



How to Prep for the Holiday Storm

*Protect your profits in the midst of the chaos
By Webgility CEO Parag Mamnani*

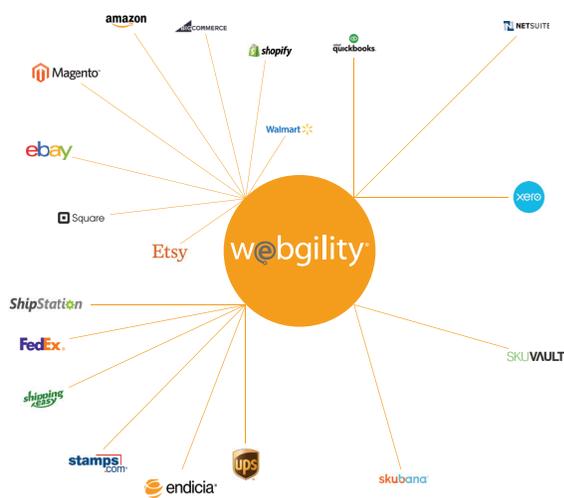


A Guide by

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It's summer, which means it's time to batten down the hatches for holiday sales. But if you're like most online retailers, you might never be fully ready. Truth is, most SMBs just don't have time to project and plan for additional holiday inventory and fulfillment, nevermind streamline workflows and minimize shipping costs. At best, most sellers are just guessing at the expected velocity of sales. It's no wonder that, although online retail continues to grow at an exponential rate, healthy profit margins continue to elude online sellers. Why? Because without the right tools, selling on multiple channels is a losing game. Retailers try desperately to increase order volume, but quickly become overwhelmed by confusion around both finances and logistics when sales do surge. And there's a big price to be paid for all that incongruity—for every dollar made, sellers could be blind to the sizable marketplace fees and shipping costs that never show up on forecasting radar. Even worse, there may be severe weather on the horizon caused by inaccurate inventory. Unfortunately that kind of trouble usually blows in with no warning at all.



Instead, imagine an e-commerce ecosystem—a virtual ERP, if you will—where all of your stores, marketplaces, software, and business applications actually work together to optimize workflows and profit margins. An order—or even a whole batch of orders—comes in from a store or marketplace and syncs directly with a central shipping hub like ShipStation or ShippingEasy. You instantly view options

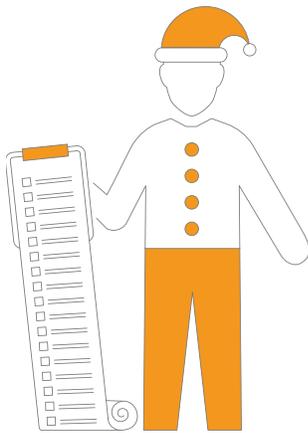
and choose a carrier based on price and delivery date. Seconds later, you click to print a branded shipping label, then confirm and send the customer tracking information. Meanwhile, all that sales data—including customer and product information—syncs with your accounting software, so you don't have to guess at the barometric pressure of your finances, you'll already know the state of things. Your inventory quantities update accordingly, all fees, expenses, and sales tax are recorded, and now you can enjoy your coffee and glazed cronut. Nice, right?



Given the time limitations, there are four simple things you can do now to get ready for—and even enjoy—the coming surge.

1. Clean it up.

What inventory do you have in stock that needs to move? Don't delude yourself that it will magically sell this holiday season—go ahead and make room for what *you know* will sell this season and focus on what products are most profitable for your business. To move large amounts of overstocked product quickly, you may need to take a hit on margins. Go ahead and use your Amazon or eBay channels as a clearinghouse or create separate marketplace stores that act as your online sale rack. Even better, donate what you can to nonprofits and be sure to get a receipt for your tax deductions.



2. Break it down.

Low-tech as it may sound, make a list and check it twice. Write down how you spend your workdays and include how long you spend on each activity. Put a star next to those tasks that you find most annoying or time consuming. If you have employees, ask them to complete the same exercise. If there are inefficient workflows or bottlenecks in your business, they will be revealed here. For example, if your manual pick, pack, and ship processes are taking up 85% of your day, consider the benefits of inventory or shipping automation and batch processing. Or if you spend your day spinning between several different sales channels to ensure your inventory is up to date for each one, find a tool that connects all channels and instantly syncs them with your master inventory list. Streamlining your workflows and operations now will clear time in your schedule—and your mind—so you can better manage your business during the holidays and thereafter.

93% of shoppers take action for free shipping.¹

¹ <https://www.slideshare.net/GrantMorrow1/e-commerce-techcampmemphis/slides>



3. Sync it.

Take a typical online order and walk it through its lifecycle, both literally and figuratively. The order comes in and that data needs to go in several different operational directions: shipping carriers and tracking, fulfillment and logistics, inventory management, bookkeeping and accounting, customer lists for marketing, and business analytics—and that’s just one order! Ten years ago, you’d be hard pressed to find ways to automate and sync all of that data. These days, full integration is the only way to go, especially since e-commerce selling, by nature, is so disjointed. Build your business model around tools that automate one set of sales data from your stores throughout the entire workflow, and you’ll be amazed by a beautiful double rainbow efficiency, accuracy, and speed.



4. Count it.

Make another list, this time write down your business’ biggest expenses to see where you might increase your profit margins and streamline your business model. What do you pay in marketplace fees and promotions each month? Make sure you’re moving enough product on marketplaces to justify those fees. Are you easily able to compare shipping carrier costs for each order based on delivery location? If you’ve been in business for a few years, maybe now’s the time to renegotiate your contract with your payment processor. And what about data entry? Could the time and money you spend on entering sales data into accounting, inventory, and shipping be done for less time and money (and more accuracy) by an automation software? Hint: Yes.



*November and December drive **30%** more e-commerce revenue than non-holiday months.²*

² <http://blog.adeptmarketing.com/the-ultimate-list-of-e-commerce-marketing-stats-for-holiday-2016/>



50%
*of shoppers
abandoned
carts that did
not give an
estimate on
delivery.³*

With a fully automated business model in place, holiday preparation on the operations and logistics side can be quite minimal. Because all of the data is already in your accounting, year-over-year sales projections are calculated in a snap, and vendor orders are in sync with reality. When inventory is updated in real-time, there's no mystery about how many products remain to be sold and for what price on which channels. Customers know exactly when their products will arrive and come tax time, your accountant is delighted by accurate, timely bookkeeping.

By integrating and automating your e-commerce sales, shipping, inventory, and accounting now, you'll be guaranteed fair skies through the holidays, new year, and beyond. @

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About the Author

Parag Mamnani is Founder and CEO of Webgility, Inc. His experience with thousands of e-commerce customers and more than a decade of building software and systems for online retailers makes him uniquely qualified to advise on this topic. [Follow Parag on Twitter.](#)

³ <https://blog.adeptmarketing.com/the-ultimate-list-of-e-commerce-marketing-stats-for-holiday-2016/>

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