



The 2020 Aimclear Guide To

HOLIDAY PROMOTIONS

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Stores may not be decked out with Christmas decorations just yet, but it's coming. It might even be here quicker than you expect!

(We're looking at you Target. Who launches Christmas displays in September!?!)

Soon, your inbox is going to start filling up with holiday-themed offers. And unfortunately, most of them are pretty much going to be the same thing you've seen a hundred times:

- Get on the early-bird list
- Claim 15% off
- This is your last chance!

While we all love the classics, there's a whole world beyond these old holiday chestnuts, and in this guide we're going to unwrap them for you!

Campaigns That Feel Like A Gift, Not A Grab

For the purposes of this guide, our goal is to show you how Aimclear creates holiday campaigns for our clients that feel like a gift, instead of a money grab. We're going to discuss tactics for ecommerce, consumer services, and business to business (B2B) brands. So no matter what you do, this guide should help you!

We will start by discussing campaign strategy, and share some ideas you can use to delight your customers and boost sales at the same time. Then, we're going to dig deep into specific ad creative and landing page tactics for turning your dream campaigns into real results!

The goal is to create campaigns that entertain, enlighten, and also encourage the right prospects to spend their holiday dollars with you.

Doing this effectively all starts with proper planning.

Planning Your Promotions

You're probably running staggered promotions throughout the year based on seasonal trends, historical performance, and other events that impact your industry. If not, you should be.

In addition to these events, there are 5 big holidays and shopping events in Q4 that wrap up the holiday season in North America every year. Most businesses should factor these into their plans.

Key Dates For Q4 Holidays/Shopping Events:

- Thanksgiving (in the US) the fourth Thursday in November
- Black Friday the Friday immediately following Thanksgiving
- Cyber Monday the Monday after Black Friday
- Christmas Eve / Christmas Day December 24th and December 25th each year
- New Years Eve December 31st

Other (Maybe Important) Dates

- Halloween: October 31st, 2020
- Small Business Saturday the Saturday after Black Friday
- Green Monday Green Monday is (usually) the second Monday in December

Laying The Foundation

Once you've picked the events you plan to focus on, and have added them to your calendar, it's time to get down to the brass tacks of building these campaigns.

Aimclear specializes in integrated marketing campaigns across multiple channels and platforms.

We have a full team of media buyers and ad operations folks who support our clients with creating audiences and setting up campaigns for <u>paid search</u> (PPC), <u>paid social</u> (FB Ads, LinkedIn Ads, Instagram Ads, etc. etc.), <u>organic search</u> (SEO), organic social and PR. We also support many of our clients with data services, <u>martech services</u>, and <u>website development</u>.

Each of these topics in and of themselves would require a full guide to properly cover, and so for the purposes of this guide we're focusing on:

- Strategizing effective campaigns
- Producing effective ad creatives and landing pages to support these campaigns



In essence, this guide focuses on the "creative" side of holiday promotions.

There are however other major considerations beyond the creative, including ad spend, audiences, technical setup and testing, and data monitoring. Check out the <u>Aimclear blog</u> for articles where we cover these other critical components of your holiday campaigns.



The 2020 Aimclear Guide To Holiday Promotions



Okay... You've identified the events and opportunities you're going to focus on, and planted them firmly into your marketing calendar.

You've also determined your budgets, audiences, and the KPIs you need to hit to make these campaigns a success. You've got the tech and paid media teams gearing up in Santa's workshop.

The next critical step in launching successful holiday campaigns (or any campaigns, really) is what our creative team considers this the fun part...

Actually writing copy, and designing marketing creatives!

Fundamentally, your messaging strategy depends on a deep understanding of the different states of awareness of your buyers.

⁴⁴ The buying process is a journey...
And not every buyer is going to be at the same stage of that journey. **



Some customers are just browsing the web, not even aware that they have a need when they stumble across your ads. On the flip side, other segments of your audience will know they have a need, and may also know that you offer a solution that fills that need. Maybe they've even been to your website and snooped around a little!

For this reason, it's important to create different messaging that accounts for different buyer states. Without this, you'll never be able to meet your audience where they are in the buying journey.

The Four Stages Of Buyer Awareness

1. Unaware





An example ad for an Unaware Audience: Wait... My AC unit might die at the worst possible moment? I had no idea!

These are prospects who don't even know they have a problem yet, or that you offer a new, cheaper, better, or more innovative solution.

An example of this buyer state might be someone who doesn't understand that drinking tap water is bad for them, due to the fact that most tap water contains chemicals and contaminants might potentially be poisoning their bodies.

Shocking discoveries, right?

There's a certain amount of education required here, and these buyers are ripe for initial messaging that revolves around the painpoints and your solutions.

2. Problem Aware

This segment of your audience consists of prospects who know they have a problem, they just haven't started researching solutions yet.

- A prospect might strongly feel they're paying too much for cable television.
- Or perhaps a prospect has lower back pain.



Doctors: "This Is 10x Better Than Metformin"

boctors say this is the **real cause** of high blood sugar, and it **may shock you...**



An example ad for an Aware Audience: If someone is diagnosed as a diabetic, they know they have a problem with their blood sugar.

3. Solution Aware



A Solution-Aware ad example. These often work well in retargeting. This audience may have tried everything, and may be well familiar with the options that are available to address their problem.

These are prospects who know they have a problem, and have started looking into ways to solve it. To further our examples:

- The unaware water-drinker mentioned above is now worried about drinking tap water, and has started researching water filtration systems, and also home-water delivery services.
- The prospect from above who feels like they're paying too much for cable television, has started looking at other cable companies and streaming options.
- The above prospect who has lower back pain has started looking into chiropractors, or buying a new office chair, or joining the gym to lose some weight. Maybe all three!

4. Brand Aware

This segment of your audience is not only aware that they have a problem or need, but is also aware of the solutions available to them. Even more, they've done some looking around and narrowed down their options to certain brands.

- Our thirsty water-drinker has decided water-filtration systems are too expensive, and is deciding between two different water delivery services.
- Our penny-pinching cable subscriber has decided to cut the cord entirely, and is choosing between Hulu, Netflix, and SlingTV.
- The prospect with lower back pain is reading reviews for different office chairs online, and is extremely interested in buying a Peloton stationary bike.

Once you identify your buyer states, it becomes really easy to start to determine where different messaging might fit into your funnels.

At that point, it's simply a matter of touching on the right emotions and sales triggers.



Brand Aware Audiences are just comparison shopping, looking for a discount or final reason to pull the trigger on a purchase.

For ecommerce brands, messaging might emphasize the giving spirit of the season, or highlight how nice and easy it is to shop online and avoid potentially crowded stores. Ads might include coupon codes.

Retargeting campaigns might focus on guaranteed in-stock or limited inventory/countown messaging.

Consumer Services might focus on unique holiday-specific services, or year-end deals and offers for last-minute shoppers.

B2B clients might focus messaging on year-end deals and promotions extended beyond the holiday season.



Call (218) 727- 4325 24 Hour Emergency AC Repair 24-Hour Emergency Service Don't panic! Call Duluth's trusted AC repair experts right now... Available day or night!

This ad works for an urgently Aware Audience: If your AC unit dies or your hot water heater explodes and floods your basement with water... You not only know you have a problem, but you need it fixed ASAP!

7 Delightful Holiday Campaign Ideas

No matter how great your offer is, the average person can only scroll, click, open, and read so many emails and offers on a given day. They can only do so much shopping.

When you combine this with less-specific messaging (e.g. every marketer under the sun pushing "10% - 15% off" sales), it's natural to expect slightly lower open and click-through rates during the holidays.

The effect of this, combined with limited inventory and higher ad costs, can play havoc with your numbers. How do you minimize it?

By thinking outside the box, and creating campaigns that shock, delight and stand out from everything else out there!

Here's 7 outside-the-box campaign ideas that are worth exploring:

1. Thank Your Customers!

A large percentage of your holiday sales can (AND SHOULD) come from existing customers. Make sure to create campaigns that sell to them this holiday season, but before you do, make sure to thank them!

- Send out a thank you card
- Publish a blog post
- Send them a gift
- Let them know to keep an eye out for the amazing deals you have coming

Just make sure they know you appreciate them.

2. Involve A Cause

We understand that as marketers, the focus always has to be on ROI to some degree, but there is life beyond it to consider. We all have beliefs, movements, and causes that are important to us. Not just as individuals, but also as brands. The holidays are a great time to make an impact in your community, and for the causes you brand believes in.



Making this clear in your marketing shows the passionate, human side of your brand, and can also boost sales at the same time among the percentage of your audience that shares these values! Pro tip: work with your ads team to determine if audience segmentation and behavior data is available to assist in specifically targeting your customers by cause affiliation.

3. The Often-Overlooked Gift Card

Not everyone is an amazing shopper. Some people look at the screen and have no clue what to get for uncle Frank, let alone their own kids! For this reason, gift cards are a multi-billion dollar industry. It's also why you should probably start selling them, if you don't yet.

Gift cards are an easy "slippery sale" compared to other holiday offers that involve multiple sizes, colors, and customizable variables. All you really need prospects to do in the gift card decision-making process is pick between 3-5 different price-points!

Promote your gift cards heavily, especially in retargeting campaigns aimed at prospects who have visited multiple purchase-focused pages, but not added anything to their cart.

4. Don't Forget Email

Just like existing customers, you want your email subscribers to feel special.

They've given you the privilege of popping up in their inbox every once in a while, but if your messaging falls flat or becomes boring and repetitive, they'll be gone before the sun comes up on Christmas morning.

One idea to keep them happy: reward your customers and email subscribers with early bird deals before the holiday rush. They'll feel special and may also have more to spend in your store earlier in the season.

Exclusive content and offers for email subscribers are also incredibly effective.

Finally, smart segment customers who regularly buy certain items during the holidays, and send them to a custom landing page - filled with personalized deals on items that complement what they've already bought!

5. Bundle It Up

Holiday baskets, bundles, and product combos are a win-win for both you and your customers. They can increase your AOV (average order value) which can boost revenues during a time when ad spend usually skyrockets.

6. Urgency!

From one perspective, ads that highlight the urgency of the approaching holidays, countdown reminders that sales are ending, or notifications of limited stock can all feel overbearing and unethical. Another perspective is that some of us are really busy (especially during the holidays), and we keep postponing or forgetting to do our shopping.



For the latter, these reminders are incredibly helpful!

You can also create urgency in smaller, more focused "quick hit" campaigns like 24 hour flash sales, and limited-time raffles and giveaway contests. These campaigns are great opportunities to keep promotions lively and fresh and they keep customers paying attention and coming back to satisfy their curiosity.

Amazon has perfected this strategy with the "Lightning Deals" they offer as a part of Black Friday/ Cyber Monday Deals Week.

7. Add A Bow On Top

To make the customer experience even more magical, consider adding a small gift to their purchases during the holiday season. You can also offer free shipping, or free holiday gift-wrapping. Be sure to highlight a holiday gift guide that promotes your holiday campaigns.

Not only will things like this delight your customers and make them feel special, but it can also boost your conversion rates, and help you stand out from the flood of other offers!

Once you have your messaging dialed in, and have worked through some ideas for how to apply your messaging to inventive campaigns, you can start to get into some of the specifics of creating creative assets.

Let's start at the top by discussing ads, which often comprise that critical first touch.





If you've run ads before, you're probably familiar with <u>different channels</u>, and the various file types and size outputs required for each. Instead of getting into the weeds on this, we're going to talk about some broader tips to make sure your ads stand out and get people clicking.

Let's Start With Video

According to Hubspot, more than 50% of consumers want to see videos from brands - more than any other type of content. Once they start watching videos, they end up purchasing more as well. The average CTR of video ads in mobile apps is 7.5 times higher than for display ads.

For these reasons, video is king.

Video ads merge movement and sound to capture attention. Make the first 3-5 seconds count. You need to stop users from scrolling to even have a chance. Try bright colors, and big, bold movements. People love video - you want them to know immediately (even with the sound off) that your ad is a video, and not an image.

Not all channels support video, and video is often a heavier creative lift. So let's talk about headlines, and other static banners and images.

Headlines

There are hundreds of books and blog posts detailing formulas and strategies for writing compelling headlines. Here's the basics:

- Write 10-15 headlines for each ad. Discard the weakest, improve the strongest.
- Keep headlines short and sweet. Usually, the fewer words, the better.
- If possible lean on emotions (joy, curiosity, trust, fear, anger) in your headlines.
- Test headlines that contain specific numbers and data.

Button Copy

As simple as it sounds: Tell people what to do!



Be direct. Try to avoid generalized call-to-action statements like "Click Here" and "Learn More" and instead, use stronger intent-based statements:

- Buy Now
- Shop Now
- Sign Me Up
- Download The Guide

Static Banners And Other Images

When it comes to visual design, the same concepts that apply to landing pages also apply here. Be smart, clear, and consistent in your design.

Use high-contrast colors for your buttons so they really stand out. Sure, an entire banner is clickable, but people still love buttons. Test adding a thin border around your banners, so they stand out from the various pages where they'll appear.

Make sure your headline and other supporting copy is big enough to read!

Remember, your resolution might be huge when you're reviewing and approving banners, but not everyone who sees them will have the same luxury. When you view standard banner sizes (250x250, 468x60, 336x280, and 120x600) at 100% on a variety of screen/resolution sizes, you might be shocked at how small and difficult to read the copy renders!

Static images with higher contrast (in LinkedIn and Facebook, for example) and images with borders around them (especially for display banners) can also create jumps in conversions, and are worth testing.





Unfortunately, many businesses build a single, solitary landing page for the whole season, and then simply change out the header image for different holidays.

Bah Humbug!

It's possible to do so much more, with just a little bit more effort.

A great place to start might be to build a landing page that contains everything pertinent to all your holiday shopping promotions, including gift-worthy products, coupon codes, info on sales, dates, shipping deadlines, and so on.

Update key inbound links (social media profile links, links in email signatures) that point to your homepage with a link to your new "Holiday Overview" page, and you can quickly start sending early holiday traffic here, instead of your homepage.

Once you've done that, you can dig even deeper with more granular landing pages for specific uses.

- Build a landing page that captures lead information (name and email) that can be used later. Maybe let shoppers download a PDF of your new shiny Holiday Gift Guide!
- Build a landing page (or series of landing pages) especially for visitors clicking through from email, and fill the page with special "email subscribers only" offers.
- Build a landing page for your "Holiday Gift Guide" promotion, that features only the products featured in your guide for easy shopping!
- If you plan on discounting an entire product line as part of your holiday promotions, create a landing page with the coupon code on it (so shoppers don't have to dig around for it) and include the products that are included in the sale.





7 Tips For Effective Landing Pages

1. Consistency Is Key

We can't stress enough the importance of having close alignment between the messaging and visual elements in your ads and the actual landing pages for those ads.

If your paid search ads are constantly reminding shoppers about Black Friday deals, you should absolutely communicate that same sense of Black Friday urgency above-the-fold on the landing page.

2. Keep It Minimal

Your landing page is meant to direct visitors to take a specific action, whether that's filling out a form, or purchasing a product. For that reason, don't include too many other links, options, or distracting elements.

At Aimclear, we often develop landing pages that look like they were created to exist in an isolation bubble:

- We minimize or remove the top navigation
- Move the social media icons to the footer
- Remove bright visual elements that aren't buttons, or elements that encourage our ideal outcome

And the results? The more simplified design and direct the copy, the better they convert.

3. Add Testimonials/Reviews

Testimonials and reviews are a great way to reassure buyers that they're making a smart decision. Unfortunately, most testimonials are too weak and generalized. Testimonials that say things like "WOW!!! LOVE THIS PRODUCT!" are ineffective at best, and totally unbelievable at worst.

You want to use testimonials that describe in great detail how your customers have benefited from their purchase.

So go ahead and remove that plugin that displays every review you've ever received, no matter how short, unreadable, or vague they may be. Instead, curate detailed, granular testimonials and use those on your landing pages.

⁶ The more detailed and human testimonials are, the more believable they are.

4. Add Other Authority Markers

Logos, badges and icons make people feel warm and cozy, like they're huddled around a blazing fireplace.

- Test adding "Trust Badges" (Icons for SSL, Safe Checkout, Secure Ordering, Satisfaction Guaranteed, etc. etc.) under/around your buttons
- Test adding icons/logos for "Awards and Certifications"
- If you've been featured on television or other mainstream media, test adding "As Seen On" icons/logos for known media outlets

5. Test Countdown Timers

As we've already discussed, a countdown timer displaying how much time is left during a particular promotion works to create a sense of urgency, and reminds shoppers that it's time to take action.

6. Finesse Your Buttons

You really want visitors to click the buttons on your landing pages. Buttons add items to a cart. They add a prospect's name to your email newsletter, and they take visitors deeper into your funnel. With this in mind, your buttons should stand out in contrast from the rest of the elements on your landing page.

Use heat-mapping software like Hotjar or CrazyEgg to test the effectiveness of these modifications, and adjust accordingly.

7. Simplify Your Checkout

This isn't necessarily a landing page specific tip, but it's critically important:

You need to do everything in your power to simplify and streamline your checkout process. Monitor your data, and isolate areas where prospects are getting hung up, and test variants that work to address those roadblocks.



Tips From The Trenches

Integrated Marketing & Creative Fundamentals

The push towards brands "being everywhere" has been building for years. While the sentiment has merit, it can also create some potential headaches, especially during the holiday shopping season. Integrated marketing can build authority and brand awareness, but it largely comes down to users feeling like they're seeing you everywhere.

⁴⁴ Being visible on multiple channels isn't going to do much for your business if your creative is inconsistent.

If you're running ads on multiple channels, but using a variety of different ad messaging and design elements, you're not going to get the results or perceived status of being ubiquitous that you're seeking. In extreme cases, users may even think you're two or even three completely different companies!

Your native ads, display ads and social ads need to touch on the same themes and styles for consistency in your campaigns. The key to solving for this is by starting with a couple assets every business should have (and yet many don't) - a Style Guide (or Brand Standards Manual), and a Media Library.



Creating A "Brand Bible"

A Style Guide/Brand Standards Manual is basically the "bible" that outlines exactly how your brand should be visually represented. It's the cornerstone of creating a consistent, recognizable brand.

An effective Brand Standards Manual will usually include:

- A word or two on your values, and the essence of the brand that should consistently be communicated in your marketing
- Specifics on how your logo should be treated for various applications
- Specifics on using images, icons, symbols, and brand drivers in your marketing
- The exact CMYK/RGB and Pantone color values to be used in all marketing
- A breakdown of the approved fonts, and the spacing and kerning of how those fonts are treated

With this information, your in-house teams and vendors will always have everything they need to replicate your brand style for any application, from black and white embroidered hats to full-sized, full color billboards, and beyond.

Whether you're working with in-house teams or multiple vendors, this consistency can make a dramatic impact on the effectiveness of your integrated marketing efforts.

Creating A Media Library

This is a shared folder that lives somewhere in the cloud (on a server or service like Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, etc.) that contains all your approved marketing assets. You'll use it to store all the approved files your in-house teams and vendors need to execute your holiday creatives.

Storing these assets in the cloud (instead of on your hard-drive, or scattered across several different employees' computers) provides a safety layer of backups, and also allows you to control permissions on each folder or asset, so you can share certain elements with certain vendors while still ensuring consistency.

Your Media Library might include:

- Approved headlines and ad copy
- Approved full color, two color, black and white, and reverse files for your logo and brand drivers (icons, symbols, etc. etc.)
- Vector (.AI or .EPS) files so your logos can be reproduced at any resolution.
- Approved holiday campaign-related images, product images, and other assets
- Templates for ad creatives and social posts
- Any other elements you want consistently used in your marketing



Split Testing

We split test (or A/B test) just about everything - and you should as well.

Split testing is basically taking one version of your marketing and testing it against another, different version; then crunching the numbers, and seeing which version works better.

This allows you to improve your marketing on an ongoing, iterative basis. Today's generation of marketing and tracking tools make it a breeze to constantly test, track, and tweak.

- You can split test almost every aspect of your marketing, from your ads to your email follow up sequences, promotions, product pages, and sales letters
- You can test different price-points for your products
- You can test different headlines, email subject lines, button colors, and call to actions
- You can even test completely different layouts

Make sure you're testing. Even small changes in your numbers can mean a dramatic difference to your bottom line!

Holiday Campaign tips from our Ad Operations Team

As we mentioned at the outset, this guide focuses specifically on the creative side of holiday promotions: campaign ideas, messaging strategy, ad creative, and landing pages.

Obviously, there's a whole other side to your campaigns that is just as important, and that's the client services/<u>paid media</u> side. The ad operations team creates your campaigns. They manage your budgets and watch the numbers. None of what we've been discussing happens without them.

- Be ready to move fast and adjust on the fly.
- Advertising costs in Q4 typically go through the roof. You need to increase transaction values to offset these high costs and make your sales actually profitable. Flat holiday AOV is likely the result of increased competition for holiday shoppers, and bargain shoppers taking advantage of deep discounts.
- Start building audiences early, before costs soar. (Delayed attribution and retargeting)
- Focus on high-intent keywords. Narrow your PPC ads to phrases that indicate buyer intent ("buy [product]" "[product] comparisons" "[product] deals")
- Use behavioral data (past-purchases, for example) and real-time personalization to segment your existing users and offer them custom email marketing campaigns and other upgraded experiences.
- Don't wait until the 11th hour to stage and submit ads for approval in Facebook/Google
 Display Network. Build your ads in channel as far in advance as possible, so the systematic review processes have time to approve your ads.

Don't get stuck in an ad approval limbo during primetime holiday hours while waiting on a notoriously impersonal review process!

Closing Thoughts



We hope you've enjoyed Aimclear's Guide to Holiday Creative.

Running successful campaigns through the holidays can involve lots of assets, deadlines, and other moving parts. These all need to be carefully managed. In order to avoid a frantic, stressful couple of months at the end of the year (while still reaping the business rewards of the holiday season) make sure you do the following:

- Start planning early
- Understand different buyer states so you can create messaging for multiple touches, and give shoppers exactly what they need at every stage of your funnel
- Really think outside the box with your campaigns test
- Create clean, consistent ad creatives
- Create landing page experiences that make it supremely easy for users to find what they need, and take action
- Test, tweak, and adjust your way to a very Happy New Year

Thanks again for reading.

Questions? Comments? <u>We would love to hear from you</u>. Learn more about our <u>integrated marketing services</u>.

Appendix

Key Dates For Q4 Holidays/Shopping Events:

Thanksgiving

This is a great opportunity to take a moment and appreciate what you have. Many businesses use this holiday as an opportunity to thank their customers for their support and patronage.

Black Friday

Black Friday is the Friday immediately after Thanksgiving, and has become known for huge deals from thousands of businesses, big brands, and smaller retailers. Black Friday tends to include physical and online (digital) retailers.

Cyber Monday

The Monday after Black Friday. Cyber Monday is the biggest online (digital) shopping event of the year.

Christmas Eve / Christmas Day

These dates mark a religious and cultural holiday for billions of people around the world. Christmas is becoming more commercial every year, but it's still a family holiday, so base your campaigns on heart-warming ideas and well wishes.

New Years Eve

The end of the year. Send New Year's well-wishes to your customers, reflect on the past year, and run special promotions that will help prospects have a huge and successful 2021!

Other (Maybe Important) Dates

Halloween: October 31st, 2020

Primarily a North America thing, Halloween is a great opportunity to inject some spooky elements into your social media campaigns... Offer "Trick of Treat" deals, spooky savings, and other themed promotions and assets.

Small Business Saturday: November 28th, 2020

Created by American Express to encourage shoppers to support local businesses rather than industry giants. If you're a small business, you may have some success here.

Green Monday: December 14th, 2020

Green Monday is (usually) the second Monday in December and is the day shoppers realize they only have around 10 shipping days left before Christmas. This sense of urgency translates into big online sales, as prospects rush to complete their holiday shopping.

We don't necessarily feel you should run scarcity promotions on this specific Monday, but this week in general offers urgency that fits well into promotions.