



The first of a two part series, we take a look at ways to plan now for a cracking 4th quarter sales. 'Tis the season to be jolly and hopefully up on sales targets!

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Although the biggest rush for Christmas commences from September, there's much to be said for getting your plans in place and starting early. Thinking and planning ahead will give you that little bit extra over the competition and could ensure you much seasonal jollity.

Looking back to your sales strategy for last year's Christmas period is a good idea. Think about your promotions, sales techniques and selling strategy.

Interactive media in retail group (IMRG), the industry body for e-retailing, says that since April 2000 e-retail sales have increased by 1500%, while total UK retail sales have grown just 20%. By April 2010, online shopping will have expanded by a further 320%, be approaching £60bn per annum, and represent almost 20% of all retail. By 2010, 36 million Britons will shop online. Consumers, IMRG said, are motivated by the convenience of the internet, the wider choice available and cheaper deals on offer.

Have you thought about your own online offering? Do you regularly offer deals on your website? Do you have a website? If not, it may be time to consider a rethink of strategy. Twenty-one million Britons now shop online and 85% of them will be ordering Christmas presents on the internet, each spending an average of £220. Christmas shopping online will be equivalent

to the sales of 19 Bluewater Shopping Centres this year, according to IMRG. Shopping at Christmas has a reputation for being stressful, impacted by confusing store layouts, a lack of assistance, poor customer service and a lack of product knowledge. Oftentimes, it's not just about the product, the service can make the sale.

There are ways to reduce shopping stress and avoid the late Christmas shopping rush, and one of these is to shop early. The great thing about Christmas is that everybody buys for different types of people, so, potentially, it's a selling opportunity for every type of product – from PCs to pens to stationery sets to books. And it's not just the gifts that need to be marketed – customers always appreciate the accessories to complete the gift. So stock up on wrapping paper, sellotape, glue, gift tags, glitter pens, stickers, transfers, ribbon and bows.

Tell your clients also, that consumers will want to order larger items earlier so they can be guaranteed delivery on time. So they may want to order in larger items ahead of time, which means getting promotions out earlier. Research by Egg, provider of digital banking and financial services, confirms that 'early bird' high street promotions encourage one in three to avoid the Christmas rush and shop early. ■