

Three simple rules for your online store this festive season

The festive season is the most profitable time of year for many online businesses with a surge not only in the number of placed orders but in the basket size as well, according to Neil Watson, CEO and founding partner of Digital Planet, a leading South African e-commerce and logistics solutions partner.



Watson says his claim is validated by a recent study by Arthur Goldstuck, CEO at World Wide Worx, which shows that there has been a 30% increase in online sales each year for the last few years. According to the study, the increase particularly applies to December, which makes up about 20% in online sales.

With the festive season well under way, online retailers are looking at their sales' graphs and November is tipping the scales as the best performing month for 2014. 'In fact, our clients usually see an increase of 35% versus the average month for the month of November,' comments Watson.

Watson says that this type of increase will only happen if you've applied three simple rules to optimising your online store for the festive season.

1. Is your online store ready?

Not only are you looking at the basics such as security, usability and website speed, you also need to remove any potential stumbling blocks for your customers.

You may already have the standard payment methods but what about instant EFT? With this payment method, the funds are cleared immediately from the customer's account which means that the proof of payment is not required and most importantly, there is no delay in the checkout process.

How about the checkout process? It needs to be simple with as few steps as possible before the purchase is completed. Remember that online buyers are impatient and want a fast and hassle-free transaction.

Beware, however, of implementing new processes during this busy time. This is not the time to troubleshoot new processes, to test new theories and definitely not the time to inconvenience your existing loyal customers

2. Are your deals approved?

Retailers often underestimate the amount of time it takes to get your specials online. There is a lot of background work to do, such as negotiations with suppliers for stock and pricing, internal agreement on pricing strategies, marketing plans and logistics. You'll also need to get your message out in time for customer to be able to get their deliveries before Christmas. Retailers often wake up too late to have an effective marketing plan for the festive season: everything has to be ready for GoLive at least a month before the festive season.

3. Are your teams right sized and ready?

People are the most crucial element in your value chain. It's important to make sure you have sufficient well trained resources in order to provide superior customer service. As order volume goes up and timing becomes essential, customers communicate more and require more special attention.

The dispatch & fulfilment of orders is an intricate and time-consuming process. Extra attention should be paid to your processes to ensure everyone knows precisely what they need to do as a small error in the process can lead to big shipment problems. If required, add more staff to your call centre and dispatch to ensure there are no stumbling blocks.

'Retailers are made and destroyed during the holiday seasons', says Watson. 'All it takes to have a successful season is some careful planning and foresight.'

About Digital Planet

With 15 years of experience, [Digital Planet](https://www.digitalplanet.co.za/) is a leading end-to-end e-commerce solutions partner in South Africa. Founded in 1999 as an online store, the company became well positioned in the e-commerce industry with excellent sales. HP took notice and approached Digital Planet to replicate their site and create an IT channel using e-commerce. HP launched a consumer e-commerce channel in 2003. Other IT companies such as Samsung and Dell followed suit.

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