

Email is the new Black [Friday]

How B2C marketers use the inbox for holiday promotions



Summary

Introduction.....	3
1. Meet the marketers.....	5
2. Setting the pace.....	7
3. Standing out	11
4. The big payoff.....	17
5. Keys to success	20
6. Quick tips for holiday email marketing	23
7. How Pathwire can help.....	26

Introduction

The holidays are hectic for us all. But email marketers *really* feel that seasonal pressure. Many B2C brands start planning and preparing for Black Friday and Cyber Monday months ahead of time, and a **solid email strategy is the cornerstone of any holiday marketing plan**.

You may have heard that the term “Black Friday” originated because it marks the point when retailers finally achieve profitability and go into the black for the year. However, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) tells a different story about the day after U.S. Thanksgiving, which dates back to the 1960s:

“Police officers in Philadelphia began using the phrase ‘Black Friday’ to describe the chaos that resulted when large numbers of suburban tourists came into the city to begin their holiday shopping and, in some years, attend Saturday’s annual Army-Navy football game.”

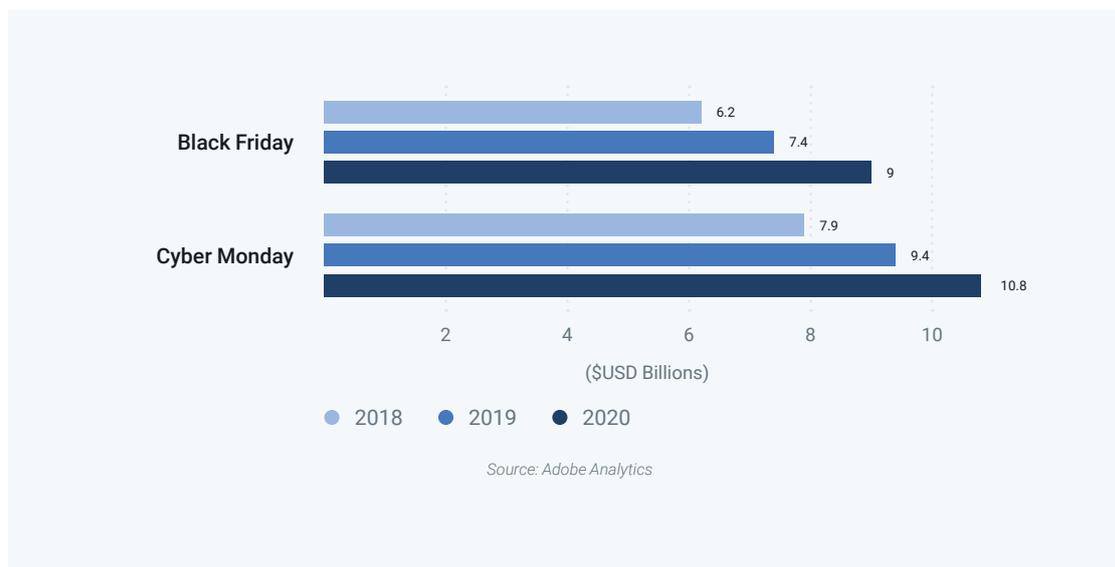
Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

That chaotic shopping tradition grew over the years as crowds of Americans descended on shopping malls and big-box retailers in a frenzied race to snatch up deals. Black Friday has since become a global phenomenon. Research shows it has 100% awareness in many European nations.

In 2005, online retailers observed the first Cyber Monday sales events. Fifteen years later, [Adobe Analytics data](#) revealed that Cyber Monday 2020 broke the record for the biggest online shopping day in U.S. history. All told, U.S. consumers spent \$9 billion online during Black Friday, \$10.8 billion on Cyber Monday, and more than \$106 billion total throughout November of 2020.



Online holiday shopping growth



Shopping habits have shifted from malls to mobile devices. In 2020, the number of U.S. consumers who shopped online during Black Friday (as opposed to in-store) rose 22% YoY. No doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the online shopping trend, but things were quickly heading in that direction already.

In a world where online shopping is the norm, it's not shopping malls that are crowded, **it's email inboxes that are packed with Black Friday and Cyber Monday promotions**. Instead of retail stores that open early for shoppers, it's the first Black Friday emails that are launching earlier than ever.

Email drives traffic to ecommerce websites. It's how brands and customers communicate about online transactions and order delivery. It's also the most personal of all marketing channels, and you won't see much holiday sales success without it.

So how do your plans for Black Friday and Cyber Monday compare to other email marketers? [Pathwire](#) and [Ascend2](#) partnered on a survey that spans various industries and business sizes. Our report, *Email is the new Black [Friday]*, reveals the results so that you can compare and adjust your strategy.

In this exclusive report, you'll discover:

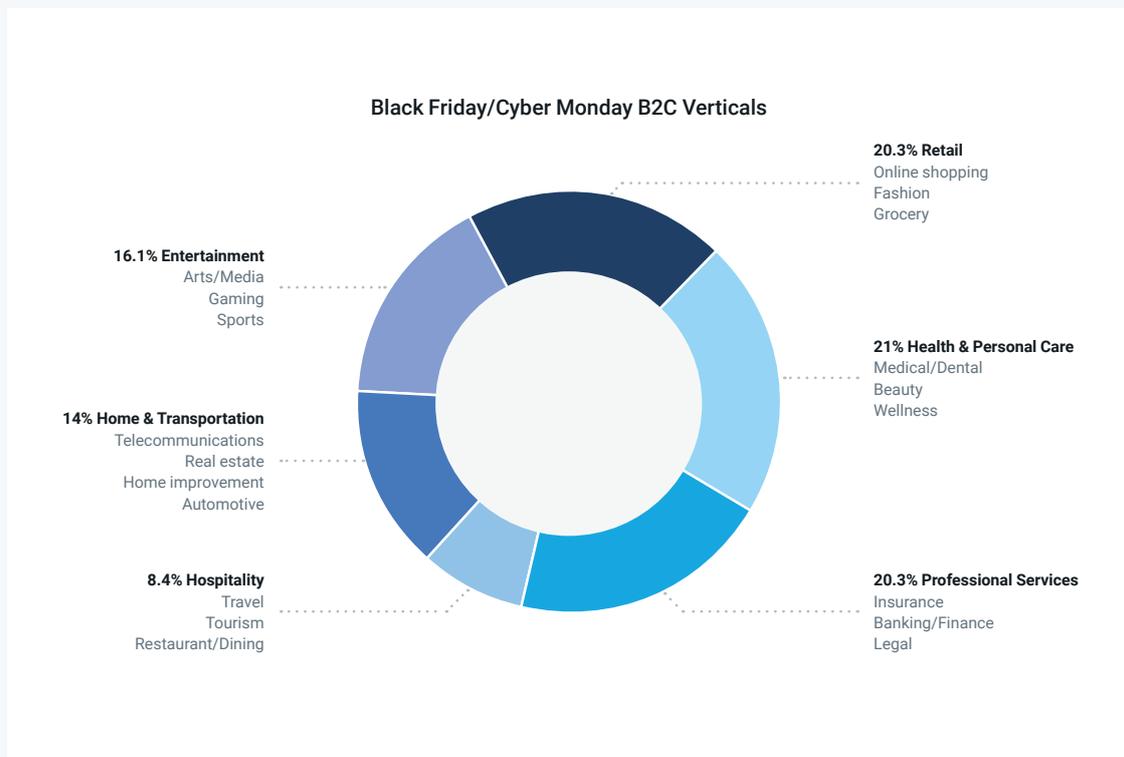
- Insights into holiday email marketing cadences.
- The most-used tactics for Black Friday and Cyber Monday email marketing.
- Whether marketers see a return for their efforts with email.
- Habits of the most successful email marketers.
- Quick tips to improve your holiday email strategy.



PART 1

Meet the marketers

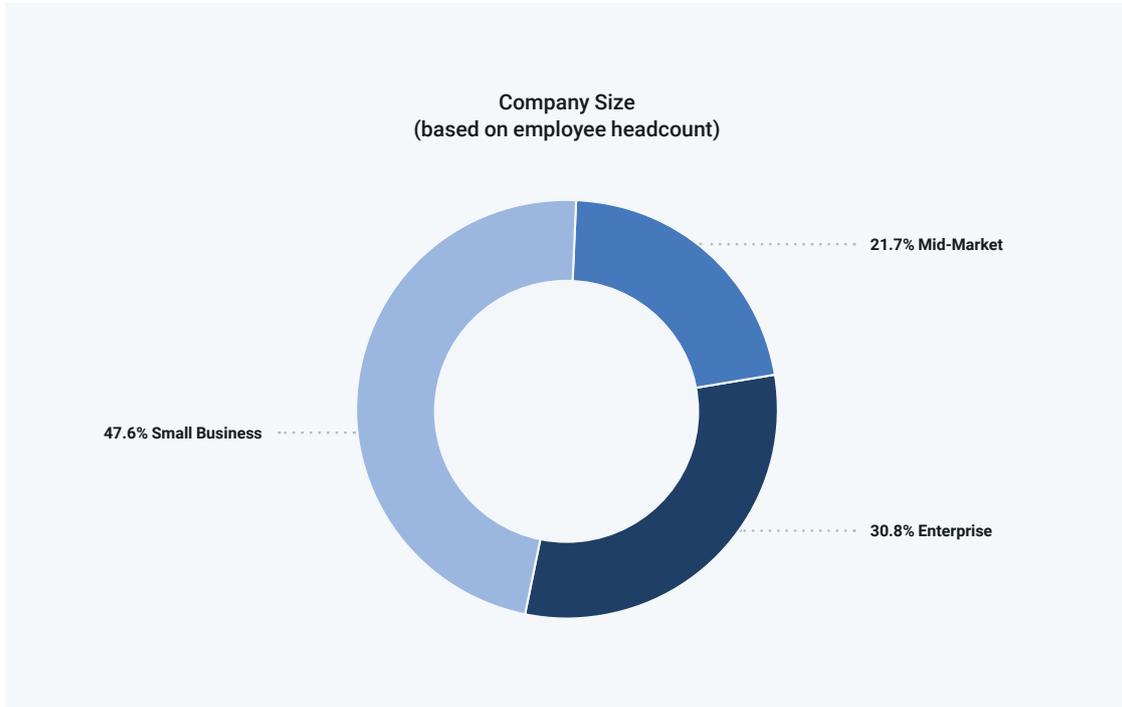
While the occasional B2B brand may try to piggyback on all the hype surrounding Black Friday and Cyber Monday, these events are made for consumer spending. Respondents in our survey associated with one of six B2C verticals:



Some B2C verticals, such as Retail and Entertainment, are more likely to launch Black Friday and Cyber Monday email promotions than others. Throughout this report, we'll take a closer look at the responses from specific verticals so you can gain deeper insights.



We'll also segment responses by company size based on the number of employees: Enterprise (500+), Mid-market (50 to 500), and Small Businesses (> 50). Nearly half of the email marketers who participated in the survey were from small businesses, but larger organizations are more likely to have extensive holiday email marketing strategies. So, we'll take a look at both sides of the data.

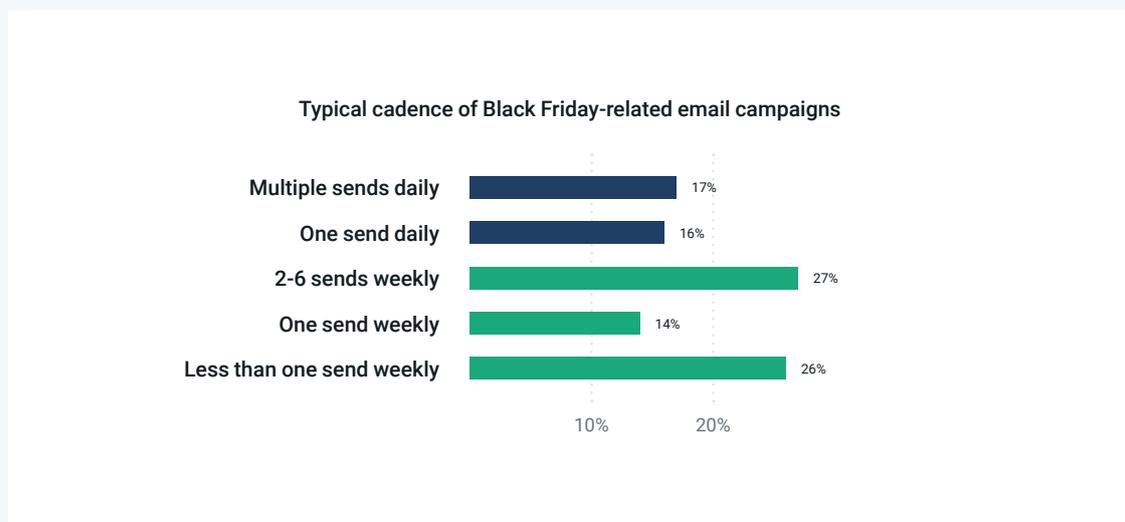


PART 2

Setting the pace

Before email marketers come up with ideas for holiday promotions and start designing and developing campaigns, there needs to be a schedule. At the outset of Black Friday and Cyber Monday planning, marketing teams outline when certain promotions go out and how often they'll be communicating with subscribers.

You want a frequency that keeps your brand top of mind, but you don't want people to get annoyed with your efforts. We asked survey participants about their email marketing cadence in the weeks leading up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday.



The results reveal a significant spread in cadences. A third (33%) of email marketers send emails at least once a day as Black Friday draws near. On the other end of the spectrum, just over a quarter (26%) send fewer than one email per week.

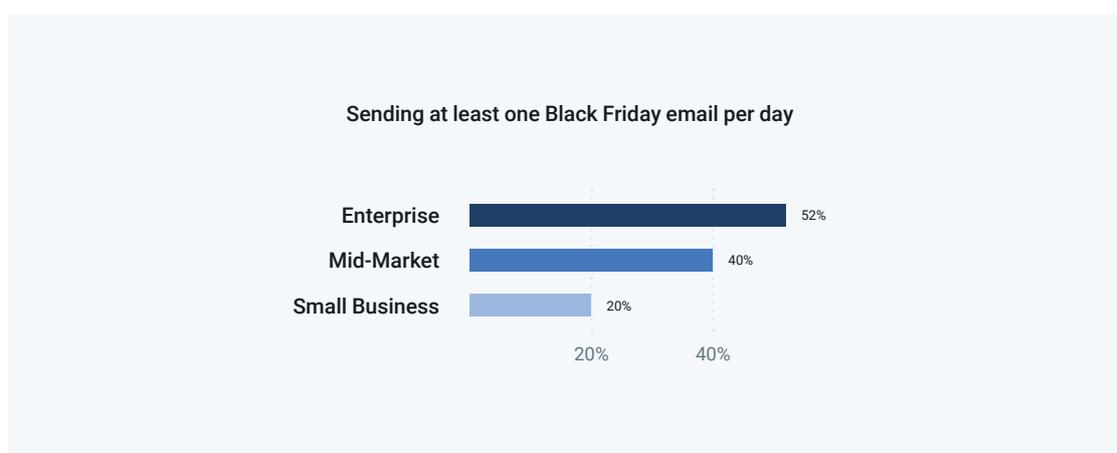
The majority of B2C marketers (60%) plan for multiple sends over the course of a week during the time leading up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday.



Company size

Of course, company size and industry can have an impact on sending frequency. Some companies have limited resources for email marketing and subscribers may have expectations for how often they hear from a brand.

Our survey found that company size plays a definite role in sending frequency. The larger the organization, the more likely it is that Black Friday and Cyber Monday emails are being sent daily.



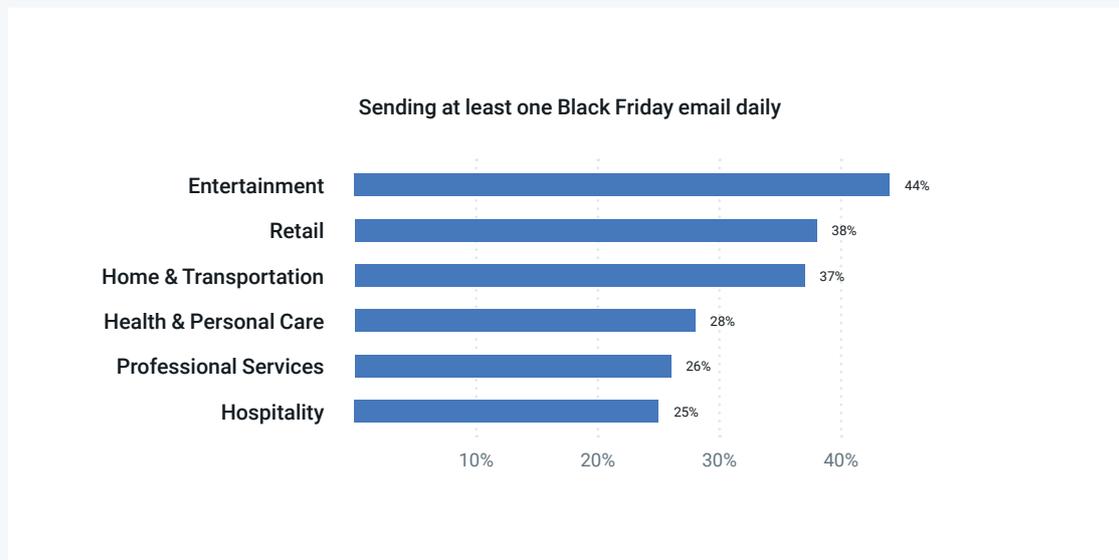
More than half of Enterprise email marketers are sending at least one Black Friday or Cyber Monday email per day, but only 20% of small businesses have an aggressive cadence like that. In fact, 40% of small business marketers surveyed are sending less than one such email per week.

In addition to the 40% of medium-sized businesses that send emails daily, another 40% send multiple communications per week. So, **80% of Mid-Market respondents send at least two emails per week ahead of Black Friday and Cyber Monday.**



B2C verticals

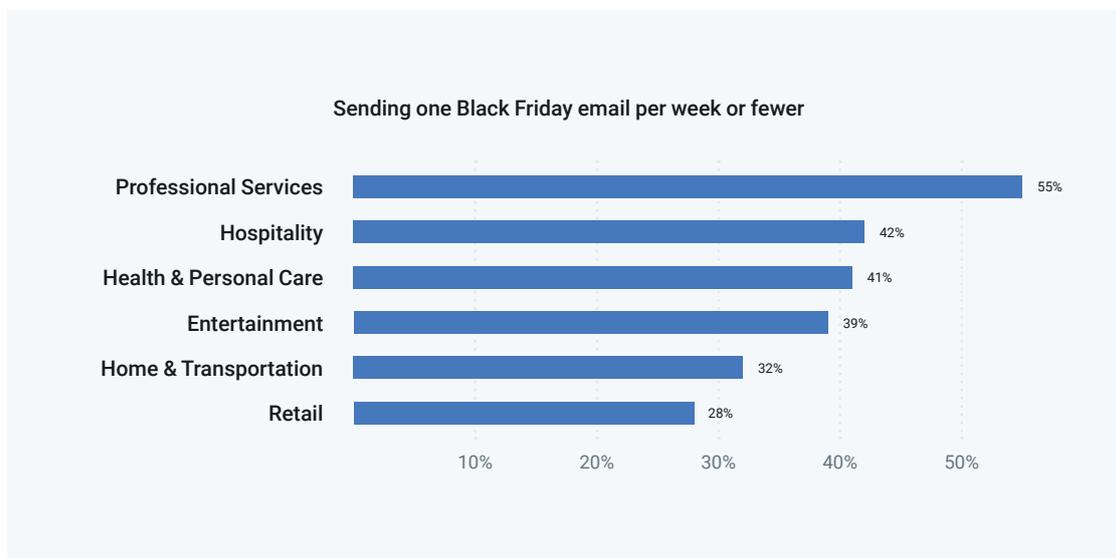
You wouldn't expect to get daily Black Friday emails from a financial institution or a personal injury lawyer, but a fashion brand or major retailer is a different story. Our survey results reflect this logic.



Brands in the **Retail and Entertainment verticals are most likely to have an aggressive email marketing cadence** heading toward Black Friday. Interestingly, Home and Transportation frequency is almost as aggressive as Retail. Keep in mind, this includes Automotive and Telecommunications brands. Promotions around vehicle purchases and wireless plans are abundant around the holidays, so this result makes sense.



Retail email marketing teams are the least likely to send just one email per week or fewer (28%), while **more than half of Professional Services marketers (55%) stick to a much less aggressive email sending cadence** around Black Friday and Cyber Monday.



Key takeaway

Defining your cadence for Black Friday and Cyber Monday emails is a multifaceted decision. Consider your industry, your audience, planned promotions, and email marketing resources as you set the schedule.

Use the results of this survey to understand how other brands in your space are approaching email frequency around the holidays. If you choose to ramp things up, keep an eye on engagement and the unsubscribe rate. Find a balance between the quantity and quality of emails you send this time of year. Give people a way to opt out if they aren't interested in Black Friday emails. And if Black Friday marketing doesn't make sense for your brand, don't send them at all.



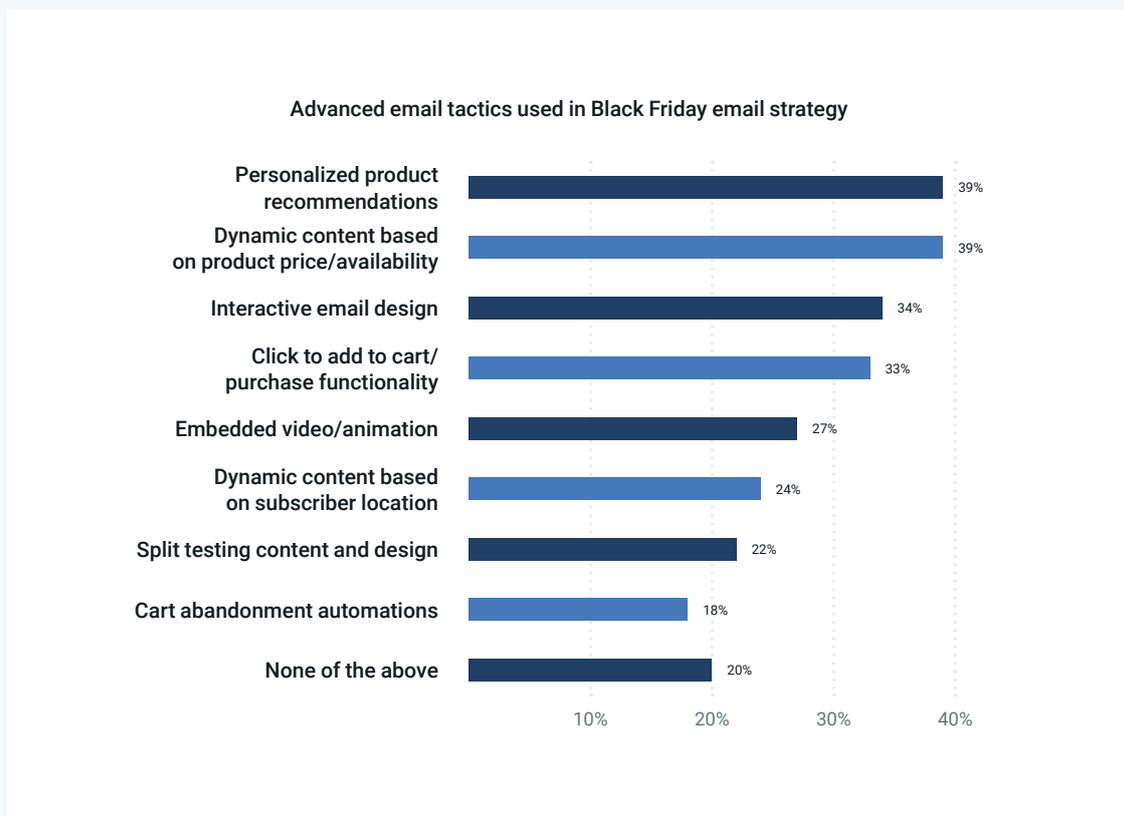
PART 3

Standing out

Whether it's in the real world or the email inbox, distractions abound over the holidays. Brands do whatever they can to break through the clutter and noise leading up to Black Friday and throughout the shopping season.

Defining specific holiday promotions may fall outside the realm of your email team's responsibilities. But deciding *how to deliver* Black Friday and Cyber Monday promotions is your opportunity to get creative and stand out in the inbox.

We asked survey participants about the "advanced email tactics" they plan to implement with their Black Friday campaigns. Respondents could select any tactic listed that applied to their current strategy.



Among enterprise email marketers 90% of respondents are using *at least one* of the tactics above. However, nearly a third (31%) of small business email marketers admit they aren't using any advanced tactics.



Most-used email tactics

Tied for first are two email marketing tactics that are commonly used in ecommerce. **Personalized product recommendations and dynamic content about products each garnered 39% of the results.** Both of these tactics are extremely valuable over the holiday shopping season.

Product recommendations that are tailored to a subscriber's personal preferences create up-selling and cross-selling opportunities. Plus, McKinsey found that 80% of consumers want personalization from retailers. This is an opportunity to create effective one-to-one email experiences.



McKinsey
& Company

*“Customers receive offers that are targeted not just at customers **like** them, with brands targeting at the segment level with broad-based offers, but at them as individuals, with products, offers, and communications that are uniquely relevant to them.”*

McKinsey & Company



Fashion email personalization



There's an important caveat to consider about product personalization during holiday gift-giving. Many consumers are shopping for family and friends – not necessarily themselves. If you have demographic data or purchase histories that indicate who they're shopping for, try using that to segment your lists and personalize holiday email experiences.

Dynamic content that informs customers about product availability and shipping provides value to the subscriber as well as the brand. Order tracking emails that update when opened offer reassurance that packages will arrive in time. Dynamically updated email content on limited inventory can create a sense of urgency. It's also very helpful in times when supply chains get disrupted and back orders are common. Dynamically updated content cuts down on customer service issues because fewer disgruntled shoppers will have questions and complaints.

One of the easiest ways to add dynamic content to Black Friday and Cyber Monday emails is with **countdown timers**. Use them to build excitement and anticipation around the start and the end of holiday promotions.



Promotional countdown timer

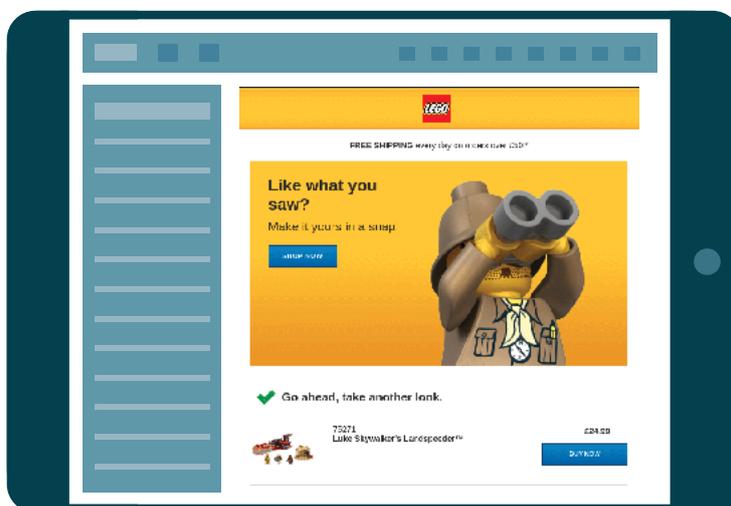


Least-used email tactics

It's a bit surprising to see cart abandonment emails and split testing at the bottom of the list of popular tactics. Both of these efforts could have a meaningful impact on Black Friday and Cyber Monday conversions.

Over the holidays, consumers jump from website to website in search of the perfect gifts, often leaving items in a cart that they intend to buy later. If there was any time to implement abandoned cart emails, it's now.

Only **18% of respondents said they're using cart abandonment automations** as part of their Black Friday and Cyber Monday email strategy. That's like leaving money on the table. According to [research from SaleCycle](#), in 2020, abandoned cart emails had an average open rate of 38.5% and a conversion rate above 20%.



Abandoned cart email

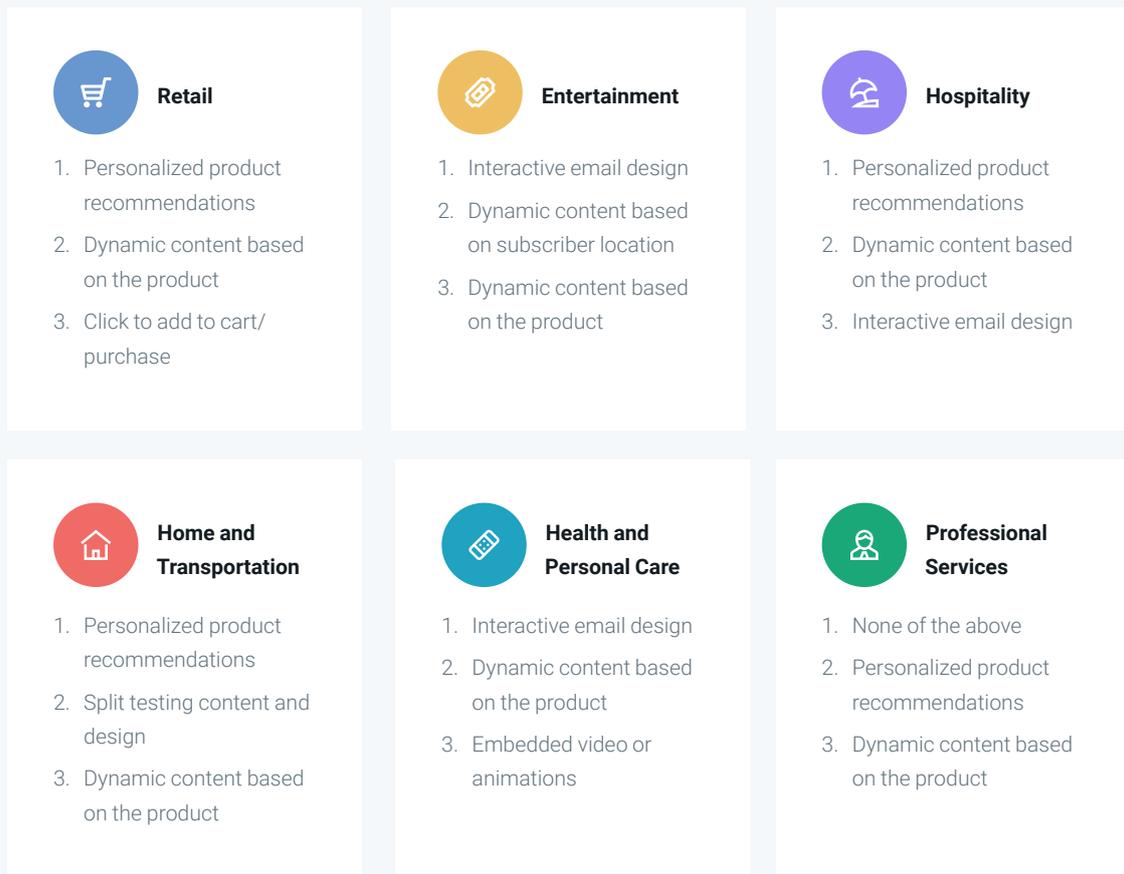
While not every B2C brand has an ecommerce operation that includes an online shopping cart, any brand can split test email campaigns. Whether it's different promotional offers, subject lines, or email imagery, smart marketers are always testing and optimizing. **Yet, just 22% of survey respondents say they're split testing Black Friday and Cyber Monday emails.**

Split testing produces datasets that give email marketers valuable insights and a competitive edge, but it may be difficult to get definitive results over the holidays. That's especially true with Black Friday and Cyber Monday campaigns that take place over a short time. Use the knowledge you've gained split testing throughout the year to build effective holiday campaigns.



Tactics for B2C verticals

Certain email marketing tactics may not make sense for your brand. Time and resources may limit your ability to pursue other advanced techniques. To help you narrow in on what matters, let's explore what the survey reveals to be most popular among our six B2C verticals.



You'll notice that four out of six of these lists include product recommendations and dynamic updates about product prices and availability. Even if these tactics aren't listed above, they were usually near the top and often tied for third.

One tactic stands out for retail marketers. **41% selected the ability to add items to a cart or purchase products from directly within an email.** This is an advanced strategy that suits ecommerce retailers. While it could impact web traffic, it also cuts out some of the friction between getting an email and making a purchase.

The idea that fewer clicks lead to more sales is now common. If a brand is already sending personalized product recommendations, why not make those products extra easy to buy?

Entertainment, Health and Personal Care, as well as Hospitality all had interactive email design among their top tactics. **Interactivity is still unexpected in the email inbox.** So, it's a great way for brands to stand out.



Email is the new Black [Friday] | **Standing out**

The interactive email below lets subscribers preview Google's Pixel Buds in different colors. It also includes add-to-cart functionality (likely programmed with [AMP for Email](#)).



Simple design. Advanced email tactics.

The use of animations and video isn't the textbook definition of interactive, but it is an excellent way to liven up email designs over the holidays. Overall, **27% of respondents said they're adding videos and animations to Black Friday/Cyber Monday emails**. According to our survey, the B2C vertical most likely to use this tactic is Hospitality (38%).

Among Professional Services marketers, 41% selected "None of the above", meaning they aren't implementing any advanced email tactics for Black Friday or Cyber Monday. Of course, that still means 59% of these email marketers are using at least one advanced tactic.



Key takeaways

Email marketing programs that have yet to introduce advanced personalization into their strategies are falling behind the competition. A name in the subject line is no longer going to cut it. More than half of retailers plan to send personalized product recommendations as part of their email strategy for Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

The survey found **20% of all respondents don't plan to use any advanced email marketing tactics**. While simple emails may work for some lists, if your goal is to stand out in the inbox over the holidays, you probably don't want to be among the 20% who aren't trying to innovate at all.

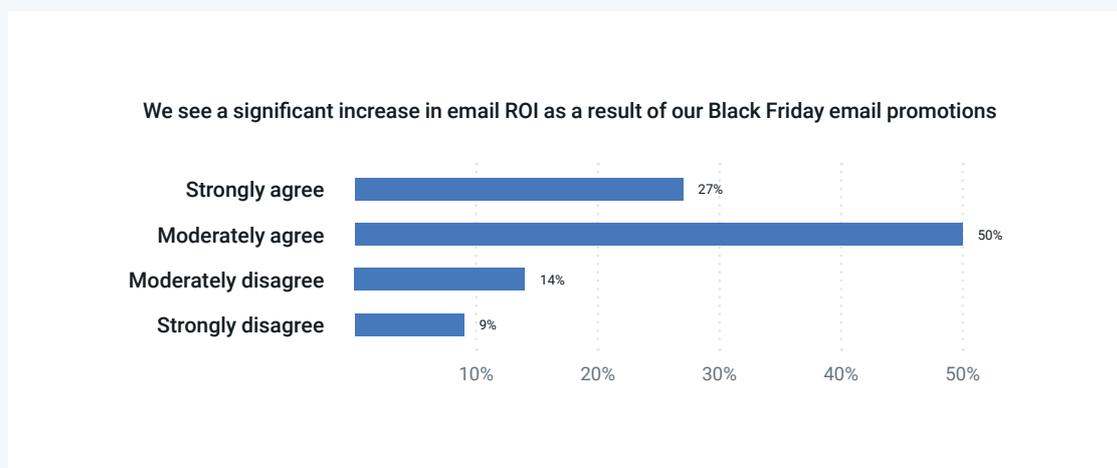
PART 4

The big payoff

After all that work to strategize, design, and develop emails for Black Friday and Cyber Monday, is it worth the effort? According to our survey, most email marketers say “Yes.”

There are plenty of reasons why email’s return on investment (ROI) remains high even though it’s one of the oldest digital marketing channels. In 2020, the [Data & Marketing Association \(DMA\)](#) estimated that email earned more than \$35 for every \$1 spent.

But does that sort of payoff carry over to Black Friday and Cyber Monday emails? We asked respondents if they agree with the following statement: “We see a significant increase in email ROI as a result of our Black Friday email promotions.”



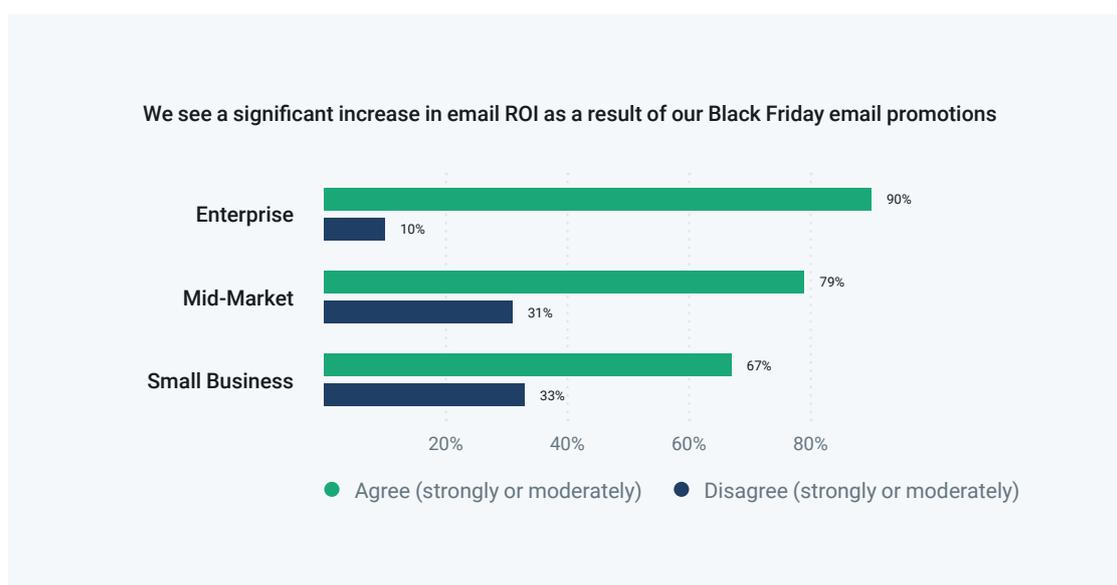
More than three-quarters (77%) of email marketers agree that investing in Black Friday email promotions provides a significant return. Less than a quarter (23%) disagreed with the statement.



Business size ROI

At 42%, Mid-Market respondents were most likely to *strongly* agree that Black Friday emails had a significant payoff. Only 15% of Small Business survey participants felt the same way while 32% of small businesses disagreed with the statement.

As you can see in the next chart, a majority of all business sizes strongly or moderately agreed that Black Friday email marketing results in a significant ROI.



B2C vertical ROI

It's clear that Black Friday and Cyber Monday email marketing is more important in some consumer-focused industries than others. So, who is seeing the most significant ROI and who has their doubts about the impact of Black Friday emails?

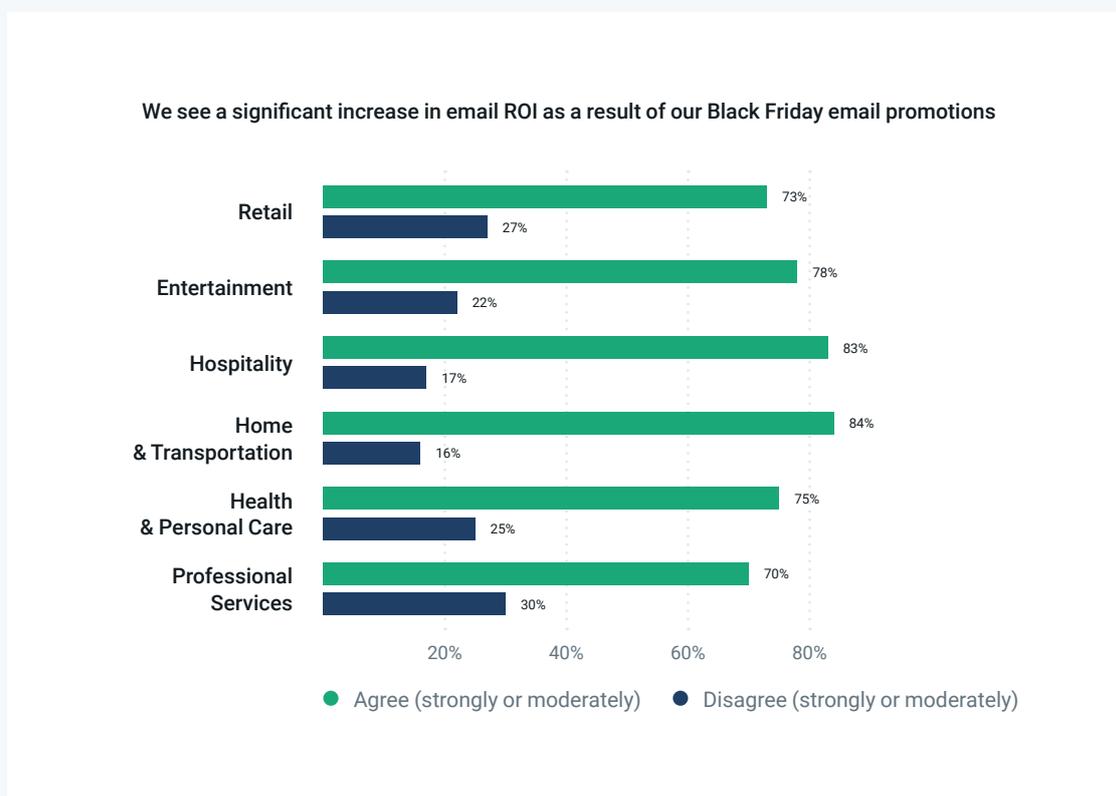
At 30%, Professional Services marketers were the most likely to disagree (strongly or moderately) that Black Friday emails produced a significant return. Interestingly, however, Retail marketers were not far behind.

27% of respondents who work in the retail vertical don't feel the ROI of Black Friday emails is significant.

This could reflect the fact that email marketing during the holiday season is extremely competitive for retailers. Many of these email marketers may head into the season with high expectations and lofty revenue goals only to be disappointed when results fall short.



Despite some skepticism, **the majority of respondents from all B2C verticals agree that Black Friday email marketing produces a significant ROI.**



As you'll see in the next section, what email marketers get out of their Black Friday and Cyber Monday campaigns may be related to how much they put into it.



Key takeaways

It may be dangerous to assume that Black Friday campaigns will deliver better results than normal. If you want to set performance benchmarks and determine how much to invest in email marketing during the holidays, ask a few questions first.

- What's your organization's typical ROI from email marketing?
- What's your audience's appetite for email communications?
- Do Black Friday/Cyber Monday campaigns make sense for your industry?
- Will you implement any tactics that take Black Friday emails to the next level?

If your return on Black Friday email marketing falls short of expectations, it may have more to do with your strategy than the idea itself.

PART 5

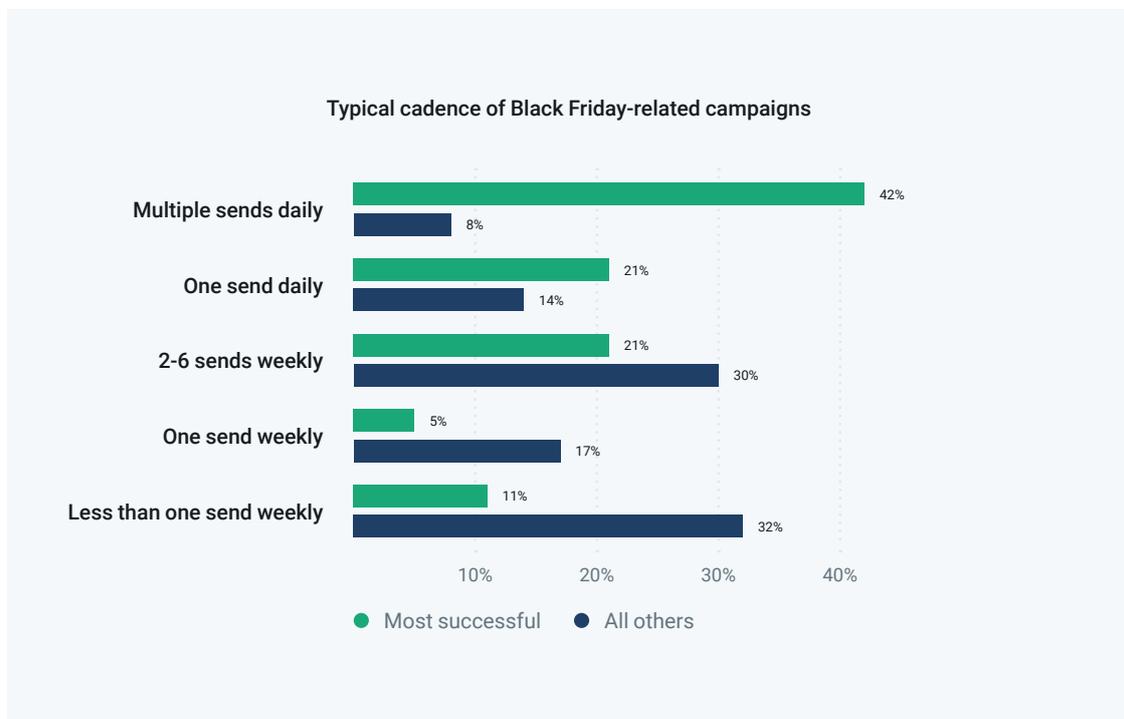
Keys to success

Is there a secret to Black Friday email marketing success? 27% of email marketers surveyed *strongly agree* that Black Friday emails lead to a significant ROI. So, what are these marketers doing right, and how do they approach things differently from others?

Let's take a look at the Black Friday habits of the most successful email marketers. We define this segment as those who feel strongly that Black Friday emails produce a significant ROI. For context, just under half of these respondents work in Mid-market organizations while about a quarter each work for either small businesses or enterprise companies.

Email frequency and Black Friday success

The survey results suggest that an aggressive email marketing cadence leading up to Black Friday could be an indicator of success.



At 42%, the most successful segment is also the most likely to send multiple daily messages to their lists.

An impressive 84% of the most successful email marketers are sending at least two emails per week leading up to Black Friday.

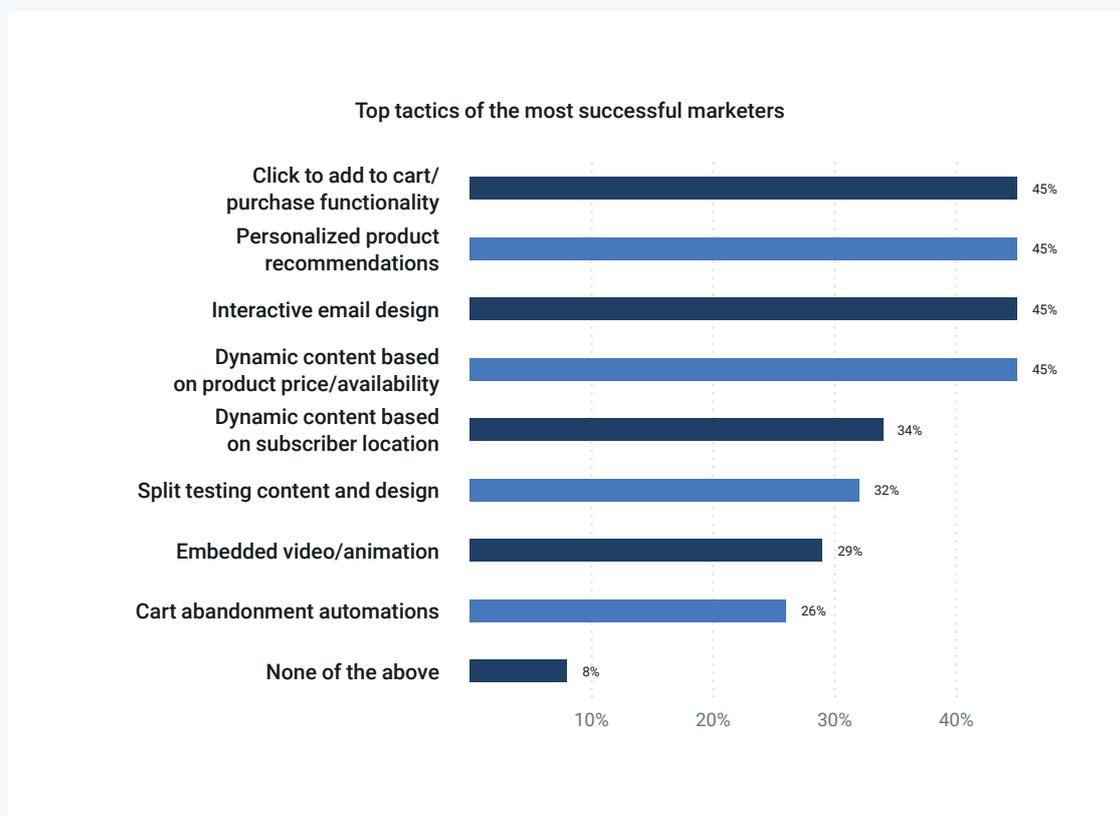
For comparison, only 8% of all other segments (anyone who *did not* strongly agree) send multiple daily emails. Nearly half (49%) of those outside the most successful email marketers are sending just one Black Friday email per week or less.

High frequency and repetition can help ensure your brand's messages aren't missed or ignored during the hustle and bustle at the start of holiday shopping. This could be one of the keys to achieving stretch goals at the end of the year.

Tactics of the most successful

How are top marketers standing out in the weeks leading up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday? One thing is certain, the most successful campaigns aren't relying on just one tactic.

The results show this segment is most likely to use *all* the email tactics listed in our survey. This indicates another key to success leading up to Black Friday is an advanced and mature email marketing program.



Nearly half of the most successful marketers do the following with Black Friday emails:

1. Simplify decision-making for subscribers by making it easy to do from the inbox.
2. Personalize the email experience with specific product/service recommendations.
3. Add interactive elements to email campaigns for a memorable experience.
4. Use dynamic content updates to keep subscribers informed about products, shipments, and promotions.

It would seem that taking your Black Friday emails to new heights increases the chance that you'll see a significant ROI.



Key takeaways

It may be tempting to look at these results and assume the answer is to send more emails more often while making them flashy and feature-packed. But don't forget to take an informed, strategic approach.

Introducing untested tactics at a crucial time of year for sales could backfire. Take the time to try out advanced tactics before making them an integral aspect of your Black Friday and Cyber Monday email campaigns. Find out what resonates with your subscribers and what adds value to the email experience your brand provides.



PART 6

Quick tips for holiday email marketing

Black Friday and Cyber Monday are just the beginning of the holiday shopping season. The numbers show the last Saturday before Christmas is actually the busiest shopping day of the year. So, we still have our work cut out for us in December.

Here's some essential advice for optimizing your holiday email campaigns this year:

1. Email deliverability and the holidays

No one wants to be on Santa's "Naughty List" this time of year, and no one wants to be on an email blocklist either. Take steps to ensure high deliverability rates over the holidays:

- **Warm up your IP address before Black Friday.** This is a smart move if you plan to increase the frequency and volume of your sends over the holidays.
- **Use separate domains for transactional and marketing emails.** Separating your message types is always a good idea, but it's especially helpful during the holidays. If for some reason marketing emails start going to spam, important customer communications should still land in the inbox.

2. Holiday send time optimization

When you send Black Friday campaigns and other holiday emails is just as important as how often and how many messages you send. Your subscribers may have different email habits this time of year. Mailgun's [Send Time Optimization](#) tool helps ensure your emails land in the inbox at the perfect time.

3. Re-engage inactive subscribers

The holidays are a time of year for reconnecting with family and friends. **Email marketers can also use the season to reach out to unengaged subscribers.** Before launching Black Friday campaigns, see if you can re-engage customers who haven't purchased and subscribers who haven't opened anything in a while.

4. Clean up your lists

You don't want your house to be a mess before you throw a holiday party, and you don't want your lists to be full of inactive subscribers and bad emails either. **A little list cleanup is another important step** to support deliverability and ensure accurate email analytics over Black Friday. Conducting [email validation](#) cuts down on bounces and protects your sender reputation.



5. Segment subscribers wisely

Once your lists are optimized for the holidays, how will you segment subscribers differently? Keep in mind that people are usually shopping for gifts.

Here are some options for segmentation:

- Subscribers shopping for spouses.
- Men shopping for women or men.
- Women shopping for men or women.
- Parents and grandparents shopping for kids.
 - Segment by ages of children.
- Geographic locations.
- Past purchase history.

A pre-holiday survey or gift guide could help you collect even more valuable information about how to personalize the email experience for subscribers during the holidays.

6. Find or build responsive, seasonal email templates

Because there's a lot of work on an email marketer's plate over the holidays, reusable **holiday-themed templates can lighten the load**. Create your own email templates using a tool like [Mailjet's easy-to-use email editor](#). You can also find [holiday email templates](#) to make the job even easier.

Keep in mind that mobile-friendly templates are important. Adobe Analytics found **more than half of online holiday purchases happened on smartphones during the 2020 season**.

7. Decorate your transactional emails

Usually, transactional emails are no-nonsense and straightforward without much design. The holidays, however, could be a good time to **create a more memorable transactional email experience**.

If your brand creates positive emotions about purchases, people are more likely to come back for more and become loyal customers. So, why not add a little holiday flair in transactional email designs?



8. Use email marketing to give back

Some people get a little fed up with overconsumption and overspending during the holidays (some marketers do, too). **Use email marketing to balance things out.** Your brand can support a worthy cause or non-profit while using email to tell people about it and get them involved. Consider sending [cause marketing emails](#) this year. It's an excellent way to portray some *real* holiday spirit.

9. Test and preview before sending

Sending a Black Friday email that renders horribly on certain clients is like giving someone a gift that doesn't work (except you can return the gift but not the email). **Make sure your emails are ready for every inbox when you test and preview holiday campaigns.** [Email on Acid by Pathwire](#) offers unlimited testing – and that's all the time – not just a holiday promotion.

10. Prepare your infrastructure for the crowds

It used to be shopping malls and retail stores that had to get ready for mobs of Black Friday shoppers. Today, it's websites and apps that need to be prepared for an influx of traffic. What happens if your emails prompt a deal to go viral leading to a massive spike in traffic?

Get some advice on [preparing your infrastructure ahead of the holidays](#). That includes everything from website security and elasticity to handling large numbers of transactional emails around Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

Further reading for your holiday email strategy

Get even more expert advice for email marketers when you check out the following articles:

- [The ultimate guide to holiday email marketing](#)
- [Thanksgiving email: Make customers feel appreciated](#)
- [Black Friday: Tips for the perfect holiday campaign](#)
- [5 tips to stand out in a crowded inbox over the holidays](#)
- [Deliverability tips to avoid the spam folder this holiday season](#)
- [Tips for building better holiday email templates](#)
- [Black Friday emails: How to optimize holiday campaigns](#)



PART 7

How Pathwire can help

At [Pathwire](#), our mission is to help brands build better connected experiences, and the holiday season marks one of the most important times for brands to connect with consumers. Pathwire simplifies complex communication problems for more than 100,000 customers with these unique solutions:



[Mailgun by Pathwire](#) is the world's leading email delivery service. Developers and businesses use Mailgun's powerful API to send, receive, and track emails with a focus on simplicity and compliance to standards.



[Mailjet by Pathwire](#) is an intuitive email marketing platform that includes an easy-to-use email builder for beautiful designs, a contact management solution, and campaign analytics. Use Mailjet to drive results with meaningful emails.



[Email on Acid by Pathwire](#) is a leading email readiness platform that lets teams test and preview campaigns before hitting send. Take advantage of unlimited tests to address issues with client rendering, email accessibility, inbox display, and more.

Use Pathwire's suite of tools to make sure your Black Friday emails and other holiday campaigns look amazing and get delivered. Find out [why so many brands choose Pathwire](#).



Research Partner

Marketing technology companies and digital marketing agencies partner with Ascend2 to supplement their marketing content, generate leads, and engage prospects to drive demand through the middle of the funnel. Learn more at [Ascend2.com](#).





Pathwire empowers 100,000 paying customers around the world to solve complex communication problems. Through its powerful email API and intuitive email marketing solutions, Pathwire delivers over 250 billion emails a year for companies like DHL, Wikipedia, Toast, Lyft, and Microsoft.

The company provides reliable, cloud-native infrastructure, local expertise, and smart solutions based on machine learning so companies can more easily reach their customers and build connected experiences. Pathwire has offices worldwide including in the UK, Spain, France, Germany, and the US.

For more information, please visit www.pathwire.com.

