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The Ultimate Guide to Getting Your eCommerce Website Holiday Ready with A2 Hosting

A Technical Checklist to Prepare for Holiday Traffic

As all eCommerce business owners begin to buckle down and get ready for the upcoming holiday season, many are focused on bringing new traffic to their sites to take advantage of the increased spending during Q4. What happens when your site isn't ready for the traffic and crashes in the middle of your biggest Black Friday Sale of the year? We want to make sure your website is fast and ready to receive all the new visitors coming your way.

Identify Your Resource Weaknesses

One of the secret tips to keeping your eCommerce website functioning smoothly is making sure you're not approaching your resource limits. Have you looked at your traffic from last year? Did you run into any issues during your big sales? If so it may be important to check to see if you should move to a plan with more resources to help support a smoother customer experience. Not sure what resources to look at? Here are four important ones to check:

- **Disk Space**: This refers to the amount of room on your account to store files, including all of your text, code, and images.

- **Memory Usage (RAM)**: RAM stores working data and is a vital part of a computer's performance. A2 Hosting's RAM options on our VPS and Dedicated plans range anywhere from 4GB to 128 GB DDR4 ECC, so we have options for any sized website!

- **CPU Usage**: This is the central processing unit that processes and runs instructions. We offer the choice of AMD and Intel CPUs on our Dedicated plans!

- **Inode Usage**: These correlate with how many files you can store on your website. If you're an eCommerce company with lots of files it may be important to get a plan with access to more inodes. Read our knowledge base articles to learn more about how to manage your inode count.

If you're nearing the maximum usage afforded to your current plan we encourage you to upgrade! Interested in going even faster? Check out A2 Turbo, available on most plans! Confused about what all the web hosting resources are? Check out this blog on four web hosting resources to consider when choosing your hosting plan.

Try a CDN

That's right, that CDN you've been debating? Now is the time to go for it. But what is a CDN? A CDN, or Content Delivery Network, works by utilizing dispersed servers. This allows you to distribute your web content to different physical server locations. This way visitors from around the world can access your site and all of its information from a server that is closer to them. Here's a list of the benefits of using a CDN:

- Faster loading speed
- Boost in reliability and response time
- Better global reach
- Increased number of users at one time
- DDoS protection

A2 Hosting offers Cloudflare, a popular CDN, for our customers' use.

Increase Your Payment Security

Online security has always been important but in 2021 it's absolutely essential. You want your information and your customer's information to be safe and secure to help build consumer trust. Make sure you implement these strategies to help secure your site before the holiday sales:

- **Install an SSL Certificate:** SSL certificates are so easy and there are free versions offered with most of A2 Hosting's plans. This will help verify your identity to any potential customers and let them know that there's an encrypted connection when transmitting their information. The great part about paying for an upgraded SSL with A2 Hosting is added security and the benefits of displaying a trust badge. These are symbols you can add to your site that will assure customers that their information is secure and your site is trustworthy.

- **Implement an Address Verification Service (AVS):** Don't let those suspicious

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credit card transactions get by you! An AVS is a fraud prevention system that will help your eCommerce store limit its fraud and chargebacks.

- **Require Card Verification Value (CVV)**: The CVV is the little number on the back of debit cards. By requiring customers to enter this information when trying to check out, you can add an extra level of security to every transaction.

- **Is your payments processor ready for a greater number of purchases?** Last but not least, check the fine print on your payment processing system. Make sure you have the right setup so those sales don't go down the drain when your customers can't pay!

Cache, Cache, Cache

Caching is a great way to speed up your site! Caching stores your web pages in memory, so the server can serve them very quickly, instead of fetching them from the disk each time. Implementing caching can dramatically reduce page load times. Our A2 Turbo plans come with Litespeed caching preinstalled! Read our knowledge base article to learn how to use Litespeed on your site.

Now You Can Speed Off Into that Proverbial Sunset

Though technical updates may not always be as flashy as marketing updates, they are vital when trying to get your eCommerce website ready for the heavy traffic coming with the holidays. Follow the steps above to make sure you have the right resources and tools to give your customers a great shopping experience.

Master the Holidays with Festive Marketing Strategies

The holidays are right around the corner so it's a great time for eCommerce companies to capitalize on new customers and increase holiday shopping conversions. With proper preparation, online stores can gain brand recognition and increased conversions as they sail into the new year. Read more to learn about our top marketing tips for the upcoming holiday season.

Plan Out Your Target Audience and Social Media Advertising Strategy

To ensure your promotions are a success it's important to start out with a target audience in mind. That way it's easier to decide how you want to strategically choose the products you are featuring. When determining your product choice and targeting within the campaign, each social network has different options to choose from. Here's a list of the different types of audience segments on some of the most popular social platforms:

Facebook & Instagram
- **Location**: You can choose by city, community, and country.

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- **Behavior**: Base your ads on behavioral attributes like prior purchases or device usage.
- **Demographics**: Choose from different demographics like gender, age, education levels, job titles, and more.
- **Interests**: You can segment your audience by hobbies or traits like the type of movies they like to watch or their dietary preferences.
- **Connections**: This allows you to decide if your audience is currently already connected to your business or unfamiliar with your products. This can be important if you're trying to target an audience that is currently already interested in your business for an easier conversion rate.
- You can also use **lookalike audiences** which are created from source audiences of people that already interact with your ads! This connects you to people that are very similar to people that already follow your page.

LinkedIn

- **Job Experience**: This includes job titles, seniority, job functions, member skills, and years of experience.
- **Education**: You can target based on degrees, subjects studied, schools attended.
- **Demographics**: Unlike Facebook and Instagram this is only split by age and gender.
- **Company**: You have access to target audiences based on industry, company names, company followers on LinkedIn, the growth rate and company size, and company category.
- **Interests and Traits**: Segment your audience by your potential customer's interests, the groups they are a part of, and their traits
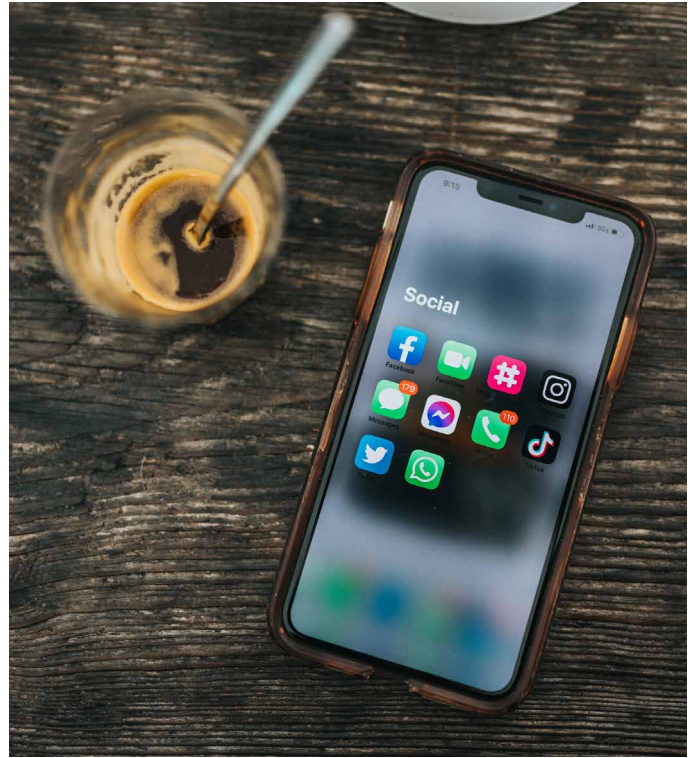
Twitter

- **Demographics**: You can filter by location, language, device (like phone type), platform (like phone carrier), Wifi (like internet provider), age, and gender.
- **Targeting Types**:
  - **Conversation**: This is based on the content of people's tweets and conversations.
  - **Event**: Target people who attended various online and offline events.
  - **Tweet Engager**: Market to people that have organically engaged with your previous tweets.
  - **Keyword**: This allows you to search based on words your target audience used in previous tweets.
  - **Movie and TV**: If people mentioned any tv or movies this is how you would interact with them.
  - **Interests**: Twitter offers over 350+ present interests to choose from.
  - **Look-Alikes**: Like Facebook, Twitter lets you target people who behave similarly to accounts that already follow you.

YouTube

Audience targeting: Find people based on their interests, who they are, their daily habits, what they're looking up, and their interactions with your business. This is split up based on google analytics.

- **Affinity**: Reach people based on their lifestyles, passions, and habits.

- **Life Events**: This narrows your audiences based on milestones like graduations or getting married.

- **In-Market**: This allows you to target people who are looking up products and businesses similar to yours.

- **Custom**: Craft this audience based on keyword research, URLs, and apps.

- **Remarketing**: This helps you reach people that have already had some sort of historical engagement with your videos.

- **Detailed Demographics:** This is more like the other platforms and helps you create target audiences based on shared traits like their hobbies, occupations, or ages.

- **Similar Audiences**: This is like the lookalike audiences from above and allows you to find people that are similar to consumers that already follow you.

Social Media Strategies & Content Marketing

Social media is a great way to stay in contact with your customers and attract new ones along the way! Post all about your sales and discounts to let your followers know you're doing something special this year. Make sure your brand is shining through in all your images and copy so people can see what you're about and how your deals are serving to enhance their customer experience with your eCommerce store. If you want to increase interaction or build your following, try creating a giveaway or contest run specifically through your social media to build interest and start to create some buzz around the idea of future posts. Read our in-depth blog that describes all about [how to create an effective content strategy to grow your brand](#).

Pricing and Promotion Techniques

Now that you've picked your audience and who you will target with your ads you can cater your pricing to meet their needs. Before you begin to decide on your promotional pricing strategy here are some basic pricing techniques:

- **Price Skimming**: To price skim, start your prices high and then lower them as you become more competitive in the market.

- **Marketing Penetration Pricing**: When your company is first starting out, set your prices low so you are more competitive than your competition.

- **Premium Pricing**: If you have a more wealthy target audience and are selling high-quality products you can start your prices high to signal quality and luxury appeal.

- **Economy Pricing**: This is when you set lower prices and target customers who are looking to make larger savings overall.

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While these are good long-term pricing strategies, you may want to implement short-term pricing and promotions for the holiday months. Here are some examples of different promotional strategies to implement to encourage quick conversions.

- **Refer-a-Friend**: Tap into your clientele's social networks and use social proof to your advantage! Give your customers some type of reward if they refer their friend to your products.

- **Buy One Get One Free**: This is a great way to entice your customers to try out multiple items from your store.

- **Free Shipping**: It's always difficult to get to the checkout and see that shipping costs are going to add $10 or more to your purchase. By swallowing this cost you may raise your overall conversion rate.

- **Free Item with Purchase of $X or More**: Some customers may be buying holidays gifts in bulk. This is a great way to encourage customers to buy more of your products.

- **Loss Leader**: A loss leader is when you discount a product or service lower than its production cost. Some companies use this strategy to try and attract new customers or to sell more expensive products. It can also be a smart tactic if you're trying to penetrate a new target market.

Publicize Your Sales with PPC and Google Ads

Now that you have a well-thought-out marketing strategy in place it's important to promote and publicize it! PPC and Google Ads are a great way to increase the traffic to your site. Get that keyword strategy together and start bidding on the words that are most relevant to your business. It's amazing what a good PPC strategy can do to garner traffic and conversions. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Make sure the landing page you're linking to is relevant and optimized for conversions.
- Optimize your negative keywords so your ads aren't showing up on searches that don't align with your strategy.
- Research and understand the basics of keyword matches:
  - **Broad**: match searches with any words or synonyms of your target words
  - **Broad Match Modified**: match only with searches that include all of your keywords within the query
  - **Phrase Match**: match only when searches use the exact phrase you are targeting plus searches that include the meaning of your keyword
  - **Exact Match**: match search that have an exact keyword match and order (searches must contain all keywords in the exact order you list them plus close spelling errors)
- Adjust your bids for geotargeting. If your products are weather dependent or popular in certain areas you can adjust geotargeting spending so your ads show up to people in the most appropriate locations.
- Run mobile-centric campaigns. We recommend checking your campaign conversions by device so you can see which ones to shift to target certain users' search preferences.
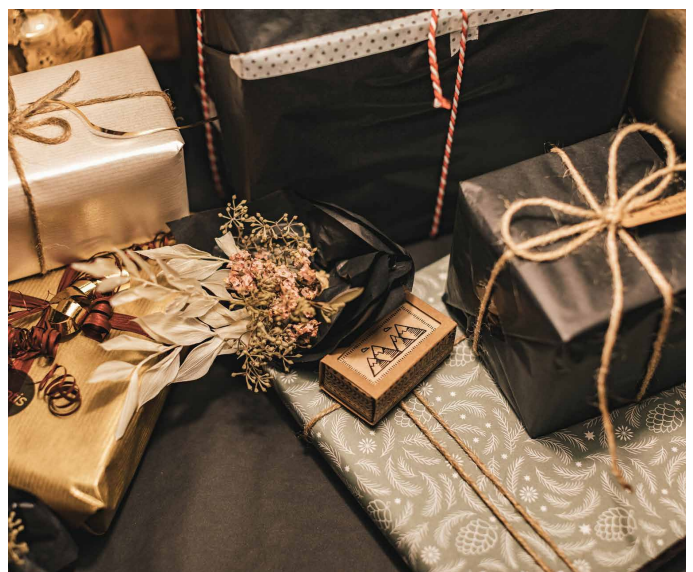
Be Strategic About Your Email Marketing Tactics

It's important to tap into your established leads list with a well-thought-out email drip campaign. You want to make sure you're touching your pool of potential holiday shoppers more than once to remind them about your upcoming sale and create some urgency. This is a great opportunity to use some advanced email tactics like last-chance opportunities and special offers catered to certain mailing lists. Here are a few rules of thumb to follow:

- Split your email lists into segments and groups so you can specialize the copy, graphics, and promotions displayed.

- Use perfect timing setting options when sending your emails so it lands in your customers' inbox at the time they are most likely to open it.

- Use A/B testing on your sales emails to see which strategies worked the best so you can utilize them for your next sale.

- Optimize your emails for mobile. Around 47% of emails are opened on people's phones according to email marketing firm Litmus. Here are some quick

optimizations you can use:
  - Use one-column templates.
  - Increase your font size.
  - Make your call to action easy to identify, in the middle of the page, and easy to tap.

- Measure your performance as you go by looking at open rates, click rates, and eCommerce data through UTM tracking and your email marketing providers' tools.

- Implement a last chance email list. Look at your email results a few days before the end of the sale and send a last chance email offer to some of the mailing lists with the highest open rates.

Some email marketing plans have begun to change since Covid-19. Read our blog to see how it may impact your strategies this year!

## Create Holiday Content Converts By Adding Retargeting Pixels to Your Ads

Did you know that 96% percent of customers will leave a website without actually purchasing anything? Utilizing retargeting pixels in your ads is a great way to bring customers back to your website! But what is a retargeting pixel and how does it work?

By attaching a small piece of code to your site you can track potential customers that leave your eCommerce stores and display more advertisements on Facebook and Google to remind them of your sale! This is a very effective marketing strategy because it helps you turn some of your bounced traffic into conversions down the line.

Check out our blog that describes how to implement retargeting pixels into your marketing campaign!

Now Go Get That Cash!

Marketing is important to drive traffic and increase conversions during the holiday season. By following the steps above you'll be sure to improve your digital marketing strategy for Q4!

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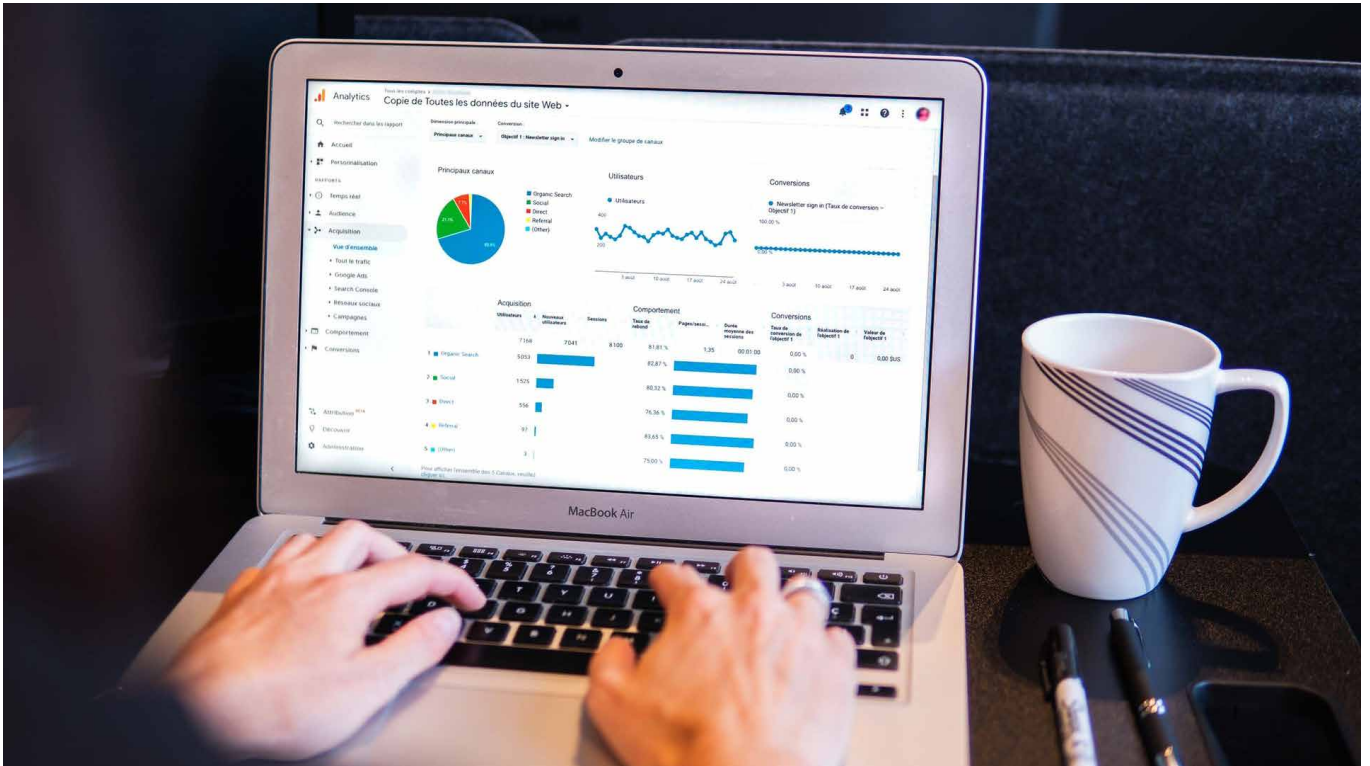
Four Holiday Optimizations Your eCommerce Site Needs for Q4

Getting ready for the holiday shopping season and looking to make some changes to your site? Well look no further, we have a list of great optimizations to help you thrive during Q4. Read more to learn about how we recommend you tweak your online store for success!

Improve Your Online Store's Loading Speed

Having a fast eCommerce site is key for conversions in 2021. These days 47% of customers expect a website to load in two seconds or less. Here are a few steps we recommend you take to speed up yours:

Choose the Right Hosting Company and Hosting Plan

Choosing the right host for your site is an essential part of speeding up your website. Our turbo plans at A2 Hosting are 20x faster with 99.9% uptime! Once you've found the right host make sure you're on the right sized plan for your needs. Don't run your

large eCommerce site with heavy traffic on a shared server because it may not be able to handle the amount of resources you'll need, especially on heavy traffic days like Black Friday. We recommend a VPS or Dedicated plan if possible.

Uninstall Useless Plugins

We all have them, those plugins that we downloaded months ago and never once used. Well, now it's time to finally get rid of the dead weight and get that site speeding again. If you're not using it, get rid of it and save some room for other necessary parts of your website.

Remove or Compress Large Photos and Videos

I know, it's hard not to love those big, beautiful photos, especially when selling such great products!. The trade-off is that loading those images can drastically slow down your site. We recommend either getting rid of them or compressing them so they take less time to load. This way you can save some resources for all the potential customers you'll have looking at them. Here's a checklist on how to get your images ready for the web.

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Optimize Your Checkout Process

It's important to spruce up your checkout process. Here are few tips we recommend to make it as effective as possible:

- Add some urgency by including a count-down clock at the top that specifies how soon your sale is ending.

- Avoid adding in surprise costs at the end like large shipping fees. Extra costs are an issue for 60% of cart abandoners according to Optinmonster.

- Include multiple payment options. BigCommerce found that this can triple the conversion rate of your store.

- Highlight your security with a trust seal. You can purchase this with a paid SSL Certificate with A2 Hosting!

- Ask for your customers' payment information last. You want to give them some time to make sure they trust your site and have all the details of their purchase in order before they start giving you their private payment information.

- Ideally use a single-page checkout process. You want it to be relatively straightforward with as few steps as possible. The worst thing is to have so many extraneous steps that you lose a potential conversion midway through the process.

- If you're currently running a single-page checkout, declutter your form, and only have your customers fill out the most necessary information.

- If you're running a multi-page checkout try adding a progress indicator at the top of it! That way your customers can count down their progress rather than guessing how long it's going to take to actually be able to buy from your store.

At the end of the day, you're always going to lose some of your customers during the payment process no matter how well your cart is optimized. To try and convert this lost traffic follow up with those potential customers by sending abandonment emails with special discounts. This will serve as a great reminder of your store while also giving them some incentive to purchase from it.

Give Some Love to Your Sales Team/Improve Instructional Content

While your customers are perusing your site they are bound to have some questions, so it's important to make sure your sales team has all the answers. Make sure they're experts on your business and know your products from top to bottom. Now's the time to implement some in-depth training so by the time November and December come around they're ready to dominate.

To help your team out you can also go through and make sure your website content is working with them rather than against them. If you have good information all over your store this will help your customers find their answers before they resort to your online chat boxes. Here are some elements to make sure you include or edit for clarity:

- Great product description
- FAQ sections
- Contact us page
- Ways for customers to reach your team:
  - live chat, phone number, email, ticket system etc.
- Social platform links for customers to check out or reach you there

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Capitalize on Heavy Traffic and Grow Your Email List with Lead Gen Tactics

Lead gen, lead gen, lead gen. It's always important to keep building your mailing list with potential customers. With all the traffic you're bringing in from the holidays, now is a perfect time to implement some new tactics! Here are some ideas:

- Add a place on the homepage where they can enter their email to gain access to special mailing lists (like a newsletter)

- Implement pop-ups with places for them to submit their emails in return for different deals or discounts

- Create an interactive quiz or tool that requires them to enter their email to get the answers

- Create special contests where you can only enter by giving you their information

- Provide gated offers or informative content that require an email to access

- Offer free trials so you can collect more than just their emails
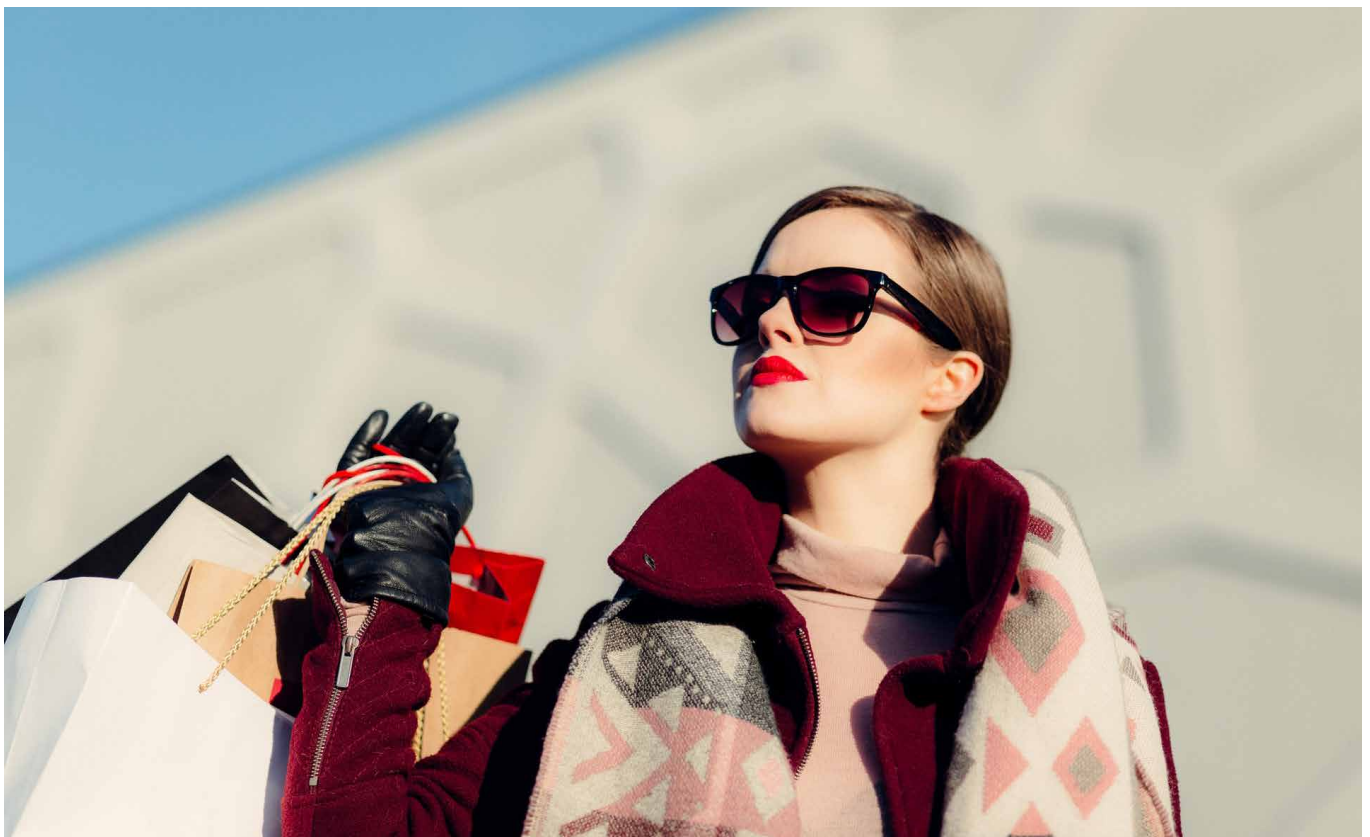
Optimizing Your Way to the Holidays

Now that your marketing plan is set, you're technically up to date, and your eCommerce store is optimized you're ready to sail into Q4 and capture all those holiday conversions! If you're looking for more information on how to get ready for the holidays keep checking our blog for more guides and expert advice on preparing your eCommerce site! We'll be running a guest blogging series where experts from our team inform you on topics from the best way to make sure your site is secure to common types of fraud to look out for as your conversions keep rolling in. If you're looking for hosting with speed, support, and security to make sure your eCommerce site is up and ready to handle all that holiday traffic, make sure you check out our discounted turbo plans!

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