



Clover Retail Holiday Guide 2020



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Welcome

As the coronavirus pandemic drags on, it continues to shape and change the ways we live, work, play, and shop. Holiday season 2020 has been irrevocably altered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn that's followed in its wake. Families and friends may not be able to gather as they have in years past. Small businesses have been hurt by business disruptions. We are all carrying the stress of these uncertain times, and many are dealing with increased pain and loss.

But life and business—and the holidays—must go on. While it may feel a bit scary, you, as a small business owner, have a real opportunity to offer your customers a sense of safety, security, and above all joy this holiday season. At a moment when everything we know feels like it could change in an instant, the warmth, familiarity and cheer of holiday shopping provide a much-needed respite.

We designed this guide to help you prepare your retail business for this unique holiday season.



2020 Holiday Timeline

Pre-pandemic, the holiday season used to be pretty straightforward for retail businesses. A merchant might soft launch new holiday products after Halloween. Then, right around Thanksgiving, sales would rev into high gear through Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday and sail on full force until December 25th.

While this year has been full of surprises, savvy retailers are still planning way ahead for the holidays. The first step in successful planning is to assess how the upcoming seasonal timeline will be different from years past.

Changes wrought by the pandemic have already impacted the timeline for retailers this holiday season. Big-box retailers including Target, Walmart, JC Penney, and Kohl's have all announced they will **stay closed on Thanksgiving**. Simon Property Group has followed suit and pledged that its malls will **remain closed** on Thanksgiving this year as well. In addition to these retail-led adjustments, consumers will likely drive change, too.

A recent **Google survey** found that half the respondents who usually shop for the holiday season said that the pandemic will affect how they normally buy. Changes in customer behavior are likely to influence the retail holiday timeline both directly and indirectly. For example, a third of the shoppers who typically shop in-store on Black Friday say they won't do so this year. We can anticipate that to impact sales directly on that day.

So, how can we expect the retail calendar to shift? Salesforce **predicts** that customers will begin shopping earlier. Prime Day, the Cyber Monday-style blowout for Amazon Prime members, is taking place later this year due to coronavirus. While no official date is public as of this writing, the retail giant advised sellers to use the week of October 5 as a placeholder. Salesforce predicts that this Prime Day date could siphon as much as 10% of sales from Cyber Week.

Prime Day is also expected to motivate shoppers to begin their holiday shopping early. It's likely that customers will already be motivated to purchase early out of concerns for shipping delays, worries over safety, and fear over product shortages. Once you add discounts into the mix, we can expect buyers to be highly motivated... even at the beginning of October.



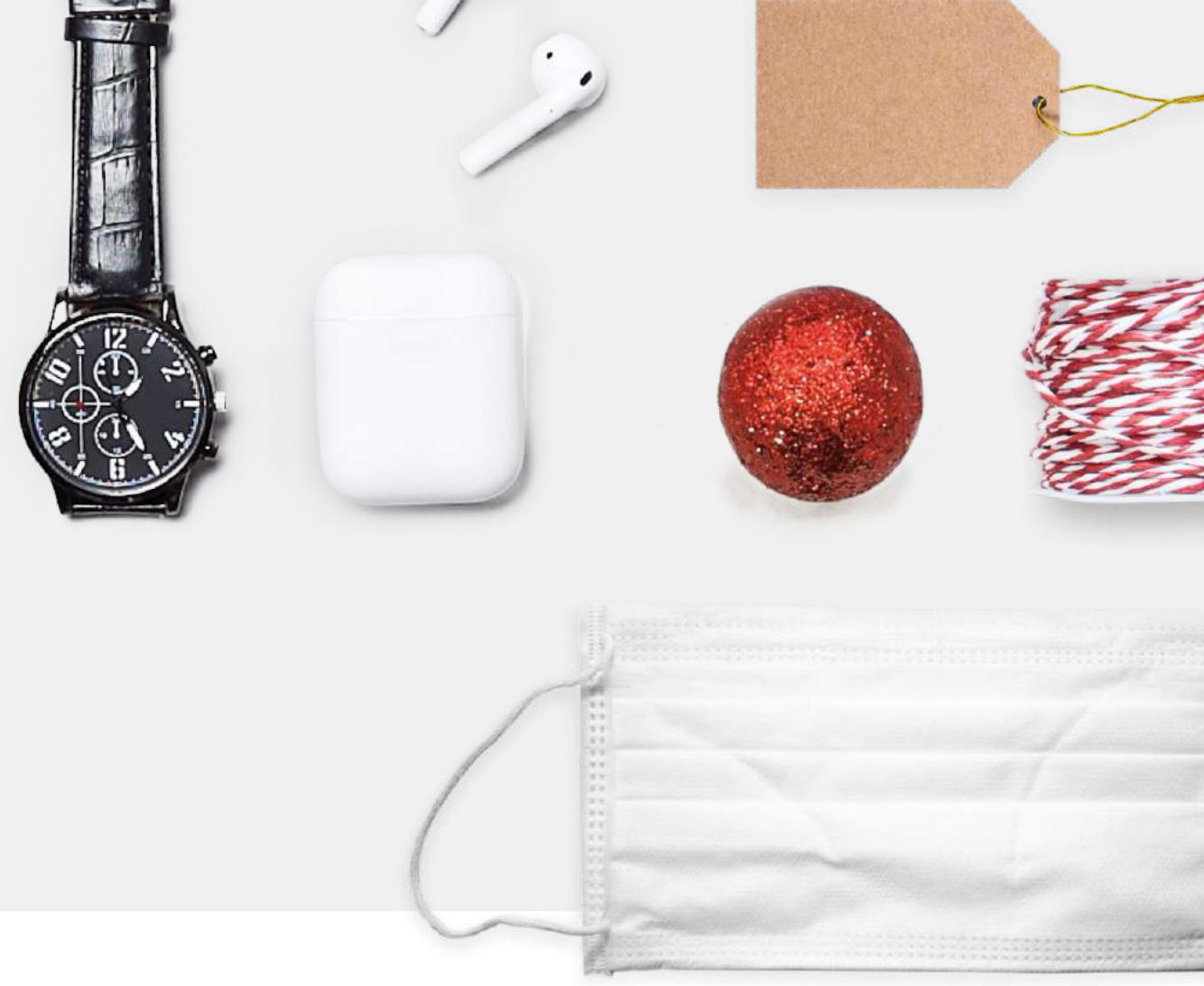
The Customer Experience

According to **Google's 2020 Retail Guide**, the average online shopping journey has 140 touchpoints. Those touchpoints influence both who a customer purchases from and what they buy. This is something we tend to know and frame as negative. We hear things like “We’re living in **an age of distraction**,” or “We’re experiencing **information overload**.”

What the savvy merchant hears is the way the shopping experience is evolving for consumers. Personalized experiences and tailored customer service offer an opportunity for smaller merchants to stand out. Let’s unpack that.



The Customer Experience



Customer service opportunities

Customer service has declined in recent years. A **2017 survey** from Arizona State University found that over three-quarters of complaining customers were less than satisfied with a given company's response to their complaint. **Harvard Business Review** offered this explanation for why customer service has gotten so bad: it's profitable. The larger the company, the more the economics of ignoring customer complaints make sense.

This dearth of positive experiences provides a way for smaller merchants to outshine big companies. Providing an exemplary customer experience can help you gain attention and retain customers. Additionally, it makes more financial sense for small businesses to invest in the customers they already have because it reduces the costs for customer acquisition.

Leverage your data

So, how can a small business provide the best holiday shopping experience? Look at customer data and use industry trends to help you anticipate how consumers are likely to behave this year. If you read that and thought, "Yikes! I am not tech-savvy," rest assured. No matter where you fall on the scale of Luddite to tech genius, you can draw on data to create a winning holiday strategy or plan.

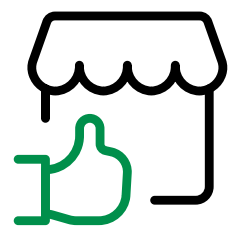
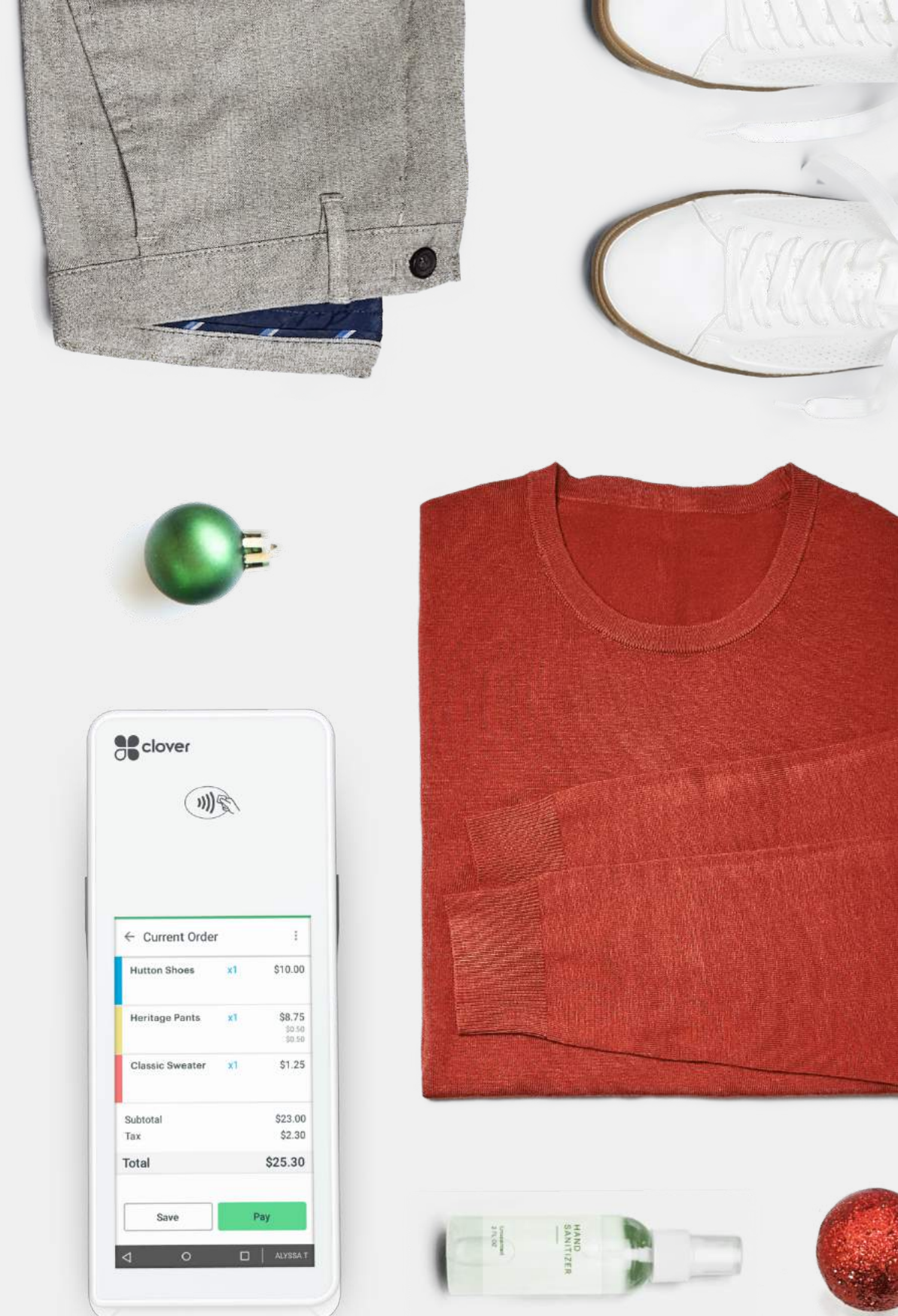
You can use many of the industry trends outlined in this guide to draw a picture of what the holiday season may look like. Then, use your **CRM** to review what's been successful with your customers. Gift cards, loyalty programs, and promotions are all tried-and-true methods for generating business. Let yourself get creative. Innovative, out-of-the-box thinking can turn a challenging situation like the pandemic into an opportunity.

A customer engagement program like our **Customer Engagement** suite makes those steps simpler because you can create custom promotions and thank your most loyal customers with VIP bonuses. Features like **autopay**, which provide for faster transactions and eliminate lines, are more appealing than ever because they provide increased safety and convenience for in-person shopping.



In-Store Shopping Experience

In previous years, a store might have offered hot cider or cookies as an added amenity for shoppers. This year, it's all about **safety and sanitization**. If you open for in-person shopping, you can follow a handful of easy-to-implement safety measures. You can set up hand sanitizer stations at the store's entrance and at **POS check-out stations**. If you expect customers to browse, you may want to include additional stations throughout the store.



Communicate what customers can expect and what your expectations are of them before they walk in the door. You can place signs outside that outline your rules for safe shopping, such as mandatory mask wearing and reminders about maintaining social distancing. You can continue communication about social distancing once shoppers enter the store by placing “Keep 6 feet apart” stickers on the floor near the check-out counter.



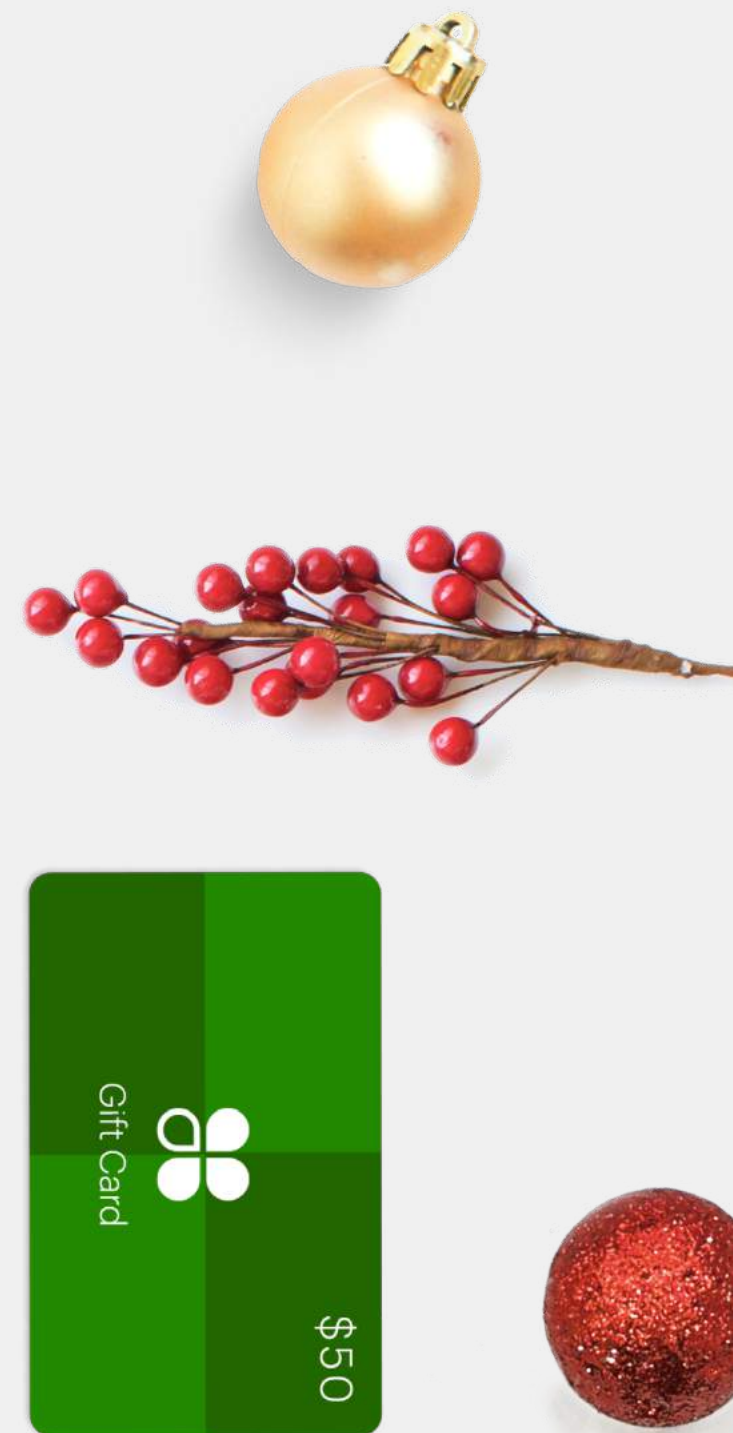
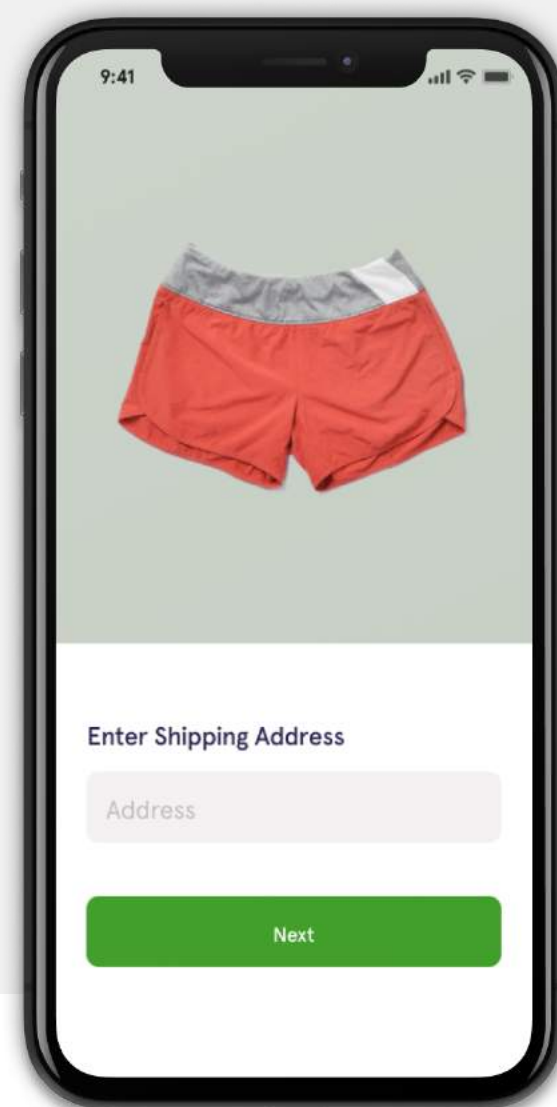
Your staff will likely encounter a high number of people as customers come in and out. You can provide extra protection for yourself and your employees by installing clear, plexiglass shields at POS stations to protect your customers and staff.



If you decide to limit the number of customers in your store in order to maintain social distancing, you can take a couple of additional steps to support that initiative. You can ask a store clerk to monitor foot traffic. If you're at capacity, you can make this clerk the point person to welcome new guests as other guests exit the store. You can even continue the “Keep 6 feet apart” stickers outside, so that there are markers to help shoppers socially distance as they wait to enter.

Online Commerce

Online shopping is expected to be bigger than ever for the 2020 holidays due to safety concerns. In 2019, **58% of holiday shopping-related purchases** were made online, according to Google's survey.



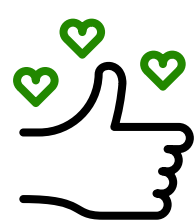
The digital shift is proving that every small business **needs an online presence**. Even if your customers ultimately shop in-store, your website and digital footprint still matter. In a **Google survey**, 90% of the respondents who had visited a store in the last week had searched online first.

Setting up your business online can be a breeze, especially if you have the right tools. Platforms like Ecwid and BigCommerce can help you **easily set up** your e-commerce store. When it comes to navigating shipments and delivery, you **have options** there as well. Traditional delivery isn't your only choice, either. **47% of respondents** who were planning to shop told Google that they planned to buy online and pick up in-store or curbside.

Clover devices accept contactless payments—such as Apple Pay® and Google Pay™—to ensure safe and convenient transactions.

Person-to-Person Communications

Putting together a strong and actionable marketing plan has never been more important. Strategize for how you'll engage with customers through social media and email marketing. At their best, these channels should work together without overloading the customer.

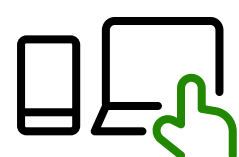


Social Media

Posting regularly on social media will keep your customers engaged and informed. As is true in most aspects of business, you want to **create a strategy** before you dive in. You may find your brand is **best served** by curating content or you may want to create your own.

Social media offers the opportunity for retailers to manage relationships with their customers. Whatever strategy you choose, you'll want to be consistent. People are craving consistency wherever they can get it. Prioritize your relationship with your audience; make them comfortable. In return, they'll build positive associations with your brand and be more likely to choose to shop with you in this altered holiday season.

In addition to organic reach, industry trends show that paid social ads have been rising because of their targeting and efficacy. Two new paid social formats, Instagram Stories and Snapchat ads, are driving **higher conversions**, so much so that they've actually led to a price decrease in other paid social advertising. Given the granular targeting available, this may be something you want to consider for your small business. TikTok and Instagram Reels are booming in popularity. While these new formats aren't proven yet in terms of conversion, both offer a fun, exciting, and novel way for you to connect with your customer base.



Email Communications

Email allows you to communicate everything from promotions to operational changes to your customers. Create a strategy and craft your email communications well ahead of time. Emails can be scheduled to send so that you don't have to worry about it at the peak of the season. That way the only emails you'll have to worry about are last-minute hiccups.

In addition, email marketing gives you more control than social media, because you aren't subject to the whims of a social media algorithm that makes your posts less visible to followers.

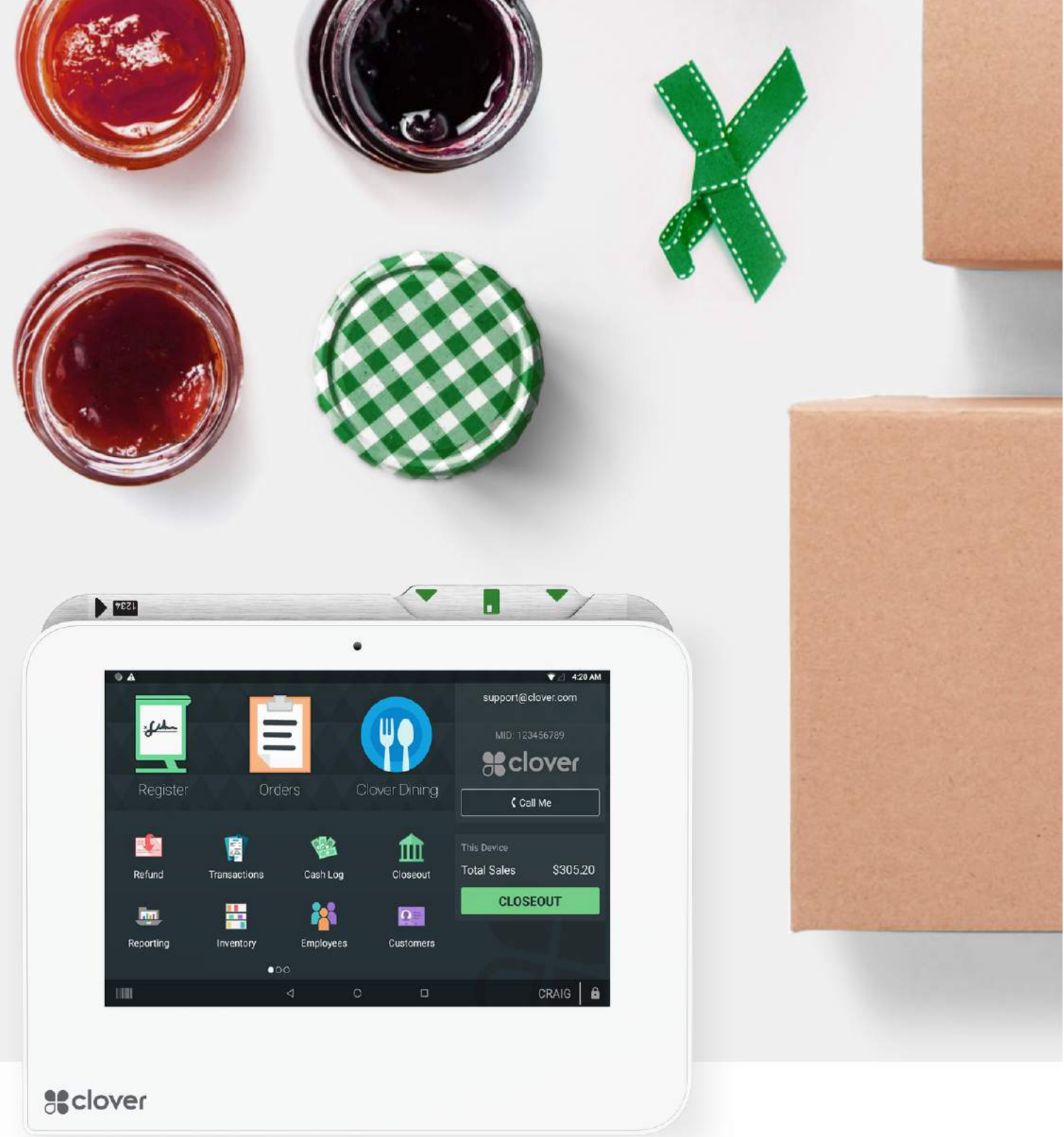
Inventory and Supply Chains

Inventory management is always a key element to a successful holiday season, and it's even more critical because of the various ripple effects of the pandemic.

Some manufacturers are operating with reduced workforces and outputs, causing delays in production. In the last six months, customer behavior has changed, leading to shortages of certain products. The shortages are often unexpected. Did you know, for example, that the rise in popularity of canning during the pandemic has led to a major **shortage of canning lids**?

It's not just inventory. The entire supply chain has been upended. As **Salesforce notes**, "Supply chains around the globe are buckling under extreme pressure, and unprecedented surges in digital commerce have limited shipping capacity and impacted delivery windows." Retailers from online giants like eBay to small jigsaw puzzle companies are advising customers to expect **shipping delays**.

All this to say, carefully consider your inventory, ordering, and shipping timeframes. To be extra cautious, use the widest timeframes you could possibly need for each and add an extra buffer. Once you've set these expectations for your business, communicate them to your customers as clearly and as often as you can. Set reasonable last-minute deadlines for orders that will need to be shipped, especially out-of-state and international orders, and communicate them clearly on your site and any other points of contact where sales are being made.



In the same way that repeated touchpoints are necessary for the sales cycle, repeated communication regarding deadlines and shipping limitations can help you **avoid unhappy customers**. Consider explaining to your customers (via your website, newsletters, and in-store signs) what's different about this year and why it's different. We're all operating with limited capacities, but shoppers may not have any idea about the global supply chain issues affecting your inventory. When you give them that missing piece of the puzzle, they'll be more likely to understand... and purchase early.

On the back end, you want to place inventory orders as early as possible. Given the supply chain issues, you may be tempted to bulk order everything you think you'll need... and then some. But given the **economic uncertainty** facing the country, you want to be as precise as possible so you're not saddled with unsold inventory come January. **Carefully plan** for how much inventory you'll likely need, and it will save you a few headaches down the road.

The Human Factor

In the end, your customers are human. They're struggling through this pandemic, too. Compassion and empathy, hallmarks of stellar customer service, have become even more important.



Keep in mind that a disgruntled customer may be dealing with sick family members, or they may be stressed by the struggle of learning the new expectations of safe shopping. The more you can meet them with understanding, the better served your business will be.

Let's not forget what makes everything we just discussed hum with harmony: you and your staff. Employee burnout will harm not only the morale of your people, but it will also hurt the bottom line. **Proper staffing and scheduling** are vital to ensure that no one gets burnt out. Yet you don't want to overstaff, either. That can lead to employees having nothing to do, and given the continued importance of social distancing measures, you don't want to have more employees together than is necessary.

Yes, the holiday season is the busiest for many retailers. It can be your overtime, your uphill sprint. It's important to remember to take care of yourself, allow for some "me" or "family" time—for yourself and your employees. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your work is to take a break.

Retail Holiday Checklist

Here's a checklist for retail business owners preparing for the 2020 holiday season. Print it out and keep it handy!

Adjust to the new timeline

- Be prepared to adapt to changes in normal business patterns

Customer experience

- Review customer data and industry trends to craft a robust strategy
- Provide exceptional customer service
- Use customer engagement tools like gift cards and loyalty programs

Safer shopping experience

- Set up hand sanitizer stations at the entrance and POS check-out stations
- Place signs outside your door that outline rules for safe shopping such as mandatory masks
- Install clear, plexiglass shields at POS stations to protect your customers and staff
- Create a process to limit the number of customers in your store to maintain social distancing, such as asking a store clerk to monitor foot traffic and welcome new guests as other guests leave the store
- Place "Keep 6 feet apart" stickers on the floor outside your store as well as near the POS check-out station to ensure social distancing for customers waiting to enter

Contactless POS transactions

- Set up contactless payments through Clover devices that accept payments through credit and debit cards as well as Apple Pay® and Google Pay™ to ensure safe and convenient transactions
- Place placards at POS check-out stations that encourage contactless payments over cash and credit card swipes

Retail Holiday Checklist

Online business

- Make sure your business has a website and an online shopping option
- Allow customers to purchase online and pick up in-store or curbside

Communications

- Create a social media and email marketing plan
- Publicize that your store is open for business and specify your operating hours

Inventory and supply chain

- Create a timeline for when you need to order inventory
- Set a deadline for last-minute orders
- Communicate time constraints and longer delivery times, if applicable, to your customers
- Offer Clover Gift Cards that allow your customers to make safe, contactless purchases online or in-store

Managing your people

- Schedule employees in a way that avoids burnout
- Staff appropriately so employees aren't over or underworked
- Prioritize rest for you and your people
- Train your staff on how to promote a safe shopping environment and shopping experience in your store
- Ensure the safety of your staff by providing COVID protection equipment such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers

Additional Resources

Contactless Payments

→

Clover Gift Cards

→

Disclaimer

The content provided in this guide is for informational purposes only. Nothing contained herein should be construed as medical advice. Please refer to www.cdc.gov and www.who.int for further information with respect to the coronavirus and COVID-19, and steps you can take to mitigate the related risks.

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