

HOLIDAY

EMAIL LOOKBOOK

Get inspired,
see what
worked last
year, and
plan for 2019

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NETSUITE



READ TIME:
20 MINUTES

The 2018 holiday season set online records again

Online holiday sales figures hit \$126 billion¹ — with 26 days surpassing the \$2 billion mark. Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday, and Cyber Monday each beat their all-time highs, which were all set just last year.

Smartphones accounted for nearly 31% of revenue this holiday season, marking a 35% lift from the previous year — almost 50% more than just two years ago. And for the first time ever, smartphones made up more than half of all retailer web traffic (51%), an 11% increase from last year².

Email continued to play an important role, driving more than 24% of all retailer web traffic during the holiday season. Compare this to social media's 1.1%³, and you can see why email plays such a pivotal role in retailers' success during the season. With email and smartphones being such a large part of this record-setting season, how did retailers manage to stand out in a crowded inbox and drive those sales?

In this year's holiday email lookbook, we'll once again help you plan for this year's season by looking at some of the prevalent trends, from incentives and subject lines to combining the email and in-store experiences.

¹ Adobe, "Holiday 2018 predictions, actuals, and analysis," 2019.

² Digital Commerce 360, "Online Holiday Sales Surge 17.4% and Reach \$122 Billion," 2019.

³ Marketing Charts, "Holiday 2018 Data Hub," 2019.

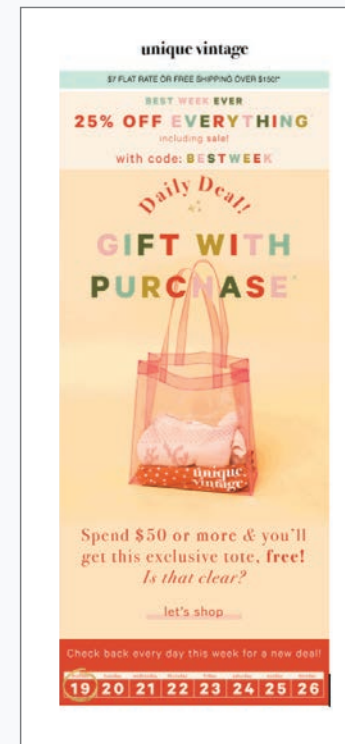
A Week's Worth of Black Fridays

Retailers were aggressively trying to secure sales before their competitors, and the recent trend of "Black Friday" starting on the Monday before Black Friday and lasting the entire week continued. But how does a retailer keep subscribers engaged with their emails while offering early sales?

By keeping it fresh, like Brylance Home and Unique Vintage did. Offering daily deals on top of the weeklong sales gave email subscribers another reason to come back and open their emails each day.

Planning Tip

Start early! Black Friday weeks will be prevalent this year, so finding ways to keep subscribers engaged will be critical. Think about how this can be done, such as by using daily deals, flash sales, contests or drawings, and by using social media content and influencers to create engagement.



Trends in Discounting

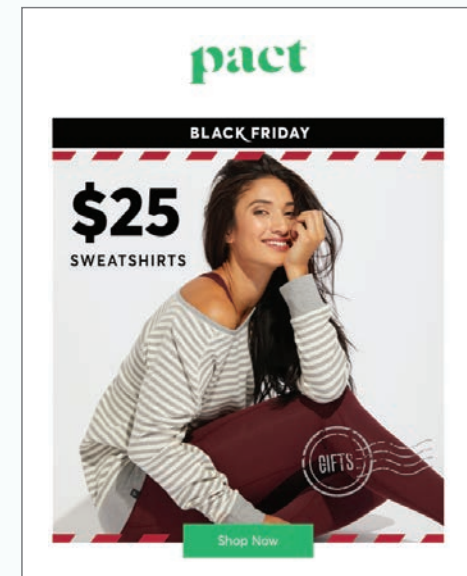
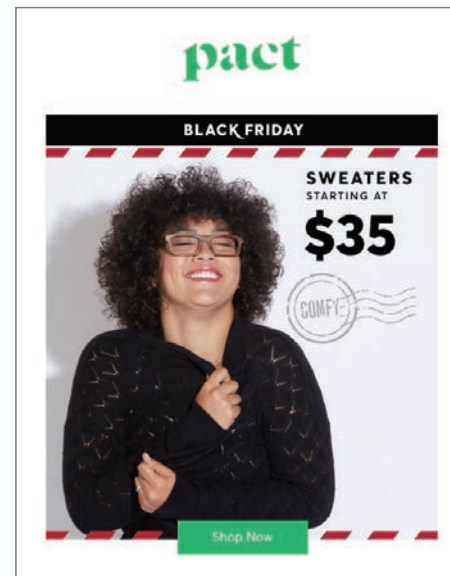
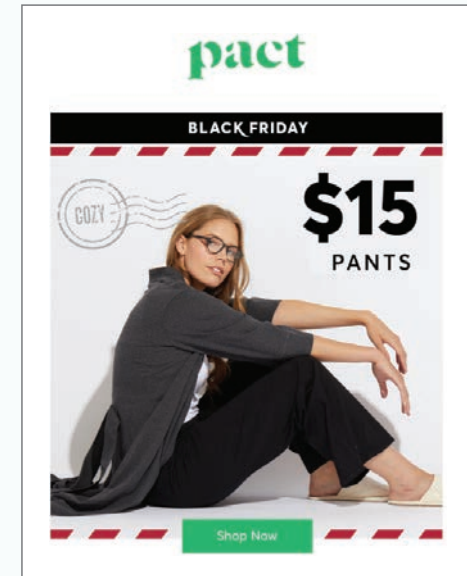
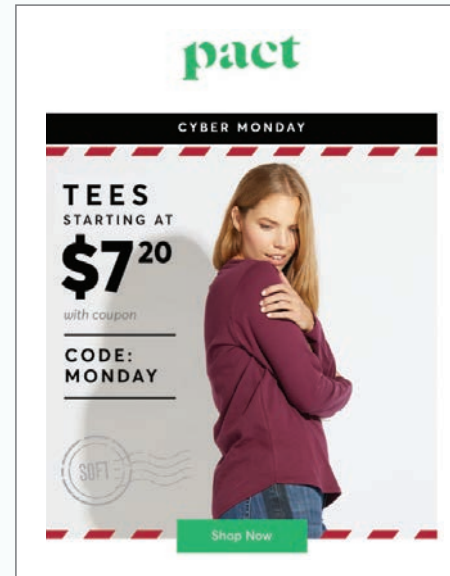
It's impossible to run through every incentive offered during the holiday season, but there are always messages that truly stand out. A couple of standout incentive types from 2018 include daily deals, category-specific sales, and free gifts with purchase.

Category-Specific Sales

Category-specific sales have seen an increase over the past several years, while daily deal sales — like the “twelve deals of Christmas” — have been less popular. 2018 became the year these two strategies merged.

Category sales continued in 2018, but rather than keeping subscribers in the dark about which categories would and would not go on sale, they promoted category sales as daily deals. This was a good compromise between keeping the email engagement high while also protecting margins for other product categories.

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Daily Deals

The benefit of daily deals is that subscribers have an incentive to keep checking their inboxes, which can keep open rates climbing. On the flip side, you may lose sales to competitors who offer site-wide sales that allow subscribers to make multiple category purchases at once.

This email from the Loft used an animated GIF, which scrolled through each daily deal for the week and helped shoppers plan their purchases early.

Planning Tip

If you're doing category sales, run them early. This will allow you to determine which products are slow to sell, entice shoppers with steeper discounts as the season winds down, and provide planning for year-end closeout sales.

The screenshot shows a promotional email from Loft. At the top, it says "NEW ARRIVALS | MOST LOVED LOOKS | PETITES | PLUS | SALE". The main headline is "joy of the day!" in a red script font, followed by "A.K.A. 7 really good reasons to check back every single day this week". Below this is a calendar-style graphic with days from TUE 20 to MON 26, where TUE 20 is highlighted in red. The product being promoted is "PRETTY EARRINGS" in large, bold, black letters. Below the product name, it says "And it all starts...right now." and includes a red button that says "SHOP TODAY'S DEAL". At the bottom, there is a social media prompt: "FOLLOW, LIKE AND SHARE THE LOVE @LOFT #LOVELOFT".

This image shows a vertical scroll of daily deals from the Loft email. Each deal is presented with a date indicator at the top (e.g., 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26) where the current day is highlighted in red. The deals listed are:

- FRAYED JEANS
- FURRY SLIPPERS
- THE COZIEST SWEATERS
- LEGGINGS TO LIVE IN
- OUR FAVORITE COAT
- SWEATERS YOU'LL LOVE

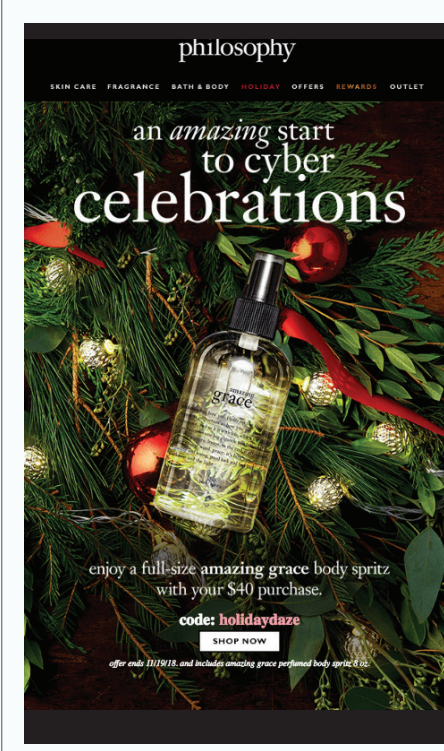
Free Gifts with Purchase

In brutally competitive industries, giving shoppers samples of products for personal consumption can influence future purchases. Free gifts also fit into the increased trend of self-gifting, where shoppers buy for themselves during the holiday season.

Planning Tip

If you offer free gifts, ensure they actually hold value for the shopper (as many keep those for themselves), but can also keep customers coming back. Offer gift certificates, desirable products, or surprise-and-delight gifts like in the Body Candy Jewelry email.

Nobody wants a product left lying around the warehouse that you couldn't sell in the first place.



philosophy

SKIN CARE FRAGRANCE BATH & BODY HOLIDAY OFFERS REWARDS OUTLET

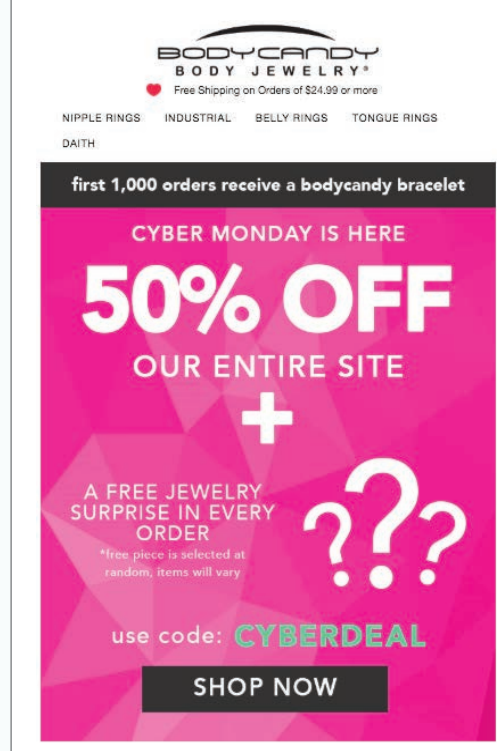
an *amazing* start
to cyber
celebrations

enjoy a full-size *amazing grace* body spritz
with your \$40 purchase.

code: **holidaydaze**

SHOP NOW

offer ends 11/19/18. and includes amazing grace perfumed body spritz 4.0z.



BODYCANDY
BODY JEWELRY®

Free Shipping on Orders of \$24.99 or more

NIPPLE RINGS INDUSTRIAL BELLY RINGS TONGUE RINGS
DAITH

first 1,000 orders receive a bodycandy bracelet

CYBER MONDAY IS HERE

50% OFF
OUR ENTIRE SITE

+

A FREE JEWELRY
SURPRISE IN EVERY
ORDER

*free piece is selected at
random, items will vary

use code: **CYBERDEAL**

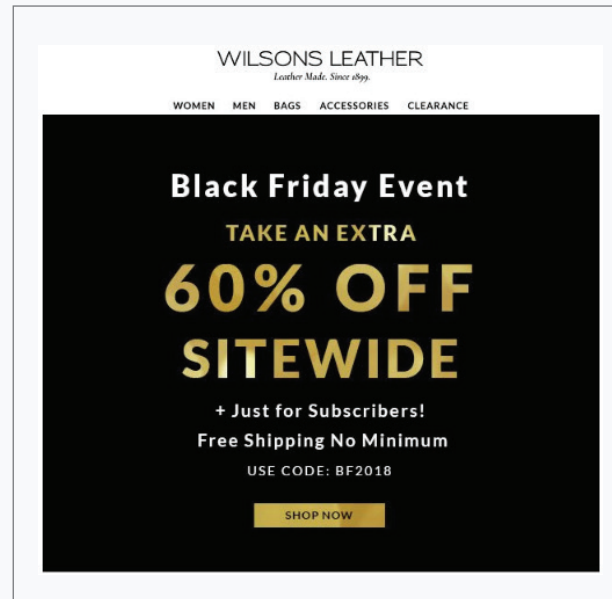
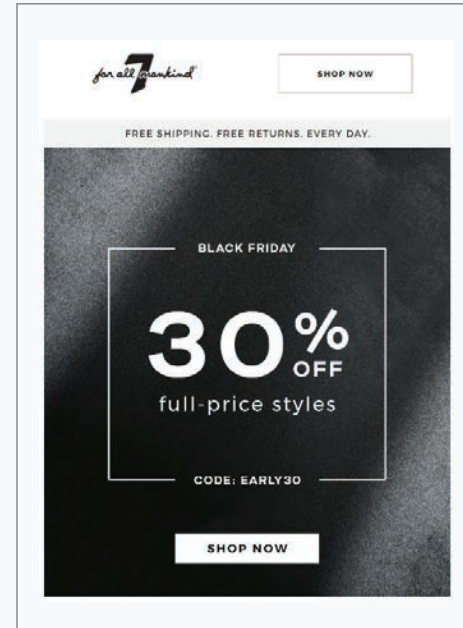
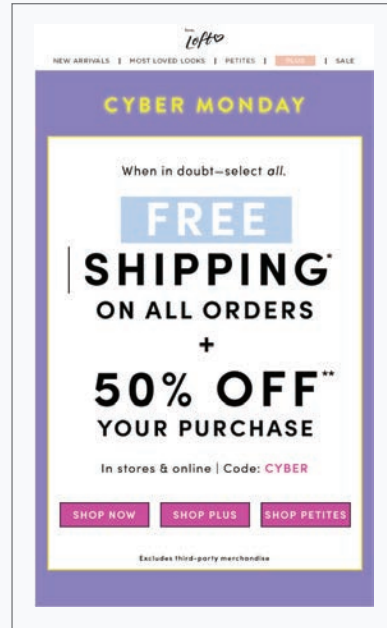
SHOP NOW

Free Shipping

Free shipping is fast becoming an expected perk, but during the 2018 holiday season it went from an add-on to a key promotion by itself. In the example from the Loft, you'll notice the primary advertised incentive in the body of the email is shipping, not the deep 50% discount.

Notice the top banner for 7 For All Mankind. They scored bonus points by prominently touting customer-friendly value-adds: free shipping and free returns. Banners promoting these incentives help build consumer confidence year-round, but especially when people are buying for others.

We love what Wilsons Leather does in their email by mentioning that their no-minimum free shipping is available only to email subscribers. While we're not sure if that's actually the case, it does show some exclusivity for being an active subscriber.

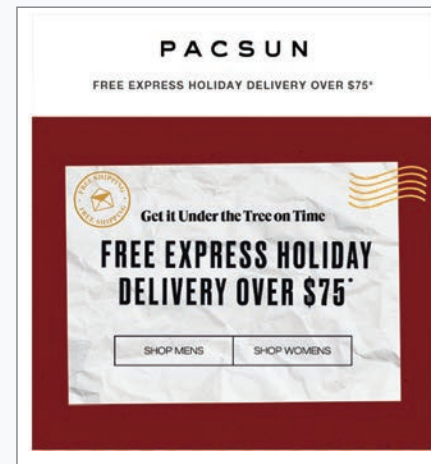
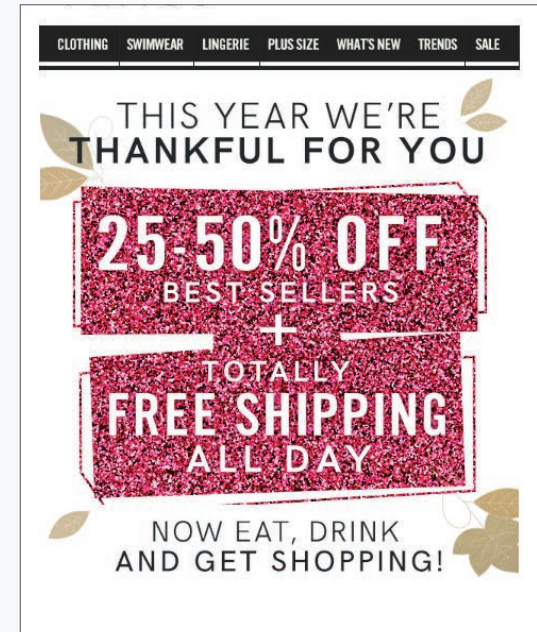
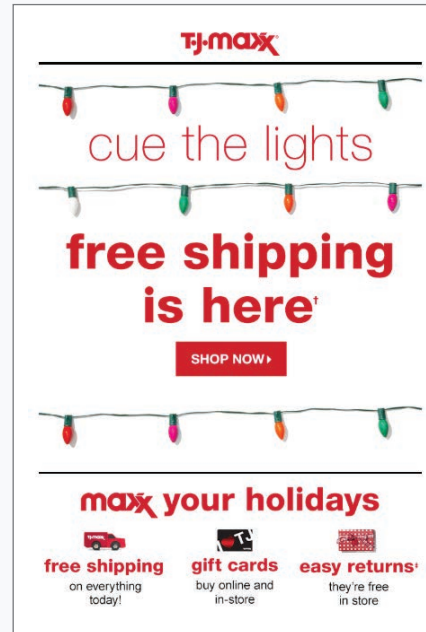


Planning Tip

Even though free shipping may be expected, it's still an effective incentive. Test using free shipping with either no minimums or with reduced minimums. You may find that customers will meet those old thresholds anyway, leaving you one step ahead. And if you do offer this as a subscriber-only perk, promote that prior to Black Friday to increase email subscriber sign-ups.

Shipping Becomes the Promotion as the Season Winds Down

As you can see with PACSUN example sent a week before Christmas, the message highlights express shipping as the primary incentive even though the subject line promoted other offers. This is a good use of making the subject line and email creative complement one another.

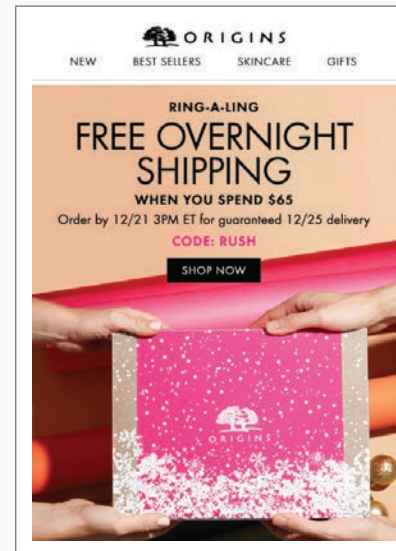
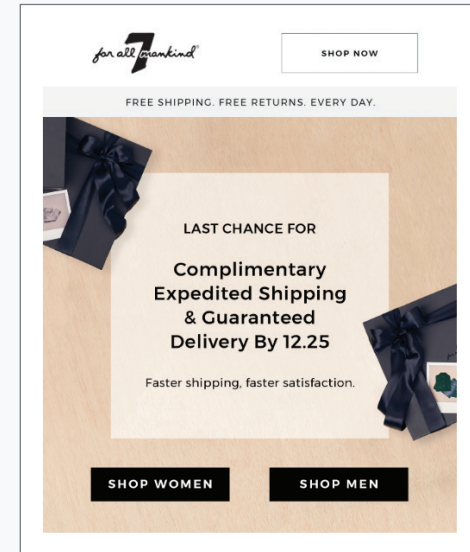
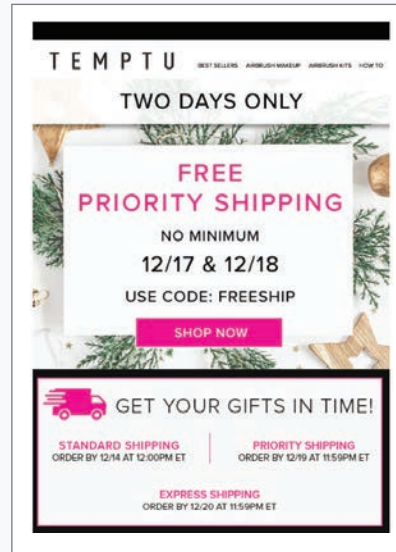


Looking at the TEMPTU and 7 For All Mankind examples, you'll notice that the holiday season is coming to a close. These messages use free expedited shipping as the primary incentive, even with no minimum spend.

ORIGINS continued the free shipping incentive but offered overnight shipping. Once again, this was the primary callout in the subject line.

Planning Tip

Be sure to capitalize on the sense of urgency during this time period. The longer the customer waits to make the purchase, the more they risk the product arriving too late, not being available, or the free shipping incentive being gone. Use this fear of loss to drive the same urgency now!



Buy Online, Pick-up In-Store

Buy Online, Pick-up In-Store (BOPIS) is a successful year-round strategy for multichannel retailers. But during the holidays, where procrastinating shoppers are common, this can rise to a whole new level. Between November 1st and December 19th, BOPIS use increased 47% over the previous year⁴, making it a great tactic for driving last-minute sales during the holiday season.

ORACLE[®] NETSUITE

NEW ARRIVALS | MOST LOVED LOOKS | PETITES | PLUS | SALE

BEST WEEK OF THE YEAR

FLASH SALE!

50% OFF^{*}
YOUR PURCHASE

SHOP NOW | SHOP PLUS | SHOP PETITES

Online only | Code: **THANKS**

Psst! Here's a look at our floral-obsessed Black Fri-yay collection

SHOP NOW | SHOP PLUS | SHOP PETITES

Starts tomorrow in stores!

Get a **FREE TOTE** (in our floral-obsessed Black Fri-yay print) with your \$75 purchase^{***} in stores

FIND YOUR STORE

While supplies last

FOLLOW, LIKE AND SHARE THE LOVE @LOFT #LOVELOFT

VISIT YOUR NEAREST LOFT STORE

THERE'S SNOW MUCH MORE IN STORES!
treats, prizes + your chance to win \$500 →

ANTHROPOLOGIE

30% OFF EVERYTHING

SHOP NEW ARRIVALS →

in stores + online

SNOW MUCH FUN

⁴Retail Dive, "Holiday Spending Sleights," 2019.

Here are three examples of ways to use BOPIS in emails. In the Old Navy example, they speak to the self-gifters by remind them they can have the product today and wear it today as well.

Pottery Barn not only highlights BOPIS at the top of the main content section, they also include the local store at the very top of their email.

Michael's may be the most intriguing example of the lot. Michael's offered a discount to purchase online, rather than in-store, but promoted the BOPIS option. This may be their attempt to secure an immediate sale while still driving people in-store for additional, unplanned purchases.

SET IT BY CHRISTMAS Order by 12/18 for FREE delivery by 12/21. View in [web browser](#).

OLD NAVY

NEW ARRIVALS / WOMEN / WOMEN'S PLUS / MATERNITY / MEN / GIRLS / BOYS / TODDLER / BABY

today ONLY! IN-STORE & ONLINE MONDAY, 12/17

THERMAL LEGGINGS
women's
\$7

CAN'T WAIT TO WEAR IT?

BUY ONLINE PICKUP IN-STORE. [LEARN MORE](#)

VISIT YOUR LOCAL STORE
Durham - Streets at Southpoint - 6030 Renaissance Parkway, Durham, NC
[In Stores & Online >](#)

POTTERY BARN

THERE'S STILL TIME FOR LAST-MINUTE GIFTS

GET IT BY CHRISTMAS
ORDER BY SATURDAY, 12/22
10AM PT WITH NEXT DAY DELIVERY

NEED IT TODAY?
BUY ONLINE + PICK UP
IN STORES

Extended hours in stores, now through Sunday, 12/23
[FIND A STORE](#)

Michael's
MAKE CREATIVITY HAPPEN

SHOP | COUPONS | WEEKLY AD

**OUR MOST EPIC
CYBER
WEEK EVER!**

HUNDREDS OF ITEMS EACH DAY - IN STORE & ONLINE!

[SHOP ALL CYBER DEALS NOW >](#)

**ONLINE OR BUY ONLINE PICK UP
IN STORE PURCHASE ONLY**

30% OFF

Your Entire Online or
Buy Online Pick Up In Store
Purchase Including Sale Items

VALID THRU MON 11/26/18 • PROMO CODE: CYBER30W

[SHOP NOW >](#)

Exclusions apply. Excludes doorbusters. Excludes Everyday Value program. See coupon for details.

Planning Tip

If free shipping periods have come to a close, BOPIS becomes a serious value-add – use it! Really put an emphasis on this service during the home stretch. Use geolocation data or location-based segmentation to pinpoint the nearest store inside of the body of your emails.

If you don't have this capability, highlight a link to your website's store finder. Remember, customers tend to make additional purchases in-store — Retail Touchpoints reported that 65% of holiday shoppers make additional purchases when picking up their orders.

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picking up their orders

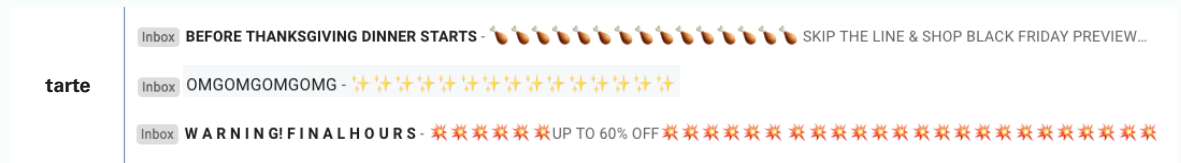


Subject Line Standouts

The increased send cadence during the holidays creates a crowded inbox — last year, Bronto saw a 21% lift in emails sent from the previous year on Cyber Monday alone.

Finding a way to stand out in the inbox may never be more critical than during the holidays. Here are some retailers who used emojis effectively in subject lines and preheader to stand out in a crowded inbox.

In these Tarte subject lines, they use repeating colorful emojis in the preheader text that appears after the subject line in the inbox view, making them stand out in a sea of black and white. In the second example, notice the all-capital subject line that conveys excitement.



Hits and Misses

Hits

The first email on the nice list is this one by Francesca's. The email design complimented the "Are You Stocking up?" subject line. Also, they used two present emojis to bookend the text and make it stand out.

The design itself was aesthetically appealing, and it also directed readers to the right product category quickly. They focused on stocking stuffers for different sets of people, such as those with a sweet tooth or the tech-savvy person on your list.



This Rebecca Minkoff email is similar to other goodwill holiday emails “from the CEO,” but branded itself better by including Rebecca’s smiling face. The message was short and sweet, which plays well with how much someone will actually read on their phone.

This message provided value to the reader, but it wasn’t as clear as it could’ve been. Clicking the CTA takes the subscriber to a BBQ turkey recipe. It sounds delicious, but unfortunately it was sent on Thanksgiving Day — if a subscriber was interested in the recipe, it was likely too late.

Overall, the image, short message, and click-through content was appealing. Next year, just send it a bit earlier and make the CTA clearer that a recipe lies on the other side.



This email from Tarte checked all of the boxes. The subject line used emojis and all capitals, while the preheader text repeated emojis, making the email really stand out in a crowded inbox.

The email itself was short and to the point, even though it used animated GIFs to cycle between content. Using large black text with a contrasting colored background made the message easily readable and digestible, and the product formulation section was visible and reinforced the products' value-adds.

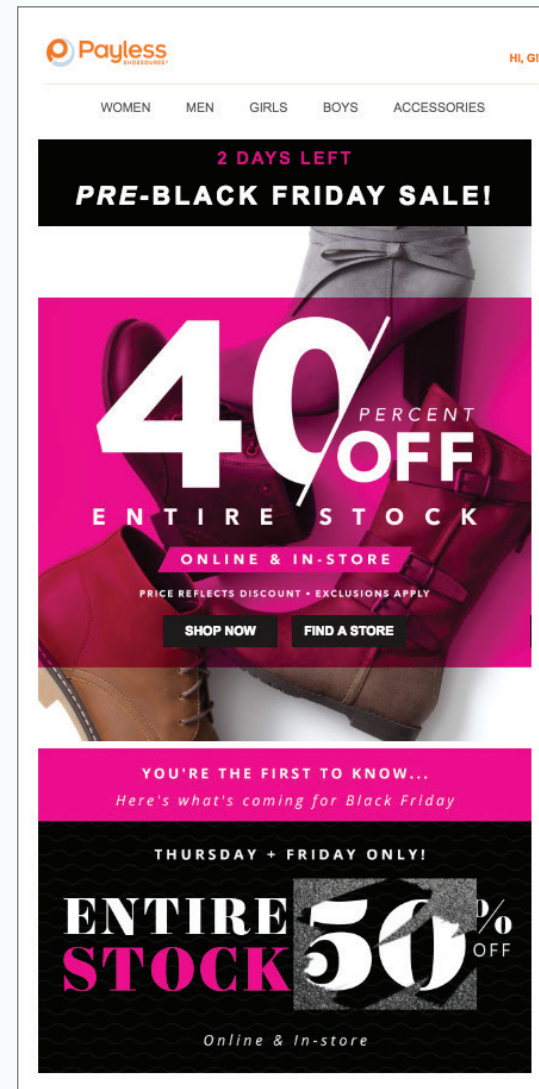
Planning Tip

Simplicity can be powerful — don't overthink it. Marketing is all about successfully conveying the message you wish to share. During a time period where people are inundated with email, keeping it short and sweet (or in this case with a little sweet BBQ) can be quite effective.

Misses

This email from Payless was confusing, from the subject line all the way through the content and creative. This email was sent on Tuesday, two days before Black Friday. The subject line read, "Is It Sunday Morning Yet?" I don't understand what Sunday has to do with anything, especially as this is a pre-Black Friday email.

The email itself clearly calls out that if you wait two days, you'll receive a better discount than what is offered here. Why would a customer want to shop now when they know they'll receive a better deal two days from now?



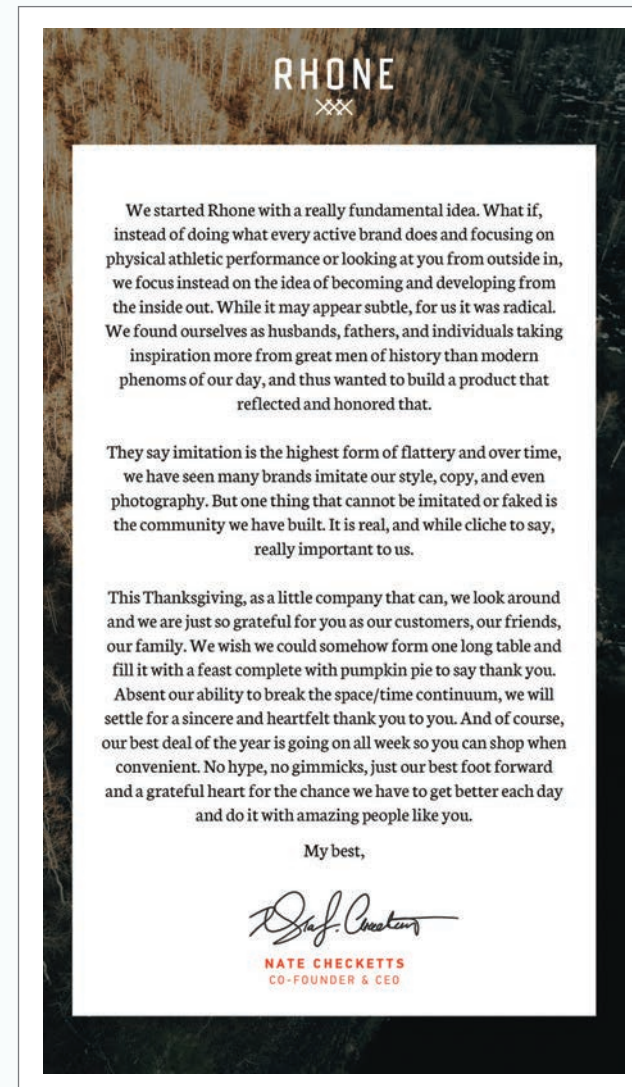
This email from Rhone is one we've been seeing more and more over the past several years: an email letter from the CEO. While these aren't necessarily bad emails to send, they seem rather disingenuous and aren't mobile-friendly. It's doubtful that people reading this on their phones are going to pinch and zoom to read the "letter."


A final word to note. Just once, it would be great to see the email actually sent from the CEO's email address instead of a generic email. If you want to connect with a customer, reciprocate and let them connect with you.

Planning Tip

Always think about the customer experience. Being cute or fancy with promotions during a time where consumers tend to scan rather than read can be less effective. Don't confuse them with conflicting discounts.

And finally, remember consumer smartphone usage. Make sure your emails are mobile optimized. It's too important to ignore.



A close-up photograph of a young woman with blonde hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a white knit beanie, a grey turtleneck scarf, and a dark jacket with a red and white plaid pattern. The background is a soft-focus outdoor winter scene with snow and trees. The image is overlaid with a dark blue semi-transparent box on the left side containing text.

The holidays are just around the corner

Last year's online holiday season met online shopping expectations, and even took the season to a new level with Gray November's early sales and discounts — which led to another record-setting Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

We saw a continued focus on connecting online to physical stores by highlighting BOPIS and in-store exclusive deals. We also became reacquainted with some old friends, like those daily deals of the season. And through it all, of course, email played a pivotal role in retailers' success and took mobile holiday revenues to new heights.

Start planning for this year's holiday season now. Knowing that it starts early and runs through the new year, you need to be prepared for the marathon, not the sprint. If you're late to the game, it'll be someone else who reaps the rewards.

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Bronto Marketing Platform helps organizations of all sizes grow revenue, save time and optimize marketing resources. By delivering powerful and flexible email marketing solutions that work seamlessly with multiple ecommerce platforms, the Bronto Marketing Platform enables brands to maximize the value of customer data and deliver irresistible customer experiences. Bronto solutions incorporate best practices from 16 years of email marketing success and are used by the world's top brands, including Rebecca Minkoff, Lucky Brand, Theory, Brooks Running and Christopher & Banks.

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