



BEST PRACTICE BRIEF

**Social Shopping: Five Tactics for
this Holiday Season—and Beyond**

By Clay McDaniel



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Last holiday season, retailers dabbled in social media marketing. Maybe they launched a few Twitter promotions, links to deals on their Facebook pages or promoted the sharing of e-mail coupons. But this year, shoppers are more reliant than ever on word-of-mouth recommendations; 71 percent of consumers have said that reviews from family members or friends influence their decisions about whether to shop with a specific company or brand or to buy a particular product, according to a 2010 Harris Interactive study. With deep connections to their social networks, consumers now expect a full range of social-shopping services when making online purchases.

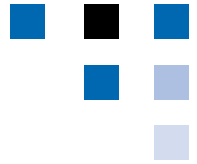
As a retailer, which social shopping tactics can you deploy right now to boost sales this holiday season? There are several sophisticated social strategies retailers can use to dramatically influence sales—and they aren't too costly or complicated to roll out. Here are five tips to get you started.

LAUNCH A FACEBOOK OR TWITTER CONTEST

Your business may already have Facebook and Twitter accounts, but are you using them to increase sales? One way to influence purchases on social networks is to launch a holiday contest and then promote it via Twitter, Facebook, e-mail and other marketing channels. Alternatively, you can use social media channels as the exclusive vehicle for the contest, requiring users to take social action (such as re-tweet a tweet, comment on a post or submit information to an application) to be eligible for the prize. The contest should offer participants an enticing prize—a large gift certificate, for example—and be easy to share. Embed “share this” buttons into the contest page and on Facebook, and require them to “like” or “follow” your brand to participate. This will have the added benefit of increasing your number of fans and followers.

GET ON CONSUMERS' WISH LISTS

Websites such as Wishpot allow users to create “wish lists” of products they'd love to get as gifts. These lists can be shared on social networks (most notably, Twitter and Facebook) so that family and friends can access them and select gifts during the holiday season. Every retailer should consider adding themselves to the Wishpot search, as well as take advantage of Wishpot's promotional features and analytics. Another wish list site is Kaboodle. Registered Kaboodle users can add items from various websites to their lists, then share them on social sites and via e-mail. Kaboodle also offers many social features, including the ability to create polls to receive feedback from the community on potential purchases, view updates on friends' Kaboodle activities, and write blog posts. Other wish list sites are TheThingsIWant.com and ThisNext.com. Amazon has opened up their own wish list technology to allow customers to add goods and items from almost any other site to build up a “Universal Wish List” in their Amazon accounts. Online retailers would do well to make it as easy as possible for site visitors to add their items to these wish lists, Amazon's Universal Wish List included.



JUMP ON THE GROUP-SHOPPING BANDWAGON

Group shopping programs such as Groupon and Living Social have exploded in popularity in the last year. Consumers now regularly turn to these e-mail-based “daily deals” to get discounts on their favorite products and services. By sharing the deals with friends, users can often get even steeper discounts. During the holidays, every retailer should try a few Groupon-type deals. Even large brands have had incredible success with these sites; Gap recently sold 441,000 coupons on Groupon in one day.

GO MOBILE

Check-in applications such as Foursquare, Gowalla and Whrrl offer users discounts and rewards for being frequent customers at their favorite stores, shops, businesses and restaurants. Marketers with a retail presence can use these check-in applications during the holiday season to boost in-store foot traffic and to offer special deals and offers. For example, last year at Fashion Week, Marc Jacobs used Foursquare to drive consumers into retail stores by giving away tickets to a fashion show. Shopkick is the newest entry in the check-in space, using signal-sound technology to automatically check-in consumers when they walk by or enter a store and offer them applicable rewards, coupons and discounts. Best Buy has already partnered with Shopkick to offer deals to consumers in the form of discounts and rewards (“kickbucks”).

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS

All these new social shopping technologies are great, but don't forget to do the basic social legwork for all your holiday promotions. For every promotion you offer during the holiday season—discounts, contests, free shipping, etc.—make sure to promote these deals via every possible social channel. Tweet about deals, post them to Facebook, promote them in-store, add them to your website, post them to coupon sites, send them via e-mail—and entice users to send these e-mails to friends—and blog about the promotions on your own blog and on high-traffic blogs related to your products, services or sector. For example, if you sell women's apparel, make sure to blog about your promotions on fashion blogs, mommy blogs and other interactive forums frequented by your core customers.

You don't have to guess or wonder whether these social promotions have worked to drive sales; there are myriad free and paid tools to monitor and track the reach, sharing and impact of social shopping promotions. The built-in measurement tools integrated with services like Groupon, Foursquare and other paid social promotions services provide near-real-time data on the effectiveness of your sponsored promotion. You can track Twitter promotions using third-party tools like Seismic and Tweetdeck, and if you use a link-shortener service like Bit.ly for your promotion links, you can gather click, re-tweet and pass-along stats as well. Of course, you should also use Google Alerts every day to monitor mentions, posts and tweets about your promotions. If you want to go above and beyond this level of tracking, you can pay for a social media monitoring tools.



Whichever social shopping tactics you decide to deploy this holiday, remember that your customers now expect you to deliver social-driven deals. If you don't offer social shopping this holiday, your customers will simply turn to your competitors who do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Clay McDaniel is founder and principal of Seattle-based social media marketing agency *Spring Creek Group*. He can be reached at clay@springcreekgroup.com.