



Holiday **Shipping** **Guide** **2021**



eShipper

Essential Tips to Get You Through Peak Season

What is Peak Season?

Peak season can vary depending on your business model. For B2B businesses, peak season typically happens from August to October, as retail businesses begin gearing up for back-to-school and holiday shopping. eCommerce businesses, however, will remain busy until well after the holidays as people continue to order gifts throughout December.

While peak season doesn't come as a surprise to most businesses, like many things in 2021, this year looks a lot different. The economy is in a much better place than it was a year ago, with retail and manufacturing shippers experiencing strong consumer demand while businesses are restocking their inventory. All of this means that carriers are taking on higher than normal freight volumes, and much like holiday season 2020, couriers will be over capacity, which will cause everything from delays and backlogs to missed pickups, all the way to limiting the number of packages they'll allow a business to ship on a daily basis.





Did you know?

20% of
eCommerce stores'
annual revenue is
made during the
holiday season.

Many carriers did not properly forecast the unprecedented volume of peak season 2020, and were therefore forced to restrict their customers' shipping volumes by up to 50%.

In fact, retail sales during November and December of last year far exceeded holiday forecasts, growing an unexpectedly high 8.3 percent over the same period in 2019, to \$789.4 billion, despite the economic challenges of the pandemic.

While November and December see the

highest number of sales, purchases start steadily increasing through the month of October, and most consumers don't wait until Black Friday to start shopping.

With so many sales opportunities lying just weeks ahead, now is the time to fine tune your strategy and make this season your most profitable to date. Sales and marketing should be your primary focus during the season, while your shipping and fulfillment strategy should already be in place, working seamlessly in the background.

Not there yet?
Don't worry.

This guide will get you up to speed with exactly how to map out your e-commerce shipping and fulfillment strategy for holiday sales.

Key Dates

Holidays, Sales and Key Events

**Take
advantage
of these
key dates
to maximize
your sales:**

- Thanksgiving (Canada) – 11th October 2021
- Halloween – 31st October 2021
- Remembrance Day – 11th November 2021
- Singles Day – 11th November 2021
- Thanksgiving (USA) – 25th November 2021
- Black Friday – 26th November 2021
- Cyber Monday – 29th November 2021
- National Free Shipping Day – 14th December 2021
- Christmas Eve – 24th December 2021
- Christmas Day – 25th December 2021
- Boxing Day Sales – 26th December 2021 onwards



Now that we've identified these key dates, how does your business prepare for what is hopefully your highest revenue period of the year?



HOW TO KICK OFF THE **2021** **PEAK** **SEASON**

1. Stock Up!

Don't wait until the last minute to stock up on your inventory. Start by using sales patterns and spikes from last year to give you an indication of how much inventory to plan for. It's crucial to ensure you don't run out of products to sell, especially during the holiday season. Make sure your inventory is linked with your website effectively so that your customers know which items are available, and which ones are not.

Bear in mind that, like last year, consumers may start their Christmas shopping early in anticipation of holiday delays. For that reason, it's a good idea for you to stock up in advance. When you are in the planning stages of forecasting your inventory, be aware that ocean and airfreight rates have in some cases increased by 5x their level a year ago. Always partner up with a trusted 3PL to ensure you get the best rates on the market. Check out [SmarteFreight](#), which handles ocean, air, and truckloads and can get you the most competitive rates and transit times for your inbound needs.

In addition to stocking up on inventory, you also want to ensure you have enough shipping and packaging supplies. Find a partner who offers free supplies such as label rolls, envelopes, and polybags and to avoid delays, order ahead of the holiday rush! If you ship with eShipper, supplies can be ordered directly through your account.

TIP

Make sure you have enough staff to fulfill your orders, or outsource your operations to an e-commerce fulfillment centre.

To avoid an inventory nightmare



- Track sales history in the last year to determine your bestsellers and make sure they're in stock.
- Ensure that your supplier is reliable, and your warehouse or fulfillment partner is well-staffed and able to handle the influx of orders.
- Use real-time predictive analysis to understand product trends and stock up accordingly.
- Use an e-commerce fulfillment partner that uses automated reorder thresholds to stock up when inventory is running low.

2.

Set Up a Seasonal Shipping and Delivery Strategy



During last year's peak season, all carriers were inundated with volumes unlike we've ever seen before and they were all over capacity. Not only were there massive backlogs at Canada Post, but the courier companies were also experiencing huge delays. In many cases, this led carriers to limit the number of packages a business could send out on a daily basis, causing many businesses to scramble to find alternative solutions. How else could they get their products in their customers' hands before Christmas?

This year, ensure your shipping partner has a variety of carrier choices to mitigate the issues you experienced last year.

[eShipper](#) has introduced several new services which don't rely on the normal courier networks in fact, they leapfrog right over them! [CPX](#) and [CanX](#) are zone skipping programs that bypass the busiest GTA hubs and line haul packages across Canada to induct them locally into major cities.

eShipperX is another service that has been tried and trusted by the likes of Amazon, and it also has the advantage of providing photographic proof of delivery to mitigate any disputes your customers may have.

If you're looking for incredibly fast delivery options, [FleetOptics](#) is a regional carrier that provides flat rates up to 10 pounds and gets your products to your customers the next day, ensuring a positive delivery experience that puts you ahead of the competition.

Do you think this holiday season might be too much for your team to handle? Consider partnering with a fulfillment centre so you can focus on growing your business while they take care of the nitty gritty logistics. [eShipper+](#) offers boutique eCommerce and B2B solutions which will enable you to scale your volumes, without compromising your customer experience.

3.

Set Up Customers' Expectations

Ensure your customers know when they should anticipate the delivery of their shipment. No one wants to be waiting around on Christmas Eve worrying that their loved one's gift is not coming on time! To avoid these issues, establish and communicate order-by deadlines based on the carrier holiday cut-off dates. Make your shipping time clear at checkout, not just in your FAQs.



53%

of US online shoppers won't make a purchase without a clear indication of when it will arrive.

If you're not showing your customer exactly what to expect as they make a purchase, you're risking the chance of losing them.

It's also important to remember that shipping and fulfillment times differ. Find out what are the holiday 2021 carrier cut-off dates, then provide a timeline for how long the item takes to ship out and how long it takes to get delivered. If you use a partner that provides live shipping rates, this will already be automated.

TIP

Add a banner at the top of your website to clearly set your "order by" dates to guarantee delivery before Christmas.



4.

Offer Competitive Rates and Shipping Options

Giving your customers only one option for their deliveries can deter them from making a purchase if they need their product in a hurry! Choose a shipping partner that offers competitive rates with multiple service options. With [eShipper](#), you can offer several ground and express shipping options, knowing that transit times vary based on the point of origin and final destination. By giving your customer a variety of delivery speeds at checkout, you allow them to make their own choice depending on how quickly they want their order to arrive.

If you've been considering free shipping as an option, the holidays are the perfect time to start. But be strategic about your free shipping play. Set minimum order value thresholds for customers to qualify so you can recover shipping costs and increase profits within the same purchase.

79%

of US consumers are more likely to shop online if shipping is free.



To facilitate this, consider bundling some products to help customers meet the minimum cart value they need to qualify for free shipping. This not only simplifies their purchase decision-making, but also gets more of your stock moving while increasing overall sales. This strategy works. A survey by HubSpot revealed that 24% of online shoppers would spend more money in order to qualify for free shipping, so why not aid them with a bundle?

25%

of consumers would spend more money in order to qualify for free shipping.

However, keep in mind that in order to offer your customers free shipping, you as the business owner will have to absorb the cost, so make sure you use carriers that offer competitive shipping rates, or integrate your online store with a third party logistics provider that gives you discounted shipping rates from major carriers.

5. Automate Shipping

If you're anticipating a big increase in your daily volume, but you don't have the time or staff to manually process all your orders, make sure to automate your shipping. Whether you are on Shopify, BigCommerce, eBay, or Amazon, eShipper has the technology to support you with your order automation.

Our Shopify app gives you the ability to control rates and process orders with pre-approved carriers and services, so when you log in to fulfill orders, the hard work is done. You'll be able to sync and fulfill all orders at the click of a button, using multiple filters to reduce processing times.

Check out our list of integrations and contact us to learn how you can get your shipping automated well before you get busy!

[Click here!](#)





6.

Create a Memorable Unboxing Experience

You know the warm and fuzzy feeling you get when you receive a package and the box is absolutely stunning? That's the unboxing experience you want to give your customers every time they order something from your store.

Make an impression by using special packaging that serves as an extension of your brand. Presentation goes a long way at brick and mortar stores, so why not give your online shopper a boutique experience in their own home? Custom packaging, a beautifully placed “thank you” note and luxurious packing material can cultivate a strong connection with your brand and help you gain repeat customers and advertise your product through word of mouth.

If you fulfill with eShipper+, we can even replicate the unboxing experience you envision with gift wrapping, inserts, stickers, and other items that add a personal touch.

While aesthetics are important, consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of their carbon footprint. Be a part of the movement by using eco-friendly custom packaging from [ARKA](#) or Packlane.

40%

of shoppers would share their package to social media if it came in unique or custom packaging.

61%

say they're more likely to make a repeat purchase if it came in a custom box.

TIP

Ask your shipping provider if they offer solutions for custom packaging to really WOW your customers.

7. Plan for Delivery Delays

Because all carriers experience delays during the holiday season, you need to plan for when it inevitably happens.

Set up a section in your FAQs that details the carrier cut-off times, and ensure you build in a buffer of a few days to give your customers a bit more time to plan. Also, utilize services such as eShipperX and last mile carriers like FleetOptics to give your customers options for last minute gifts.



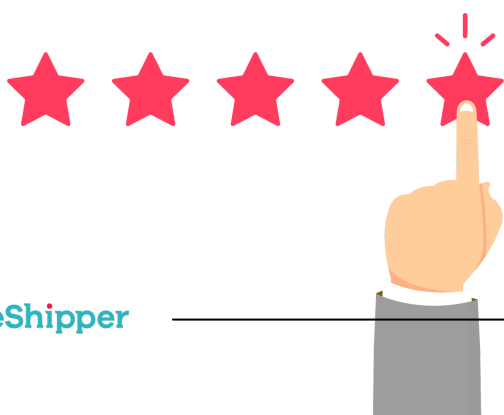
8. Be Prepared When Something Goes Wrong

Select a shipping service that offers accurate and detailed tracking information. Providing your customers with a tracking number as soon as the order is processed will mitigate the number of complaints you receive, as they can monitor the status of their delivery on their own. If there is an issue

with a damaged or missing package, and your customer brings it to your attention, make sure to offer a resolution right away.

With eShipper, you are automatically insured for \$100 of coverage plus the cost of the freight.

That means you can send your customer a replacement and submit a claim on the missing or damaged package. Once the claim is approved you'll have your money back for the initial shipment, and in the meantime you've made your customer happy by immediately sending them a replacement.



**A happy customer
is a repeat customer!**

9. Set Up Easy Returns

One of the biggest concerns that consumers have when purchasing something online is the fact that they can't touch or try on the products. Give your customers the confidence to place their order, and take away the fear of complicated returns! For eCommerce businesses selling clothes, especially, it is always a good idea to include a return label and even an extra polybag in the original order that way if someone needs to return an item, the process is simple and easy.

If you're concerned about the cost of doing this, don't be! Generating return labels doesn't cost you a penny as merchants only pay for a return shipment if the label is actually used by the customer. If the carrier doesn't scan the label, you're never charged for it.

Whatever your return policy, always make sure to outline it in your FAQs so your customers know the process before they order, and clearly define your exchange and return procedure so they know what to expect.

Hassle-free returns:

- Implement free shipping on returns. This way, your customer will feel safer buying your product knowing they won't be charged if it arrives and isn't what they expected.
- Make your returns policy visible and easy to find. If a customer has to search through fine print to find it, you're risking the chance of losing them.
- The same goes for long drawn-out returns policies that are overbearing and confusing. Keep it simple, concise, and clear.
- If returns aren't possible due to the type of product you're selling, consider offering store credit for dissatisfied customers. This will go a long way in increasing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.



10.

Anticipate Customer Questions

Whether your customers have questions before, during, or after their purchase, make sure they have the support they need! Having a robust FAQ section will hopefully answer the majority of their queries, but you could also consider having a Live Chat option for the busy holiday season. Hiring a college or university student to monitor your chats and social media is another way to ensure your customers' messages and DMs get answered in a timely manner.



More eCommerce Tips



Manage your cash flow

Cash constraints and mounting costs are a continuous challenge for any business. To ease the financial pressure that comes with Q4 and free up the working capital you need to meet holiday season demands, consider [Clearco's](#) Buy Now, Pay Later program. You'll be able to pay any invoice over 6+ months rather than upfront, so you can better align costs with the revenue that these costs generate.

Go beyond your website

Expand your reach beyond your online store and gain access to millions of new customers. The holiday season is the perfect time to do this, with so many consumers on the prowl for great products and gifts for their family and friends. We can help you maximize your sales by setting up your business on Amazon, Walmart, and Google Shopping for your best holiday season yet. If you're thinking about expanding to Amazon, make sure you're prepared to sell and deliver to all your eager customers worldwide with [AMZ Prep](#). They'll prep, pack, and ship orders on your behalf and get your listings set up so you can drive sales, increase your brand's online visibility, and establish marketplace dominance.

Give your customers the option to spread payments

With [Sezzle](#), online shoppers can pay for purchases, interest-free, over a period of 6 weeks. Increase your peak season sales by giving them this option at checkout, so they can get what they want now and pay for it later.

A hand is holding a stack of four cardboard boxes. The boxes are tied together with a piece of twine. The background is a light blue gradient.

Explore More

- [eCommerce Shipping 101: The Beginner's Guide](#)
- [7 Ways to Profit from Free Shipping in your eCommerce Business](#)
- [E-commerce Packaging Trends 2021](#)
- [Sturdy, Instagrammable But Sustainable Packaging? How To Satisfy Millennial eCommerce Shoppers](#)
- [How partnering with a shipping company can benefit your eCommerce business](#)
- [Looking for the right shipping company for your business?](#)
- [10 Ways to Prepare for Shipping Demands](#)
- [Acing Customer Service For Your eCommerce Business In 2021](#)