

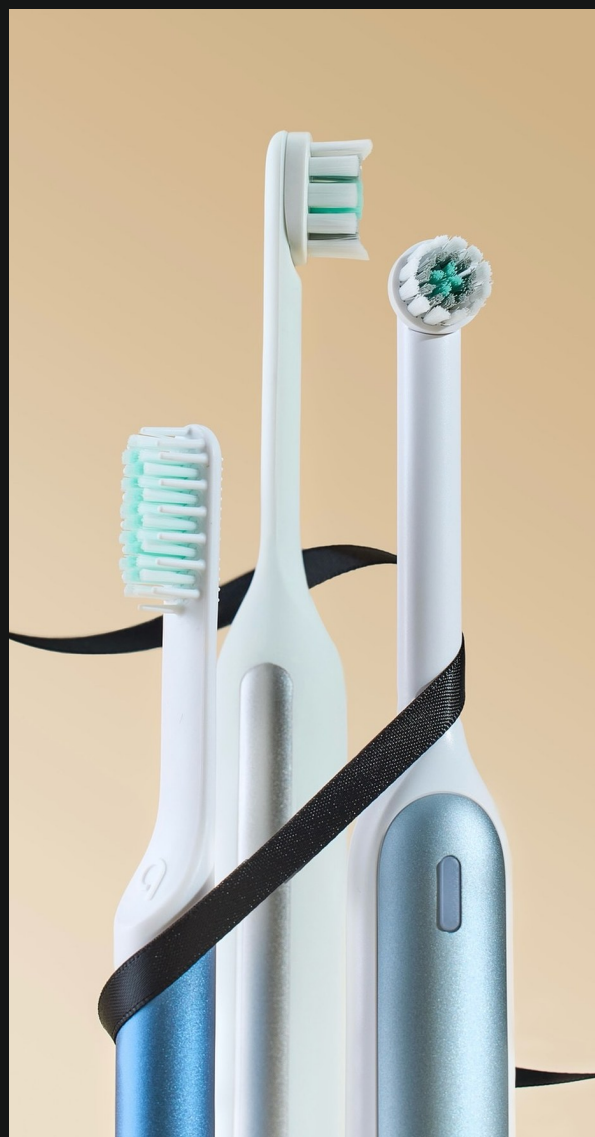
Holiday Readiness Lab

10 DAYS, 10 WEEKS.

Forty-four things to settle before peak, organized around when they need to happen. Holiday plans are more likely to fall apart because of timing than because of the media itself.

Only 11% of holiday shoppers wait for Black Friday. 65% start before it, and 28% of those start in September.

eMarketer, Statista and Google LCS Holiday Consumer Studies, presented by Google at the Holiday Readiness Lab, September 2026.



START WITH THE ONE YOU COULDN'T ANSWER.

The session put four questions to the room. Whichever one you could not answer is where this list is worth your time first.

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PHASE 01

THE NEXT 10 DAYS

NOW → FRI, OCT 3

Decisions, not tasks. Everything here is free this week and expensive once the plan freezes.

THE NUMBER

What are you maximizing, and who agreed to it?

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- ☐ 01 Write one sentence naming what you are maximizing this season, and what you will not sacrifice to get it.
 - ☐ 02 Get finance to agree to that sentence in writing, not in a meeting.
 - ☐ 03 Check that every channel target ladders up to that sentence rather than to its own separate number.
 - ☐ 04 Set the margin floor: which products you will not discount, and which you will not bid on at all.
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THE SHOPPER'S CLOCK

When does your season actually start?

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- ☐ 05 Write down when demand for your category actually starts, from last year's data rather than the retail calendar.
 - ☐ 06 Decide whether your earliest promo is a test or a commitment, and what result would tell you which.
 - ☐ 07 Name the surface where someone who has never heard of you meets you first, and who owns it.
 - ☐ 08 Ask an AI assistant your top five category questions and record what it says about you.
 - ☐ 09 Set the gifting cutoff dates you will publish, working back from shipping rather than from marketing.
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PHASE 01, CONTINUED

THE NEXT 10 DAYS

NOW → FRI, OCT 3

SUPPLY

Do you have the assets your plan requires?

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- ☐ 10 Count usable assets against the media plan, by placement and ratio, not against what the shoot delivered.
 - ☐ 11 Name the gap in assets, then decide whether to shoot, generate, or cut the plan to fit.
 - ☐ 12 Write down the claims, colors, crops and marks AI is never allowed to touch.
 - ☐ 13 Put one name against creative supply through December, with the authority to say no.
 - ☐ 14 Give every promo a fallback asset that still works if the offer changes late.
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RUNNING IT LIVE

What moves money mid-season, and who can call it?

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- ☐ 15 Name the single number that governs a mid-season budget move.
 - ☐ 16 Check that everyone who can move money would name that same number.
 - ☐ 17 Agree the thresholds that trigger a move, and who can call it without convening a meeting.
 - ☐ 18 Decide now what you do if you are fifteen percent behind on 3 December, while nobody is panicking.
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PHASE 02

THE LOCK

BY FRI, OCT 10

What has to be true the day the plan stops being editable. Most holiday failures are a missed date on this list, not a bad media call.

SIGNED OFF

What has to be agreed before the plan freezes?

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- ☐ 19 Budgets approved through January, including the contingency you fully expect to spend.
 - ☐ 20 Wave one creative delivered, wave two briefed and dated.
 - ☐ 21 Promo calendar signed off by merchandising, finance and marketing in the same version.
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THE PLUMBING

Does everything downstream of the click still work?

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- ☐ 22 Tracking verified end to end on a real test purchase, on a phone, in a private window.
 - ☐ 23 Feeds audited for price, availability, title and margin flags on every surface you sell through.
 - ☐ 24 Landing pages and product pages frozen, with a named exception process for what has to change.
 - ☐ 25 Site code freeze dates agreed with engineering, in writing.
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ACCESS AND COVER

What takes you offline if nobody checked it?

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- ☐ 26 Credit lines, spend caps and billing thresholds raised ahead of peak rather than during it.
 - ☐ 27 Platform accounts checked for policy issues, expiring cards and unverified domains.
 - ☐ 28 Coverage calendar published: who is on, which hours, across Cyber 5 and the weekend either side.
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PHASE 03

THE NEXT 10 WEEKS

MON, OCT 13 → MON, NOV 30

You cannot change the plan now, so set the rules instead. Decide these while the room is calm, because December will not give you the chance.

THE SCOREBOARD

How will you read performance, and who settles an argument?

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- ☐ 29 Lock the definitions before you need them: sale to date, year over year comp, and which dashboard settles an argument.
 - ☐ 30 Set attribution windows and lookback for peak, and write them down so nobody moves them mid-week.
 - ☐ 31 Freeze testing from the agreed date, with the exceptions named in advance.
 - ☐ 32 Agree the reporting cadence, including who reads what, at what hour, across Cyber 5.
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DECIDED IN ADVANCE

What gets settled now so December is only execution?

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- ☐ 33 Date the creative refresh at the fatigue point, roughly five days into a promo, not when performance drops.
 - ☐ 34 Flight upper funnel ahead of the demand curve rather than alongside the promo.
 - ☐ 35 Align retention and paid on the same suppression and audience logic, so you stop paying twice.
 - ☐ 36 Build one contingency campaign per channel and leave it paused, ready to switch on.
 - ☐ 37 Agree inventory triggers: what you pause the hour a hero product sells through.
 - ☐ 38 Run a daily standup with one owner and one decision log, not a thread nobody can reconstruct.
 - ☐ 39 Name the escalation path for a platform outage or a disabled account, with the contact already warm.
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PHASE 04

AFTER

TUES, DEC 1 → JAN

The part everyone skips, and the only part that makes next season easier.

- ☐ 40 Have the post-Christmas plan live before Christmas, not written after it.
- ☐ 41 Treat gift card redemption and self-gifting as their own season, with their own creative.
- ☐ 42 Book the January read now, and write the questions down while you still remember them.
- ☐ 43 Design one holdout or geo test that reads on this season rather than the next one.
- ☐ 44 Schedule the debrief with merchandising and finance in the room, before the February review.

STUCK ON ONE OF THESE?

Email us the one you couldn't answer. Our media and creative teams, who work with clients like Ben & Jerry's, The North Face, and Foot Locker, will tell you how they'd handle it.

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