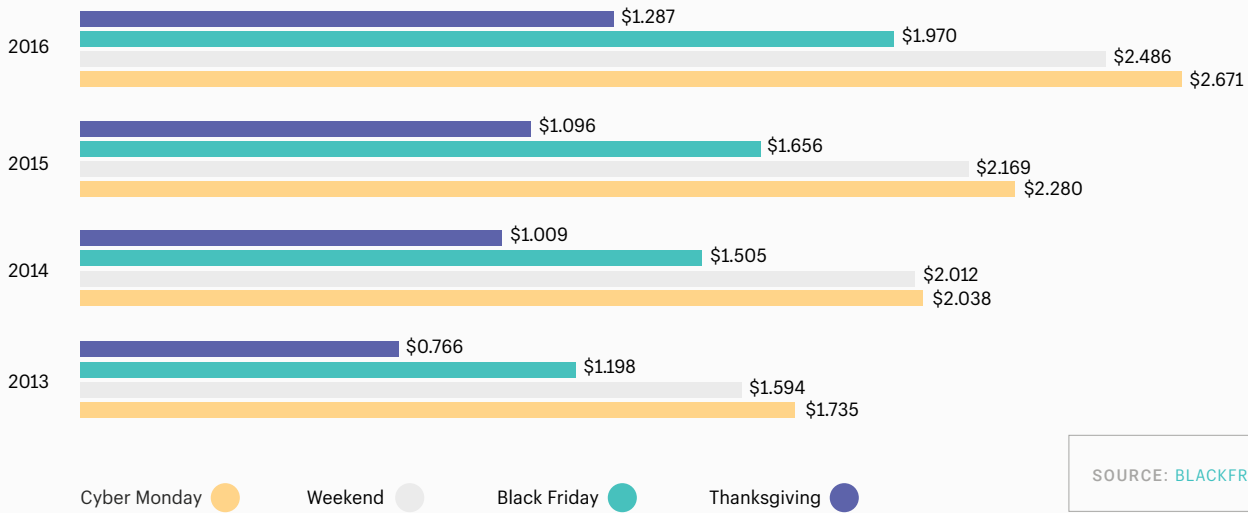
But that initial spike in traffic, for the merchants who survive it, is just the beginning. In fact, research suggests traffic will likely continue to surge through noon on Black Friday and as late as 9 P.M. on Cyber Monday before tapering off:



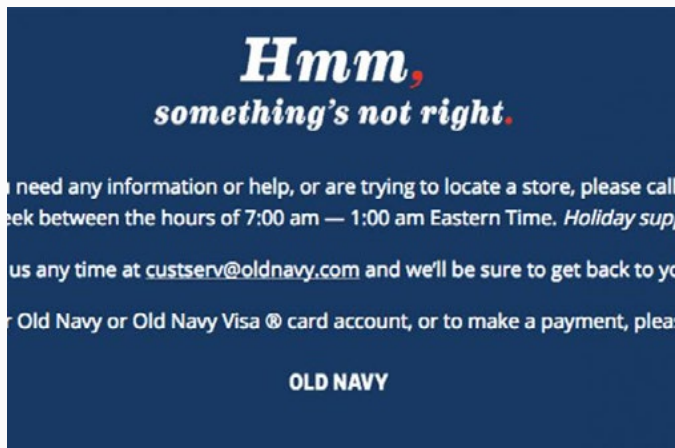
With shoppers spending on average \$289 during the Black Friday-Cyber Monday weekend in 2016, billions of dollars of sales are up for grabs over the course of just a few days:

## Retail Online Spending During Black Friday

Total U.S. Home & Desktop Computers (in millions)



Despite knowing how crucial the weekend is both financially and reputationally, some of the world's largest and best known brands are routinely overwhelmed by the sudden yet predictable burst of traffic; their pages don't load quick enough or worse their sites crash altogether:



With so much on the line the health of your site is paramount. Site speed is key as [research reveals](#) 75% of smartphone and tablet users will immediately abandon a mobile site or application that is prone to crash while 50% say they'll shop elsewhere if your mobile site or app doesn't load within three seconds:



The brands with the deepest pockets in the world haven't yet figured out how to bulletproof their sites during Black Friday-Cyber Monday.

But you can.

Your site's health is vital in offering customers the type of experience they've come to expect, especially when they're chomping at the bit to spend. As Black Friday-Cyber Monday approaches, a health check-up can reveal whether your site will be up to the task or make headlines for crashing and disappointing eager shoppers.



“  
*It was a nightmare when our  
Magento site crashed on  
Black Friday. I didn't sleep for  
two days [and we lost £100,000  
in sales.] Our customers hit us  
hard and buy frantically but since  
migrating to Shopify Plus, we no  
longer have to worry. If you want  
to focus on what you do best,  
Shopify Plus let's you do that and  
takes the worry out.*”

**Seb Mills**

CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER  
AT GYMSHARK

SECTION ONE

# Before Black Friday- Cyber Monday

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## Key Insight

### \$2.67 Billion

In 2016, Cyber Monday became the biggest U.S. online shopping day ever with close to [\\$2.67 billion](#) U.S. dollars in online spending. In fact, [nearly a quarter](#) of U.S. shoppers did half of their holiday shopping online in 2016. To capitalize on what could be a record 2017 holiday shopping season, Amar Gandhi, founder of [AN & Associates](#), which is home to several popular ecommerce brands, closely monitors campaign performance long before the holiday season begins:

*“Monitoring for us starts a couple of months prior to Black Friday-Cyber Monday. We are looking for what’s trending, our best sellers, what customers have responded to in the past and building a campaign around it. While the sales are going on, we look at both traffic source and also the campaigns that are doing well. We tend to scale the ads that are doing well live. For example, if we have a campaign running on Pinterest or Instagram that is getting a lot of traction - sales/clicks/likes/comments, we will increase the budget of that campaign. We are even more aggressive when it’s Black Friday-Cyber Monday.”*

## Your Checklist

The best doctors always seem to know the right questions to ask and the most appropriate tests to run when assessing a patient's health. The same is true when it comes to gauging the health of your site prior to Black Friday-Cyber Monday. You can spend months or even a small fortune testing, tweaking, and adding capacity in the lead up to the big weekend. But unless you're narrowly focused on the things that matter, your time and money will be wasted and Black Friday will leave your brand with a black eye. Fortunately, we've made it easy to give your site a check-up by identifying three key areas to investigate:

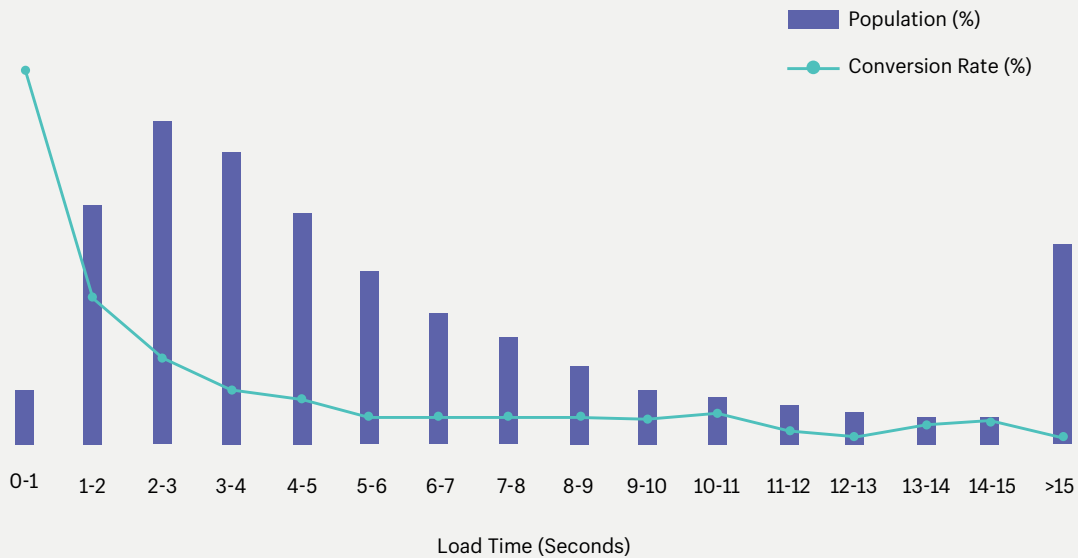
## I. Page Speed Optimization

Page speed optimization may be the single biggest factor in your Black Friday-Cyber Month performance. A **1-second delay** in page load time has been found to yield 11% fewer page views, a 16% decrease in customer satisfaction, and a 7% loss in conversion. In fact, Walmart recently found that every 1 second of speed improvement led to a **2% increase** in conversions:

### Impact of Site Performance on Overall Site Conversion Rate

Baseline - 1 in 2 site visits had response time > 4 seconds

- Sharp decline in conversion rate as average site load time increases from 1 to 4 seconds
- Overall average site load time is lower for the converted population (3.22 seconds) than the non-converted population (6.03 seconds)



\*Note: Load Time here is the time taken from head of the page to page ready (T\_Page)

SOURCE: GLOBAL DOTS

There are two main aspects of improving page speed: server side and client-side optimizations.

## Client-side Efforts

These are optimizations you can make in your content and code. The following improvements are ranked by what we've found to make the biggest impact for our merchants:

### 1. Optimize Images

#### CHOOSE THE CORRECT FORMAT

Images are often the largest size assets on your page. Ensure they are optimized to reduce page size. Use JPGs for most images, including photographs and complex images, for a compressed but visually appealing image. Use PNGs sparingly as it is a lossless format (which causes a larger file size), but can be useful for images that require transparencies or highly graphical images (such as an app screenshot). For small graphics such as buttons or icons, GIFs or SVGs (a scalable vector-graphics) can be useful.

#### UPLOAD CORRECT IMAGE SIZE

Oversized images take longer to load, so it's important that you keep your images as small as possible. Be sure to crop your images to the correct size. For instance, if the space for an image is 300px wide, re-size the image to that width.

### 2. Combine Multiple CSS and Javascript Files Into One

This is a quick win that allows for fewer HTTP round trips (one isn't needed for every file) and has a much higher potential for gzip compression to work:

#### CSS

Each CSS file you are using for your website adds time to your page load speed. Sometimes this is unavoidable, however in most cases you can combine two or more CSS files together using nothing more than "copy and paste." Check how many CSS files you have with this [CSS Delivery Tool](#) so you can combine them. [Here are instructions](#) on how to combine external CSS files.

#### JAVASCRIPT

Javascript files are very often found in several external files. Collecting all Javascript files into one will reduce the amount of time it takes to load your web pages because you are reducing the amount of things the web browser has to request before displaying your page. Use this [Javascript Usage Tool](#) to see how many JS files you're using. [Here are instructions](#) on how to combine external JS files.

### 3. Minify HTML, CSS, and JS Files

Removing HTML comments, CDATA sections, [whitespaces](#) and empty elements will decrease your page size, reduce network latency and speed up load time. For the non-external files you have access to, you can minify these resources with a tool like [Refresh-SF](#).

### 4. Be Conscious of Render-Blocking Elements

Render means loading, so if something is render-blocking, it means that it is keeping the page from loading as quickly as it could:

#### RENDER-BLOCKING CSS

CSS loads first before any visible content. Be sure to properly call your CSS files, lessen the amount of CSS files in your critical rendering path, and use less CSS overall. [Here are instructions](#) on how you can do all three.

#### RENDER-BLOCKING JAVASCRIPT

[Google recommends](#) to remove or defer scripts that interfere with loading above the fold content of your webpages. For example, if you have a Javascript file that loads for the needs of your footer, consider delaying the load until (or if) the viewer gets to your footer. Read up on [render-blocking Javascript](#) and how to [properly defer it](#).

### 5. Minimize DNS Lookups

For any external resource to be downloaded for your page, the browser must “look it up.” The browser must do this at least once for each domain your web page is receiving resources from. As a web page becomes more feature-rich it often uses more DNS lookups which makes it render much slower. You can use this [Page Requests Tool](#) to see how many external resources your page is referring and see where you can cut them down.

## 6. Reduce the number of Apps, Plug-Ins & Scripts

These slow your site, create a larger security footprint, and often cause crashes and other technical difficulties. Deactivate, delete, or remove any unnecessary apps, plug-ins or tracking scripts. Try selectively uninstalling problem apps, then measuring page load time. This way you can identify any that harm your site speed.

## 7. Minimize Redirects and Fix Mixed Content Errors

Sometimes to indicate the new location of a URL you need to redirect the browser from one URL to another. Redirects trigger an extra HTTP request and add latency. Only keep redirects which are technically necessary and for which you can't find another solution. Moving your old store to a new platform and SEO migration tactics are the right reasons to use short-term redirects. Long-term permanent redirects are okay, but they shouldn't be used at the entry point for visitors (usually your homepage). You can use this [redirect mapper tool](#) to see what redirects are present on a specific page.

## 8. Avoid Bad Requests and Broken Links

Broken links result in 404/410 errors. These cause wasteful requests. Fix your broken URLs (pay special attention to images). Use this [Broken Link Checker](#) for free to see your broken links so you can fix them.

## 9. Defer Videos, Images, & Other Assets to Load as You Need Them

A video or image can be deferred until after your initial page load. This will allow your page to load quickly without having to gather all the files and resources that aren't in view yet. For example: loading product images in a "quick view" pop-up only after the customer requests them, or loading videos as they are scrolled into view. Here are instructions on [how to defer videos](#) and [how to defer images](#). You can even defer Social Share buttons (Facebook, Twitter) and many other items. [Here are the instructions](#) on how to defer almost anything.

## 10. Avoid Repeat Inline CSS

CSS holds the style requirements for your page. Generally, your website accesses this information in one of two ways: in an external file which loads before your page renders, and inline, which is inserted in the HTML document itself. You can use this [CSS Delivery Tool](#) to see how many external stylesheets you have, and how many times you have inline CSS referenced.



## Server-side Efforts

If your business is powered by [Shopify Plus](#), you can skip this section since Shopify optimizes server-side performance for you. However, if you're not on Plus, the following checklist will help you hone in on crucial server side tactics to ensure you're ready:

### 1. Leverage browser caching

When you visit a website, the elements on the page you visit are stored on your hard drive in a cache, or temporary storage, so the next time you visit the site, your browser can load the page without having to send another HTTP request to the server. Be sure to set your browser caching for cacheable resources hosted on your store (JS and CSS files, image files, media files, PDFs, etc.) to one year for each file, the maximum possible.

### 2. Use a content delivery network (CDN) if possible

Investigate whether your platform provides you with a world class CDN run at no additional charge like Shopify Plus does. A CDN is a collection of web servers distributed across multiple locations to deliver content more efficiently to users. This means that your Shop will be fast around the globe, even in remote areas like New Zealand and South Africa. The Shopify Plus CDN serves all assets up using HTTP/2. This reduces overhead by using a single TCP connection with multiplexed streams instead of opening up several connections simultaneously.

### 3. Enable gzip compression

As web pages become more complex, they also become bulky and slow to download. The best way to speed up their load time is to zip them with a technique called gzip compression. Gzipping reduces the bandwidth of your pages, thereby reducing HTTP response. Shopify Plus employs this compression technique on CSS, JavaScript, any documents (ex. PDFs), and the page itself. We also enable [keep-alive](#), which allows the browser to grab more than one file at a time.

## Key Insight

### \$230 MILLION IN SALES

Black Friday actually takes a back seat to Cyber Monday and the following Tuesday, when measured by the [biggest online spending days](#) of the year. In fact, the Tuesday after Cyber Monday 2016 generated nearly \$230 million more in online sales than Black Friday in the U.S. To capitalize on a day competitors may be overlooking Griffin Thall, co-founder of [Pura Vida Bracelets](#), says merchants must correctly forecast inventory demand:

*“We order inventory 6 months in advance and our fulfillment center hires 10x the staff to facilitate shipping out all orders the same day they are placed. Our overall brand strategy includes using all marketing channels to the absolute maximum. One example, our daily organic Instagram posts goes from 4 to 10, each day for the entire week. Our biggest lesson learned is simple - ORDER MORE INVENTORY THAN YOU THINK YOU CAN SELL!”*

## II. Scalability and Reliability

To crush Black Friday-Cyber Monday it's necessary to scale on demand without compromising site speed or the user experience. To win, consider the [three criteria](#) Amazon says merchants must simultaneously balance; server capacity to accommodate the expected spike in traffic, the ability to scale that capacity rapidly to meet sudden spikes, and a platform that allows for robust management of product listings and inventories:

### 1. Server Capacity Planning

Accurately forecasting demand so you can determine how much capacity you need is part art and part science. As a basis, you might consider overlaying your conversion rates with the email marketing, PPC advertising, and other marketing efforts associated with Black Friday-Cyber Monday to calculate a back of the napkin estimate. You might also use [The Universal Scalability Law](#) to determine how many queries per second a server can accommodate before performance is affected. Doing so establishes a basis against which you may compare traffic forecasts and adjust server capacity accordingly. Additionally, [Queuing Theory](#), which can offer insight regarding how efficiently and rapidly a system can work when stressed, can also help improve your forecasting.

### 2. Load Testing

With forecasts and capacity estimates in hand, merchants must rigorously load test their capacity to simulate Black Friday-Cyber Monday conditions to ensure their sites can meet the anticipated demand. For instance, users may be added in a [step-wise fashion](#) beginning with a thousand and scaling to 100,000. Importantly, quality load testing requires that the test imitates actual shopper behavior. For example, buyers may browse non-Cyber Monday deal pages or use your site search tool before adding an item to cart and checking out.

## Key Insight

### GREEN MONDAY UP 15%

Don't forget about lesser known but equally valuable holiday shopping days like Green Monday (December 12) and Free Shipping Day (December 16). While BF and CM are the leaders in [year over year sales growth](#) at 19% and 17% respectively, Green Monday sales grew 15% yoy and Free Shipping Day sales grew 14% yoy meaning the holiday rush is both a sprint and a marathon.

To capitalize, Sean Geng, co-founder of [Smoke Cartel](#), says merchants must align each facet of their organization well before the holidays:

*“Prep, prep, prep! Your biggest ROI will be time invested this season in planning, structuring, and properly executing your Black Friday-Cyber Monday event. Comparably to the rest of the year, it’s worth investing your time and energy making sure you have a successful sales event. Coordinating your marketing, collections, sales event page, graphics, and more will yield better results this day than most.”*

### III. Customization

Earlier we recommended merchants consider temporarily removing apps or plug-ins that can slow load times or crash. If an app isn't necessary to achieve your Black Friday-Cyber Monday goals, deactivate or uninstall it. By isolating an app and uninstalling it, you can measure page load time to gauge the impact a particular app has on site speed. Conversely, if an app is crucial to your Black Friday-Cyber Monday strategy, some merchants have found success by hosting the app themselves rather than depending on the app maker for the capacity necessary for optimal performance. Separately, double check the apps or scripts you leave in place to be sure they're functioning optimally ahead of the big weekend:

#### 1. Checkout

Remove any friction that might make it harder for your customers to checkout. Remember, customers often have a list of online stores they plan to visit on Black Friday. If they encounter a problem or delay when trying to checkout on your site, they can easily bounce and be on to the next store on their list and potentially never return. Customize the checkout process and deliver a best in class customer experience.

Merchants using Shopify Plus can customize payment options with [payment scripts](#) built on Shopify's secure PCI compliant checkout and allow you to offer a smart checkout experience that protects you and offers customers an easier and faster checkout experience designed to reduce cart abandonment:

- Show, hide, or rename payment methods shown during the checkout based on products in the cart, customer group or tag, or a customer's shipping address
- Prevent discount codes from being used when certain payment methods are selected
- Restrict payment options based on products or customers
- Reorder to display preferred payment methods first

Plus merchants can also reduce the number of steps to purchase with [Shopify Pay](#), a powerful checkout feature that allows customers to save their information for faster checkout at your store and on other participating Shopify stores. Customers who opt into Shopify Pay can save their shipping and payment information and instantly check out with just one click or touch.

## 2. Shipping

With shoppers expecting deep discounts during Black Friday-Cyber Monday, margin pressure is the norm for merchants. Custom shipping options based on what's in a shoppers cart or where a shopper is located geographically are often the difference between a profitable sale and one that loses you money. Instead of hoping freight won't be an albatross this year, Shopify Plus merchants can use [Shipping Scripts](#) to create custom shipping options for specific orders or customers.

With Shipping Scripts you can now remove, rename, and reorder various customer shipping options with just a few clicks. When a customer adds a product to their cart and enters a shipping address, your customized shipping options will automatically be presented. For instance, consider using Shipping Scripts to show or hide custom shipping offers based on the following variables:



### PRODUCTS

You can show or hide shipping rates based on the products in a customer's cart. For example, you can tailor your script so that a customer who places an order for a high-value item is only shown shipping options that include a tracking number.



### CUSTOMER GROUP

You can show or hide shipping rates based on a customer group or tag. In other words, a store with both B2C and B2B customers can now ensure that less expensive shipping rates are not offered to B2B customers or wholesalers.



### LOCATIONS

Choose to show or hide shipping rates based on your customer's shipping address. If you cannot sell in a particular country or specific regions, you can now remove the shipping rates for those customers.

### 3. Discounts

Calculating the discounts you offer storewide in combination with the custom shipping options you offer will help prevent surprises when it comes to the profitability of Black Friday-Cyber Monday orders. Since deep discounts are crucial, especially on loss leading or featured SKUs, it's important that merchants double check the discounts associated with upsell, cross-sell, and like items shoppers may be tempted to impulsively add to cart.

Shopify Plus customers can leverage [scripts](#) to customize or stack discounts in a variety of creative ways that can lift AOV. For example, merchants can use scripts to offer:



Free gifts with particular purchases



BOGOs



A percentage off discount



A dollar amount discount



Stack discount codes with discount scripts



Innovatively marketing in ways that increase conversions and customer lifetime value

Use scripts to protect your margins by looking to see if a discount code has already been applied on the cart, and then use a script to decide not to add any more discounts. You can also choose to exclude certain products (via tags) so that a customer cannot get a discount on them. Or isolate specific customer groups (e.g. with specified email or shipping addresses) to only apply a discount to their orders.

# Merchant Spotlight

## Why Gymshark Migrated From Magento to Shopify Plus for Black Friday-Cyber Monday Peace of Mind

Late at night, months before Black Friday 2015, Seb Mills, the Chief Technology Officer at [Gymshark](#), a U.K. based apparel brand delivering gym fitness and sports clothing and accessories, load tested the company's live site instead of a clone to save money.

"We didn't have any money left to test an identical site so we did it live when we thought our customers were sleeping," Mills says. "We spent thousands load testing the site."

Mills simulated the customer journey, hammered the site built on Magento to see at what point it would break, and added more server capacity than was likely needed.

*"We had a 100% seal of approval the site would hold up," Mills says. But the site crashed anyway.*

Gymshark's site was down, according to the company, eight hours. The company estimates it lost £100,000 in lost sales and wound up with an extremely disappointed customer base that made its frustrations known for the world to see on social media.

The culprit, according to Mills who troubleshot the site, was an application not even being used in conjunction with Gymshark's Black Friday campaign. "It was an absolute nightmare," Mills says. "One bug in one app we weren't even using crashed the entire site. It was the lowest of lows."

Afterward, the Gymshark team did the only thing it could; apologize profusely.

In fact, Ben Francis, the company's founder, penned more than 2,500 handwritten apologies that included discounts to those who were affected by the Black Friday crash.



*“We have the same morals and values as we did when we were a small company,” Francis says. “Each of these customers is a human being and deserves to be treated the way I’d wanted to be treated if a brand let me down.”*

Ten months after the meltdown on Magento, Gymshark replatformed with Shopify Plus and has since grown sales to more than £26,000,000. Importantly, Mills and his team no longer have to worry about site crashes at the worst possible moment thanks to Plus’ ability to scale on demand.

*“We don’t load test Shopify, it just works,” Mills says. “Our customers hit us hard and buy frantically but since migrating to Shopify Plus, we no longer have to worry. If you want to focus on what you do best, Shopify Plus let’s you do that and takes the worry out.”*

# Your Black Friday-Cyber Monday Prescription

The health and wellness of your site is paramount considering there are billions of dollars in sales up for grabs. If your site is sick or ailing it likely won't withstand the onslaught of traffic that routinely brings the largest retailers in the world to their knees. Your prescription for a healthy and robust Black Friday-Cyber Monday site includes:

- Optimize page speed and lift conversions by reducing image sizes, combining CSS and Javascript files, and deactivating any unnecessary plug-ins or apps
- Optimize server side performance by leveraging browser caching, using a CDN, and enabling gzip compression. NOTE: Shopify Plus automatically optimizes server side performance freeing merchants to focus on more important parts of Black Friday-Cyber Monday campaigns
- If you're not using Shopify Plus which scales automatically and on demand, forecast additional server capacity necessary to handle a spike in traffic and rigorously load test your site to ensure it won't break
- Expedite the checkout process by offering one click or touch checkout and customize discounts and shipping options based on items added to cart or a customer's geographic location

“  
*Our sales doubled despite not having our ducks in a row. Shopify Plus made all the difference, and it didn't even matter that we didn't have all our ducks in a row. It's going to get even better.*”

**Cassidy Cohen**

**MARKETING MANAGER  
AT CRISLU**

# *During* Black Friday- Cyber Monday

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## Key Insight

### \$17.2 BILLION

Spending via mobile devices reached \$17.12 billion U.S. dollars over the course of the entire holiday season in 2016. Similarly, 40% of shoppers took advantage of mobile e-mail while holiday shopping. Mobile accounted for 48% of online Black Friday orders in 2016 and 53% of all traffic on Cyber Monday 2016. To capitalize on the shift to mobile, Griffin Thall, co-founder of Pura Vida Bracelets, reminds merchants not to forget about existing customers who can significantly increase sales this holiday shopping season:

*“Here at Pura Vida, we view Black Friday & Cyber Monday as a day and week to acquire new customers at scale. Also, a great way to reward our current customers with a heavy discount. With that said, we offer 50% off sitewide + free shipping on all orders. Our marketing spend is in the hundreds of thousands during this time so we can capitalize on anyone who has heard of our brand or who may be interested in shopping at Pura Vida.”*

## Your Checklist

With the prep work behind you, it's time to monitor the health of your site in real time. Below is a checklist we've created that'll help you perform optimally in three key areas during your sales event:

## I. Real Time Performance Monitoring

### TRAFFIC SOURCES & ADS

Particularly agile merchants can monitor the performance of various traffic sources and PPC ads in real time and adjust marketing efforts based on which sources of traffic and ads are converting at the highest rates or more economically achieving your campaign objectives. Monitoring site traffic also positions you to offer the best possible shopping experience by speeding up [website fault resolution](#). Additionally, monitor your analytics in real time and adjust AdWords accordingly for [negative keywords](#) so you're not paying up for irrelevant or non-converting traffic.

Importantly, the paid traffic you drive to your site shouldn't be perceived as a one-off. Specifically, in the case of [Facebook ads](#), be sure you've correctly installed a [Facebook pixel](#) so you can retarget and create lookalike audiences to market to after the holiday shopping season. Separately, ensure you are capturing Google Analytics (GA) events properly. With the increase in traffic, you will want to capture new data points to inform Black Friday-Cyber Monday strategy. Implement and test at least 12 hours in advance. In GA, new events take 3 hours to appear so if there is a configuration issue, addressing it will cost you time and valuable insight

### INVENTORY

Not having enough inventory to satisfy expected demand or not being able to track inventory in real time can negatively impact future sales. Likewise, misjudging demand can leave you with [excess inventory](#) that is costly to warehouse and account for. To better forecast inventory demand, some merchants ask customers interested in reserving the right to purchase a sale item to [register](#) prior to the holiday sale. Not only might registration give you a ballpark idea of what peak load capacity may look like on sale day and how much inventory you may need, but you'll also position yourself to reduce your PPC spend a bit as you'll be collecting email addresses for contact purposes as you get closer to the sale.

Separately, it may take longer to fulfill, ship, and deliver as demand for your products increases. Communicate accurate timelines and fine tune your processes so holiday shoppers can rest assured that their purchases will be delivered before the holiday deadline. According to an ecommerce fulfillment solutions provider, [45% of flash sale items](#) sell out faster than expected. One way to really disappoint customers is to build excitement, use scarcity to drive them to your flash sale, and then tell them the item they want is out of stock. Monitoring inventory in real time positions you to shut down your sales and marketing campaigns before disappointing customers (or communicate clearly that your fulfillment terms have changed).

For Shopify Plus merchants, a new tool [Launchpad](#), will help you automate all of the activities necessary to perform flawlessly during major sales events. Schedule, coordinate, and execute

major commerce events in advance. With Launchpad you can pre-plan everything on your to-do list and instantly roll it all back once the sale or event is over.

## Key Insight

**\$27.19%**

For the fifth year in a row, Black Friday shopping cart [conversion rates](#) have declined with just 27.19% completing the checkout process in 2015. Conversely, shopping cart abandonment has significantly increased on Black Friday during the same period. Besides using [Shopify Pay](#), which allows Plus merchants to offer an easy, lightning fast one-touch checkout option to increase conversions, Amar Gandhi, founder of [AN & Associates](#) which houses several popular ecommerce brands, says lifting conversion rates hinges on identifying the most effective ad sets:

*“For us it’s not the traffic source itself. It’s the ad that is converting the best. Ultimately in today’s online marketing, there are three primary traffic sources which will drive 90% of your revenue. In no particular order they are: Google search, social media ads (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook), and influencer marketing (youtube videos/instagram posts by influencers). So we would have a team looking at ad sets across all these platforms and increasing it based on what is converting the best for us.”*

## II. Conversion Optimization

### URGENCY

Losing something can be painful. This psychological principle is especially pertinent when the objective is to lift conversion rates. If something is in short supply or offered only for a limited time, shoppers tend to want it more than they might otherwise. Urgency can help you lift Black Friday-Cyber Monday conversions.

During the holiday season when consumers are narrowly focused on scoring big deals, losing out on one of those deals and being forced to pay full price can cause shoppers to feel a great deal of mental discomfort. You can inject urgency into your Black Friday-Cyber Monday deals by adding inventory quantities to products pages or installing a countdown clock. [Here's a list](#) of apps that can help you add urgency to your holiday sale. (NOTE: Remember to isolate and check the impact any apps you use on site speed and performance.)

### SOCIAL PROOF

Shoppers also tend to follow the herd meaning that we're also psychologically predisposed to do what those similar to us are doing. One way you can sprinkle social proof throughout the customer journey this Black Friday-Cyber Monday is with customer reviews. Reviews are a powerful persuasion tool [this merchant](#) used recently to lift conversion rates 400% and AOV 11%.

Adding real time social proof this holiday can make your store feel "busy" and simultaneously leverage urgency. For example, [Fomo](#) allows merchants to display key customer behaviors in real time by alerting visitors that other visitors on the site just completed a desired action like:



Someone just made a purchase



Someone just left a 5-star review



Someone just signed up for a newsletter

It's instant social proof and allows merchants to, according to the company, get the credit they deserve and use recent conversions to convert others currently on the site.



## Key Insight

### 10% OF FOURTH QUARTER RETAIL SALES

Ecommerce as a percentage of overall 4th quarter retail sales has been accelerating for 15 years and could rise to [10% in 2017](#). While email, social, and influencer marketing are key, remember the importance of search in a shopper's pre-holiday investigatory process. Consider working well in advance of the holidays to improve your organic search results. Capitalize on shoppers' curiosity as Katie Knoll, the Digital Marketing Manager at [The Amazing Group](#) did recently after replatforming from Magento to Shopify Plus to achieve a 130% increase in search traffic that resulted in a \$98,000 increase in sales in just one month:

*“The impact that Shopify had on our SEO strategies was ground-breaking. We could have never achieved such results with Magento. We were able to lock down top spots for some of our most valuable keywords, bringing in new customers and more revenue than ever before. We would have never been able to scale without Shopify!”*

Importantly, Ric Kostick, co-founder of [100% Pure](#), says merchants must not be blinded only by sales this holiday season but must calculate the impact sales have on the bottom line:

*“Make sure you plan for profit. Whatever deals you offer, at the end of the day, after overhead and costs, make sure it's worth it. You will be stressing your operations with the volume just make sure the juice is worth the squeeze.”*

### III. Contingency Plan

Prepared merchants have developed a variety of creative contingency plans in the event something should bring down their site or cause it to perform suboptimally. For example, merchants who use competing platforms that have previously let them down or that they don't fully trust have created backup stores powered by Shopify Plus. Still others use Shopify Plus to build backup emergency bare bones sites that strip out anything that might possibly slow the site from loading rapidly.

Importantly, consider issuing a code freeze during the holidays. Avoid adding, removing, or changing your theme (if you're on Plus) or products during a sale. Plan ahead to ensure a seamless checkout experience. For Shopify Plus merchants, consider using [Rewind](#), an automated backup system you can use in case roll backs need to be made. While it's not recommended to change, add, or delete store data during this high traffic time, you should be prepared for every scenario.

## Merchant Spotlight: Crislu

### How Crislu Rapidly Migrated to Shopify Plus Just In Time for the Holiday Sales Season

It's nothing Nelson Sun, the CEO of [Crislu](#), an affordable luxury jeweller founded in 1961, would recommend to other executives, but replatforming at the [worst possible moment](#) was something he says he couldn't avoid. Crislu was primarily a B2B company and knew it needed to reinvent itself as a B2C company if it was to be competitive. That's why Sun and his team recently decided to replatform just weeks before the holiday sales season.

"It made sense for us to go with a platform that we could count on to keep up with new technologies and would allow us to move much faster than we had in the past," Sun says.

Conventional wisdom says replatforming at such a critical time carries with it risks too big to take. But Crislu looked at the situation differently; if it could successfully replatform in the nick of time it just might position itself to generate record sales.

"It's risky whenever you overhaul your entire IT infrastructure," Sun says. "If we mess it up, we'd be giving up Christmas sales."

Thanks, in part, to a dedicated Shopify Plus launch management team, Crislu launched its new site just before Thanksgiving. Despite not having the time to make all of the integrations it desired, Crislu suggests the holiday rush was a success. In fact, since replatforming Crislu's sales have doubled year over year.

*"Our sales doubled despite not having our ducks in a row," says Cassidy Cohen, a marketing manager at Crislu. "The platform made all the difference, and it didn't even matter that we didn't have all our ducks in a row. It's going to get even better."*

# Your Black Friday- Cyber Monday Prescription

Your prescription for a healthy Black Friday- Cyber Monday includes the following action items to be executed during your sale:



Optimize performance in real time by analyzing and adjusting traffic sources & PPC ads that convert at the highest rate, configuring pixels and analytics that position you to market to visitors after the holiday, and closely monitor inventory so you can shut down your sale and ad spend should you run out faster than expected



Improve conversion rates by injecting urgency into your sales with countdown clocks or product page inventory counters while simultaneously lacing your site with real time persuasive social proof that makes your store feel “busy” and causes shoppers to act



Have a contingency plan such as a back-up store on another platform, a bare bones emergency back-up that can be taken live, or an automatic backup tool that can restore your store in the event there's a hiccup

*“ We don’t stress anymore about the site crashing,” Wilson says. “It’s quite amazing that using a tool like Shopify we can start a business and a year later sell to people all over the world, and compete with billion dollar brands. ”*

**Marcus Wilson**

**CO-FOUNDER OF  
NOBULL**

SECTION THREE

# *After* Black Friday- Cyber Monday

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## Key Insight

### 40% SAY EMAIL MOST EFFECTIVE

Despite being the grandfather of digital marketing, Email is still the [most effective](#) way to deliver offers on mobile devices. With 40% of shoppers citing email, text messages, and notifications via a brand's app as the top three most effective ways to be targeted, it's crucial to understand the channels through which your customers prefer to communicate. If it's push notifications via app, Shopify Plus merchants can use the [Mobile Store Builder](#) to create an app quickly for the holidays. While email remains supreme, to capitalize before, during, and after the holidays, Sean Geng, co-founder of [Smoke Cartel](#), says merchants must ramp their customer service efforts to support their marketing communications:

*“Be fully staffed and prepared on the customer service front. Having live chat agents helps, and expect a significant increase in emails and phone support if you have it. Our biggest lesson learned was not being able to handle the rush, and losing sales as a result of it.”*

## Your Checklist

With Black Friday-Cyber Monday in the rearview mirror, it's crucial to objectively assess your performance so you can be even better next year. It's also important to capitalize on the spike in traffic you experienced and turn holiday shoppers into loyal lifetime customers. The checklist below will help you accomplish both objectives:

## I. Post Mortem

### TRAFFIC ACCURACY ESTIMATE

Did you accurately forecast traffic? If you're not using Shopify Plus to scale on demand, the accuracy of your traffic forecast played a major role in determining whether you had enough server capacity. Which channels resulted in the greatest amount of traffic? Investigate further by comparing traffic source & PPC ad conversion rates? Is there a more efficient way to allocate your marketing spend next year?

### INVENTORY ESTIMATE ACCURACY

Did you sell out faster than expected or do you find yourself holding unwanted inventory that may be hard to unload profitably? Either way, it's crucial to determine whether your issue, if any, is a traffic problem, a product problem, or whether site performance may have unduly influenced both. While monitoring inventory in real time did you double down on your highest performing marketing channels and pull back on those that were less efficient or effective? Did you immediately turn off the spigot when you ran out of inventory or clearly articulate new fulfillment terms? Or did you offer shoppers a way to order out of stock items? If your hallmark deal was a loss leader were you successful in upselling or cross-selling your way to profitability?

### SITE PERFORMANCE

If you're not a Shopify Plus merchant who doesn't have to worry about scalability or reliability, did you have enough server capacity or too much? Either way, how did this impact your margins? Incorrectly estimating server capacity can crimp already thin holiday deal margins. Of the applications, plug-ins, and scripts you maintained on your Black Friday-Cyber Monday site, which ones performed as they did when you isolated and tested their impact on site speed and which did not? Would hosting a third party app yourself improve its performance next year? Were you correct in maintaining the app, plug-in, or script? In other words, can you attribute sales or conversions and justify including a potential site slowing app on next year's site? Did you efficiently scale your ERP system in a manner consistent with front end demand? It's easy to take a "better safe than sorry" approach but doing so can also negatively impact margins.



## Key Insight

### \$289.19 PER PERSON

In 2016, [average spending](#) per person was down to \$289.19 from \$299.60 in 2015 between Black Friday & Cyber Monday. But is spending per person really down? Maybe not since deals are being spread over a longer period- before and after BFCM- meaning shoppers may have frontloaded and spent on deals before the official count between Black Friday & Cyber Monday. To capitalize, Karolyn Fox, founder of [Military Hippie](#), suggests launching sales events prior to competitors:

*“One thing I will do differently this year is to make sure I start scaling my ads early. This ensures that you’ll be able to identify your most successful ads that you can really increase during the holidays. I usually only focus on a few key pieces that I know are best sellers and that we have a ton of stock in. Also why not get ahead of the game and do some pre-holiday sales. I start a week early to get ahead of the competition.”*

Similarly, Ric Kostick, co-founder of [100% Pure](#), suggests starting early ensures a profitable holiday shopping season:

*“Spread out your Cyber Monday, make it a cyber week or even a cyber month! Offer different specials every day or every week with something extra special on Monday! It will spread out the load on your team and bring you higher overall revenue.”*

## II. Earning Repeat Purchases

Build for the long term and become a [top performing merchant](#) by immediately beginning to cultivate the new customers you earned during Black Friday-Cyber Monday into repeat loyal customers with [elevated CLV](#) (customer lifetime value):

### WELCOME EMAIL & TRANSACTIONAL TARGETING

Capitalize on the holiday sales momentum you’ve generated with a welcome email that offers new customers a reason to fall further in love with you. Welcome emails generally contain [three components](#); welcome text, images, and a strong CTA. You might invite new customers to enroll in your loyalty program, offer an incentive in return for a referral, or ask customers for more information so you can better personalize future email messages

Even more important, tailor your message based on the customer’s behavior while on your Black Friday-Cyber Monday site. [Behavioral targeting](#) allows you to personalize email or offer discounts aimed at converting customers who visited a specific product page but didn’t purchase, added an item to cart but didn’t checkout, or offer upsell and cross-sell items related to their original holiday purchase.

### LOYALTY PROGRAM

Engaged rewards members, [according to this white paper](#), buy 90% more frequently, spend 300% versus others, and are 5x more likely to purchase from a brand offering a rewards program. In fact, [research](#) suggests loyalty programs that increase customer retention by 5% can increase profits 25-95%. It’s not surprising then, when you consider there’s [\\$6.2 trillion up for grabs](#) when consumers switch brands, that companies are rushing to implement rewards programs.

Importantly, reward your customers in ways they value and for behavior that is valuable to you. Be sure you're using a best-in-class loyalty partner to implement your program. If you're a Shopify Plus merchant, we've made it easy to select the best by vetting potential partners and including them in our [Technology Partner Program](#).

#### RETARGETING

Retarget the shoppers who visited your Black Friday-Cyber Monday deals site but left without making a purchase. Consider these shoppers warm leads who came to your site and indicated a degree of intent. [Retarget them intelligently](#) after the holidays based on their behavior while on your site with ads displaying images of products they browsed or added to cart.

While cart recovery campaigns are appropriate for shoppers who abandoned cart without making a purchase, consider retargeting new customers with upsell and cross sell offers relative to their holiday purchases. Be sure to [use burn pixels and frequency capping](#) so you're not annoying shoppers and driving them away from your brand.

# Merchant Spotlight

## Why NOBULL Chose Shopify Plus for Black Friday Product Launches

In what can only be described as an ultra-creative way to solve a problem we all wish we had, NOBULL, a leading workout footwear, apparel, and accessory brand, routinely launches its products at midnight.

*“We launch all of our products at midnight because right now demand greatly exceeds supply,” says co-founder Marcus Wilson. “It’s a way to make sure our most loyal customers, those who are willing to show up and shop at midnight, are more likely to get what they want.”*

During a recent Black Friday, the company got the scare of a lifetime when it noticed site traffic exploding well above its estimates. “The number of people on the site twenty minutes before the launch was amazing,” Wilson says. “We were worried the site would crash. It was like the movie Jaws. When the guys first saw Jaws they said, ‘We need a bigger boat.’

The ability to scale on demand is why NOBULL now uses Shopify Plus for Black Friday and [midnight product launches](#). “Shopify Plus grew with us and gave us the bigger boat we needed,” Wilson says. “Shopify has the bandwidth and scalability to meet the extreme demand that comes with our launches.”

Today, NOBULL’s Black Friday sales and midnight launches sell out in minutes and the company says the Plus platform handles the spike in traffic with ease. Importantly, the platform’s reliability allows the NOBULL team to turn its focus away from technology and toward ROI generating marketing efforts and product development.

*“We don’t stress anymore about the site crashing,” Wilson says. “It’s quite amazing that using a tool like Shopify we can start a business and a year later sell to people all over the world, and compete with billion dollar brands.”*

## Your Black Friday-Cyber Monday Prescription

Your prescription for a healthy post Black Friday-Cyber Monday includes the following action items to be executed following your sale:



Conduct a thorough post mortem to identify strengths and weaknesses you can leverage next year, identify the root of any inventory forecast miscalculations, and assess any site performance issues that will need to be remedied before next year



Capitalize on your holiday momentum by using behavioral targeting to personalize welcome and follow up email aimed at new customers, implement a loyalty program designed to increase CLV, and intelligently retarget customers with relevant products or cross sells

## Conclusion

Ensuring your store is healthy before, during, and after Black Friday-Cyber Monday can be time consuming and costly. While this health check was thoughtfully created for merchants regardless of the commerce platform being used, it's clear that Shopify Plus merchants have a distinct advantage. While merchants using competing platforms must check the majority of the items on this list themselves, Shopify Plus handles many of these duties for their merchants.

In fact, Plus merchants can even put Black Friday-Cyber Monday on autopilot by using [Launchpad](#), a new tool that positions merchants to plan and automate all of the activities necessary to execute flawlessly during major sales events. The application allows you to schedule, coordinate, and execute major commerce events in advance. With Launchpad you can pre-plan everything on your to-do list and instantly roll it all back once the sale or event is over.

*“We are in the process of testing it right now,” says Russell Saks, founder of nutrition and supplements retailer [Campus Protein](#). “So far we love the real time analytics it offers for new product launches!”*

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Instead of wondering whether your site is healthy enough, or if you've checked all the boxes on this list, be sure this Black Friday-Cyber Monday is your best ever.

**Why risk it?**

Your Black Friday, Cyber Monday performance is too important to leave to chance or less-than-perfect solutions.

Shopify Plus puts control back in your hands without forcing you to sacrifice speed, performance, or agility.

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Find out why Shopify's 400,000+ merchants haven't experienced a single BFCM outage.

[Connect with an expert today](#)

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The Future of Commerce Starts Here