

5 Tips to Prepare Your Website for the Holiday Shopping Season

Online retail sales continue to grow at an annual rate that exceeds 15%, with holiday shopping accounting for more than \$100 billion in revenue. With so much at stake, the performance of a retailer's website or app on a variety of devices can have a significant impact on holiday sales and profit. To help you prepare, here are a few tips to consider when readying your website for the holiday rush.

Tip #1: Test, Test, Test

- **Determine which tests to perform**—Before traffic to your website ramps up with holiday shoppers, there are a variety of volumetric tests which can help you understand your website's capacity and vulnerabilities. Load tests, for instance, will help you understand your website's capacity under normal conditions, while spike tests will assess how the system handles sudden traffic spikes.
- **Look at metrics that matter**—The increased volume of traffic during the holiday season typically impacts availability, response time, and errors. When running readiness tests, pay particular attention to these metrics since these are factors that frustrate consumers and could cause them to abandon your site.
- **Measure the impact of your test**—There are a number of third party testing platforms that offer reporting and analysis on your tests which will help you know where to prioritize your efforts. Common testing platforms include Dynatrace for conducting backbone testing and Real User Management (RUM) testing providers like Cedexis to measure user impact.
- **Run tests that mimic real-world traffic patterns**—Visitors to your site will be coming from multiple locations simultaneously, so if you're running tests that only send traffic from one location to the Content Delivery Network (CDN), you're not testing a real-world scenario.

Did You Know?

In a survey by Limelight Networks on Consumer Experience:

- 20% of online consumers will abandon a website if pages take 3 seconds or longer to load
- 38% will leave a retailer's site and buy the product elsewhere if page load times are too slow
- 79% are likely to recommend a brand to a friend if they had a positive experience with its web site

Tip #2: Think Globally

Without the infrastructure to support a global audience, your site could be slow and unresponsive in certain regions – negatively impacting revenue and brand reputation. Since your customers may be accessing your site from across the country or across the globe, consider working with a densely-architected, global CDN to improve performance and reduce latency while also scaling to meet your needs even during high surges in traffic.

Limelight, for example, owns and operates one of the world's largest private CDNs, enabling e-tailers to accelerate delivery by bypassing the congested public internet. The geographic placement of your content across this massive network means scalable on-demand capacity with no single point of failure.

Tip #3: Optimize for Mobile

As mobile devices continue to play a larger role in the online shopping experience and more shoppers turn to their connected devices for researching products and making purchases, it is critical that your entire website is optimized for mobile users. If your site doesn't deliver a quality user experience every time, regardless of device or location, you can expect to see high bounce rates. Here are some ways to improve the online shopping experience for your mobile users:

- Use mobile browser detection at the edge to create smart rules for your content.
- If you have video on your site, streamline your workflow with a video delivery solution that automatically converts your videos into a variety of mobile formats.

Tip #4: Prioritize Website Security – Protect Against DDoS and Web Application Attacks

All industries are targets for cyberattacks, but during the holiday shopping season, retail sites are prime targets. A Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack that overwhelms your servers with malicious traffic can cost thousands of dollars per minute. Hacking and other security breaches can expose sensitive data and erode customer trust and brand reputation. When reviewing your website security, here are some things to consider:

- **Most security solutions in the market are reactive**—These solutions require the customer to identify and report attacks to the security provider. This approach increases the time to effectively mitigate attacks when compared to proactive solutions.
- **Look for a solution that constantly monitors without impacting your website's performance**—Always-on monitoring that scrubs all traffic to your site offers proactive protection but in some cases can cause performance degradation. When investigating these solutions, be sure to ask about performance implications. Limelight's DDoS Attack Interceptor, for instance, uses in-network detection to proactively identify and divert malicious traffic without compromising your website's performance for legitimate visitors. Limelight Web Application Firewall nodes are located between origin servers and the CDN, so this is the only traffic the CDN forwards to the WAF nodes, minimizing performance impacts.

Tip #5: Remove Content as Quickly as You Delivered It

While speed of delivery is critical for engaging consumers, the inability to quickly remove incorrect or outdated content can pose a significant financial risk. However, purging hundreds of copies of a file cached across multiple geographies often takes hours. Whether you need to correct a price, update a product description, or remove an item that is no longer in stock, any delay to purging this content from cache can create a poor customer experience and hurt your bottom line. If you use a CDN, here are some questions to ask your vendor about purging content:

- How long does a purge request take to complete?
- Are queues used to process purge requests? If so, will factors such as purge requests from other customers delay the completion of my request?
- Are there feedback mechanisms to check on the status of purge requests and are notifications sent when a request is complete?
- What reporting and analytics are available?
- Is the purge process repeatable? Can you templatize your most recently or most frequently used purge patterns?

When evaluating purge capabilities from various vendors, make sure to evaluate not only speed, but also scale, efficiency, and reliability, based upon your organization's unique needs. For instance, in the case of Limelight's SmartPurge functionality, not only can content be permanently deleted from the network edge in a matter of seconds, but the process is intuitive and efficient, with capability to create purge patterns and templates.

The Stakes Are High

The pressure is on for retailers to meet and exceed revenue targets all year long, and success in the brief holiday period can make all the difference in achieving those goals. While there are a number of factors that can impact the performance and quality of each customer's experience, thorough testing and careful planning for the expected and unexpected can improve the chances for a more successful holiday season.

Limelight Networks: Helping Retailers Deliver the Highest Quality of Experience, Every Time

Limelight Networks has extensive experience helping top retail brands around the world deliver the best quality of experience to every customer. As a global leader in digital content delivery, we specialize in solving today's complex delivery challenges. We own and operate one of the world's largest CDNs, and have the capacity to easily handle seasonal traffic spikes. In addition, an integrated suite of content delivery technology and services helps e-tailers deliver the fastest omnichannel experiences that maximize customer retention and improve brand awareness — all while reducing costs.

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