

# Beat the Black Friday business blues with this 4 point checklist

Retail businesses are facing an all-out race to meet the demands of the upcoming Black Friday weekend (Friday, 24 November - Monday, 27 November) and festive season surge.



Joshua Shimkin, head of SME growth and marketing at Peach Payments. Image supplied

However, Joshua Shimkin, head of SME Growth and Marketing at online payment gateway Peach Payments, says that the run up to Black Friday also offers businesses a chance to test their strengths.

“It is an opportunity to look into the performance of your website, customer service and logistics to identify possible issues in the run-up to the festive season, and even in readiness for the next trading year,” he explains.



## How can SA's online retailers ensure this Black Friday is their biggest yet?

Joel Bronkowski 15 Nov 2023



Focussing on the things that matter requires careful attention in the face of obstacles like loadshedding. Luckily, according to the [2023 South African Customer Experience report](#), consumers are forgiving of power-related service lapses. The report also indicates that shipping fees and available delivery time slots are becoming less of a barrier to online sales, as last-mile deliveries have improved.

So, what should businesses focus on instead?

Shimkin believes that paying attention to a few essential measures can ensure a positive overall experience. He offers the following checklist as a handy cheat sheet to avoid common peak-period pitfalls:

### **1. Website performance and security**

Shimkin warns that sales can be lost due to 'passive' factors such as a slow website or images that do not load.

"Ensure that your overall website performance is optimised across browsers and devices. Also check whether your website host's servers are performing optimally, and consider additional bandwidth for increased traffic demands," he says.

He cautions that because website security should be top of mind, the cheapest hosting solution is not always the best choice.

"Professional website penetration testing can be a costly exercise, but at the very least, address website security concerns with your service provider," Shimkin advises.

If you are managing your own website, make sure that you have installed updates to your content management system and update passwords. Also, double check that information on your website is accurate and up to date. This should include prices, promotions or discounts your business offers during upcoming sales.

"Make sure your payment gateway uses 3D Secure, a very secure protocol to process payments. And check with them if they have staff available to help you determine where you may have gaps," Shimkin says.

### **2. Marketing**

Shimkin says business owners often do a lot of marketing in the lead-up to Black Friday, but are super busy on the day itself and forget to continue marketing.

"Your focus on marketing activities may take a backseat on Black Friday itself - but that's exactly when consumers are looking for deals. So check that your Google Ads budget, for example, is sufficient to carry you through the weekend," suggests Shimkin. "Make sure your existing customer base is aware of your specials by sending them communication about exclusive deals. Repeat customers shouldn't be ignored at this important time."

These admin functions can be easily delegated to allow you to pay attention to problem solving and team management, he suggests.

### **3. Emergency contacts**

Things can and do go wrong on busy shopping days - from websites failing to stock issues to workplace injuries. How you deal with these can have a material impact on the success of your Black Friday.

Shimkin suggests business owners keep a curated emergency contact list at hand, preferably posted where everyone can access it. In addition to the more traditional police, security company, ambulance and fire department numbers, Shimkin says to expand the list with contacts you wouldn't normally have on an Emergency List.

"Include key people - and their direct contact details - at your bank, point-of-sale equipment provider, Internet service provider, web hosting provider, courier company and your suppliers, Shimkin says.

Don't forget to check with suppliers beforehand if they have extra stock on hand of popular items. This way, you may be able to continue taking orders once you've run out of stock, with only minor shipping delays.

"Also, make sure your payment gateway has dynamic failover capabilities so you won't have payment processing issues in your checkout," Shimkin advises.

#### **4. Customer service**

E-commerce success depends on effective distribution and delivery logistics, but that's not the only customer service issue to address. Make sure that you have enough staff on duty over the Black Friday weekend to answer questions and fulfil orders, Shimkin suggests.

"We know that on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, South Africans tend to shop first thing in the morning, over lunchtime and just after supper," Shimkin says. "Allocate staff to answer queries and process orders during those times. The rest of the day can then be used to pick, package and dispatch orders."

Also plan for incidentals, such as adequate packaging materials and waybills, to reduce delays.

"The customer journey starts with a good browsing experience, progresses through a quick, secure checkout with adequate payment choices, and culminates in timely delivery. Check every part of that journey before Black Friday for the best results," Shimkin says.

As a final reminder, he says that the customer's journey does not end after the sale is completed. Support should be ongoing: before, during and after the purchase. This is key to customer retention, and ultimately loyalty.

"The change of pace Black Friday brings provides an ideal opportunity to identify what works in your business and what doesn't. Any improvements that can be implemented now will ensure more streamlined and efficient processes during the rest of the festive shopping season," Shimkin concludes.

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