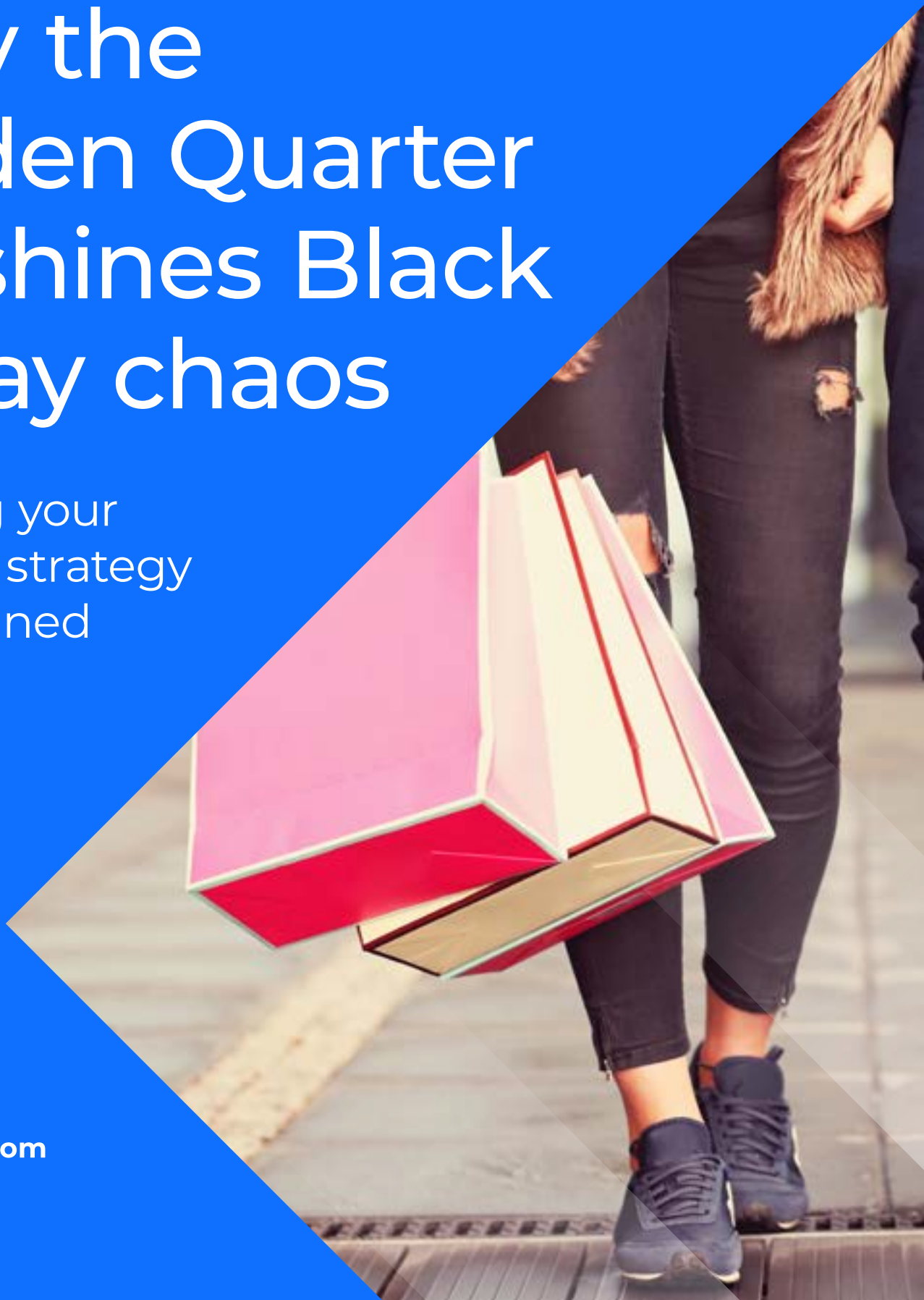


iDHL

Why the Golden Quarter outshines Black Friday chaos

Focusing your seasonal strategy for sustained success

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The changing face of Black Friday.

In this white paper, we're investigating the pivotal sales period for most brands, which centres on Black Friday and Cyber Monday (BFCM).

Where this weekend perhaps once stood as a one-off chance for businesses to cash in, it's now at the heart of a longer period of sales activity that provides several touchpoints to engage customers and create loyal brand advocates.

The lines between Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Q4 generally have blurred considerably in the past half-decade.

Black Friday's online sales eclipsed Cyber Monday's for the first time in 2019 and the following year's event came in the midst of COVID-19 enforcing monumental societal change.

The world's biggest retailer, Walmart, responded by making its Black Friday 'event' a multi-day operation – prioritising online sales over those traditional midnight doorbusters.

Cyber Monday itself steadily crept into Black Friday territory and we are now at a point where the acronym BFCM more accurately represents an ongoing period of breakneck-speed retail activity.

In the UK, Black Friday essentially represents the start of Christmas shopping. [It's the most common reason for picking up a deal among shoppers.](#) Given we now live in an era of savvy shopping – destination dupes in the travel industry are a prime example – it's perhaps no surprise that consumers have turned this period into a game of cat and mouse as they seek out the very best deals.

The Golden Quarter

Black Friday and Cyber Monday becoming a largely singular event is not the only factor that makes Q4 the Golden Quarter.

Quarter 4

October

Amazon's second Prime Day of each year (branded as Big Deal Day) has opened up this period even more. This is typically the best time for shoppers to get a deal on Amazon products like the Kindle, Fire TV and Echo smart assistant.

November

Singles' Day (11/11) is starting to catch on in the UK, having already become the largest retail event on the planet, driven by Alibaba in China. Its proximity to the established BFCM weekend allows retailers to target specific segments of their consumer base throughout the season. Black Friday and Cyber Monday then land at the end of the month, with Western consumers ready and expectant of retailers and brands offering big-ticket discounts.

December

Super Saturday – the last chance to purchase before Christmas – may need some help from the calendar to take this traditional high-street dash online; indeed, there is a handy buffer for deliveries in 2024 as Christmas Day falls on a Wednesday. Falling outside of a designated sales event, this allows retailers with a good handle on their stock and expedited delivery options to cash in. Boxing Day in the UK retains a strong tradition as a shopping event but has definitively been eclipsed by November's bonanza – major retailers including M&S and John Lewis [didn't even open their stores](#) on Boxing Day in 2023.

Where did Black Friday come from?

Black Friday – the day after Thanksgiving in the United States – has seen heightened retail activity in the US for decades.

1960s

The name is thought to have originated from 1960s traffic cops in Philadelphia bemoaning congestion. It's also become renowned for putting retail finances 'into the black', owing to the huge sums spent by droves of discount hunters.

2005

The other side of BFCM, Cyber Monday, is a far more recent phenomenon. The National Retail Federation coined its now-familiar branding in 2005, as the dot-com boom gave online-savvy shoppers a second bite at snagging a deal.

2000s

It also gave smaller, perhaps online-only, retailers their opportunity for a seasonal shot in the arm after the headline-grabbing 'doorbusters' had raided the bricks-and-mortar premises of their chain-store rivals.

2010s

The two had largely blended into one Stateside by the early 2010s, just as the phenomenon had started to catch on around the rest of the world.

2013

Canadian stores had introduced their own Black Friday deals to prevent shoppers near The Great Lakes from seeking cross-border bargains, before Walmart (through its Asda brand) took the event across the pond in 2013 with somewhat chaotic initial results.

Now

Supermarket skirmishes have largely been consigned to history now. But what is left is a global shopping experience that signals the starting gun for the most critical revenue-making period for retailers and brands.

Consumer and economic influences on Black Friday.

Inflationary pressure and a generational cost-of-living crisis have again changed the consumer-retailer relationship in the UK over the last few years.

Rather than put shoppers off, [Mintel data](#) from 2023's Black Friday event suggested that over half of shoppers had actually "relied" on the discounts offered, with higher-income households joining lower-income ones in putting off purchases until certain thresholds were met.

Decrease in shoppers but increase in sales

2023 presented an intriguing paradox on Black Friday: while the number of shoppers and transactions decreased, there was a reported 7.3% uptick in total sales. This suggests a focus on high-value items and confirms a switch towards BFCM becoming a key date in the diary for budget-conscious families to make larger purchases.

Rob Garf, Salesforce Vice President and General Manager of Retail, highlighted this consumer behaviour in a November 2023 interview with Retail Dive:



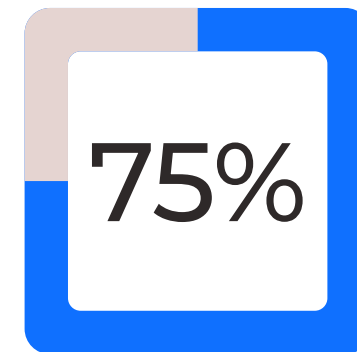
Consumers have been really diligent and patient with making sure they get the best value. And we see this each year, but [now] it's even more acute. We call it discount chicken, where it's always a game between the retailer and the consumer. And the consumer more often than not ends up winning the game of discount chicken. They just wait for the best and final deal.



If consumers are willing to delay purchases until they perceive maximum value, it falls on brands to communicate this effectively as well as offer unique selling points over rivals in a period where slashed price tags are now an expectation.

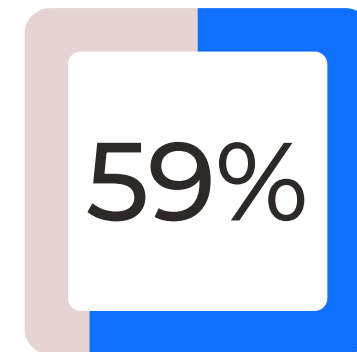
Generational shopping habits

Generational differences have a significant impact on how consumers approach shopping during BFCM. A 2023 GWI survey lays bare how brands and retailers must adapt to suit each demographic.



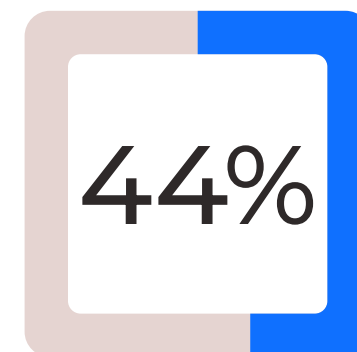
Millennials & Gen Z

Three-quarters of Gen Z (aged 16-26) and Millennials (aged 27-40) planned to shop during Black Friday. These groups are highly likely to shop online via mobile devices, valuing convenience, speed and digital engagement. Social media, peer reviews and influencer endorsements play a crucial role in their purchasing decisions.



Gen X

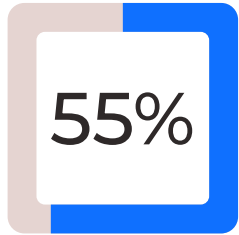
While 59% of Gen X (aged 41-59) planned to participate in Black Friday shopping, they display more mixed behaviours compared to younger groups. Many Gen X shoppers are comfortable with online shopping but may also appreciate a blend of online and traditional in-store experiences. Gen X is likely influenced by both digital content and practical considerations like discounts and product quality.



Baby Boomers

Only 44% of Baby Boomers (aged 60-64) intended to shop during Black Friday, the lowest among all generations. Many Baby Boomers still prefer traditional in-store shopping, valuing personalised customer service and the ability to view products first-hand before making purchases. This generation tends to be more loyal to established brands and is responsive to direct promotions and loyalty programmes.

Is mobile king of the Golden Quarter?



Data from Adobe shows that £24.4 billion was spent by UK shoppers between November 1st and December 31st in 2023. Quite remarkably, over 55% of that (£13.5bn) was spent via mobile devices.

The importance of mobile optimisation is nothing new for brands and retailers, but these figures throw into even starker contrast just how large an audience is out there on the smallest of screens.

Counter-intuitive to this, when it comes to Black Friday specifically, mobile did cede a little ground to in-person shopping in 2023.

Mintel's study included big-name online retailers like Amazon and eBay as well as high-street staples such as Sports Direct and The Body Shop, complemented further by brands that offer both entries to consumers, with Currys and Argos being leading examples.

It found that in-store purchases grew, with 44% of consumers purchasing a Black Friday deal in-store. Clothing, shoes and accessories were the **most sought-after products**, perhaps going some way to explaining a trend towards in-person purchases.

But connecting with consumers on an experiential level should not be overlooked at this time of year. With the crowds perhaps gathering online instead of at your storefront, this gives you more space to focus on maximising opportunities with store visitors.

Key considerations include:

Responsive design

Making sure your website is mobile-friendly with easy navigation and quick load times.

Mobile payments

Including secure and convenient payment methods like digital wallets (Apple Pay, Google Pay).

App development

Offering dedicated shopping apps to improve user experience and build customer loyalty.



What the Golden Quarter means for performance channels.

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to tackling the Golden Quarter from brand to brand. The same is true for your eCommerce channels.

Web store

Experiential retail

Whether combatting 'discount chicken' or gaining an edge on rivals, enhancing the online storefront can offer key advantages at this time of year.

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR)

These technologies let customers see products in real-world settings or explore them in 3D. For example, virtual try-on features for clothing or AR apps that show how furniture would look in a customer's home can help them make decisions.

Interactive content

Quizzes, virtual assistants and interactive product guides can personalise the shopping experience, making it more engaging and suited to individual preferences.

Multi-channel experiences

Integrating multiple platforms ensures consistent branding and a better customer experience across all touchpoints.

Online and offline integration

Services like buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS) bridge the gap between digital and physical retail. This not only offers convenience but also brings people in-store for better connection.

Unified customer data

By bringing together customer interactions from all channels, retailers can offer personalised experiences, whether the customer is shopping online, in-store, or through a mobile app.

Paid media

Focus on customer acquisition cost (CAC)

During the Golden Quarter, advertising costs can rise due to increased competition. Managing the customer acquisition cost is vital to maintaining profitability. By strategically managing CAC, brands can gain new customers while preserving profit margins.

Targeted advertising

Using data analytics to focus on high-value customer segments can make ads more efficient.

Budget allocation

Prioritising channels that have proven return on investment (ROI) helps optimise spending. For example, investing more in platforms where your target audience is most active.

High-converting channels and retargeting

Identifying channels that bring in the most conversions allows brands to focus efforts where they're most effective.

Channel analysis

Regularly reviewing performance metrics to see which platforms drive sales.

Retargeting campaigns

Engaging customers who have previously interacted with the brand but haven't made a purchase. Personalised ads reminding them of viewed products or offering incentives can encourage them to buy.

Dynamic pricing and real-time bidding

Adjusting pricing and advertising strategies in real time can provide a competitive advantage.

Dynamic pricing

Changing prices based on demand, stock levels and competitors' prices means opportunities can be capitalised on faster.

Real-time bidding (RTB)

This allows for instant buying of ad impressions, ensuring the most relevant audiences are targeted at the best times.

Organic

Early planning and content optimisation

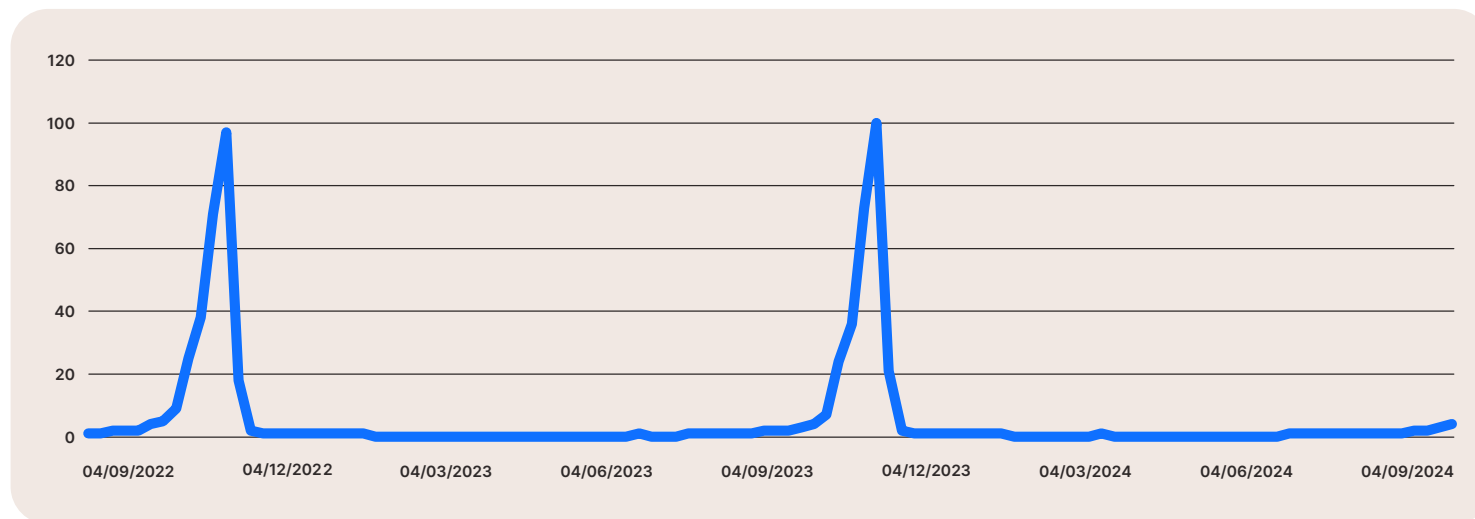
Organic marketing efforts, especially SEO, need time to produce results.

Advance preparation

Starting SEO campaigns months before the Golden Quarter can put your brand front and centre in SERPs at peak shopping times.

Seasonal keywords

Using holiday-specific keywords and creating relevant content improves visibility. Google Trends data shows how search interest in Black Friday ramps up steeply through October each year, although overall interest has waned since its peak in 2019. Repurposing annual content can help streamline an unusually short-term search strategy.



Relevance of Christmas trends to specific markets

Tailoring marketing strategies to regional and cultural differences increases relevance.

Market research

Understanding local customs, preferences and shopping behaviours allows for more effective messaging.

Localised content

Adapting language, images and promotions to suit specific audiences enhances engagement.

Social media

Engaging consumers during peak activity

Social media usage increases during the holiday season as consumers look for gift ideas and share experiences. Active engagement on social platforms builds community and strengthens the relationship with consumers.

Interactive campaigns

Contests, polls and live events encourage participation and can increase brand visibility.

Timely content

Sharing holiday-themed posts, behind-the-scenes looks, or customer spotlights keeps the brand in people's minds.

User-generated content (UGC) and influencer collaborations

Using content created by customers and influencers can expand reach and build trust. These strategies tap into existing networks and can greatly boost marketing efforts.

UGC campaigns

Encouraging customers to share their experiences using branded hashtags or taking part in challenges.

Influencer partnerships

Working with influencers who fit the brand to promote products authentically.

Social commerce

Integrating shopping features directly into social media platforms makes the purchasing process smoother.

Shoppable posts

Features on Instagram and Facebook allow users to shop without leaving the app.

Chatbot assistance

Providing instant support or product recommendations through messaging apps enhances the customer experience.

Email

Inboxes are busy places at this time of year, with brands and retailers fighting for attention in arguably the most direct marketing channel.

List building and segmentation

Collecting customer emails and dividing lists based on behaviour or preferences allows for targeted messaging.

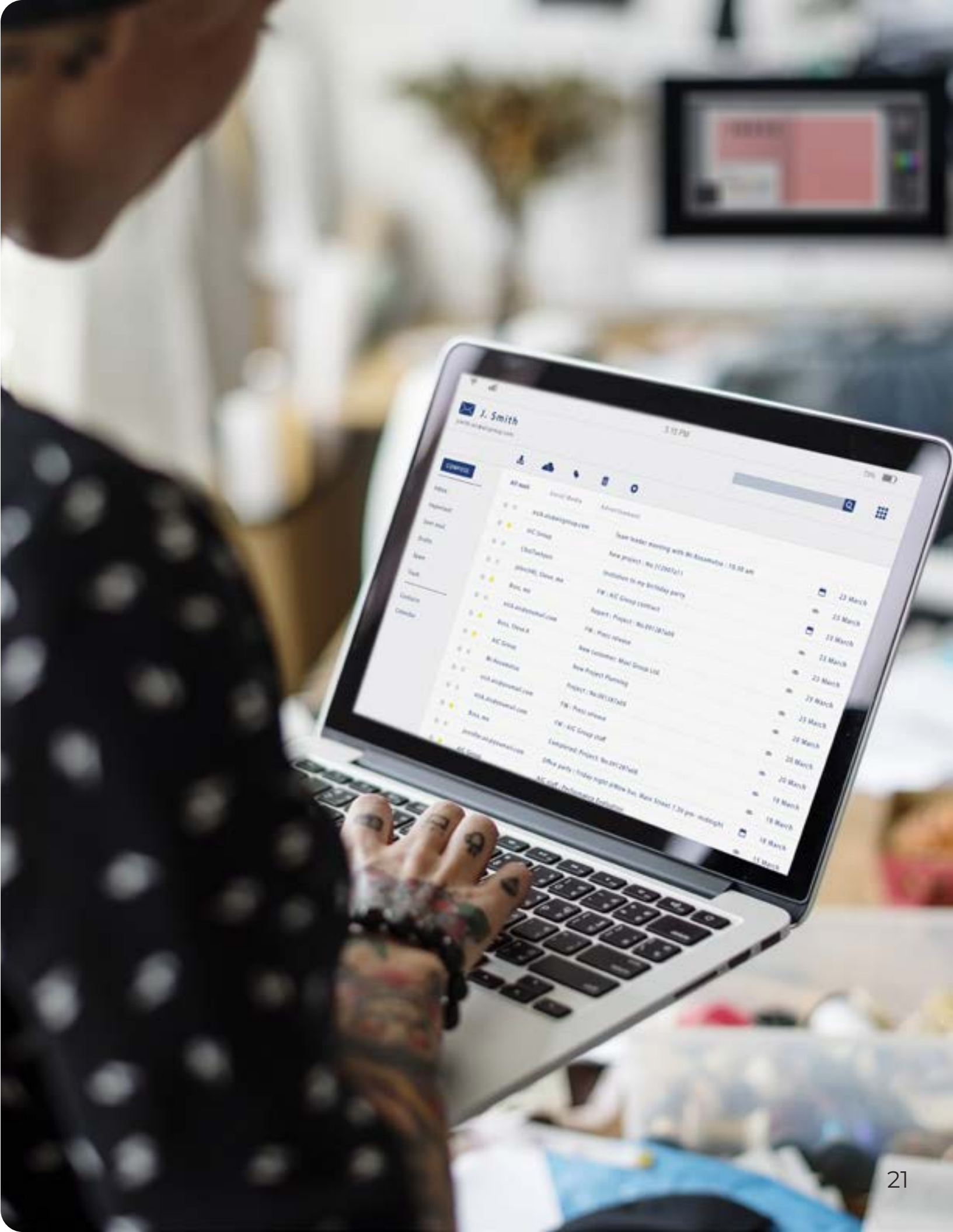
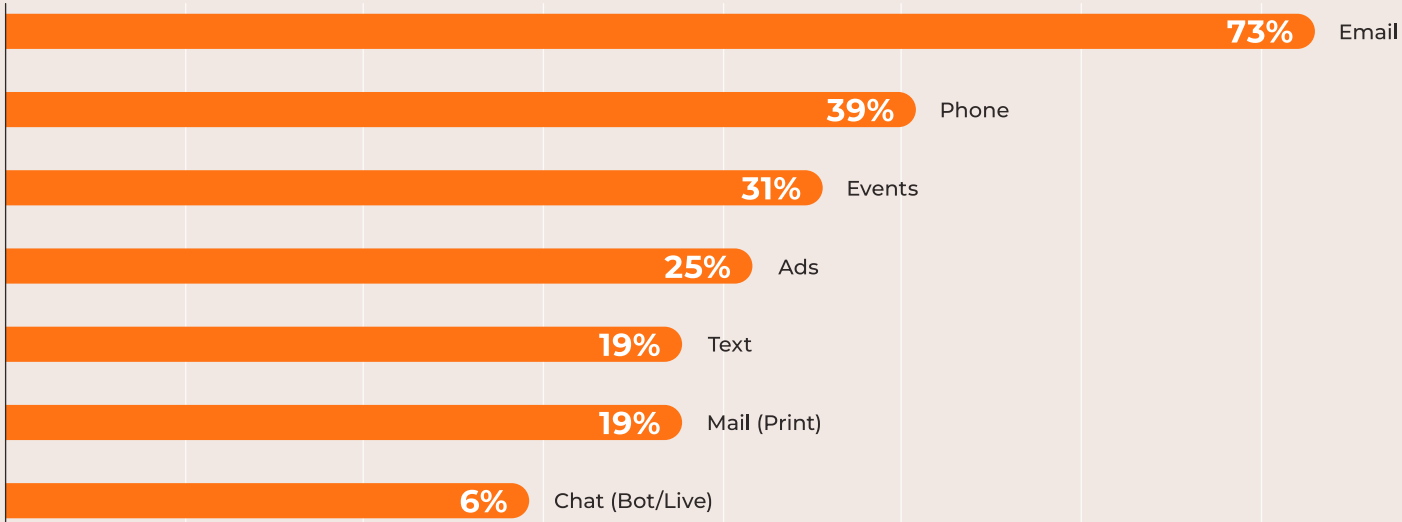
Personalisation

Customised emails with relevant product recommendations or exclusive offers can increase open rates and conversions.

Automation

Setting up automated campaigns for abandoned carts, post-purchase follow-ups and special occasions ensures consistent engagement.

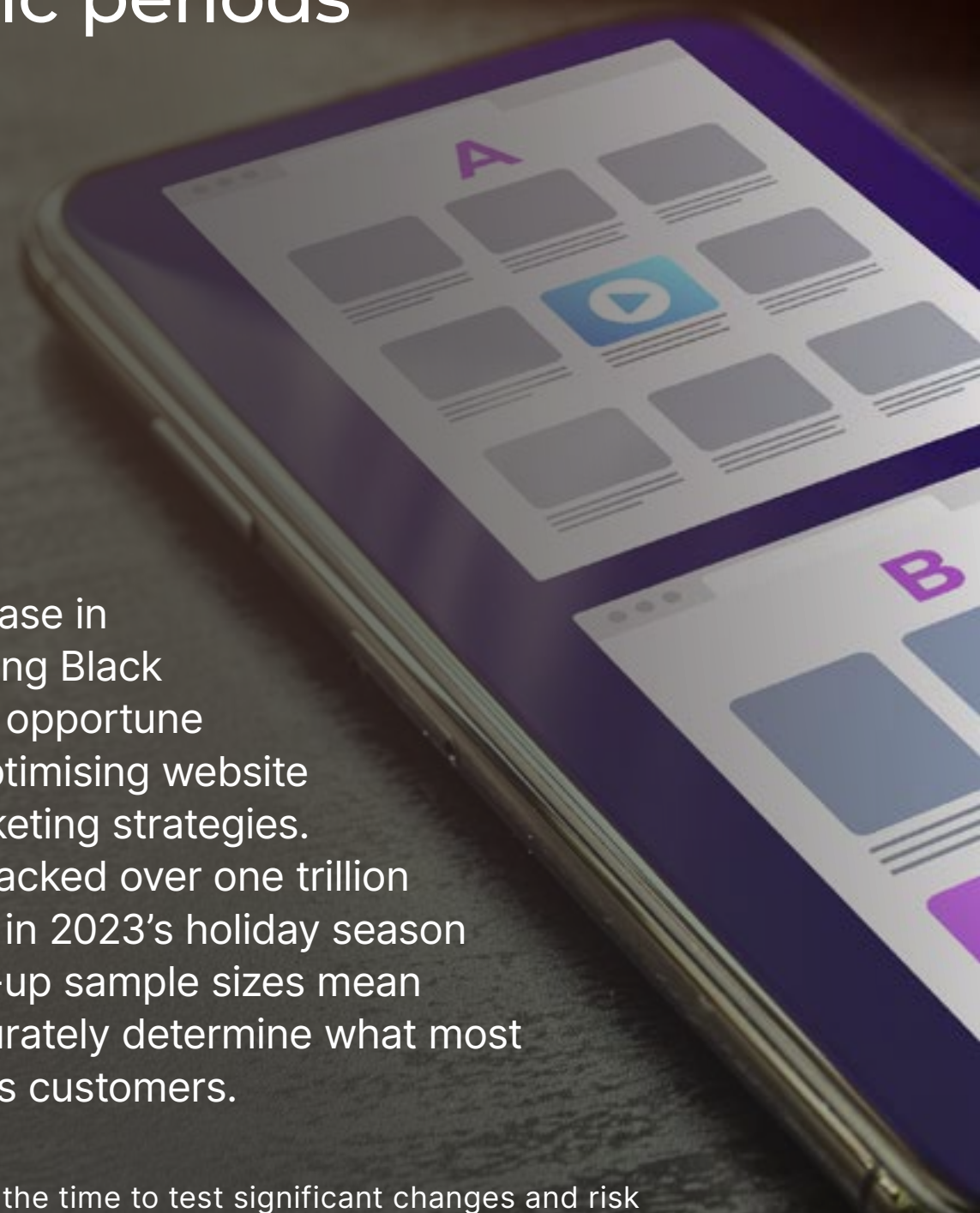
Most effective way to contact prospects for b2b



Leveraging data and analytics.

Gathering data, knowing how to analyse it and forming actionable insights can be game-changing for brands looking to rise above the noise around Black Friday.

A/B testing during peak traffic periods



The potential increase in website traffic during Black Friday presents an opportune environment for optimising website elements and marketing strategies. **Adobe Analytics** tracked over one trillion visits to retail sites in 2023's holiday season in the US. Souped-up sample sizes mean you can more accurately determine what most effectively engages customers.

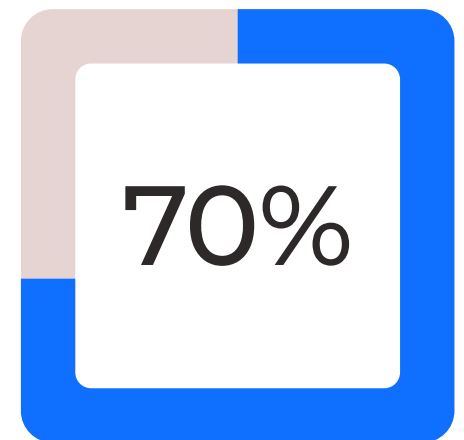
Black Friday may not be the time to test significant changes and risk revenue loss. But gathering data by experimenting with variations of headlines, images, call-to-action buttons and page layouts can identify which elements lead to higher conversion rates. For instance, testing urgency-driven headlines against value-focused ones can reveal which approach more effectively motivates purchases.

User analysis and customer journey mapping

Customer journey mapping allows brands to visualise each touchpoint a customer interacts with on their path to purchase. By pinpointing where users exit the site, brands can address specific issues causing friction.

The **Baymard Institute** reports an average cart abandonment rate of around 70% across eCommerce sites. Common reasons include complicated checkout processes, unexpected costs and a lack of trust signals.

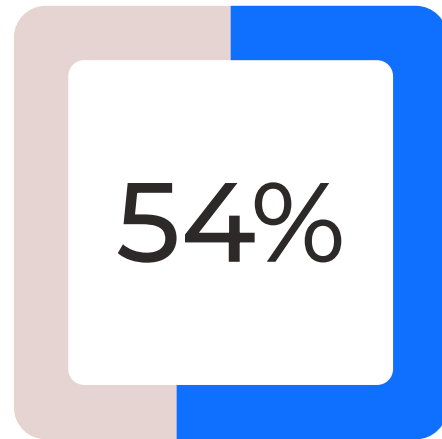
Simplified navigation, clarified messaging and streamlined checkout procedures ought to improve conversion rates. For example, implementing a guest checkout option or displaying security badges can enhance user trust and encourage the completion of purchases.



Personalised recommendations to enhance engagement

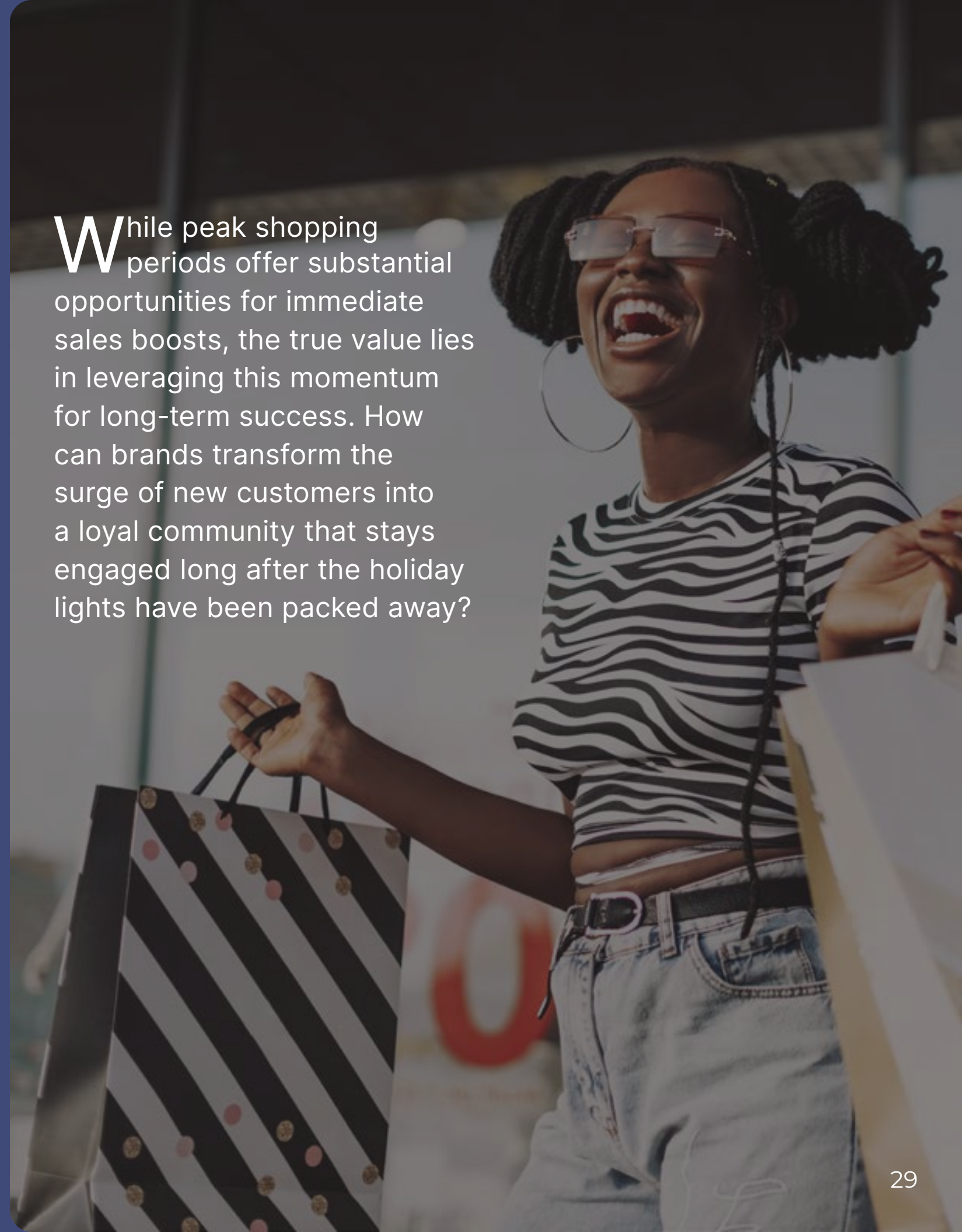
Personalisation strategies such as recommending products based on browsing history or past purchases can deepen customer engagement.

Research from the [British Retail Consortium](#) and [American Express](#) suggests that well-thought-out personalisation remains a key trend driving customer satisfaction and loyalty. Dynamic content – personalised banners, exclusive offers and curated product selections, for example – can help brands enhance engagement and encourage higher average order values. Balance is key here, however; 54% of those surveyed said they'd unsubscribe to emails if they felt their data was being exploited.



Using the Golden Quarter as a springboard for sustained success.

While peak shopping periods offer substantial opportunities for immediate sales boosts, the true value lies in leveraging this momentum for long-term success. How can brands transform the surge of new customers into a loyal community that stays engaged long after the holiday lights have been packed away?



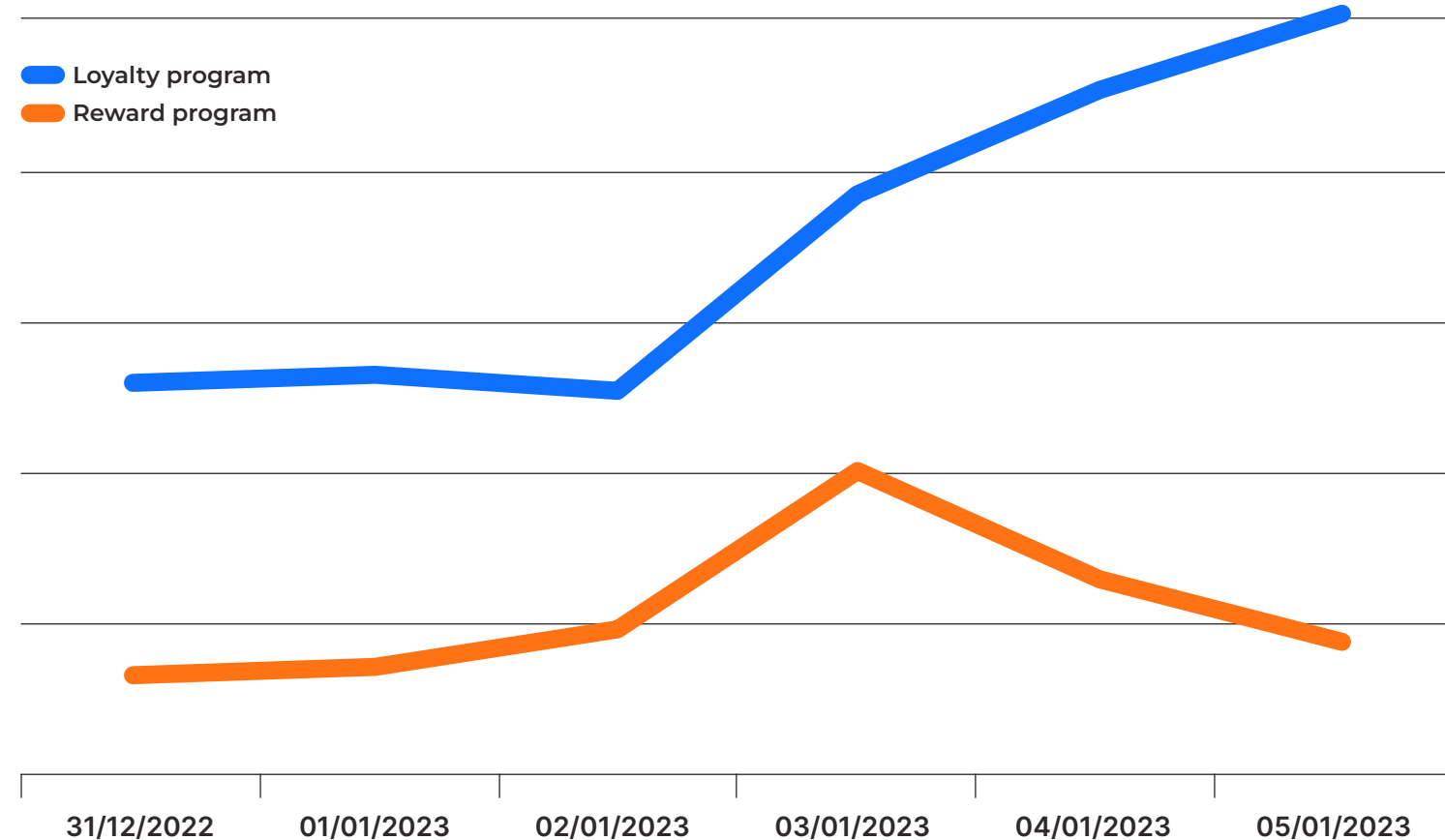
The importance of loyalty programmes

Google data suggests that searches for loyalty programmes spike early in the calendar – suggesting that it is a fertile time to grow your customer base.

Offering rewards like points for purchases, early access to new collections, or special discounts not only incentivises customers to return but also makes them feel valued and part of your brand’s journey.

Member-exclusive access to certain BFCM discounts can drum up further interest and deepen the connection with your audience.

Google search interest



Positive experiences drive future sales

Mintel’s Black Friday study shows a huge 84% of consumers agree that a positive experience with a retailer during Black Friday encourages them to shop there again.



Small gestures like excellent service, fast delivery and personalised packaging can leave a strong and memorable impression.

Encouraging customer feedback through reviews and actively responding to it demonstrates your commitment to customer care as well as building trust and loyalty.



Personalised follow-up communications

The interaction shouldn't end at checkout. Following up with personalised messages shows customers that you care about more than just the transaction.

Sending a sincere thank-you email to express your appreciation can go a long way in building lasting goodwill.

1

Providing product care tips or advice on how to make the most of their new purchase adds value to their experience.

2

Suggesting matching products based on their purchase history can encourage further engagement and sales.

3

Continue the conversation rather than closing it. This harbours positivity among your customers and provides an opportunity for cross-selling and upselling.

4

Recommending products that genuinely complement the original purchase encourages customers to explore additional offerings that meet their needs.

5

Highlighting premium versions or upgrades can provide enhanced solutions, potentially increasing customer satisfaction while boosting your revenue.

6

These strategies strengthen the relationship by demonstrating an understanding of their preferences and showing that you're attuned to their needs.

Cultivating brand advocacy

Your next customers are reading reviews left by your previous ones. **Around 9 in 10 UK shoppers seek out reviews of brands** before purchasing. And the barrier for progressing to purchasing is high – lower than four stars out of five and forget it.

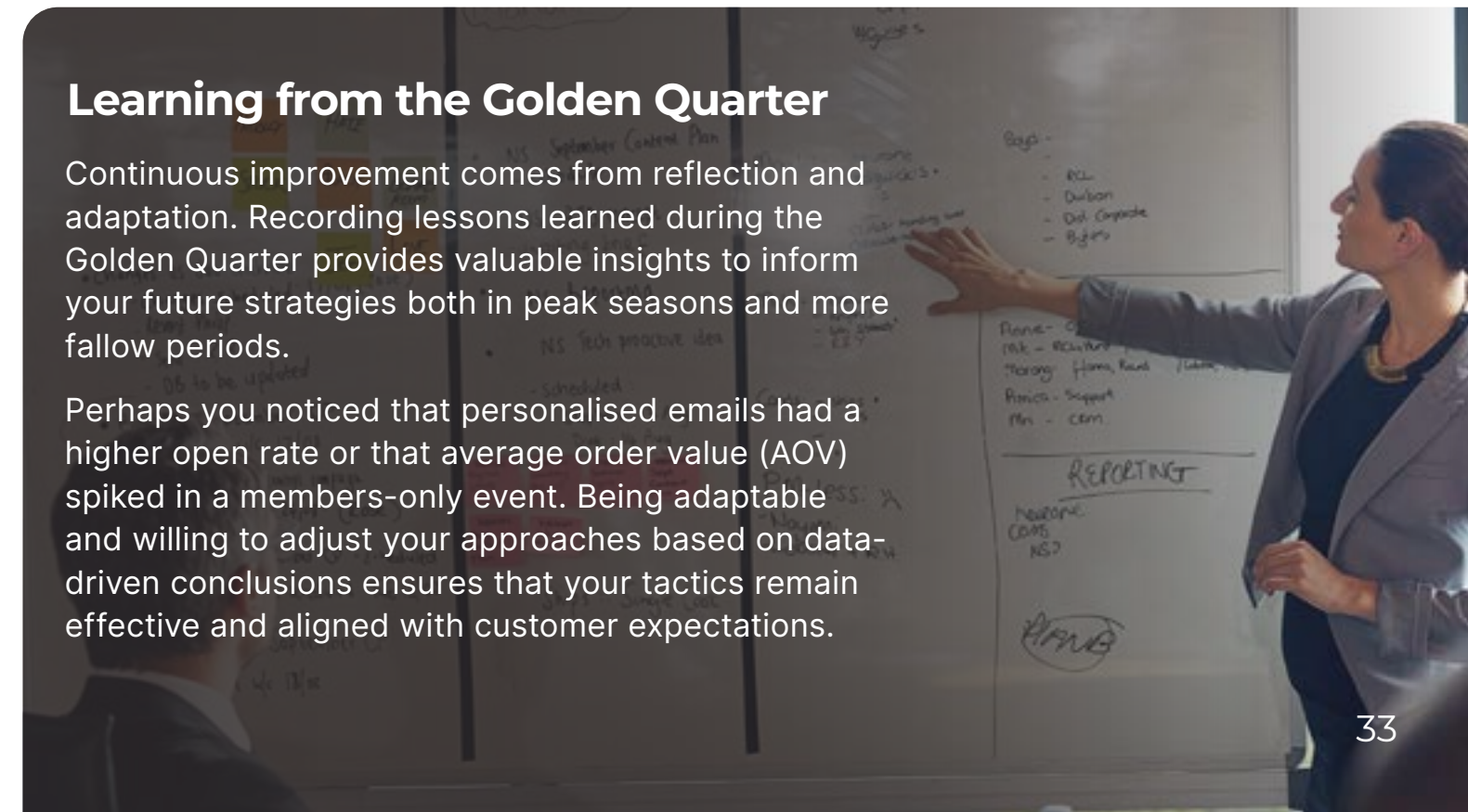


Your satisfied customers can become your most powerful promoters. Implementing referral programmes encourages them to share their positive experiences with friends and family, expanding your reach through trusted word of mouth. Showcasing customer testimonials and reviews serves as social proof, adding credibility and influencing potential customers.

Learning from the Golden Quarter

Continuous improvement comes from reflection and adaptation. Recording lessons learned during the Golden Quarter provides valuable insights to inform your future strategies both in peak seasons and more fallow periods.

Perhaps you noticed that personalised emails had a higher open rate or that average order value (AOV) spiked in a members-only event. Being adaptable and willing to adjust your approaches based on data-driven conclusions ensures that your tactics remain effective and aligned with customer expectations.



Strategies and best practices for Golden Quarter preparation.

Preparation is key to capitalising on the opportunities this peak season offers. These touchpoints should form the basis of your strategy as you look to make the most of the frenzy ahead.

Best Practice

Inventory management

Meeting a surge in interest with out-of-stock messaging and disappointment could be a critical BFCM error with wide-reaching repercussions.

Demand forecasting

If last year's data shows a spike in sales for certain items, plan accordingly. Current market trends and focus groups can also help you jump on the next hot ticket.

Solidify suppliers

If you're reliant on suppliers ahead of BFCM, now is the time to see where you stand with them. A diversified supplier base can offer you more flexibility at this crucial juncture.

Optimise inventory

Striking the right balance prevents both shortages and excess stock. Inventory management systems that alert you when stock is low can help you reorder efficiently.

Optimising website performance

Often the first point of contact with customers during the Golden Quarter, a seamless online experience can significantly impact your sales.

Load testing *

Anticipate higher traffic by simulating peak load scenarios. This helps ensure your website can handle the influx without crashing. A slow or unavailable site leads to lost sales and frustrated customers.

Speed improvements

Optimise images, streamline your code and utilise efficient servers to enhance page load times. [Google research](#) shows that even a one-second delay in page load can reduce conversions by up to 20%.

Mobile responsiveness

We've established how this increasingly online event has found a home on consumers' smartphones. A responsive design that adapts to different screen sizes and provides a consistent experience across all devices is a must.

* Undergoing significant site development can impact these metrics, hence we would advise against making major front-end changes ahead of key trading times, such as BFCM.

Elevating customer service readiness

Your customer service team will play a crucial role in creating your next horde of brand advocates this BFCM.

Strategic staffing

Plan your staffing schedules to handle increased enquiries during peak times. Consider extending support hours or adding temporary staff to ensure every customer receives timely assistance.

Comprehensive training

Equip your team with in-depth knowledge about your products, policies and common customer issues. This empowers them to resolve queries efficiently and confidently while positioning your brand as true experts in your field.

Automated support

Implement chatbots or automated responses for common questions. This provides instant support and frees up your team to handle more complex enquiries.



Strategic marketing and promotion planning

A well-coordinated marketing plan ensures your promotions reach the right audience at the right time.

Creating a promotional calendar

Outline key dates, special offers and campaign themes well in advance. This helps you stay organised and ensures all team members are on the same page.

Cross-channel alignment

Ensure consistent messaging across all platforms – be it email, social media, paid ads or in-store promotions. Consistency strengthens brand recognition and trust.

Smart budget allocation

Analyse past performance to invest resources where they'll be most effective. For instance, if social media ads have previously yielded high returns, allocate more budget there.





Are you ready to capitalise on the Golden Quarter?

The Golden Quarter offers brands and retailers of all shapes and sizes the opportunity to accelerate growth – something we're pretty passionate about at IDHL.

Our [web and eCommerce experts](#) can help you ensure that your online storefront is ready for the rush this year, while our full suite of [performance marketing services](#) is there to provide connected multichannel capability and our [intelligence division](#) helps you make sense of the data and turn it into a winning strategy.

Why not look at some of the brands we've helped to elevate and drive tangible outcomes for by browsing [our work](#)?

Ready to learn more? [Reach out](#) today and find out how your ambition becomes our mission.



We're ready to help you **stand out** in the digital world. Get in touch with one of our experts at **info@idhl.co.uk**

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