



The 2026 Festive Social Playbook

Eight shopper shifts shaping how the holidays will be
discovered, considered and bought.





It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas...

The wish lists are starting to grow, calendars are filling up and, before we know it, we'll all be wondering where the year went.

For brands, though, the holidays start long before December. And this year, there's a lot to think about.

**Holiday shopping looks different this year.
So should your strategy.**

Shoppers are starting earlier, thinking harder about value and finding more of what they want through social and creators.

They're researching, comparing and looking for more reassurance before they buy. And when they're ready, they expect getting from discovery to checkout to be easy.

So the big festive campaign and Black Friday push can't do all the heavy lifting anymore.

Brands need to show up earlier, give shoppers what they need to make a decision and make buying the easy bit.

That's where this playbook comes in.

We've pulled together the eight shopper shifts you need to know for 2026, what they mean for your brand and where we think the biggest opportunities are.

Consider this your head start.

What's Inside?

Eight shifts shaping how people are discovering, choosing and buying this holiday season, plus the trends, opportunities and practical ideas to turn them into action on social.

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INTRODUCTION

The Holidays at a Glance.

Shoppers are starting earlier, thinking harder about what's worth their money and looking for more confidence before they buy.

But that doesn't mean they're closing their wallets.

25% of US shoppers & 26% of UK shoppers expect to spend more on gifts than last year.

The opportunity is there. The way brands win that spend is what's changing.

From where shoppers find inspiration to who they trust, what they value and how they buy, the 2026 gifting season comes with a new set of expectations.



THE HOLIDAYS AT A GLANCE

Before you dive in...

Here's the 2026 festive shopper in numbers.

68%

plan to shop early to avoid delays.

(Basis)

57%

shop throughout the year to take advantage of deals.

(TheTradeDesk)

52%

of Gen Z use TikTok or Instagram over Google to research products.

(Mintel)

33%

of Gen Z expect to purchase directly through social this holiday season.

(Business Insider)

29%

social commerce market growth annually.

(Ringly)

87%

say rich product content helps them decide what to buy.

(Printful)

44%

of Gen Z look to creators for Christmas gift inspiration.

(Retail Rewired)

78%

of consumers say creators help them discover new products.

(TikTok)

56%

of online holiday sales come from mobile.

(WebFX)

The background is a light cream color with a pattern of small, light gray stars and dots scattered across it. At the bottom of the image, there is a dark red silhouette of a row of chili peppers and leaves.

The Eight Shifts of the Season.

SHIFT 1

Holiday Shopping Is Starting Earlier.

The festive shopping journey begins long before the festive campaign.

The Shift In Numbers

68%

of shoppers plan to shop early to avoid delays.

57%

shop throughout the year to take advantage of deals.

2 in 5

shoppers begin researching before Black Friday.

38%

make purchases during that early shopping window.

(TheTradeDesk, Basis)

What's Changing

Holiday shoppers aren't waiting for Black Friday anymore.

Shoppers are planning earlier, researching for longer and making more considered decisions about what they buy and who they buy from. From saving gift ideas on social to comparing reviews and prices, many purchase journeys are already underway before brands launch their festive campaigns.

Showing up in November isn't necessarily too late to make a sale, but it could be too late to make the shortlist.

What This Means For You

The brands that capture attention early have more time to build familiarity, answer questions and earn a place in shoppers' consideration sets before buying decisions are made.

Waiting until peak trading means competing when shoppers may already have a basket, a shortlist or a favourite brand in mind.

Where To Focus

Rather than building your strategy around Black Friday, build it around the shopper journey.

Think about how your brand can:

- Inspire shoppers with gift ideas before peak season.
- Stay visible through creators and social-first content.
- Create saveable gift guides and wish lists.
- Answer product questions early with rich content and reviews.
- Build momentum across October, November and December, rather than relying on one campaign burst.



Key Takeaway

The best Christmas campaigns start with helping shoppers discover, save and remember your brand before they're ready to buy.

SHIFT 2

Value Means More Than a Good Price.

Shoppers aren't just looking for cheaper gifts. They're looking for purchases that feel worth it.

The Shift In Numbers

71% of holiday shoppers say product quality drives their purchase decisions.

40% of perceived value comes from non-price factors.

64% of shoppers are willing to pay more for products they trust or see as better for them.

23% cite promotions as a purchase driver, putting them well behind quality and price.

(Capgemini, NielsenIQ, Optimove)

What's Changing

Shoppers still have one eye on the price tag, but a discount alone isn't enough to make something feel like a good buy.

They're weighing up quality, usefulness, trust and what the purchase says about them.

Especially when it's a gift, shoppers want to feel they're spending their money on something that's genuinely worth giving.

So while promotions still have a role to play, the product needs to earn its place under the tree.

What This Means For You

Don't let the discount become the whole story.

Brands have an opportunity to make the reason to buy much bigger than the price. Show the quality. Demonstrate the usefulness. Bring your values to life. And give shoppers enough proof to feel confident they're choosing something worth gifting.

That's how you compete on value without competing on price alone.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Show what makes the product worth gifting.
- Demonstrate quality through real product use.
- Turn features into benefits shoppers actually care about.
- Connect brand values to a tangible product benefit.
- Use creators, reviews and reactions as proof.
- Make price and promotions support the value story, rather than lead it.



Key Takeaway

Shoppers still want a good deal, but they also want to feel good about what they're buying.

SHIFT 3

Shopping Is Moving Into Social.

There's a reason more of the brands you know and love are showing up in social commerce.

The Shift In Numbers

22%

of global ecommerce will come through social in 2026.

51%

of shoppers expect to buy more on social this Christmas.

7 in 10

global shoppers are buying directly through social.

29%

annual growth forecast for the global social commerce market this year.

(Retail Rewired, US Chamber, LA Times)

What's Changing

Social isn't just where people find products anymore. It's becoming somewhere they actually buy them.

A shopper can spot something they like, watch a creator use it, check the reviews and buy it, all without really leaving their feed.

And as more shoppers get comfortable buying this way, brands are following them there.

What This Means For You

If your social content is making someone want your product, don't make them go looking for somewhere else to buy it.

Make the next step obvious. Product tags, clear pricing, delivery information and shoppable content should all be part of your social plan.

If the interest is happening on social, give the sale a chance to happen there too.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Make your product content shoppable.
- Give creator content a clear route to buy.
- Use product tags wherever you can.
- Make price, stock and delivery easy to find.
- Try live shopping around key seasonal moments.
- Retarget people who've watched, saved or engaged.
- Look at what social is selling, not just how it's performing.



Key Takeaway

If someone's ready to buy, don't make them work for it. Make sure your products are easy to shop through social.

SHIFT 4

Search Is Getting More Social.

Shoppers aren't always arriving on social knowing what they want. They're going there to figure it out.

The Shift In Numbers

-  **51%** of consumers have discovered a new brand or product on social.
-  **77%** say social gives them ideas for products they'd never considered.
-  **78%** say creators help them discover new products.
-  **85%** have bought after seeing a product advertised or reviewed on social.

(TikTok, Retail Rewired)

What's Changing

Gift shoppers don't always have a product, or even a brand, in mind when they start looking.

They're scrolling gift guides, hauls, wish lists and creator recommendations for ideas. And that gives brands a chance to get in front of shoppers before they've decided what they want to buy.

Social isn't just helping people find products. It's helping them decide what they want in the first place.

What This Means For You

Don't just create content for people already looking for your product.

Think about the person staring at their list, wondering what on earth to buy. Who are they buying for? What's their budget? What would make them stop scrolling and think, "That's perfect."

That's where your content can do some of its best work.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Create gift guides by person, budget or interest.
- Show unexpected ways your product could be gifted.
- Use creators to get products in front of new audiences.
- Create hauls, wish lists and "best gifts" edits.
- Answer the questions people are actually searching for.
- Make useful content people want to save and send.

And get it out there early. You want to be on the shortlist before the shortlist is finished.



Key Takeaway

Some of your best customers don't know they're looking for you yet. Create for the shopper who's still deciding what to buy.

SHIFT 5

Creators: The New Personal Shoppers.

When there's too much choice, shoppers are turning to creators to help them work out what's actually worth buying.

The Shift In Numbers



([Influencer Marketing Hub](#), [NetInfluencer](#), [TikTok & WARC](#), [Mavelly](#))

What's Changing

Creators are becoming a real part of how people shop for gifts.

They're helping shoppers find gift ideas, work out what's actually worth buying and narrow down the endless choice. And it's not necessarily one post that does it. 36% of shoppers need to see a creator talk about a product 2-3 times before they'll even consider buying it.

So, one creator post in November probably isn't enough.

What This Means For You

Think about creators across the whole festive period, not as a one-off campaign moment.

Get products into their hands early and give them more than one reason to talk about them. Gift guides, demos, wish lists, reviews, unboxings and genuine recommendations can all play a role as shoppers move closer to buying.

The more naturally your product becomes part of their content, the better.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Get products to creators early.
- Plan multiple touchpoints, not one post.
- Create gift guides around different people and budgets.
- Show the product being used, opened and gifted.
- Let creators say why they'd actually buy it.
- Answer the questions shoppers have before buying.
- Put spend behind the creator content that's already landing well.



Key Takeaway

Consumers would rather see a creator talk naturally about a product three times than force everything into one big sponsored post. Give creators time to make your product part of the conversation.

SHIFT 6

Show Them What They're Buying.

A nice festive post might catch their eye. But if you want them to buy, they need a bit more than that.

The Shift In Numbers



(TikTok, Retail Rewired)

What's Changing

People want to know what they're actually buying.

They want to see the product properly, understand what makes it good and know whether other people rate it. Then there are all the practical questions: Will it arrive in time? Is that the right size? What are the returns like? Is it actually worth the money?

When people are buying for someone else, those little bits of reassurance matter even more.

What This Means For You

Don't make shoppers hunt for the information they need.

Show the product. Show how it works. Tell them what they need to know. Bring reviews, creators and real customers into the content where it makes sense.

The easier you make the decision, the easier you make the sale.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Show the product properly and in real life.
- Answer the obvious questions before they're asked.
- Bring reviews and ratings into your content.
- Make sizing, shades or product suitability clear.
- Put price and delivery information where people can see it.
- Show real people actually using the product.
- Keep everything easy to view and shop on mobile.

And get it out there early. You want to be on the shortlist before the shortlist is finished.



Key Takeaway

Don't make people dig around for a reason to buy. Give them everything they need to feel good about the decision.

SHIFT 7

Shoppers Want Reassurance.

Getting someone interested is one thing. Making them feel confident enough to actually buy is another.

The Shift In Numbers

82%

need to trust a brand before purchasing.

26%

say honest discussion of a product's downsides builds confidence.

44%

rely on social proof when buying through social.

58%

say free delivery and returns give them confidence to buy on social.

(JCK Online, Pepper, Sellers Commerce, eMarketer)

What's Changing

There are more products, brands and gift ideas being thrown at shoppers than ever, especially on social.

So once something catches their eye, they want reassurance. Can I trust the brand? Is the product actually as good as it looks? Will it arrive in time? And if it's not right, can I easily send it back?

These might feel like small details, but during the holiday season, they can be the difference between someone buying or moving on.

What This Means For You

Don't make people go looking for the information that could help them say yes.

Bring reviews into your content. Show real people using the product. Talk about delivery and returns. Answer the questions coming up in comments. And make it really clear what someone can expect when they buy from you.

The easier and safer the purchase feels, the easier the decision becomes.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Get reviews and real customer experiences into your content.
- Show the product properly, not just the polished version.
- Make delivery dates and stock easy to find.
- Shout about free delivery and returns if you offer them.
- Let creators be honest about who the product is right for.
- Answer the questions shoppers are actually asking.
- Use retargeting to give interested shoppers that final bit of reassurance.



Key Takeaway

Give shoppers fewer reasons to hesitate. Don't save the reassuring stuff for the small print. It could be the thing that gets someone over the line.

SHIFT 8

Shoppers Expect It to Be Easy.

Once they've found the right gift, they don't want anything getting in the way of buying it.

The Shift In Numbers



(TikTok, Retail Rewired)

What's Changing

Holiday shopping is happening in the gaps: On the sofa, on the commute, during a lunch break, or five minutes after someone sends a gift idea in the group chat.

And when shoppers are buying on their phone, patience is pretty limited.

If they can't find the product, work out the delivery date or get through checkout easily, there's always another option a scroll away.

What This Means For You

Have a look at your buyer journey from the shopper's side, not just the campaign side.

How many steps does it actually take to go from seeing your product on social to buying it?

Make the important stuff easy to find, keep checkout simple and give people flexible ways to pay where you can. The less work you give the shopper, the better.

Where To Focus

Think about how your brand can:

- Make everything work properly on mobile.
- Keep the route from social to checkout short.
- Use product tags and direct shopping links.
- Make price, stock and delivery obvious.
- Offer quick and simple payment options.
- Make checkout as painless as possible.
- Keep last-order dates easy to find as the big day gets closer.



Key Takeaway

If someone's decided they want it, your job is to make buying it the easy bit.

ACTIONING THE DATA

So, What Do We Do With All That?

We've covered what's changing, what shoppers want and how they're planning to buy this gifting season.

Now for the useful bit.

Here's how to turn those eight shifts into social content that helps people find you, choose you and actually buy from you.

What Good Festive Social Looks Like

You don't need to reinvent your entire content strategy, but you do need to give shoppers what they need at the right time.

We'd boil it down to four things...

Help them find it

Get in front of people while they're still working out what to buy. Gift guides, creator picks, wish lists, hauls and recipient-led content.

Show them why it's worth it

Don't leave the product to sell itself. Show the quality, usefulness, what makes it different and why it's worth the money.

Give them a reason to trust it

People want a bit of reassurance before they buy. Reviews, creators, real customers, demos and honest product content.

Make it easy to buy

Once someone's decided they want it, don't make them work for it. Product tags, clear prices, stock, delivery dates and a simple route to checkout.

THE TIMELINE

The Seasonal Run-Up

What to do, when to do it, and what your shoppers want along the way.

Aug - Sept

GET ON THE LIST

What's happening:

Browsing, saving and starting to think about gifts.

Where to focus:

Get discovered before the holiday noise really starts.

What to create:

Create saveable gift inspiration people will want to come back to. Think early gift guides, wish lists, creator picks and ideas by person, interest or budget.

October

HELP THEM CHOOSE

What's happening:

Comparing, researching and narrowing down their options.

Where to focus:

Give them reasons to choose your product.

What to create:

Help shoppers narrow down the choice and feel good about it. Use product demos, reviews, comparisons, creator recommendations and gift guides that answer the obvious questions.

November

MAKE THE SALE

What's happening:

Looking for value and deciding when and where to buy.

Where to focus:

Turn all that consideration into action.

What to create:

Give shoppers a reason to stop considering and start buying. Bring together strong offers, retargeting, social proof and shoppable content that makes the next step obvious.

December

MAKE IT EASY

What's happening:

Looking for gifts they can trust will arrive in time.

Where to focus:

Remove anything that could get in the way of the sale.

What to create:

Make last-minute shopping feel as easy as possible. Lead with what's in stock, what can still arrive, ready-to-gift options, delivery deadlines and a quick route to checkout.

A GIFT FROM PEPPER

8 Posts for Your Festive Calendar.

Eight ideas to steal, tweak and make your own this holiday season.

Save This For Later

A saveable gift guide built around recipient, interest or budget. Give people something useful now that they'll come back to when they're ready to buy.

Why It's Worth It

Show what they're actually getting for their money. Product in use, quality, benefits, what makes it last and the proof to back it up.

See It. Want It. Shop It.

A product-first Reel/TikTok that shows the gift in action, makes the price clear and gives shoppers a direct route to buy without leaving social.

For The Person Who...

"For the person who has everything." "For the host." "For your impossible-to-buy-for Dad." Create around who people are looking to buy for.

What I'd Actually Buy

Give a creator a budget or a product list and let them make their picks. Less scripted endorsement, more "here's what I'd actually get."

Show Me Properly

No polished product shot and vague caption. Get close, open it, try it, wear it, taste it, compare it. Answer the things someone actually wants to know.

Before You Buy...

Turn the stuff usually hidden on the product page into content. Reviews, pros and cons, delivery, returns and who the product is actually right for.

Yes, You Can Still Get It

The last-minute lifesaver. What's in stock, what can still arrive in time, what's ready to gift and exactly how to get it.



*Want a little help from our
elves this holiday season?*

We'd love to hear from you.



hello@pepperagency.com



pepperagency.com



+1 360 209 8822



+44 (0) 207 1007 222