

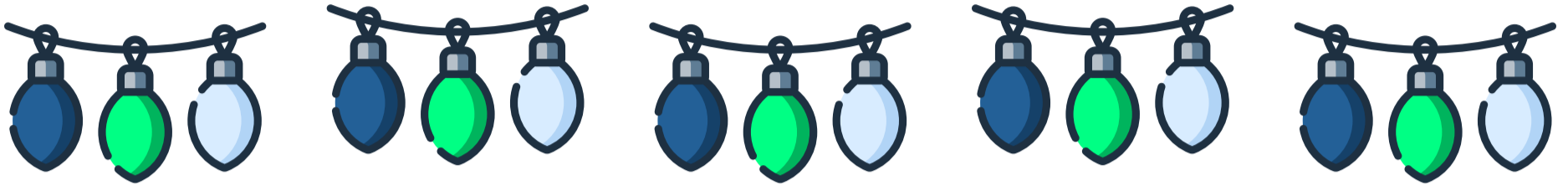
The Retailers' Guide to Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and the Holiday Season



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The Retailers' Guide to Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and the Holiday Season



Whether you're a seasoned retailer or this is your first time navigating the holiday season, our team of industry experts is here to get you ready for the busiest (and most profitable) time of year!

In this guide, we'll cover:

- What customers want and what you need to know
- How to manage all things in and outside of your storefront
- Things you can do to stand out from competitors
- Holiday tips and tricks that'll make your life easier
- How to prepare for this year's rush and all years to come
- Tips specific to [groceries and markets](#), [liquor stores](#), [tobacco shops](#), [clothing boutiques](#), [convenience stores](#), [lawn and garden centers](#), and [hardware stores](#)



Get Started Early

The key to surviving – and *winning* – the holiday season is getting ahead of the game. Planning and preparation is vital. While last-minute shoppers are common this time of year, there are plenty of early bird shoppers who are already mapping out which shops they want to tackle.

Black Friday is traditionally one of the biggest shopping days in America, but with more communities rallying around local businesses, Small Business Saturday has gained footing as a day that SMBs like yourself can expect a boost in business. Additionally, Cyber Monday is designed specifically for customers to score online deals and has been gaining more traction as well. These three days kick off a frenzied shopping season that lasts through the new year.



The truth is, people begin holiday shopping and looking for deals as early as October. So rather than plan for Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and the holidays in the middle of November, you'll want to get strategic before the fall season hits.

The biggest piece of advice here is to avoid the headache. Your store (whether online or in person) will already be insanely busy, so planning ahead will make it easier for you to focus on your customers in the midst of all the chaos.

Create Enticing Discounts

When consumers are getting their holiday shopping plan together, they're not only looking for deals – but they're looking for *the best deals*. Let's make sure your business makes the cut.

First of all, you want to be competitive. Smaller deals, like 10% off a single item, don't seem as appealing – especially if other stores are pushing 50% off, buy one get one (BOGO), or free gifts. You want to be smart with your promotions, of course – but especially on Black Friday, bigger deals are better.

The last few years, the ongoing retail trend has been that less people are shopping in stores. Consumers have found that online shopping is easier and unsurprisingly, since the COVID-19 pandemic, people are more likely to opt for virtual gifting sprees than in-person trips. (If you need some tips on how to manage your storefront post-coronavirus, we've got you covered.) Make sure that your promotions are equally accessible in-store and online – especially because virtual sales can help make up for the “missed opportunity” shoppers who are choosing to stay at home.

Here are some discount examples for inspiration:

- Gift a low-price item for free with the purchase of a select item.
- Discount gift cards by percent or dollar amount. Regulars can use gift cards on themselves later on, or gift them to a family member or friend.
- Time-sensitive offers. For example, hourly deals on Black Friday and daily deals throughout the holidays.
- Give coupons to use at a later date. Cover yourself for the post-holiday season when you know business is slower!

You'll want to get as creative as possible with your promotions. People like to know that they're saving a significant amount of money, and no matter the value, they love free gifts. That said, we've got a few industry-specific promotion ideas you can use.

Liquor Stores

- Create holiday gift baskets that have full-size bottles, airplane bottles, glassware, cocktail mixers, and other nice add-on items.
- Promote your seasonal liquors, such as Baileys, peppermint schnapps, and champagnes. You know this is what customers are looking for this time of year – and if they're getting a good deal, they'll likely buy an extra bottle or two.
- Create a 'Stock the Bar' promotion that offers a full-sized vodka, whiskey, gin, and tequila for 10% off the total. Or try 'Create Your Own Bar', allowing customers to pick their favorite bottle from each category. Mix products that sell well and products that don't to offload your hard-to-move inventory.

Tobacco Shops

- Try a 'Build Your Own Box' promotion so customers can choose from a selection of cigars and pay a flat cost for their purchase. Consumers love deals like this because they can try something new without committing to an entire box of one brand name!
- Offer free engraving services for purchases made online of a certain value. Throw in a wooden box or a lighter that can be engraved for a good price. The customer will feel like they got something valuable, and of course, they'll love that it was free.

- Simply offer a free gift with a purchase – including ashtrays, cutters, or humidification care. People are shopping for others during this time and enjoy giving presents that are off the beaten path to cigar aficionados.

Groceries and Markets

- Create holiday baskets by bundling together items that fit a certain theme. For example, a charcuterie gift basket could include a bottle of wine, assorted crackers, gourmet cheeses, stuffed olives, and a selection of chocolates!
- Gift cards are top-of-mind this time of year, so create a tiered reward system that'll help push sales. Customers who purchase a \$25 gift card will receive a voucher for a free dessert item, while customers who buy a \$50 gift card will get 20% off their next purchase – and so on. The more they spend, the more they get.
- People love to shop for their holiday parties just as much as they love to shop for gifts. If holiday baskets aren't your style, try mix-and-match promotions that'll entice customers to pair products together for a unique appetizer spread. Baking is huge this time of year, too, so consider discounting sprinkles, cookie cutters, frosting, and other festive accessories.

No matter what you decide to do, be sure to make a calendar or organized spreadsheet of all your promotions and when they're running so there's no question of what's happening and when.

Advertise Your Promotions



Now that you've thought up some awesome deals, it's time to promote them.

Before we get into the best virtual ways for promotion, consider taking advantage of local opportunities. Get in touch with your city's online or print newsletters, and if it's in your budget, consider running an ad or commercial to give consumers a heads up about what you've got to offer.



E-Commerce

Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, and the holidays should be front and center on your store's website. Make sure your homepage shows off these deals — and sprinkle in some festive imagery to get visitors in the holiday spirit.

Don't have a website? Now's the perfect time to dip into e-commerce. With online shopping taking over the traditional in-store spree, you don't want to miss out on virtual orders!



It may be a good time to hire delivery drivers to fulfill orders, or partner with a delivery service, if you don't have something like this set up already. Curbside order pickup is also a great option for people who shop online but want to swing by and collect their purchase.

The biggest point here is to start experimenting with e-commerce in any capacity. Even if you start with a website and online shop, then move to curbside pickup, and eventually upgrade to delivery service, that's progress! But with Cyber Monday historically outpacing Black Friday, you want to be as up-to-date as possible.



Social Media

A website and social media go hand in hand. Posting to your social accounts is one of the best ways to push traffic to your site. And it's free!

Paid advertisements get your business more traffic, of course – but if you're not ready to budget for ad spend, just try posting on your profiles more frequently and see how that goes.

Even if you don't have a website to direct visitors to, social media is a great place to push your promotions and best deals. Tease your specials with sneak peek hints or photos to keep followers guessing and build excitement.



You can also keep an eye on what's trending so you can hop on popular hashtags and be part of the conversation. This is a completely free way of gaining visibility for your profiles!

If you're active on social media, make sure you're *really active* during the holiday season. Assign an employee to check in on your social profiles and answer users in a timely manner. People love to ask their questions in the comments of a post or in a direct message, so make sure you respond as soon as possible to keep their interest and potentially capitalize on a sale.

Email Marketing

In addition to social media, you can use customer emails to reach out and promote your holiday specials. Most POS systems allow you to capture customer email addresses. Even if you haven't used this feature in the past, start asking for emails during sales right away so you can have a list of people who've already visited your business to promote to during the holidays.

Use interesting subject lines to grab peoples' attention so they'll actually open your emails. You can get creative here, but make sure your headlines don't sound spammy. If they do, customers will send your email straight to the trash – or it'll automatically go into their junk or spam folder before they even get the chance to see it.

In addition to promoting your specials before the holiday season is in full swing, you can also use email marketing to follow up after Black Friday or in the new year to get customer feedback. There's no better way to gauge how your business handled the influx than from the visitors who were there! And as mentioned in the discounts section, don't hesitate to send out virtual coupons that consumers can redeem later on when your store is less busy.

No matter what kind of emails you're sending out, be sure to prepare them in advance. Like keeping track of your promotions, it's helpful to keep a calendar of your advertisements and messaging so you know what's being sent out and when.

Common email spam trigger words to avoid:

- Buy
- Free
- Earn/Make
- Clearance
- Prize
- Click [Here, Below, etc.]
- Cheap
- Cash/Money
- Urgent

Set Up and Rearrange Your Store

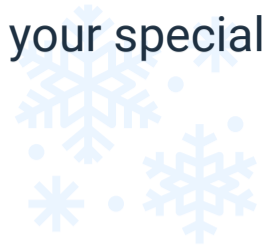
To accommodate the influx of customers in your store, it may be a good idea to change the layout and do some rearranging.

First of all, make sure your promotional displays are front and center. You want customers' eyes to go right to a big sale when they walk in. However, you also want to make sure that your specials are in areas that are easy to access – and easy for your team to re-stock. Avoid stuffing your best deals in corners or cluttered areas.

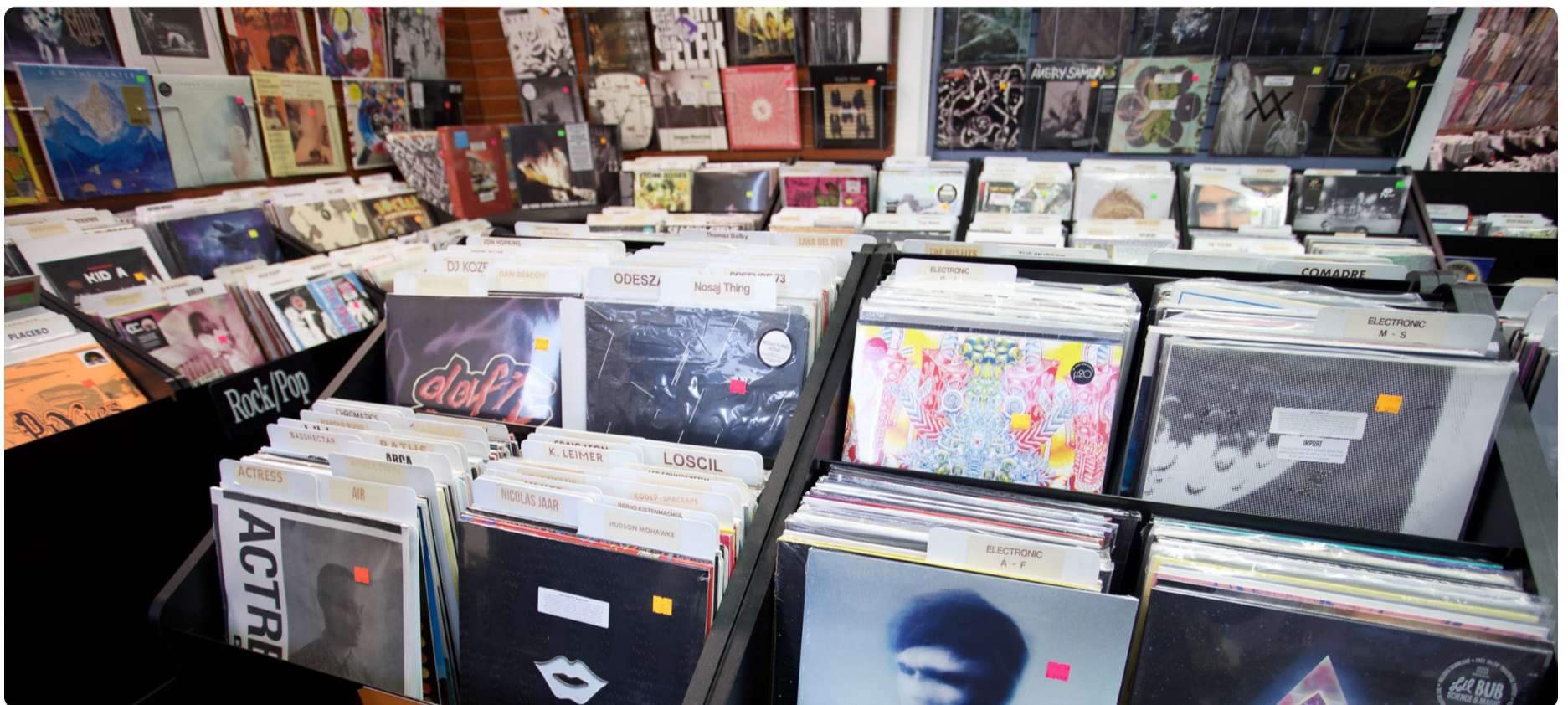
On that same note, if you have a few impressive deals to offer, be sure to sprinkle them throughout the store. This will help prevent customers from crowding in one section of your store, and encourage them to spread out to access all the deals. Plus, this allows visitors to get a better view of the rest of your inventory.



Signage is also important during the holiday season, not only to promote your specials, but to point customers in the right direction.



Make sure there are clear lines so customers know where to stand when they're ready to cash out, work with customer service, or access the fitting rooms. Top-notch signage will help guide your customers to navigate your store on their own, saving your employees time in the long run. Less people will be asking where they should if your signage is well thought out.



Last but not least, keep the holiday spirit alive! You don't have to go crazy, but customers will appreciate you incorporating festive decorations into your store's visuals. A little tinsel never hurt anyone! You may want to play holiday music or something calm to keep the mood leveled, too. Everyone will be moving quickly, so music is a great opportunity to slow things down.

Consider Adding Another POS Station

This may seem like a big investment — and we know, it definitely is — but you'll make your money back quick if you can offer a fast-moving checkout line and customer service.

While people are more willing to stand in lines on Black Friday, this isn't the case once holiday shopping is in full swing. Last-minute buyers get especially irritated when they



have to wait in a long, slow-moving line, and they'll take their business elsewhere in a heartbeat. Plus, the quicker you move customers in and out of your store, the better. It's important to keep people safe and healthy, *especially* during flu season and since the coronavirus spread.

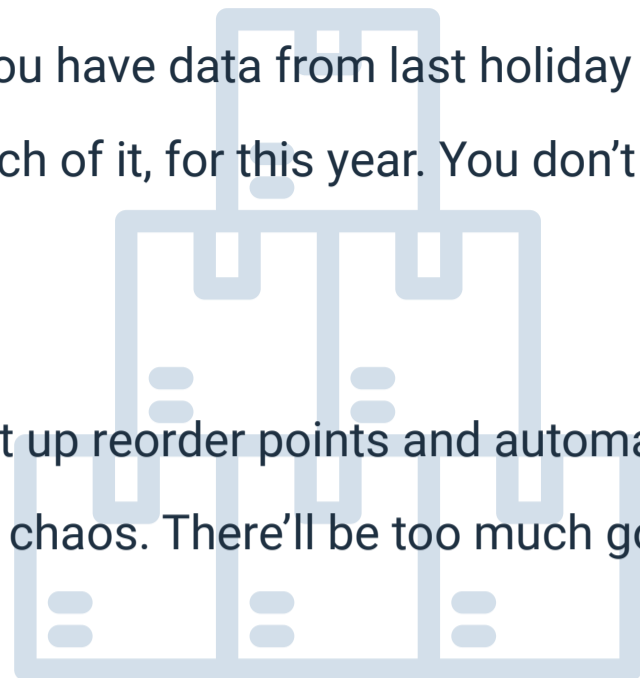
If you only have one station in your store and you think the influx will reveal the need for a second, make the upgrade sooner rather than later.

While we're on the subject of POS systems, there's a few features you should pay extra attention to this holiday season as well.

Check Your Inventory

What's in stock? What happens when you run out? If you have data from last holiday season, use it to predict what you'll need, and how much of it, for this year. You don't want to have too little or too much product.

If your point of sale software supports it, be sure to set up reorder points and automatic vendor orders to make life easier in the midst of the chaos. There'll be too much going on for you to manually replenish your stock!



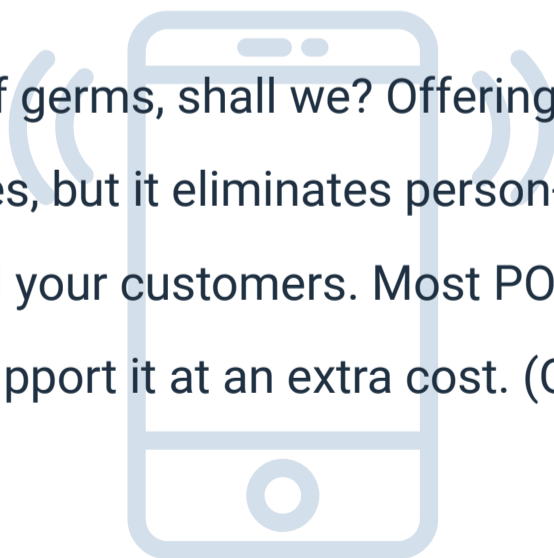
Focus on Customer Loyalty

If you aren't taking advantage of a customer loyalty program, you should be. Many POS systems allow you to manage this feature and several others in one place.

Use a loyalty program to build relationships with customers to get them to come back to your store. Whether they're new or existing customers, the holiday season is a great time to make sure you have some sort of rewards system in place.

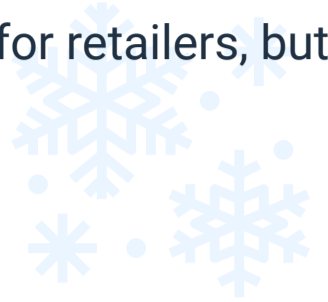
Integrate Mobile Pay

Let's circle back on the spread of germs, shall we? Offering a mobile payment option not only speeds up checkout lines, but it eliminates person-to-person contact – protecting you, your employees, and your customers. Most POS systems support this feature, however, some solutions support it at an extra cost. (Ours doesn't!) Check on this before you sign the dotted line.



Make it All About the Gifts

Black Friday and the holiday season are mostly about selling products for retailers, but customers will notice the extra effort made for gift giving.



Make sure you have the option to print gift receipts set up. People will always request them to make returns easy on their family and friends. And if you can, consider offering boxes and/or gift wrapping. Customers will also love being able to gift wrap in-store rather than doing it on their own when they get home.



As mentioned, gift cards are another top seller during the holidays. People may not come in to buy items, especially if they aren't sure what the person they're buying for would like or what size they are. Gift cards are great to have available year-round, but they're especially useful when customers are buying for other people.

And while this isn't the goal or intent, keep in mind that many gift cards go unused. Whether they get lost or have a bit of a remaining balance, it's all profit for you!

Update Your Return Policy

Returns and exchanges are a huge part of holiday shopping. It's absolutely necessary. Whether someone was given a gift that wasn't the right fit, or they simply don't like it, you'll have people back in your shop wanting to swap a product for something else.

Make sure returns are simple and even more flexible during the holiday season. Your policy should be clear and fair. We recommend something easy to understand that focuses on your business' grace period and frequently asked questions. Returns and exchanges are a high-stress topic this time of year, and customers won't purchase anything if the return policy is difficult to decode or it's too strict.



It's beneficial to have the return policy posted throughout the store so it's available and easily accessible — plus, it helps to have employees mention the policy at checkout.

Prepare Your Staff

Train up employees on how to handle the busiest time of year, ensuring they know what to do and who to ask for help once business is going wild. Try to schedule staff around your busiest days and hours — which is much easier to do when your POS software has a built-in time clock with employee reporting!

If necessary, now is a good time to consider hiring on new employees. Many people are looking for seasonal jobs, so if you could use the extra hands, consider having a few staff members on board for the holiday season. It's better to hire early and get them trained up, rather than scrambling at the last minute.



Step Up Customer Service

In general, customer service should be kicked up a notch on Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and the entire holiday season. Customers will be asking more questions and their patience will be much more limited. Make sure your employees know how to



answer the most common questions they'll get and how to handle frequent situations.

Your team should know to be available. If a customer needs help, you don't want them wandering the store with no one in sight.

Encourage employees to engage with every customer, ask how they can help, and be close by if assistance is needed.

Not only is this a nice touch to the experience, but playing close attention to customers can also help your employees spot shoplifters. This is another area of training you'll want your team to be familiar with, as people who tend to steal will take full advantage of a hectic and crowded environment.

Cross-Sell

The holidays are a good time to train up employees on cross-selling. Show your team how they can get a customer to add on to their purchase by revealing needs they wouldn't have realized on their own.

For example, if a customer is headed to the register with a blouse in their hand, your employee could mention how great it would look with a pair of jeans – which just so happen to be on sale for 40% off! This doesn't work on everyone, of course, but it's worth a shot without being too pushy.

There's an opportunity to upsell at the register, too. Say the customer only grabbed one plant that's part of a promotion, potentially not knowing they could save money or get an incentive for spending a bit more. Your employee could mention that adding on two more plants of the same kind would get them one free. The customer may turn down the offer, but again, it's worth a try.



Get Involved

The holidays are about more than gifts, food, and decorations. They're about togetherness and community. Remember how important this is and make an effort to get your business involved.

Getting in with the small business community provides a great opportunity to drive sales. During this season, there are several holiday markets that are specifically designed to highlight talented small business owners. You could have your own booth if you do some research and send in applications! Markets like this are pretty popular in larger cities, so if you're in a less populated town, don't be afraid to venture out. Travel may be necessary, but the good thing is that you'll likely only need one or two people to manage your business' table.



In addition to markets, there are many holiday-focused fundraisers and charity efforts. It's the season for drives to give less fortunate children a gift or to provide the homeless with a warm coat to get them through the winter. For example, The Salvation Army and You Give Goods are two organizations happily accepting help throughout the holiday season. Find something that's important to you and aligns with the values and mission of your business. Whether it's accepting an extra dollar at the register or being

a drop-off spot for clothing donations, every little bit counts.

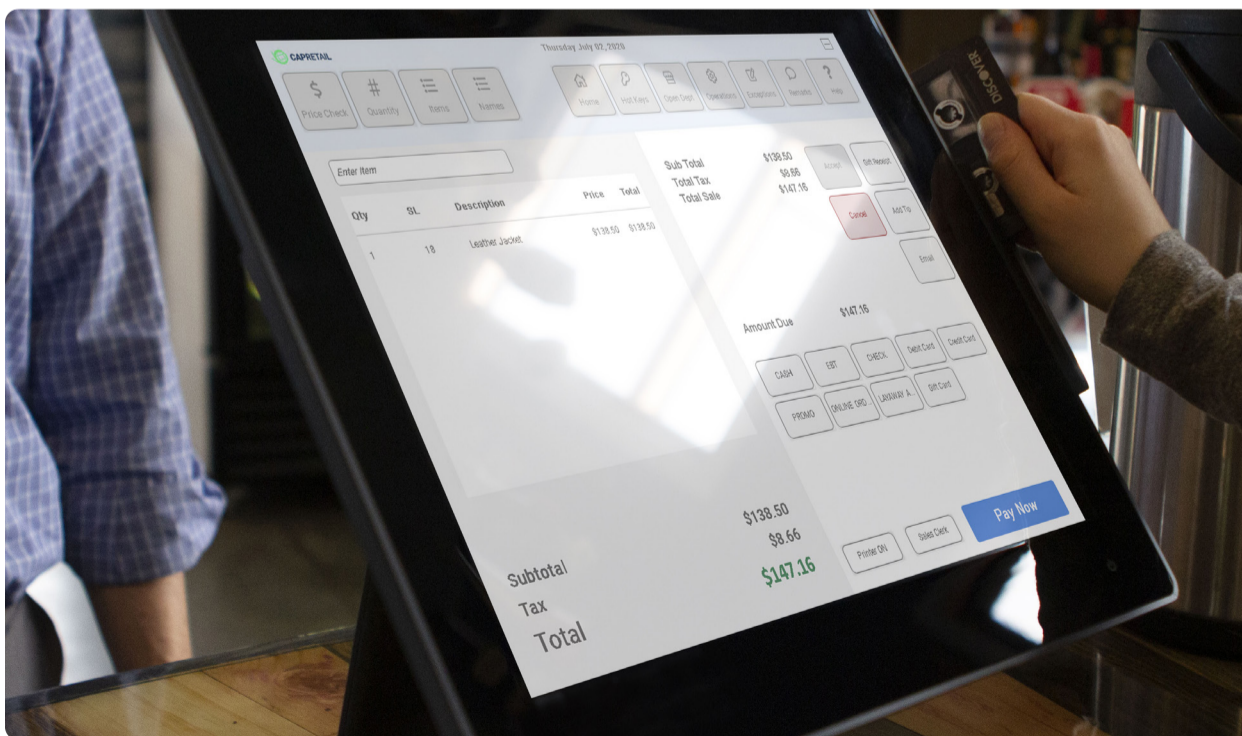
Evaluate What Worked and What Didn't

Once it's time to ring in the new year, you'll want to reassess what went well and what didn't go as planned so you can improve next holiday season.

Talk to your customers, your employees, and crunch some numbers. (Again, using a POS system with advanced reporting makes this way easier!) This season may not be perfect for your business, but there's always room to learn and grow.



Need some more tips on point of sale solutions and how our powerful software can help you kick business up a notch for the holidays? Get in touch with our team and schedule a live demonstration to see how our all-in-one POS system can set you up for success. Happy holidays!



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