

How to prepare for Black Friday 2021: Be realistic but proactive

Nobody knew what to expect ahead of Black Friday 2020, but 12 months on, it's clear local companies have woken up to the power of online sales. However, as Black Friday 2021 approaches, digital marketing specialists, Incubeta, warns that some brands are suffering unrealistic expectations around what can be achieved. The company also shares six recommendations on how businesses can best prepare for the 2021 event.



Source: [Pexels](#)

While many brands are celebrating South African consumers' rush to embrace e-commerce, the advancement is not without its repercussions, including some very high expectations. Ansa Leighton, head of client solutions USA at Incubeta says some local brands are expecting their performance to double (or more) in 2021.

"Expectations this year are through the roof. We are seeing some brands doubling their media budgets with the expectation that their returns will be even greater," Leighton shares.

This year's trend is a continuation of what the market saw in 2020 and Leighton says the heavy reliance on e-commerce had a knock-on effect when it came to buying media online, with a steep spike in cost per click ahead of the retail weekend.

"What is alarming is that everyone is placing so much store in what Black Friday can deliver. Admittedly the event has now stretched to include a whole month, but some e-commerce players have forecast 60% of their revenue will be generated just over this period," shares Chelsea Owens, business unit director at Incubeta.

Fatigue gripping e-commerce companies

While some e-commerce players have bet the ranch on Black Friday trade, for many online-only players the holiday may just be more of the same, with a dash of extra pressure.

“Spare a thought for our busier local e-commerce companies, which have been working flat out for the last two years, with some of them seeing every day as another Black Friday. Unfortunately, this has sometimes meant forgoing the opportunity to make the technical improvements that they would normally have done in preparation for the additional trade.

“In many cases the only way for them to move the needle is through their pricing as they have already squeezed every other competitive advantage they possibly can,” Owens explains.



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However, while some may be too busy to look up, for those e-commerce companies hoping to still reap some rewards this year, Leighton and Owens lay out six recommendations:

1. Discount what your customers actually want

First and foremost, the Incubeta team says retailers should avoid using pre-lockdown data as the basis for what they promote in 2021. Rather, they should be using the online data and sales trends from just the last few months. They should also remove seasonal products (unless relevant to this time of year) and then discount the top sellers. Pushing products that aren't currently in demand is a lesson in futility and a waste of money.

2. Don't neglect your feeds

Both advise that once retailers have their products chosen, it's important to then check and gear up their feeds. They warn that it's imperative to ensure brands have the correct product descriptions and the right pricing ready for the day of the sale.

3. The cookie is not dead. Yet

According to Owens and Leighton, brands should make the best of this, the last Black Friday where they can use the power of the third-party cookie. As probably the most important effort ahead of the event, brands must let customers know they exist and what they have to offer and milking all the benefits of third-party data can help them do this.

4. Consumers are savvy, don't try to trick them

One big mistake made by local brands is trying to outsmart the consumer when it comes to what constitutes a sale price. The Incubeta team warns that it is brand suicide for companies to increase their prices a few weeks or months ahead of the sale and then promote 'sale prices' which are the normal retail price.

5. Start speaking to partners now

Leighton and Owens say that deciding which stock to discount a day ahead of the sale is not uncommon. Their advice is to make the decision on what stock to discount early and then begin preparing suppliers well in advance. This will ensure that merchants have stock to deliver and that their logistics are in place. Marketplaces, meanwhile, need to share trends with their vendors and make sure the collective is adequately prepared in good time.



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6. Get your agencies on board well ahead of time

Speaking from experience, Leighton and Owens point out that the best way to avoid disappointment is to engage with agencies early.

“Once all the groundwork has been done, get in touch with your digital agency and share your plans. The lists of discounted products need to be locked and loaded at least a month before the sale begins. This will allow campaigns to be optimised and teaser communication to be released,” Leighton advises.

The final piece of advice is based on preparing for an uncertain future and the Incubeta team says this Black Friday should be seen as an opportunity for far more than just chasing sales.

“Black Friday presents the best opportunity for brands to engage with customers they otherwise may never have accessed. Because we are in such a price-sensitive economy, brands can connect with customers desperate for a great deal. But by providing them with a fabulous first experience they can convert them into a loyal customer and secure recurring revenue. But for this to happen, work must begin right now, ” Owens advises.

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