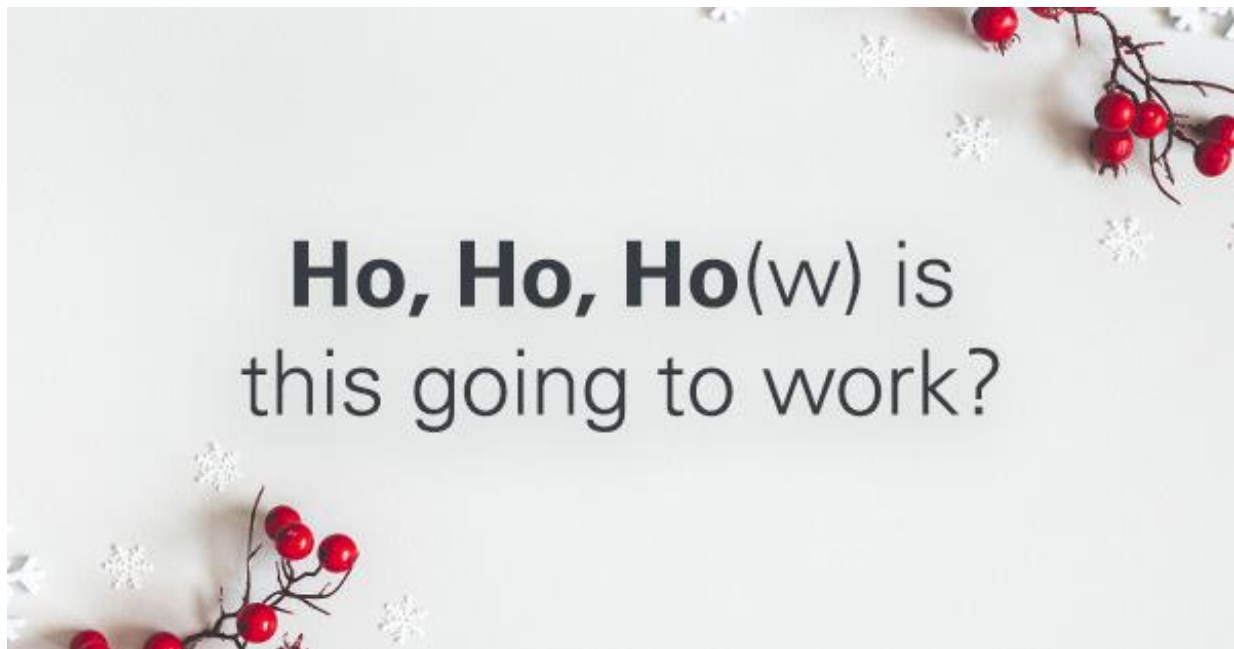




## Are your merchants ready for the holidays?

Tuesday, October 27, 2020

Like everything this year, the holidays will be different — and particularly challenging for small businesses. However, seasonal sales are expected to increase, and there are still plenty of ways entrepreneurs can connect with shoppers to make everyone's spirits bright. Take that Mr. Grinch.

Many organizations, such as financial institutions like yours, are uniquely positioned to assist their business-owning customers by helping them adjust strategies and preserve profits. To prepare these commercial clients for Black Friday, Cyber Monday and beyond, it's important for you to know the issues merchants are facing due to consumers disrupted buying habits.

### **Websites are the new storefronts**

Social distancing means less people inside stores, restaurants and almost every other business. With holiday online shopping expected to increase between 25-35% this year, websites are more important than ever. Additionally, many of the people making internet purchases are doing so for the first time. To stay competitive, retailers need an easy-to-navigate website and flexible e-commerce channels.

### **Proper training and staffing are critical**

Hiring and onboarding employees are often time-consuming activities, but they play a big role in delivering a good customer experience. Business owners can streamline the process with HR software that integrates recruiting and hiring data with time and attendance, point-of-sale platforms, general ledger and accounting systems. The technology enables workers to be productive on day one, helping entrepreneurs serve more customers so they can maximize sales.

### **Consumers expect contactless payments and convenient pickup**

Contactless payments have been on the rise for years, but demand for the technology rose rapidly in 2020. Consumers also started using in-store and curbside pickup more frequently,

with Google searches for “curbside pickup” skyrocketing 100% in March. Portable terminals that accept all major payment methods, including Apple Pay and Google Pay, can give customers a sense of security while allowing merchants the flexibility they need to checkout patrons quickly.

### **Stores serve a different purpose**

Experiential shopping is no longer the name of the game. Now speed and function rule the day. Several major retailers recently announced they are overhauling their in-store designs, and other companies are likely to follow. Easy-to-navigate spaces encourage physical distancing and let customers quickly find what they need. To create a truly seamless experience, in-store signage and department names should mimic the e-commerce site’s nomenclature.

### **Standard return policies are changing**

Businesses are making it easier for consumers to return items. To avoid a cash-flow issue, owners should look for a payments company that processes returns quickly. Additionally, using customer engagement tools to send emails and other marketing messages about newly implemented, flexible policies can help create brand loyalists and drive more sales.

### **Businesses need point-of-sale data collection**

Point-of-sale data provides valuable information about shoppers and their buying patterns — providing another way to customize marketing efforts. Robust customer intelligence suites can confirm the effectiveness of campaigns and identify opportunities for improvement to enhance performance and increase revenue.

It's not always easy to give entrepreneurs what they need or present them with a new tool that will help them overcome a problem. Heartland's partners have access to co-brandable marketing materials through the Partner Resources site. The email templates and other collateral make it easy to show owners the benefits of industry-leading technology and a custom-built suite of solutions.

Fourth quarter profits can make or break a small business. With a few strategic adjustments, entrepreneurs can connect with more customers, maximize their revenue and ring in the new year after a successful holiday season.

*Link below drives to updated copy that does not reflect the author's original submission:*

<https://www.heartland.us/resources/blog/how-to-increase-sales-during-the-holidays>