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2023 Holiday Season Strategy Guide

Unwrap Better Customer Experiences with These 8 Merry Methods

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Introduction

Though it feels like just yesterday we were popping the champagne and celebrating the new year, the much-anticipated 2023 holiday shopping season is already upon us and is poised to be bigger and more lucrative than ever.

According to market projections, the total retail sales for the holiday season are estimated to approach a staggering $1.3 trillion, signifying an increase from last year's $1.21 trillion. eCommerce, in particular, is expected to soar to new heights, with sales projected to reach $239.3 billion.

In the context of an uncertain economy and a consumer base that is becoming increasingly price-conscious, Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals will become even more crucial this year. With Cyber Monday bringing in **$11.3 billion** in 2022 alone, these annual sales can mean big bucks for organizations who are able to take full advantage. But as the old adage goes, *with great opportunity comes great responsibility.*

> **Consumers are no longer content with conventional shopping experiences; instead, they seek novel, engaging, and informative channels for product research, discovery, and purchase.**

To stand out in a competitive retail landscape this holiday season, brands must endeavor to offer unique buying experiences that captivate consumers. The best opportunity to do so lies in the ability to **provide exceptional customer experiences through all owned and unowned channels that customers engage with through product data quality and personalization.** Brands that can deliver on this stand to gain a competitive edge this year, reaping the rewards of enhanced customer loyalty and satisfaction.

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8 Strategies for Better Customer Experiences this Holiday Season

This year, we want you to be ready! Together with industry experts, we have put together a comprehensive list of strategies your organization can employ to enhance your product experiences And, if you stick around until the end, we have one more present in store for you: how product experiences create the foundation for world-class customer experiences.

01 Elevating Customer Experiences: The AI-Powered Data Advantage

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Elevating Customer Experiences: The AI-Powered Data Advantage

In recent years, the shopping landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation, offering consumers **more diverse purchasing options than ever before**, from traditional stores to online platforms, marketplaces, and even printed materials. If you're an e-retailer, you likely struggle with an overwhelming amount of data, often plagued by issues such as product listing anomalies, duplicates, and incomplete descriptions.

However, in today's retail environment, there's a catch: **customers expect a seamless and well-informed shopping experience, whether they are on your website or a marketplace.** They demand access to accurate, and up-to-date product information. To meet these expectations, you need clean and enriched data.

Unifai, an Akeneo company, is the first artificial intelligence platform designed for e-retailers and distributors that automatically standardizes, enriches, and categorizes their product catalogs to halve their time-to-market and optimize their conversion rate. Unifai, an Akeneo Company, customers include major retail companies such as Intersport, Rexel, Drawer, and Alltricks. This turnkey solution simplifies the life of retailers and their customers: business teams gain time and precision and customers benefit from a better product experience. For more information: https://en.unifai.fr/.

This is precisely where **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** steps in. AI can categorize products accurately within your product taxonomy, and systematically arrange them into a sequence that provides effortless navigation. Your product data can also be enriched through AI, ensuring that every detail is comprehensive and available.

The value of clean and enriched data extends beyond customer satisfaction—it directly impacts your bottom line. **Up-to-date product descriptions, specifications, and availability reduce the chances of cart abandonment** due to misinformation, thereby boosting conversion rates and customer trust.

Now, with the power of clean and enriched data in your hands, you can unlock the full potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for generative content. Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all product descriptions and marketing messages. **With solid data as your foundation, AI empowers businesses to craft unique and tailored content for each channel.** This ensures that your messaging resonates effectively with your audience, regardless of where they engage with your brand.

02 **channelengine**

ChannelEngine connects brands and retailers to marketplaces and online channels worldwide. Our platform makes it easy to manage all your sales channels. It streamlines and optimizes eCommerce from start to finish. With over 700 marketplaces and online sales channels, ChannelEngine gives you the advanced eCommerce capabilities you need to grow. To learn more, visit www.channelengine.com/.

Improve Upsell and Cross-Sell Opportunities with AI-Powered Recommendations

Virtual bundles are a fantastic way to offer real value to consumers, while delivering added revenue and profit for sellers. Customers get **convenience and cost savings** from consolidated shipping costs and your business benefits by **selling extra products.**

> When done right, product bundles are a real win- win.

From a seller's perspective, you can bundle slow-movers with fast-movers, maximizing turnover of your assortment and increasing average order value. Bundles also make it easy to **upsell and cross-sell across your range** by offering related products the customer hasn't thought of yet.

Additionally, bundling enables lower-priced items to be shipped together, making them more profitable to sell. This benefit is particularly relevant for brands that sell low ticket items (CPG/FMCG brands, for example) that have to sell a certain volume of product to make their online channels profitable.

From the buyer's perspective, product bundles often have a very high perceived value.
Consumers think they are getting a great deal, and when consolidated shipping costs are taken into account, they really are.

Thanks to AI-powered bundles, you can **harness the productivity of generative AI to rapidly create hundreds of unique bundles**, complete with descriptions and titles.

Each title is optimized to attract the attention of potential customers by anticipating their intention and making them findable with searches. And descriptions – usually a time-consuming task – are created in just moments.

Your customers will appreciate the added convenience your optimized bundles offer. In addition to the benefits already mentioned, they'll **avoid 'choice overwhelm' that often prevents consumers from making confident purchases,** and they'll get offers that match their needs. Your AI-powered bundles will guide them towards a convenient purchase they'll be happy to buy, while generating healthier margins and a higher product turnover.

> The peak holiday season takes a lot of preparation for sellers, and time is a precious commodity. AI-powered bundling is just one way you can save time - while boosting your productivity and the profitability of holiday season sales.

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BIGCOMMERCE

Find Your Crowd with Social Media & Influencer Marketing

BigCommerce is a leading open software-as-a-service (SaaS) eCommerce platform that empowers merchants of all sizes to build, innovate and grow their businesses online. BigCommerce provides merchants with sophisticated enterprise-grade functionality, customization and performance with simplicity and ease-of-use. To learn more, visit www.bigcommerce.com.

In the eCommerce landscape, social media advertising is one of the most efficient and effective ways to reach your target audience and turn them into customers. **No other advertising options can deliver the kind of consistent, scalable leads as social advertising.**
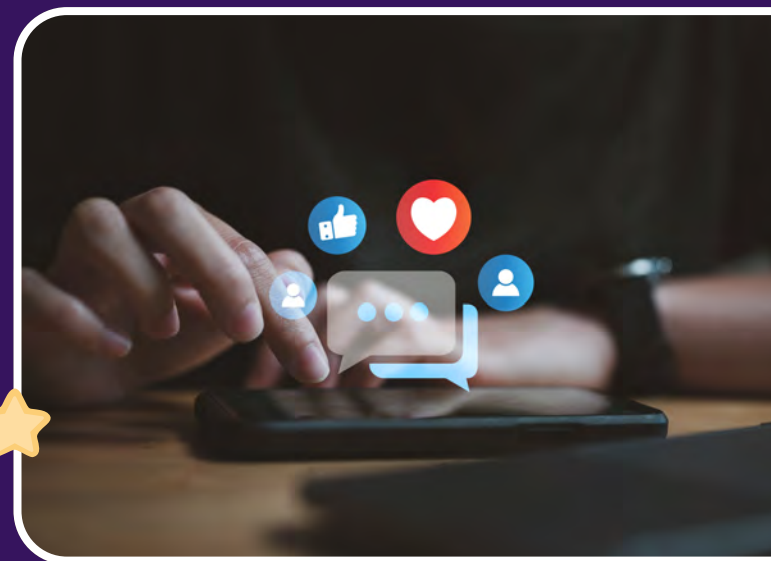
And, for many brands, a growing portion of social advertising is focused on influencer marketing. **Influencer Marketing** refers to brands collaborating with creators and influencers to produce content such as videos, written, or image-based content.

These influencer partnerships drive brand awareness and purchasing decisions through product placement and endorsements on social media. Research shows that **50% of Millennials trust product recommendations from influencers.** Creators also generate substantial return on investment (ROI). For example, Ivory Ella saw a 19x return on ad spend (ROAS) and increased year-over-year (YOY) Q4 revenue by 55% after using automation to expand its influencer program.

You also don't need a high price tag celebrity to promote your brand. Creators with smaller followings work just as well. **Nano and micro-influencers are often a better fit for eCommerce brands** compared to celebrity influencers due to their **lower cost and higher engagement.**

The partnerships channel allows eCommerce brands to **boost ROI, brand awareness and consumer trust.** However, starting and maintaining a partnerships program requires a lot of planning and a significant commitment.

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04 ⓐ algolia

Create Consistent Customer Experiences Across All Channels with Product Information

Algolia is the only end-to-end AI search and discovery platform. Our proprietary NeuralSearch tech combines vector-based natural language processing & keyword matching in a single API. Algolia powers 1.5 Trillion+ search requests a year enabling 17,000+ customers in 150+ countries to build blazing fast search and discovery experiences on their digital properties.To learn more, visit www.algolia.com.

In the eCommerce world where every blink of an eye matters, **serving an engaging experience is the top priority** and **leveraging product information can be the game changer** in moving a shopper through to checkout or losing them.

Imagine being able to use attributes of a product like colors, sizes, shapes, materials etc. as signals for preferences, shared by a shopper. When combined, these signals paint a comprehensive user profile that can be used to create **a personalized experience that can be delivered at every stage of the shopping journey.**

To take it to the next level, you can group users exhibiting similar preferences to form a segment and then target this segment or an early stage visitor/user profile with similar products, as preferred by users within the segment. This can be applied within a site experience and across platform channels including email and social media.

Another opportunity is with recommendations – based on click and conversion events, AI models like 'frequently bought together' or 'related products' also benefit from product information in **surfacing the right products to the right customer at the right time.**

Lastly, merchandisers can take full advantage of executing a balanced strategy using AI and manual controls while using product information. For example, curating a seasonal collection that is dynamically ranked while the top 20 items are pinned.

Quality data inputs – like product information – result in maximized eCommerce experiences that can efficiently drive conversions for businesses.

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Communicate Your Brand's Values to Create Authentic Customer Connections

In a world where every purchase has the potential to make a difference, the rise of **value-driven shopping** has become an unstoppable force. Gone are the days when consumers merely sought products; now, they crave a connection with the heart and soul behind the brand, and if they don't connect with your business's message, they're quick to abandon purchase in search for an organization that shares their views.

The Akeneo **2023 Global B2C Survey** uncovered that **two-fifths of consumers have declared their willingness to pay more for brands that proudly showcase their core values.** And it's not just a passing fad; we also found that these consumers are prepared to invest an **average of 18% more for products** that weave meaningful brand values into their very fabric.

Whether it's related to sustainability, social responsibility, diversity and inclusion, or other ethical aspects, **brands need to ensure that their values and commitments are consistently communicated to customers across all touchpoints to help build trust and authenticity.** This starts with your product information; sharing information about the recyclability of your product, communicating your sustainable supply chain practices, or ensuring that you have all ranges of sizing of a single product displayed properly is all rooted in the concept of having the right product data at the right place at the right time

Ensuring that your website and products are accessible to folks who utilize assistive tools, like screen readers that convert on-screen text into synthesized speech or Braille output, is also essential. In order to provide additional information to these assistive technologies, a set of attributes referred to as **ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications)** can be added to HTML elements to help screen readers and accessibility tools understand the interactive elements, live regions, and dynamic content on a web page, improving the user experience for individuals with visual disabilities.

ARIA attributes can also be applied to indicate when a product is currently out of stock or unavailable for purchase, or used to describe visual elements like product images, all of which require the appropriate product information around product availability or image alt-text to be readily available. **Having the right product information in the appropriate places enables these individuals to effectively utilize assistive tools, and have an equally enjoyable browsing experience.**

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Cloudinary

Utilize Advanced Visuals to Reduce Return Rates

With more than 1.5 million users and 10,000 customers worldwide, Cloudinary has quickly become the leading image and video platform for developers and marketers alike to manage images, videos and other media assets and deliver an optimal end user experience. For more information, visit www.cloudinary.com.

The images and videos that populate the pages of an eCommerce site do more than make it look good. **These visuals play a defining role in reducing the rate of product returns,** especially during the holiday season.

Findings from a global **eCommerce consumer survey** commissioned by Cloudinary back this up. The survey of 2,693 consumers found that 37% of consumers consider viewing user-generated videos showing the product in use as a top priority before making a purchase.

Better quality and more accurate product images reduce the likelihood of returned holiday merchandise. At minimum, retailers must provide product galleries with a variety of high-quality images. Even then, to get a proper sense of the product, consumers want more. Brands must strongly consider the advantages of adding branded product videos to the gallery and integrating technologies like **3D, 360 spin sets, and immersive experiences.**

A third of respondents reported that they returned products they bought because they didn't look as expected on the website, and 46% of respondents reported abandoning carts of clothing/shoes because they were unsure if the items would fit. When you consider that the average return in the U.S. costs a retailer 21% of the order value it's easy to see why reducing returns promises an instant boost to profitability.

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Prepare Customer Support Teams to Handle Surge of Requests

As the digital marketplace brims with eager customers seeking the perfect gifts and deals, businesses can expect a substantial increase in customer contacts, ranging from inquiries to support requests. To ensure a seamless and delightful customer experience, it is paramount for brands to adequately prepare their customer service and support teams for the busy season ahead.

Investing in comprehensive training programs helps equip support agents with the necessary skills and product knowledge to address customer queries efficiently and accurately. **Customer support teams need to be armed with accurate, up-to-date, and consistent product information** so that whoever a customer speaks with, they receive the information they need.

Leveraging AI-powered customer service tools can also significantly streamline the support process. Implementing chatbots, for instance, can provide instant responses to common inquiries, reducing the burden on live agents and enabling quicker resolutions.

Machine learning algorithms can also be utilized to intelligently route support tickets to the most appropriate agents based on the nature and complexity of the inquiry. By automatically categorizing and prioritizing tickets, AI ensures that each customer's concern is directed to the right person, avoiding delays and unnecessary escalations. **One study** even showed that AI could enable support teams to answer 14% more inquiries every hour.

By harnessing the power of AI, businesses can optimize their support operations, deliver exceptional customer experiences, and enable support teams to focus on high-value tasks, such as complex problem-solving, building relationships, and driving customer loyalty. The result? **Improved customer satisfaction, enhanced overall operational efficiency, and a competitive advantage in the market.**

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P: priint

Founded in 2003, priint Group | WERK II is the global leader in solutions that bring Product Data to life. Driven by the strong belief that timely and relevant Marketing materials, digital and printed, are key to deliver an engaging customer experience, priint Group enables organizations to create their marketing publications up to 80% more efficiently through its priint:suite platform, cloud services and integration into virtually any data system. Whether pre-planned or on-demand, generic or personalized, in one language or fifty, priint brings digital transformation and automation to the creative lifecycle. To learn more, visit www.priint.com.

Include Physical Experiences for a True Omnichannel Experience

When your organization talks about digital marketing strategy what comes to mind? **Responsive? Personalized? Relevant? Fast?** Have you ever used any of those words to describe print or other physical campaign media? The likely answer is probably not. Omnichannel must be one of the most overused buzzwords in the modern marketing world. But before you dismiss the so-called "old school" way of working, think about your daily interactions with physical assets. Billboards, retail store signage, packaging/labeling, postcards, catalogs, flyers, coupon books, magalogs; the list goes on.

For truly optimized omnichannel marketing, organizations must be able to deliver the same responsive, contextualized, personalized experience across all channels. Previously, this would have been impossible. However, with modern product information management (PIM) systems, marketing and creative automation software, and digital printing presses, it's not only possible but it's become a reality. **Organizations are taking eCommerce cart abandonment information and turning it into personalized mailed postcard offers the next day.**

Compare the open or eyeball rate on a postcard to your email open rates. This is not a question of either/or, the effectiveness comes from the integration and consistency of all channels. Gartner stated in their **Leadership Vision for 2023:**

> **CMOs need to adopt an integrated, channel-agnostic, hybrid approach to marketing activation when it comes to digital and traditional channels.**

Studies across the globe show that the **intelligent, data-driven orchestration of digital and physical assets increases revenue by leaps and bounds** with a proven **ROAS of 901%** for a digital driven, direct mail campaign. With the ability to cut up to 80% off the lifecycles it used to take to create some print publications while at the same time creating targeted and personalized print marketing experiences, there is an entirely new set a capabilities and possibilities that an organization can use to communicate their message.

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Product Experience:
The Foundation for Customer Experiences
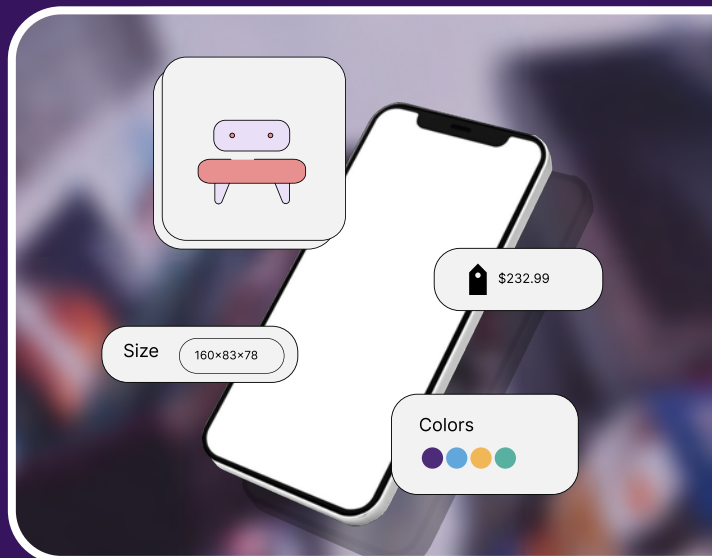
At the end of a year filled with new technologies, economic uncertainties, and shifting customer behaviors, **the 2023 holiday shopping season presents immense opportunities for businesses to connect with new audiences and nurture existing customer relationships.** While utilizing the strategies outlined will certainly help curate a stronger customer experience, **implementing each of these strategies individually is an arduous, manual, and long process that can often lead to more confusion than clarity.**

So what's the critical component needed for supporting customer experiences? The answer actually lies in your **product experience.**

Think about it - the most critical part of a customer's experience with your brand is their interactions with your product wherever they stumble upon it; and **it only takes one bad interaction to sour someone's opinion. If they don't trust your product, they won't trust you.**

An efficient **Product Experience (PX) Strategy** allows brands and retailers to offer consumers superior product experiences by delivering reliable and up-to-date product information that is personalized to each channel and market. Instead of tackling these issues channel by channel, a **PX Strategy requires organizations to take a step backward and work from the product information as the foundation**; cleanse, organize, and manage every piece of your product record first, and then activate this product story across every touchpoint of the customer journey.

PX Strategy: Noun. A comprehensive strategy to build and deliver world-class product experiences across every customer touchpoint to accelerate growth, stay competitive, and support the organization's overall goals.

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This holiday season, give the gift of **consistent, complete, and engaging product experiences that support the entire customer journey.** Authentic relationships start with authentic product experiences, and the following strategies can help kickstart your organization's **PX Strategy** in time for Black Friday and Cyber Monday:

01 Utilizing product information to understand shopper preferences can profoundly impact guiding them through the buying journey, enabling personalized experiences, targeted user segments, and optimized recommendations for improved conversions and dynamic merchandising strategies.

02 The holiday season brings a surge in customer interactions, and brands can enhance customer experiences by utilizing AI-powered tools like chatbots and intelligent ticket routing for efficient query resolutions.

03 By strategically offering virtual product bundles, businesses can enhance customer value and increase revenue through consolidated shipping, optimized upselling, and AI-powered generation of attractive bundles.

04 Social media and influencer marketing are essential for brands to authentically engage with their audience, offering an omnichannel customer experience through curated content, emotional storytelling, and influencer collaborations that foster connections, credibility, and access to new markets.

05 High-quality images, user-generated videos, and immersive experiences on eCommerce sites play a crucial role in minimizing product returns during the holiday season.
Consistent communication of values, sustainability, and accessibility in product information is crucial to build trust and authenticity.

About Akeneo

Akeneo is the product experience (PX) company, enabling organizations to build and deliver world-class product experiences across every customer touchpoint through a comprehensive PX Strategy. By providing best-of-breed technology and expertise, Akeneo's Product Cloud with native artificial intelligence capabilities equips global brands, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers like Chico's, The Very Group, TaylorMade Golf, Rail Europe, Kering, and more to accelerate growth, stay competitive, reduce time-to-market, and deliver engaging customer experiences that convert browsers into buyers. For more information: **https://www.akeneo.com.**

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