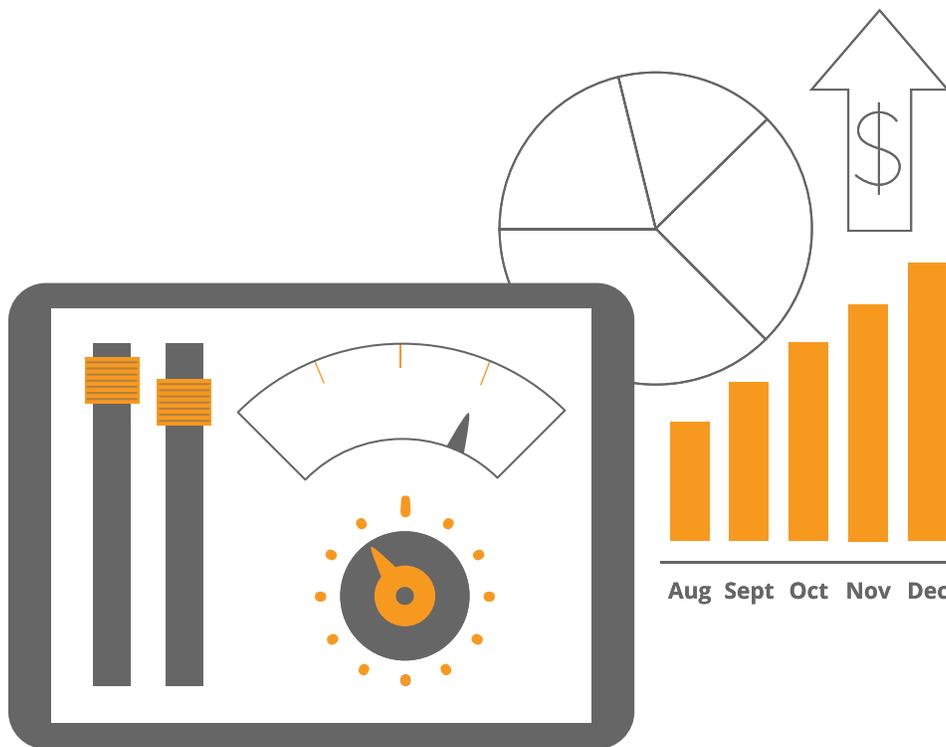




3 Fixes to Make Before the Fall

Simple ways to ensure higher profits for your stores this holiday season



A Guide by

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Remember that promise you made to yourself after the great selling cluster of Holiday 2016? If you're like most online sellers, every year, like clockwork, you make a valiant effort to get organized before the start of peak selling season. In fact, you may even reach for yet another software app that promises to fix what ails your business. Granted, there are hundreds of ecommerce apps, and, theoretically, each is intended to "solve" a problem. But enough with the BandAids.

This year, to put a finer point on the issues of sustainability and growth your business faces, we've put together some ideas and asked a few of our industry partners to weigh in. We asked, "What are the biggest systemic issues and operational aches and pains sellers should solve *before* the holidays hit?" Their answers were no surprise. In fact, we're in perfect agreement: Automation, data management, and getting up to speed with the ever-changing ecommerce industry top off the list of to-do's before sweater weather hits.

We guarantee, this advice will make business much easier and let you maximize profits through the inevitable strains of holiday selling in 2017.

Automation

You can't run an effective business without—at the very least—having your orders, inventory, and financial workflows automated across all stores and marketplaces. With the number of orders ramping up through the holidays, manual data entry is simply not sustainable. Come late fall, when accuracy and timeliness directly impact your bottom line, automation is equally important for shipping data.

Robert Gilbreath, Vice President of Marketing and Partnerships at the shipping automation company ShipStation agrees: "It's easier than ever for folks to start selling online, but when the orders come in at high volume during the holidays, fulfillment becomes a big problem."





And when putting out inevitable e-commerce holiday fires, David Doloboff, Manager of Global Business Development at the shopping cart platform Magento, points out the benefits of implementing an automation system that you can “set and forget,” if just temporarily. “You may not be able to check every day what your Magento sales are against Amazon versus Walmart versus Jet,” he said. “So it’s great to know everything is moving along despite your split focus.”

What to do now: Unlike 10 years ago, it’s now possible for sellers to optimize their entire ecommerce business with automation. So take advantage of this technology *before* the holidays. Protect both your business and your time by creating your own unified system that’s made up of best-of-breed apps in each area of ecommerce, including sales, accounting, inventory, and shipping. Go ahead and prepare for success. Know that you’ll need to scale, maybe even quickly. So use software built to grow *with* your business, so you can avoid future downtime or costly midstream adjustments.

Data management

If you sell on multiple channels, pulling all of those systems together creates an almost impossible scenario, even for the most savvy sellers. Andy Eastes, CEO of the inventory management company SkuVault, sees problems that stem from disparate data all the time. He said, “It’s crucial for you to make strategic decisions from your data in a manner that will allow you to not only compete with but to outright crush your competition.”

Crush, indeed! Data knowledge is often the most ignored aspect of the business. Because most sellers spend so much of their time in operations, they’re not able to get out of the minutia and see what it all means. They’re sort of drowning in their own business processes, so they don’t actually have the breathing room to ask themselves, *What’s the data telling me? Do I have enough information to justify an action? If so, how can I adjust quickly based on this data?*





What to do now: Find a data solution that allows you to see reports and understand the numbers from all channels and all angles—including revenue, expenses, fees, shipping costs, inventory, returns—in one place. Bonus points for a tool that will allow you to download historical data from past holiday seasons. This will help you negotiate better terms with vendors, strategize free-shipping incentives, prep for extra staffing, reduce holiday returns, improve your margins, market to your most valuable customers—and the list goes on!

Getting up to speed

Business owners and operators need to keep up with intricate details of all their operational workflows, especially if their systems need updating. SkuVault's Eastes points out, "The ecommerce industry is always changing, and the market is changing right along with it. There are always new sales channels and tools, software that is being sunset, and businesses that are expanding from local to international, just to name a few." Eastes continued, "Not only is not keeping up bad for employee morale, it costs sellers more money and leads to a poor customer service experience—all of that will affect your revenue and profits."



What to do now: Conduct an honest inventory of your entire tech stack—from the top down and side to side—before the leaves start to fall off the trees. Test and execute available software upgrades, and make sure there are no major updates on the horizon. Discuss replacing inefficient tools or processes with your team. Ask each of them about the most time-consuming, annoying task of their day. Is someone stuck searching the warehouse for hours every day? Now's the time to clean up that inventory and create a better system to organize it. Is someone doing full-on forensic research every time there's a return or exchange? Examine your return system and do a bit of research on return optimization and automation. We promise—trimming those inefficiencies now will pay off during peak selling season.



Any way you look at it, summer is the best time to take control of your data, automate your workflows, and get your tech stack up to speed. Only then can you go into the holiday selling season with a clear mind, an optimistic outlook, and a chance at rising above the competition once Santa takes to the skies. So grab a lemonade and get to work. 🍷



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