Best Shopify Tips of 2021

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When I compiled the list of the most popular tips from 2021, oddly most of them were from the holiday season. Some get into planning for the future while others go over last-minute opportunities for your Shopify store.

Much of the advice can be reused this holiday season or any other busy season. There's nothing stopping you from adapting holiday tactics to your summer marketing, just be mindful of any mentions of snow.

Enjoy the best of my Shopify Tips from 2021.

Eric Davis

Creating your pool of possibilities for next year

With the end of the year in sight, now's a good time to start to review how your year ended.

I've written about more metric-based approaches in previous articles, along with how to use my app to help analyze the data.

My tip today is to look at the year from another perspective. You're going to think about the highlights of the year based on how you feel about them, disconnected from the actual numbers.

When thinking about these, keep three points in mind.

- You're brainstorming so don't judge or weigh ideas, just note done all of them you have.
- These are separate questions, your answers to #2 don't have include items from #1 but they can.
- If something was outside your control, like the shipping carrier problems, ignore them and focus on what you can control or change.

Questions:

1. What positive things happened in your store?
2. What would you like to do more of next year?
3. What new things would you like to try?

Do this exercise by yourself and then again with employees or trusted advisors. This can help you brainstorm a pool of possibilities for next year that you can pick from.

Some ideas you'll be attracted to naturally as you plan and forecast your year. These are the ones you'll want to work on.

Eric Davis

Big orders are a distraction from long-term Shopify store success

One thing the RFM analysis will teach you is that the biggest spenders aren't always the best customers.

How recently and frequently a customer buys are more important.

Big spenders are nice when they buy but if they are only one-time customers you won't get much long-term benefit from them. They'll help you out this time but are then gone.

A big problem if you have to court those customers or bend-over backwards to get their order.

A better customer is one who comes back regularly on a consistent schedule. Every month, every other month, even every 12 months can make them better customers. Each time they buy you have the opportunity to reinforce their behavior, e.g. great customer service, fast shipping, stellar product, strong post-purchase follow-up.

That reinforcement creates buying habits that will persist in the long-term and spread through word-of-mouth.

Something that a one-time transaction, even a large one, will have a difficult time with.

In RFM-world, the first two numbers are for the Recently and Frequency. The higher the better. In Repeat Customer Insights those are shown visually in the Customer Grid and segmented for you into customer segments.

Market to and reinforce the behavior of the better customers in there and you'll see your store perform better.

Eric Davis

Show your gratitude to your best customers before the year ends

With the holiday season wrapping up, have you contacted your best customers with a non-marketing email yet?

Something that thanks them for being a customer, offers them something entertaining (e.g. joke or story), or something other than a direct call to buy from you.

Even though everyone is flooded with promotional messages right now, a gratitude email like that would cut through the noise. It won't lead directly to sales (but might). It would lead to a better relationship with the customer going into the new year though.

With your best customers, that could be worth more than a handful of additional sales.

If you're not sure who your best customers are, start with the ones who order frequently. In RFM that would be the Frequency 5 group and in Repeat Customer Insights I'd recommend the Loyal and VIP groups.

If you need inspiration about what to say, look at what some greeting cards use for copy. Both Thank You and joke cards should give you a lot of inspiration.

Eric Davis

Stay open for last minute B2B orders

With many businesses ending their fiscal year soon, now is a good time to contact any business customers you have with an offer. Both B2B and wholesale customers might be looking for ways to shift their orders for tax benefits.

A simple one-off email might be all you need to catch their attention.

Find out if last year's holiday customers came back and bought again with the Repeat Customer Insights Cohort Report.

Eric Davis

Use last-minute gift cards to attract new and returning customers

Yesterday we ordered a game from Apple for a family member. The process was pretty straightforward, just a couple of taps and a payment confirmation.

With only a bit left in the holiday season, now's the time to be sending any gift card promotions you have (or create a quick one).

They won't be Apple-ese but digital gift cards will be the best option, bypassing shipping entirely.

If you can include a gift for the sender like a free (smaller) gift card for them, there's a good chance you'll snag some new customers and repeat customers. Make sure to update the sales copy in your store to mention them and to explain how fast they get delivered (e.g. "instantly" is a good word to use).

Find out if last year's holiday customers stuck around with Repeat Customer Insights Cohort Report.

What repeat customer metrics to compare at year-end

Going into the end of the year you'll want to compare a few metrics to last year and the year before to see how things have changed.

- Total sales
- Average Over Value - good if it stays consistent or has gone up. Great if that happens while total sales have gone up.
- Repeat Purchase Rate - should be trending up when looking at the full history (the "All-time" in Repeat Customer Insights). Okay if it's consistent on a year-over-year basis.
- Average number of orders per month - should trend upwards.
- Average Latency - good if it's getting lower.

These metrics will interfere with each other too so you'll have to done some reasoning about them.

For example, if the Average Latency went down (good) but Average Order Value also went down (bad), that sounds like customers are placing smaller, more frequent orders. In most cases that would be great but it could be a problem if you have a high per-transaction cost (e.g. credit card fees, high pick and pack costs)

The COVID pandemic will also have bumped 2020's ecommerce orders up so you'll want to analyze the trends from 2019 and 2021 directly, ignoring 2020 as an outlier. A drop from 2020 to 2021 could just be from ecommerce getting back to a more normal level.

Many of these metrics are available in Repeat Customer Insights along with automatically filtered years, depending on your account level.

Eric Davis

Create a growth calendar to make next year more successful

The last few days I've taken some breaks from work to plan out next years garden.

Each plant has times where it grows the best. Peas like a cold start in spring, lettuce needs a bit warmer weather but not summer-warm, tomatoes like it warm, etc.

I created a single-page monthly calendar for all of the plants we're going to grow. It describes when they should be started (e.g. mid-May) and roughly how long each one goes for (e.g. September).

It's not only a 2022 calendar though, it applies to each and every year we're here. As I try new plants and collect new data, I can update the calendar so it improves year-by-year.

Your Shopify store could benefit from a growth calendar too.

Instead of plants though, it would list your various marketing campaigns and initiatives. e.g. you'd start your New Years campaign at the end of December and into January, maybe your anniversary sale is in April, launch year's new product lines in August/September, etc.

A birds-eye view of your Shopify store like this would make planning easier and you could discover gaps in your plans (nothing planned for June or July).

Every year you can improve the plan. Extend or shorten some campaigns, get rid of weak ones, test new ones, launch something early. The overall plan would iterative and evolve over time.

I'd recommend you leave the specifics of each campaign like content, number of contacts, and customer segments to be decided on each time.

In Repeat Customer Insights there is a bunch of advice around campaign planning and who should get what kinds of campaigns. Combining its customer segmenting with your year's worth of plans has the potential to increase your store's growth.

Eric Davis

Tiny tip: use UTM codes for attribution

Today's tiny tip is to get familiar with Google's UTM codes.

They sound technical but really are just a set of standardized text you can add to a url to make it easier to track where your customers are coming from and going to.

Most of the time you'll create a few of them as templates and just change the values as you create new campaigns or links.

For an introduction read Google's campaign data article and use their campaign url builder tool.

If you have a handle on them already, review how the different values impact traffic sources and setup a few templates for each of the campaign types you use.

Done right, UTM codes can make attribution with Google Analytics easier. Some of Shopify's reports will pick them up too which can help get that data into Shopify's attribution and into Repeat Customer Insights.

With shipping deadlines nearing, your 2021 is almost over

As the holiday shipping deadlines close over the next few days, you're bound to see a decrease in the number of shipped orders. Your retail or pick-up orders have a bit longer to go depending on how long you stay open.

That means you're close to the end of the year results-wise.

Most likely there'll be only a trickle of orders remaining. Late holiday shopping, post-holiday orders, gift card redemptions, and if you're B2B the wrapping up fiscal years can all contribute a little bit to 2021 before the new year.

I wouldn't say the final results are in yet, but you should have a pretty good idea of how the last couple of weeks will play out. That means it's time to start evaluating the broad metrics and start planning next year. You can use the 2021 filter in many reports in Repeat Customer Insights to see how things are so far.

Take the time while you're planning to dream about what 2022 could hold.

What if the health crisis fully resolves?

What if shipping was no longer a mess?

What if your early 2020 plans can be restarted anew?

The thing is, the future can hold a lot of surprises. Positive and negative.

Eric Davis

Unstick your stuck AOVs

You can make Average Order Value (AOV) more useful by segmenting it.

Instead of having one AOV for your store as a whole, you have an AOV for each major traffic source, for each major customer segment, or even for customer cohorts.

That'll give you more visibility into what's going on with them and let you compare the values.

Is this traffic source better than that traffic source?

Are these customers placing larger orders than those other customers?

My favorite ones of all: is this traffic source better or worse than my store as a whole?

That last one, comparing the specific to the overall, can reveal a lot. You can learn what behaviors and changes cause AOV to over/under-perform. That's why Repeat Customer Insights automatically does that comparison in the Store Analysis and Order Sequencing Analysis.

You might struggle to get your overall AOV to increase beyond a certain point. Finding under-performing segments and improving them can unstick your overall AOV. You just have to measure, tweak, and repeat.

Eric Davis