

Woo COMMERCE

GET STARTED
ON YOUR GIFT GUIDE



WHY YOU NEED AN ONLINE GUIDE: BECAUSE 56% OF SHOPPERS AVOID BRICK AND MORTAR

Online gift guides have been around about as long as the Internet and reasonable file sizes existed. Before online shopping came about, our only options for finding suitable gifts for our family were to go to physical stores or leaf through printed catalogs. Some of you probably have fond memories of circling wanted items in toy catalogs, or staring longingly through the glass at a clothing display, hoping your significant other would get the hint.

Now, however, online shopping dominates our lives, not to mention the holiday season. **56% of holiday shoppers planned to do at least part of their gift buying online in 2014** [↗](#), according to a NRF and shop.org survey; some of the shoppers polled undoubtedly did all of their research and purchasing online. Why circle items in a catalog when you can send a link? Why struggle through crowds in a store when you can have your selections delivered to you?



*Now that's a throwback.
(Image credit: [Todd Lappin](#))*

This desire for convenience is what has led to the evolution of traditional catalogs and printed gift guides into digital versions. **Shoppers still need recommendations, after all** [↗](#) — but if they're going to be buying online, they need those suggestions to be offered at the right place and time. They still want the ideas and expertise of store owners, but they don't want to wait in traffic or endless lines to get them.

That's where you come in. **If you can offer your ideas, suggestions, and expertise in a convenient digital format, you can push all the right buttons for these mostly-online holiday shoppers.** Unique, helpful content that is offered in the right format and the right time can help your customers make smart decisions and choose gifts without as much stress or fatigue as they might experience otherwise.



BEFORE STARTING: DECIDE IF A GIFT GUIDE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR STORE

“But,” you might be thinking, “I sell string instruments. People don’t usually give cellos as Christmas gifts. Should I really produce a guide for my store?”

A holiday shopping guide is not going to be a good fit for everyone. eCommerce websites that specialize in low value commodities will experience greater success with these kinds of promotions. The average consumer is going to be much more likely to follow through on your recommendations if they find that the item you’re suggesting costs \$30 and not \$300.



Online guides are most effective with affordable, “giftable” items.

Moreover, any store that can create a “look” or “package” in their guide will find that their suggestions are much better received than stores that have a collection of standalone, unrelated items. If all you sell is jeans, your gift guide will effectively be a PDF version of your store.

But if you sell multiple clothing items including jeans, you can use your guide to suggest different outfits, link viewers to pre-created bundles, and build new combinations.

Guides work best if you carry a hundred or more affordable products that can be combined for different results. So if you sell items like clothing, jewelry, home decor, makeup, or consumer electronics, a gift guide is something you should consider. But if you sell cellos... consider having a sale or [offering a discount](#)  instead.

THE FIRST STEP: DECIDE WHAT WILL GO INTO YOUR GUIDE

If you’ve decided that a holiday gift guide sounds like a good marketing idea and fit for your store, it’s time to make some decisions. First, decide what you want to promote.



Your guide should have a theme of some kind, so start by defining one and listing the items that fit into it. This might be as broad as “gift ideas \$99 and under” or “the hottest styles for the whole family,” or it could be something specific like “the newest electronics for kids ages 3 and up.” By sticking to a theme, you’ll, again, make suggestions that are better received than recommendations of unrelated items.

With your theme and initial list of included items, do a quick scan for anything that might cause issues.

Remove any products that:

- Are **frequently out of stock**
- Are **very expensive** or have additional fees
- **Take a long time** to create, alter, or ship
- **Don’t match or coordinate** with your other products (even if they’re otherwise popular)
- **Will be discontinued** by the time the guide is live

Your guide should include **quick, simple, reasonably priced items** — nothing that will take six weeks to order from the supplier or needs to be custom printed.

Customers are going to want to make their purchase immediately after viewing your recommendations, so **avoid suggesting anything that might cause unhappiness.**

With your item list finalized, it’s time to move on to the second step: deciding what you want your guide to look like.



CREATE A ROUGH LAYOUT, INCLUDING LINKS AND A LIST OF GRAPHIC NEEDS

Your shopping guide can take a few formats. The best two formats to use for your guide are:

1. **PDF**, which allows your guide to be viewed online or downloaded, and
2. **on-site**, which means your guide is essentially created as a new page on your store

Some more ambitious store owners have created interactive guides using tools like [ISSUU](#), or even created entirely new microsites for the sole purpose of showing off their gift recommendations. In the interest of time and your budget, however, we recommend taking one of the first two approaches.

You might already have an idea of what you'd like your guide to look like. So using paper and pencil (or whatever medium you feel comfortable with), **sketch a rough layout of your ideal guide**. Mark the location of products, text, and pricing, and try to distinguish how each item will differ in size, font, or location.

You should also try to mark down how each item will be linked to its product page. After all, no one likes searching when they can click a link instead.

With your layout, **you should also come up with a list of any special graphics you might need.**

For example, if you have rotating banners on your homepage, you'll likely want to have one produced to promote your guide. Or if you use sitewide banners, the same applies. Make this list so you can have everything done at once, rather than separately or at the last minute.



Start sketching your vision for your guide — this will be helpful to have when you enter the design stage of the project.



FIND A DESIGNER AND WORK WITH THEM TO HAVE YOUR GUIDE CREATED

The next step is to have your guide and matching graphics designed. If you don't have an in-house graphic designer capable of helping you with this, or you're not able to create the PDF or new pages needed yourself, you'll need to **hire a contract employee or freelancer to take on this job.**

You can hire reputable designers from sites like [Dribbble](#), [Upwork](#), [99designs](#), and [Guru](#). Try to be thorough when creating a job on these sites, listing everything you need created in the file formats you require as well as the deadline. If you're not certain what to pay, try looking up similar jobs for an idea of what is acceptable, or set an hourly rate that is negotiable based on the designer's skills and experience.

Once you've located and selected a suitable designer, work with them one-on-one to get everything you need. With any luck, you'll be doing this process well in advance of the holiday season, so neither of you will have to rush.

As the designer is delivering proofs and files to you, don't be afraid to **suggest changes or ask for revisions.** This is an important project, after all, and you're paying for the work!

You can also request copies of the original file formats at the end of the project so that any last-minute changes can be handled by you or another designer — for example, if a product is unexpectedly discontinued.

BEFORE PUBLISHING, MAKE SURE YOUR STORE AND PRODUCTS ARE PREPARED

With your guide completed, your marketing graphics ready, and the holiday season coming fast, you might think the only thing left to do is launch. Not yet.

Your gift guide shouldn't be deployed until you've ensured that your store is ready for it. This means doing everything on the following list:



- **Check the links of all your product pages** (and any variations or configurations)
- **Make sure all of the linked products have full details**, including copywriting, size, pricing, and availability
- If any of the included items are unexpectedly backordered, **include the expected replenishment date on the page(s)**
- Make sure nothing is going to take “top billing” away from your guide; **if anything might overshadow it, reschedule**
- **Stress test the entire process**, from clicking on guide links to adding to cart to checking out

You don't want anything to sabotage the hard work you've put into your guide, or deter your customers from acting on the recommendations that you've made. So an hour or two spent testing links and double-checking your checkout process is absolutely worth it in the long run.

Finally, **a successful gift guide in tandem with your other holiday marketing campaigns can put a lot of strain on your store, both online and off.** So this might be a good time to think about whether or not you have the hosting, staffing, and [shipping resources](#)  you need to adequately respond to an increase in orders.

LAUNCHING YOUR GUIDE: WHERE TO PUBLISH IT AND HOW TO PROMOTE IT

After you've done some testing, made a few adjustments, and prepared your team for the busy season, you're finally ready to launch your guide. Exciting times for everyone!

Publish your guide in a location that is easily and quickly accessible, like a landing page that is linked from a large banner on your homepage. Also, consider adding temporary links from your menu, header, or footer, or add a sitewide banner, so all visitors can see the link.



As far as promotion is concerned, [the holidays are the perfect time to go big with your marketing strategy](#). [Talk about your guide everywhere](#), especially on the channels where you typically receive the most traffic. This means you should aim to do the following:

- **Include a link in emails** — perhaps make the guide the sole focus of one email, then include a link or small banner in subsequent emails
- **Post a link with a special graphic on social media**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, with relevant hashtags
- **Look into paid social media advertising**, like [Facebook dark posts](#) [or Promoted Pins](#), for your target audience
- If you already have a blog, **write a short post about the guide**, or something relevant to its content, so you can link it from there
- Look for **promotional opportunities with blogs or websites in your industry** who might be willing to link your guide

With some promotion, your guide will get the attention it needs to motivate purchases, and all just in time for the start of the holiday season. What better way to kick off the busiest time of the year than with a burst of sales?

GET STARTED WITH YOUR OWN HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Now that you've read about the process of creating a gift guide for your own online store, we hope you're ready to get started. Use the tips and ideas above to get started now — before the busy shopping season creeps up on you — and make this your most successful holiday yet!



Ready to create a holiday gift guide for your own online store?

Use the checklist below to keep yourself on track as you go through the brainstorming, design, and testing process on your site.

FIRST STEPS

Decide on a theme for your guide

Choose the items you want to include -- add them on the next page

Note any items you want to exclude due to lack of stock, long shipping times, or other inconveniences to customers -- add them on the next page

STARTING YOUR DESIGN

Decide on the format for your guide: PDF/on-site/other

Sketch a rough layout -- we've given you space on the last few pages for this

List or sketch any additional graphics you need

On-site banners

Social media graphics

Email graphics

Other



DESIGNING, TESTING, AND PUBLISHING

Locate a designer to create your guide and needed graphics

Approve final versions

Receive all files, including original formats if requested

Test your store prior to launch

Do all linked product pages work?

Are all product pages complete?

Is nothing scheduled to compete with your guide's launch?

Is your store prepared to handle extra traffic?

Launch!

Deploy all marketing efforts

NOTES

Placeholder for notes, consisting of ten horizontal grey bars.



GUIDE SKETCHING/DESIGN AREA

Use this space to sketch, jot down ideas, or make notes for the layout and design of your gift guide. Use your imagination and feel free to experiment! If you run out of room, just print these last three pages again and start over from scratch.

NOTES





NOTES

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, serving as a placeholder for notes or additional content.





NOTES

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, serving as a placeholder for notes or additional content.

