adscale

The Q4 guide for online stores

Q4. Big opportunity. Clear plan. 2026

How to win new customers, protect your margin, and turn first-time buyers into repeat customers.



START HERE

More orders are great. Profit is better.

A practical guide for store owners and marketing teams | By the AdScale team

Picture the first week of December. Black Friday and Cyber Monday are behind you, the orders came in, and the dashboard looks great. Then you check the numbers. How much did the discounts cost? What did each new customer cost to win? And how many of them will ever buy again?

Q4 rewards the stores that ask those questions before the season starts. Pick products that can afford a sale. Give your best customers a reason to buy early. Plan the second purchase before the first one ships. This guide covers both halves of the job: winning new customers and keeping the ones you already have.

The big picture: the market grows, but your profit depends on your plan.

Shopify merchants worldwide sold a record $14.6 billion over Black Friday–Cyber Monday 2025, up 27%. Adobe forecasts $275.1 billion in U.S. online holiday sales between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31, 2026, up 6.7%. A rising tide lifts every store, but it doesn't make any single store profitable.

$14.6B
Shopify merchants' Black Friday–Cyber Monday sales in 2025 (worldwide, +27%)

$275.1B
Adobe's forecast for U.S. online holiday sales, Nov. 1–Dec. 31, 2026 (+6.7%)

$12.9B / $15.1B
Adobe's forecast for U.S. online sales on Black Friday and Cyber Monday

57.4%
Share of holiday online spending expected to happen on a phone

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01 The calendar

Key dates for Q4 2026

Pick the events that suit your customers and your stock. Skip the rest.

Date	Event	What it means for you
Oct. 6–7	**Prime Big Deal Days and Target Circle Deal Days** ALREADY OVER	Both pulled holiday shopping forward; Adobe estimated about $10B in U.S. online sales over Prime's two days. Check your own traffic from those days to see how early your customers shop.
Oct. 31 (Sat.)	**Halloween**	Best for candy, costumes, décor and party supplies. Holiday promotions usually start the next day.
Nov. 3 (Tue.)	**Election Day (U.S. midterms)**	Not a shopping day, but it affects ad prices. Record political spending can push up costs, especially on connected TV and in swing states.
Nov. 11 (Wed.)	**Veterans Day**	Many shoppers look for military and veteran discounts. If you offer one, make it simple to claim and keep the tone respectful.
Nov. 26–27	**Thanksgiving and Black Friday**	The biggest shopping days of the year. Adobe forecasts $6.9B online on Thanksgiving and $12.9B on Black Friday. Finalize your offer, ads and shipping before then.
Nov. 28 (Sat.)	**Small Business Saturday**	A natural day for independent brands to share their story.
Nov. 29–30	**Cyber Sunday and Cyber Monday**	A second chance for shoppers who missed Black Friday. Adobe expects Cyber Monday ($15.1B) to be a single-day record.
Dec. 1 (Tue.)	**Giving Tuesday**	Worth joining only if you have a real giving program. Tie it to a commitment, not a coupon.
Dec. 14 (Mon.)	**Green Monday**	The second Monday of December is a popular last big push before shipping deadlines.
Dec. 19 (Sat.)	**Super Saturday**	Last-minute shoppers take over. Promote gift cards, instant e-gifts, in-store pickup and express shipping, but only what you can really deliver.
Dec. 25 (Fri.)	**Christmas**	Orders placed after your shipping deadline won't arrive in time. Switch to gift cards, and to "treat yourself" offers after the 25th.

A short season this year

Thanksgiving falls on Nov. 26, which leaves 28 shopping days from Black Friday to Christmas Eve, and Christmas is on a Friday. Set your shipping deadlines first, then build your promotion calendar backward from them.

02 Profit math

Do the math before you discount

What matters is how much money is left after your variable costs.

A 25% discount looks modest on a banner, but it takes a big share of what's left. Add up your costs first, then decide how much you can spend on ads.

Regular price	**$120**
Revenue after a 25% discount (–$30)	**$90**
Product cost	**$54**
Fulfillment, shipping, payment fees and expected returns	**$9**
Left before ads	**$27**
Reserve for overhead and profit	**$9**
Maximum ad spend per order	**$18**

In this example, $90 of revenue divided by $18 of ad spend gives a ROAS of 5.0. That's the lowest return this offer can afford, not a universal target. The $9 reserve still has to cover your overhead, so it isn't all profit.

How the discount changes your target

Discount	Revenue	Left before ads	Max ad spend	ROAS you need
15%	$102	$39	$30	3.4
20%	$96	$33	$24	4.0
25%	$90	$27	$18	5.0
30%	$84	$21	$12	7.0
40%	$72	$9	$0	No room

Same basis for every number

Product cost ($54), fulfillment and returns ($9) and the reserve ($9) are held constant for a $120 product. All amounts exclude sales tax, which isn't your revenue. If your ad platform counts tax or shipping as revenue, adjust before comparing.

03 Your data

Your past sales already show who to target

Order value is only the start. Look at repeat purchases, returns and profit too.

Open last year's data and look at November and December 2025 separately. Who came back to buy again? Which products brought customers who returned? Who only bought at a deep discount, and what was your profit after returns?

Group	What to offer
Loyal, profitable customers	Early access, free gift wrapping, or a gift with purchases above a set amount.
One-time buyers	Something that goes with their first purchase, plus a clear reason to return.
Lapsed customers	A relevant nudge: a new product, a restock, or a seasonal need.
New customers	A bestseller, a sample or starter size, real reviews, and clear shipping and return terms.

Don't plan around a lifetime value you haven't measured

Customer lifetime value (LTV) helps you decide how much to spend on winning customers. But repeat revenue isn't the same as profit. Factor in product cost, returns and support. If you don't have enough history, base your budget on what the first order earns, and track repeat purchases at 60 and 90 days.

Your task today

List your top 10 products. Next to each one, write the stock level, the profit after discount, the return rate and the repeat-purchase rate. Then choose the products that deserve most of your attention in November.

04 New customers

Send the right shoppers to the right product

Use your store data, a clear offer and campaigns you can measure.

Google: capture demand that already exists

Promote products that are well stocked and can afford a discount. Make sure the titles, images, prices and availability in your product feed match your website. When someone clicks an ad showing a price, they should find that same price on the product page and in the cart.

Customer Match lets you use your own customer lists to guide your campaigns, subject to Google's eligibility and policy requirements. Don't rely on Similar Audiences: Google has retired them.

Meta: give people a reason to stop scrolling

Write different messages for three groups: people who don't know you, people who visited your store, and people who already bought. New shoppers need to see the product in use and why it's worth choosing. Hesitant visitors need the one doubt holding them back answered: size, use, shipping or returns. Past buyers should see something that complements what they already own.

> **Audiences are something to test, not a guarantee**
>
> Use the audience and exclusion options available in your account, and decide who should see each ad and who shouldn't. A customer list or a lookalike audience doesn't guarantee profitable growth. If you have little data, start with a simple account structure you can learn from.

Track new customers separately. Measure the ad cost per new-customer order and what that order contributes. A campaign that mostly sells to existing customers can show a great ROAS without growing your customer base. Google (customer acquisition goals in Performance Max) and Meta (existing-customer budget caps in Advantage+ sales campaigns) both let you push toward new buyers, so check what's available in your account.

05 Creative and AI

Test more ideas, not more banners

AI can speed up production. Choosing the product, the offer and the message is still your job.

Angle	Message	What to make
Demo	Show how the product works and what it replaces.	A short video of real use.
Proof	Answer a doubt with a real review.	A product photo with a real, approved customer quote.
Value	Explain what's in the bundle and who it's for.	A photo of the products together.
Urgency	Give a real reason to act now.	Early access or a clear end date.

A fast process for images and video

1. **Start with a real product.** Use sharp photos, accurate sizes and a finalized offer.
2. **Generate three angles with AI.** For example: everyday use, a gift, and a bundle that saves money.
3. **Check every detail.** The product, color, packaging and quantities must match what the customer receives.
4. **Make versions for feed and Stories.** Check the cropping, and make sure the text is readable on a phone.
5. **Compare results.** Look at purchases and profit per order against your previous ads.

A brief you can paste into any AI tool

Write three ad concepts for [product]: one showing it in use, one as a gift, and one explaining the bundle's value. Keep the product's appearance exactly as it is. Don't invent benefits, reviews or data. Leave room for a short headline.

Keep every claim honest

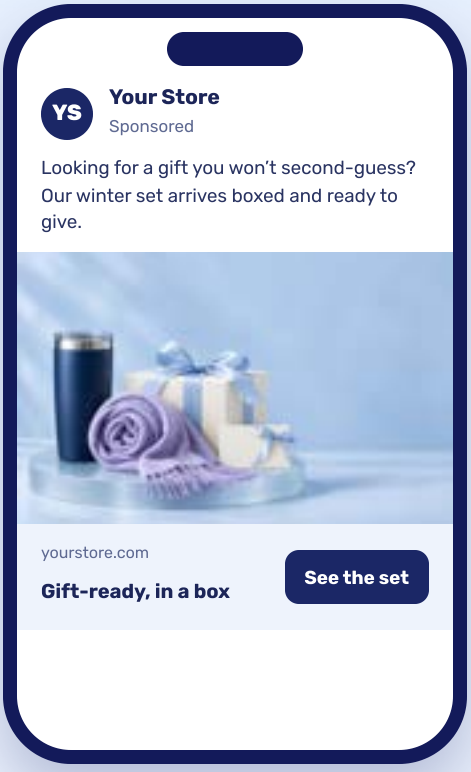
Many countries ban fake reviews, including AI-generated ones (in the U.S., under FTC rules), and "was" prices must be real. Never let AI invent proof or discounts.

06 Sample ads

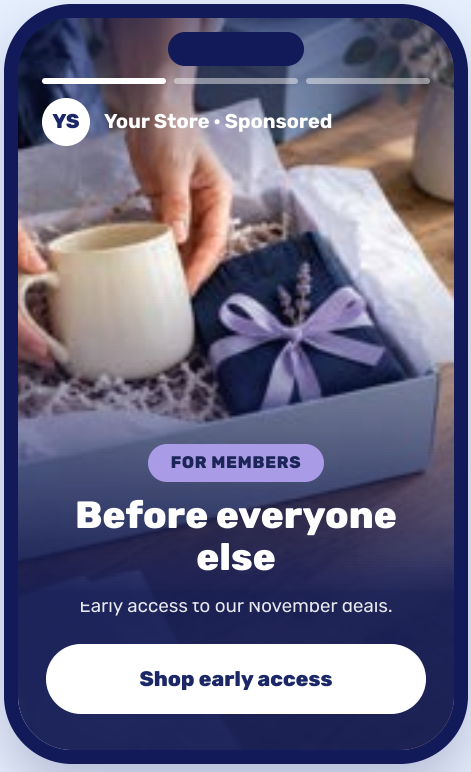
What it can look like

Two concepts for a fictional store, shown on a phone. These aren't real ads.

Concept 1 • Feed ad



Concept 2 • Story ad



Two ads, two reasons to buy

Concept 1 (left) shows the product in use. It suits shoppers who are still comparing options or looking for a gift.

Concept 2 (right) rewards your existing customers. Use it only if the sale truly opens to them before everyone else.

Adapting it to your store

Replace the mock-ups with your own product photos. Add your real price and terms, an end date if there is one, and a button that links to the right page. Don't promise shipping or early access unless they're really part of the offer.

07 Retention

Give past buyers a reason to return

Not every customer needs the same offer, and not every message has to be a sale.

Someone who has already bought from you knows what a new shopper doesn't: how the product feels, how good your service is, and whether they can trust you. In Q4, that's a real advantage. Start with what each customer already bought and what they could use now.

When	Why	What to send
Before the promotion	Early access	Send a defined group a link before the sale opens to everyone.
During the promotion	A relevant reminder	Show a product they viewed or a matching category, without flooding their inbox.
After a purchase	Help and support	Send usage tips, shipping updates and care instructions.
Later	Something that complements it	Reach out when they're likely to need a refill or an add-on.

Subject: Our sale opens for you first

Before our November deals open to everyone, we'd like you to have first pick. Early access is open now, with the sets and products we've chosen for winter.

Shop early access

Only message people who've agreed to hear from you. Stop reminders for products they've already bought, and never send "Still thinking about it?" to someone whose order is on its way.

Know the consent rules

Email and text marketing is regulated almost everywhere. In the U.S., email needs a working unsubscribe link and your postal address (CAN-SPAM), and marketing texts need prior written consent and an easy opt-out such as replying STOP (TCPA). Check the rules where your customers live. This is a summary, not legal advice.

08 Lessons from big retailers

Target and Sephora: reward the people already inside

Loyalty ideas from two big retailers, adapted to a small store's budget.

Target | Spread the season across several moments

What it did in 2025: Target didn't rely on one big day. Its season had three beats, shown below. This fall's event, Circle Deal Days, ran Oct. 6–7, with early access for Circle 360 members on Oct. 5.

Oct. 4–11
Circle Week
Paid Circle 360 members shopped early from Oct. 4.

Nov. 1
Weekly deals start
Weekly deals and a Deal of the Day begin, and the Holiday Price Match window opens.

Dec. 24
Price match ends
Price drops on Target items could be adjusted until this date.

What a small store can borrow

Plan two or three moments instead of one: early access for customers, a sale on one product group, and a gift with purchase. Each moment has its own audience and goal, so you don't have to launch a new sale every morning. A price-drop promise can ease hesitation, but only offer one you can afford to honor.

Sephora | Bigger perks for loyal members

How it works: In Sephora's Savings Event, the discount rises with your Beauty Insider tier, and higher tiers shop first. In holiday 2025, Rouge members could shop from Oct. 31, and VIB and Insider members from Nov. 4. We couldn't find confirmed fall 2026 dates, so check Sephora's Beauty Insider page.

10%	15%	20%	30%
Insider (free)	VIB ($350 a year)	Rouge ($1,000 a year)	Sephora Collection, every tier

What a small store can borrow

Tiers are a simple way to reward repeat customers with earlier access and better service. Make sure each perk pays for itself and that customers can easily see what they qualify for. A small store can keep it to two tiers: customers, and VIP repeat buyers.

09 Lessons from big retailers

Glossier and Apple: it's not just the discount

Two ways to shape an offer: grow the basket, or give shoppers a reason to buy again.

Glossier | A bigger basket earns a bigger reward

What it did: For Black Friday weekend 2025, Glossier offered 25% off, or 30% off orders of $100 or more, on glossier.com and in its stores, with exclusions. It has used the same two-tier structure in earlier years. We found no public data on how it affected order size.

25%
off sitewide

30%
off orders of $100 or more

How to test a threshold

Set the threshold slightly above your average order value, at a level shoppers can reach by adding one sensible item. Check your profit after the discount across the whole cart. Sometimes a smaller discount plus a gift beats a deep discount on everything.

Apple | Give shoppers a reason to buy again

What it did: During its 2025 Black Friday Shopping Event (Nov. 28–Dec. 1), Apple gave Apple Gift Cards with qualifying purchases instead of cutting prices: from $25 to $250 in the U.S., depending on the product. The newest products were excluded. The card is emailed after purchase and can only be used on a future Apple purchase. There's no public data on whether it increased repeat buying.

$25–$250
Apple Gift Card in the U.S., depending on the product

4 days
Nov. 28–Dec. 1, 2025: gift cards, not price cuts

How to apply it

Decide what your "next purchase" reward is: store credit, a gift with purchase, or a code for the next order. Work out the cost if everyone redeems it, write clear terms, and show them before payment. Then measure whether customers actually come back and whether the extra order covers the cost.

10 Putting it into practice

Walmart: early access without the gimmicks

The idea is simple: let your best customers shop first. You don't need a big production.

In 2025, Walmart ran its Black Friday deals in three waves. Walmart+ members got access at 7 p.m. ET the night before each one. Paying members got a head start, everyone else got a clear start time, and nobody had to hunt for deals.

Nov. 14–16

Wave 1

Online and in stores. Walmart+ early access from 7 p.m. ET on Nov. 13.

Nov. 25–30

Wave 2

Online first; stores from Nov. 28. Early access from 7 p.m. ET on Nov. 24.

Dec. 1

Cyber Monday

Online only. Early access from 7 p.m. ET on Nov. 30.

We couldn't find Walmart's 2026 Black Friday dates, so check them before you plan around Walmart's calendar.

> **A version worth testing**
>
> Tell your list in advance that a members-only window is coming. Create a dedicated page or a real code, and make sure access opens before the public sale. Don't fake a "leaked" sale.

What your version could look like

Three days before

Announce

Tell your list that a members-only window is coming, and who qualifies.

The night before

Open early access

Send the dedicated link or code. Test it first.

Launch day

Open to everyone

Start publicly at a clear, published time.

Three questions to answer first

1. **What's the real advantage?** More time to choose, better stock, or a bundle only this group can get.
2. **How will you know it worked?** Track purchases, profit after discounts and unsubscribes. If you have enough customers, compare the group with a similar group that didn't get early access.
3. **What happens after the purchase?** For products people buy rarely, like a mattress or a sofa, service and add-ons matter more than a "buy again" message.

11 More big-retailer examples

Best Buy and Amazon: use the rush, don't just ride it

Two more examples, from Q4 2025 and October 2026. They show what these retailers did, not what will work for your store.

Best Buy | Members get extra, even at the same price

What it did in 2025: Best Buy started its Black Friday sale on Nov. 20, eight days before Black Friday, with doorbusters on Nov. 20, 21 and 28 and a Cyber Sunday and Monday event from Nov. 30. My Best Buy Plus and Total members could earn up to $25 in bonus rewards on doorbusters through Nov. 29.

> **How a smaller store can use it**
>
> You don't need a points system. Start with a members list, early access, one extra perk and clear terms. Check how the discount affects your margin first, then let loyal customers choose the product and the perk. Keep it simple.

Amazon | Prime Big Deal Days pulled the rush forward

What it did in 2026: The two-day, members-only event ran Oct. 6–7. Adobe expected about $10 billion in U.S. online spending over the two days, and noted that events like this push other retailers to run competing discounts. Shoppers are being trained to look for holiday deals in early October.

What it means for you: Look at your own October numbers. If demand showed up, move your gift messaging and early-access offers earlier. If it didn't, your customers shop later, and you can plan around that.

> **Make promises you can keep**
>
> Offer only what you can deliver, such as gift wrapping, a clear order-by date or a delivery window. State the terms on the product page and at checkout. If your calendar is built around shipping deadlines, put them in your ads too.

12 Outside the box • 1/3 • Values first

Nine ideas from outside the box

Nine brands that turned a shopping day into an experience instead of just discounting. Borrow the mechanism, not the numbers: most results are reported by the brands themselves.

01 REI

Outdoor retailer • USA, 2015

Acquire + retain

Closed on Black Friday. Started a movement.

REI closed all 143 of its stores on Black Friday, paid employees to take the day off, and invited everyone to #OptOutside.

01 Close on the biggest shopping day
02 Give your team the day off
03 Invite customers to join in

Stores close → Team outdoors → Customers join

143
stores closed for the day

1.4M
people took part, per the agency

175+ organizations joined the movement.

Takeaway: A values-led move can earn attention and loyalty if it's genuine and fits your brand. It isn't a template for every store.

02 Patagonia

Outdoor apparel • USA, 2011

Retention

"Don't buy this jacket."

On Black Friday 2011, Patagonia ran a full-page New York Times ad showing its R2 jacket under that headline, asking shoppers to think before buying.

01 Say what you actually believe
02 Back it up with quality and repairs
03 Keep the promise all year

Honest ad → Trust → Loyalty

1 page
full-page New York Times ad

~30%
sales growth reported afterward

Growth figure is from secondary case studies.

Takeaway: Trust is a long-term asset. An honest message can work as an ad if the brand lives by it.

03 DECIEM

Skincare • Canada, 2019

Acquire + retain

Close the shop. Discount the month.

DECIEM closed its website and stores on Nov. 29 and offered 23% off all products for the rest of November, instead of a one-day deep discount.

01 Spread the offer across the month
02 Shut every channel on Black Friday
03 Explain why: no rushed buying

23% all month → Black Friday closed

23%
off all products in November

1 day
stores and site closed

Takeaway: Less urgency can mean less stress for you and your customers. Just check that a month-long discount doesn't cost more margin than a one-day event.

12 Outside the box • 2/3 • Engagement and play

More ideas from outside the box

Livestreams, games and hourly gifts: ways to give shoppers something to join.

04 MeUndies

Underwear and loungewear • USA, 2016

New customers

More viewers. Bigger discount.

On Black Friday 2016, MeUndies went live on Facebook with a DJ and dance contests. The discount grew as more people tuned in.

01 Go live with a DJ
02 More viewers unlock a bigger discount
03 Viewers share, and the crowd grows

Live → More viewers → Bigger deal

13,300
viewers on the live stream

25%
viewer conversion, 13× its usual Facebook rate

Brand-reported, 2016; platform features have changed.

Takeaway: Let customers help unlock the deal. The lasting lesson: give your audience a reason to invite their friends.

05 Chubbies

Casual apparel • USA

New customers

A new reason to come back every hour.

For its “Thighber Monday,” Chubbies gave away a different gift with every purchase each hour, for 12 hours. Shoppers had a reason to keep checking back.

01 Change the free gift every hour
02 Customers return to see what’s new
03 Shoppers buy when the gift suits them

New gift hourly → Return visits

12 hrs
of hourly changing gifts

No standalone sales results were published.

Takeaway: Rotating gifts bring shoppers back again and again without changing the product’s price.

06 Cards Against Humanity

Party game • USA, 2019

New customers

Humans vs. AI. Shoppers picked the winner.

In a 16-hour Black Friday livestream, two $5 packs of 30 cards competed: one written by human writers, one by an AI model. Shoppers voted with their wallets.

01 Sell a human-written pack and an AI-written pack
02 Price each at $5
03 Sales decide the winner

Human pack → vs → AI pack

16 hrs
livestream

2%
the humans’ margin of victory

The AI was a GPT-2–based model.

Takeaway: Turn buying into voting. Shoppers become participants, and the product stays simple.

12 Outside the box • 3/3 • Rethinking the price

Three more ideas from outside the box

Pricing that carries a message: a cause, a choice or a pledge.

07 Everlane

Apparel • USA, 2015 and 2018

Acquire + retain

A Black Friday that funds something.

In 2015, Everlane gave all its Black Friday profits to the workers at its Los Angeles factory. In 2018 it donated $13 per order to Surfrider for beach cleanups.

01 Commit the proceeds publicly
02 Make the impact concrete
03 Report the result

Black Friday profits → A named cause

$13
per order to Surfrider in 2018

1 lb
of beach trash removed per $13

Takeaway: Shoppers can buy because of what you do with the money, not only what they save. Make the pledge specific, and report back.

08 Allbirds

Footwear and apparel • USA, 2020

Acquire + retain

Raise prices by $1.

In November 2020, Allbirds raised prices by $1 across its collection, matched that dollar itself, and gave both to Fridays For Future.

01 Skip the discount
02 Add $1 and match it
03 Say where the money goes

+$1 per item → Matched → Donated

+$1
per item, e.g. Runner $95 → $96

No sales results were published.

Takeaway: Shoppers may accept a cause-linked price when the brand is already credible. Keep the amount small and the destination clear.

09 Trek Light

Outdoor and home goods • USA

Retention

Pay what you can.

Trek Light lets customers choose what to pay for its products, and a “Pay It Forward” option funds discounts for other shoppers.

01 Offer a range of price options
02 Let customers choose what fits their budget
03 Let those who can pay it forward

Options → They choose → Pay it forward

5–25%
discount options in its first version

No sales results were published.

Takeaway: Giving people a choice can build real trust with your community. Model it first: set a floor, a budget cap and a plan for your margin.

13 Choosing

Pick one idea, not nine

Match the idea to your goal, then test it on a small group before the busy days.

Your goal	Start with	Why it works	Effort
Win new customers	MeUndies' live unlock, Cards Against Humanity's vote	Gives people something to join and share, not just a price.	Medium
Protect your margin	DECIEM's month-long offer, Apple's gift card, Glossier's threshold	Moves value away from deep, across-the-board discounts.	Low
Reward loyal customers	Walmart's early window, Best Buy's bonus rewards, Sephora's tiers	Makes your best customers feel like insiders.	Low–Medium
Stand out without discounting	REI, Patagonia, Everlane, Allbirds	Leads with what you stand for and what you do with the money.	Medium–High
Reach shoppers on tight budgets	Trek Light's pay what you can	Builds trust with your community.	Medium

A five-minute filter

1. **Does it fit your brand?** If customers would be surprised, skip it.
2. **Can you afford it at full volume?** Run the math from page 4 as if everyone takes the offer.
3. **Can you deliver on time?** Stock, support and shipping must be ready before the first click.
4. **Can you measure it?** Decide in advance what success looks like: new customers, profit, repeat purchases.

A rule of thumb

Pick one idea and try it on a small group, like your email list, before showing it to the whole market. If it works, scale it. If it doesn't, you've learned cheaply.

14 Work plan

What to do now and what can wait

Starting point: mid-October 2026. Every task needs an owner and a product, not just a date.

Period	Focus	What should be ready
Oct. 12–18	Choose your lead products	Bestsellers, stock levels, costs, minimum margin and customer groups.
Oct. 19–25	Build and test	Offer, landing page, ads, a test purchase and tracking.
Oct. 26–Nov. 4	Warm up and watch costs	Audiences, campaigns, terms and support ready. Halloween offers live. Watch ad costs through Election Day (Nov. 3).
Nov. 5–15	Launch early access	Early-access link sent to your list, tracking checked, and a look at whether your bestsellers are profitable.
Nov. 16–22	Tie up loose ends	Stock, shipping times, support staffing and ad approvals. Big retailers' sales often start in mid-November.
Nov. 23–30	Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday	Daily checks and a clear end to the offer. Thanksgiving is Nov. 26, Black Friday Nov. 27, Small Business Saturday Nov. 28 and Cyber Monday Nov. 30.
Dec. 1–14	Giving Tuesday to Green Monday	Gifts, shipping deadlines, support and add-on offers.
Dec. 15–25	Final shipping window and Christmas	Order-by dates shown everywhere. Gift cards and pickup for last-minute shoppers. Support covered.
Dec. 26–31	Keep your new customers	Handle returns and exchanges, review the season and plan your 2027 follow-ups.

Starting late?

Lock in your lead product first: confirm the profit, build a working page and run a test purchase. Add targeting and new ads after that. A small campaign that's ready beats a big one that isn't.

15 Budget and control

Don’t spend your budget just because it’s November

Base decisions on profit, stock and what you can deliver.

Split your budget into three parts: a base for campaigns that already work, a test budget, and a reserve for the busiest days. The right split depends on your store, so don’t copy another brand’s percentages without checking your own costs, stock and sales flow.

Check every day	Why it matters
Net revenue and orders	What actually happened, after discounts and cancellations.
Ad spend	How much you spent in total and in each channel.
Cost per new customer	Ad spend aimed at new buyers, divided by the new customers it brought in.
Profit after ads	Revenue minus product cost, shipping, fees and advertising.
Stock and support	How long stock will last, delivery delays and unanswered customer messages.

Three rules to set in advance

Scale up when results stay above your target, you have enough data, and your stock and team can handle more orders.

Hold when costs rise. Find out whether it’s a traffic problem, a price or discount change, a stock or website fault, or a tracking error.

Stop when the price is wrong, the product is out of stock or checkout is broken. More traffic won’t fix those.

> **In Google Ads, don’t add seasonality adjustments by default**
>
> Google says Smart Bidding already accounts for typical seasonal patterns. Seasonality adjustments are meant for an unusual change in conversion rate, mainly during short events of 1–7 days, and Google notes they may not work well beyond 14 days. Don’t use them to raise your budget for all of November.

16 From ad to purchase

The ad got them there. Now make buying easy.

Go through the whole journey on a real phone, like a first-time customer.

A click on an ad should land on the right product, with the right size, price and stock. If shoppers have to search again for what they saw in the ad, you've added friction. Mobile is expected to account for 57.4% of holiday online spending (63% on Thanksgiving Day), so run this test on a phone.

Check	What good looks like
Product page	Clear photos, specs, sizes, what's included, the price and the promotion terms.
Shipping	The cost and delivery date shown before the final step, with exceptions spelled out.
Payment	A test purchase that works, a coupon that works, and an order confirmation that actually arrives. If you offer Apple Pay, Google Pay or Shop Pay, test those too.
Returns	A clear policy that's easy to find, not buried in small print.
Product feed and tracking	Prices and availability are up to date, and each purchase is counted only once.

Plan for things going wrong

Who checks the coupon code? Who pauses an ad when a product sells out? Who tells customers about a delay? Name an owner and a time for each check. Prepare a customer message in advance, and a backup product to promote if your bestseller sells out.

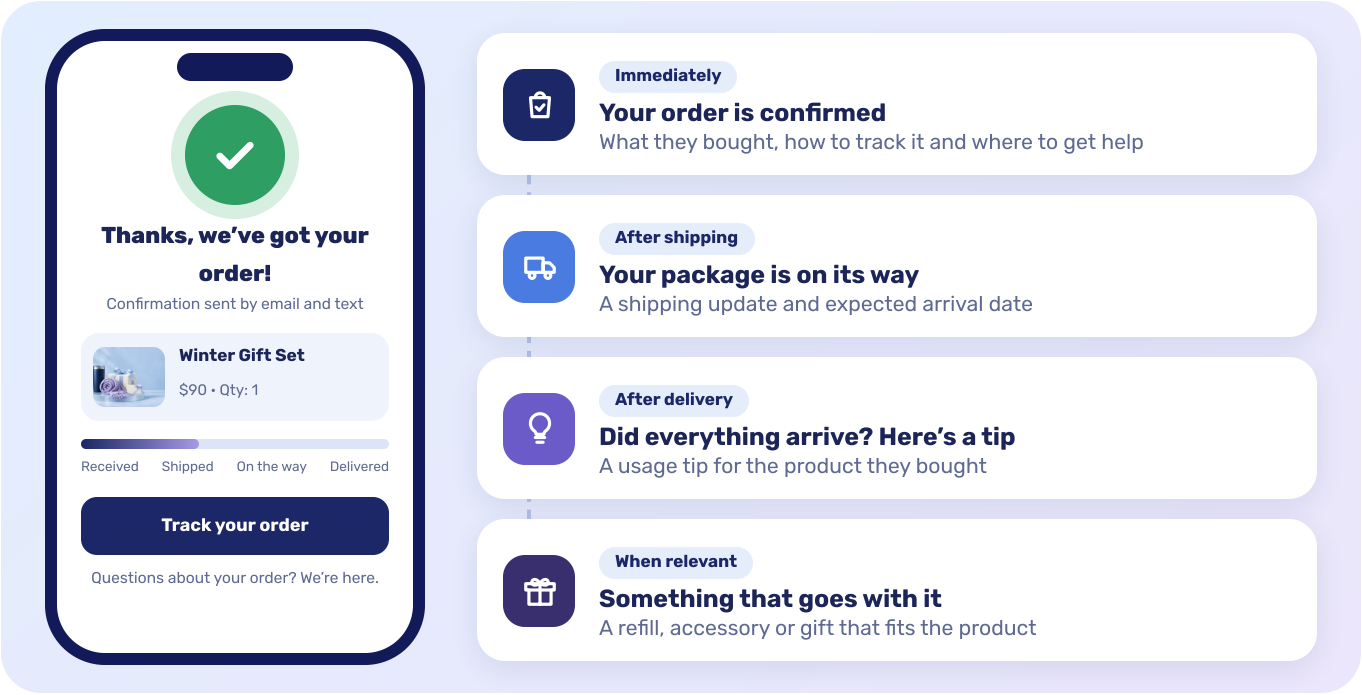
Before you approve

Compare the ad, landing page, product page and cart side by side. The promotion, dates, price and shipping promise should tell the same story everywhere.

17 After the sale

The first order is only the beginning

December is part of the plan. So is the support you give after the sale.



A customer who joined for a promotion doesn't know you yet. A clear confirmation, an accurate shipping update and a useful tip are the first proof they chose well.

When	What to do
Right after the order	Confirm what they bought, how to track it and where to get help.
After delivery	Check that it arrived and share a tip for using the product.
When they may need more	Offer a refill, accessory or gift, timed to how the product is used.
After 60 and 90 days	Check repeat purchases, returns and the profit from your November customers.

Don't send everyone the same message. A gift buyer isn't buying for themselves, and someone waiting for a problem to be fixed needs support before another offer. Consider extending your return window into January so gift buyers don't feel rushed.

18 Launch checklist

Ready to go live?

Go through this with whoever handles ads, your website, support and the warehouse.

Offer and numbers

- [ ] We chose products with enough stock and a healthy profit after the discount.
- [ ] We set a maximum ad cost and kept a reserve budget for the busiest days.
- [ ] We confirmed the dates, exclusions and offer terms.

Website, ads and tracking

- [ ] We ran a test purchase on a phone and tested the coupon.
- [ ] We checked the price, shipping, sales tax and total at every step of checkout.
- [ ] We reviewed every ad's copy, cropping and layout, and confirmed that any "was" prices are real.
- [ ] We confirmed that purchases and order values are tracked correctly.

Customers and operations

- [ ] We decided who gets reminders and who is excluded.
- [ ] We aligned stock, packing and support hours.
- [ ] We decided who handles problems and who can pause a campaign.
- [ ] We set the last order date for Christmas delivery and announced it.

Three decisions to make before launch day

What's your lead product? What's the lowest profit you'll accept? Who's responsible when something breaks? If you can answer all three, even your busiest day will be easier to run.

19 FAQ

Quick answers before the season starts

Do we have to offer the biggest discount in the market?

No. Your offer has to be clear and affordable. You can compete with a gift, early access or great service instead. Work out what the promotion costs and how much profit is left, and compare it with other offers. Without that math, a campaign that brings in lots of orders can still leave you with very little money.

When should we start advertising for Black Friday?

In October, check your audiences, products and ads, and start testing with a small budget. Just because competitors start early doesn't mean your results need to. Grow your budget based on performance, stock and your business plan, not an arbitrary date. Black Friday is Nov. 27, and big retailers' own events started in mid-November in 2025 (Walmart on Nov. 14, Best Buy on Nov. 20), so shoppers will be comparing offers by then.

We have a small customer list. Should we still segment it?

Yes, but keep it simple. Start by separating existing customers from new ones, and recent buyers from lapsed ones. If the groups are small, don't split them into dozens of campaigns. Use whatever you can act on across your tools, and keep enough data to learn whether the offer works.

Can we rely on ROAS to tell us whether the promotion worked?

Not on its own. ROAS compares revenue to ad spend, not to profit. Also check discounts, product costs, shipping, returns and new customers. And don't add up the revenue that Meta and Google each report as if every order were different. Compare it with the total orders in your store.

Will the U.S. midterm elections make ads more expensive?

They might, depending on where you advertise. AdImpact projects a record $11.6 billion in political ad spending for 2026, concentrated in connected TV and swing states. For most stores that means a more crowded auction in the weeks before Nov. 3, not a reason to stop advertising. Check your ad costs and cost per purchase daily, test new ads early, and hold off on big budget increases until costs settle.

What if sales drop when November ends?

Plan for it. Christmas is on Friday, Dec. 25, so your shipping deadlines and gift offers need to be ready by mid-December. After that, focus on support and on offers that fit what people already bought: gift cards, treat-yourself offers and exchanges. Not every customer needs another coupon, and not every post-holiday dip calls for a bigger budget.

20 Next steps

Make the big decisions now

More clarity in October. More control in November. Stronger customer relationships in December.

You don’t have to do everything at once. Choose a lead product, make sure the offer leaves you with money, and match the message to the audience. Then build a campaign, a buying journey and a support process that work together.

Three tasks for the start of the week

Today: choose your products and finish the discount math.

Tomorrow: prepare two ad angles and an offer for existing customers.

Before launch: run a test purchase and check your tracking.

Where AdScale fits in

AdScale connects your store’s data to planning and running campaigns on Google and Meta. Our AI tools help create ads and optimize campaigns and budgets. You decide the business goal, the offer and your profit limits.

Want to walk through your store’s plan?

Book a free 30-minute plan review with Sam Franke. We’ll look at your lead products, your discount math and your early-access plan, and what to prepare before the busy days.

Book a call with Sam

calendly.com/sam-adscale/30min

The goal is to finish the season stronger: knowing which products really sell, which customers are worth winning, and how to bring them back after the promotion ends.

SOURCES AND NOTES

Where the numbers come from

Public sources, checked as of Oct. 18, 2026. Brand examples show what the brands did, not what will work for your store.

Shopify merchants' BFCM 2025 sales ($14.6B, +27%): shopify.com/news/bfcm-data-2025

Adobe 2026 holiday forecast ($275.1B; Black Friday $12.9B; Cyber Monday $15.1B; mobile share; Prime Day estimate, Sept. 29, 2026): Digital Commerce 360 summary of Adobe's release. Cyber Monday 2025 ($14.25B): news.adobe.com

Prime Big Deal Days and Target Circle Deal Days, Oct. 6–7, 2026: NBC News • NBC News (Target)

Target 2025: ConsumerAffairs • Slickdeals (price match)

Sephora holiday 2025 Savings Event: Sephora Community FAQ

Glossier (Black Friday 2025): Particl **Apple (Nov. 28–Dec. 1, 2025):** MacRumors

Walmart 2025: TODAY **Best Buy 2025:** Best Buy press release

Political ad spending ($11.6B, AdImpact): Campaigns & Elections • eMarketer

Google Ads seasonality adjustments: support.google.com/google-ads/answer/10369906

Outside-the-box cases: REI Retail Dive • Patagonia IMD • DECIEM Cosmetics Business • MeUndies Digital Commerce 360 • Chubbies BroBible • Cards Against Humanity BGR • Everlane Hypebeast (2015), Surfrider (2018) • Allbirds Retail Dive • Trek Light P arade via AOL

Notes

Walmart, Best Buy and Sephora hadn't confirmed 2026 holiday event dates in the sources we found, so check each retailer. The profit examples are illustrative, not benchmarks. Sample ads are fictional. Legal notes are summaries, not legal advice.