



THE ULTIMATE ROADMAP To Q4 Success



“Last minute panic” might work as your personal holiday shopping strategy, but it’s a disaster waiting to happen in Q4 ecommerce.

The last three months of the year represent either a huge opportunity or a giant headache for online retailers. On the plus side, ecommerce continued to climb in 2021, with consumers spending **more than \$4.5 billion** online by the end of the year.

That’s a huge chunk of change. But at the same time, a still fragile supply chain means stockouts remain a looming threat. Research from Adobe shows out-of-stock messages **skyrocketed 250%** in October 2021 when compared to a pre-pandemic period.

And let’s not forget, empty digital shelves can send your customers straight into the arms of your competitors.

The good news: you have control over whether you exit Q4 with a healthier bottom line. All it takes is careful and intentional planning.

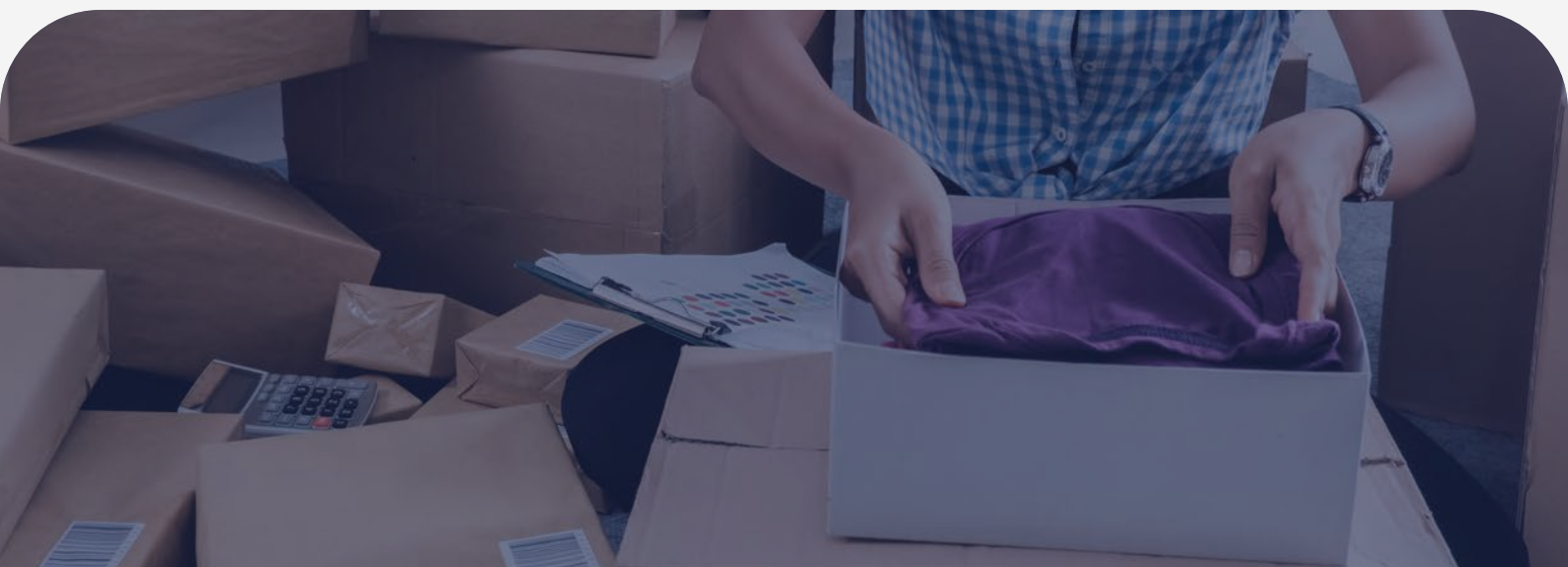
This ebook will serve as a quick and useful roadmap to making this Q4 your most successful ever.



Here's what we'll cover

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The holidays will be here before you know it. Get the inventory and marketing budget you need with fast, flexible [ecommerce funding](#).



Acing Q4 inventory and logistics

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you've already weathered a couple years of Q4 madness. You know the value and opportunity is there. Now you're looking for an edge to take your online store to the next level.

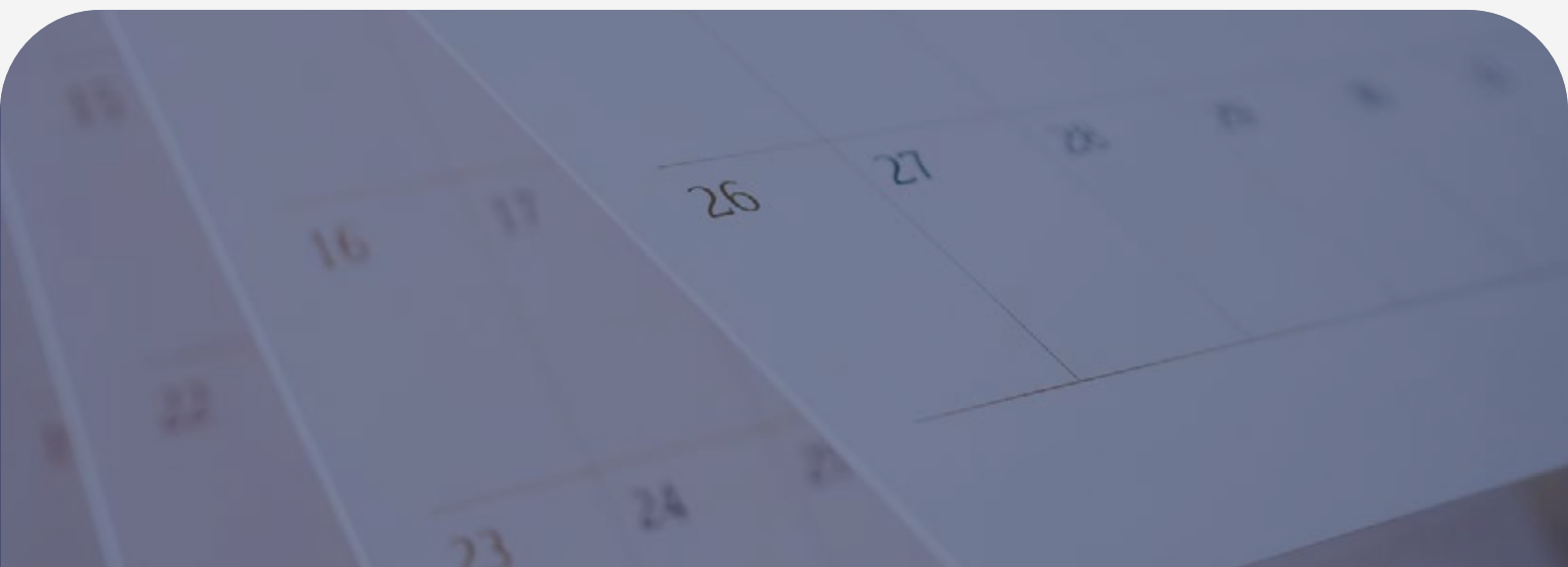
Intentional and thorough planning for Q4 is that golden ticket.

Making an advance inventory and logistics plan for Q4 offers several advantages:

- Securing capital and growing your inventory reserve gives you **a safety net for unexpected expenses** so that you don't get caught flat-footed in the most crucial quarter of the year.
- Why do customers pick you over the competition? Pre-planning answers these questions and **reveals your strengths and weaknesses**.
- Confidence is key for a successful Q4. Planning and testing your products in advance reveals **which Q4 SKUs are your keepers vs. your duds**.

But the benefits of Q4 prep go well beyond the bottom line and profits. A positive customer experience generates glowing reviews and (hopefully) new and repeat customers in the year to come. On the flip side, a bad review can tank your reputation and drive customers away.

Let's make sure you nail it, starting with your inventory plan.



3 simple steps to win with holiday inventory

A solid Q4 marketing plan gets you nowhere if you don't have products to sell.

That's why every successful inventory strategy starts with forecasting. Predicting the future is obviously impossible (we've all been caught without an umbrella on a "sunny" day). But you can get a clearer picture of your Q4 inventory demands with a few simple tactics.

Here are three quick steps to better Q4 inventory planning.

Step 1: Listen to the Numbers

This Q4, say goodbye to the guesswork and crunch the numbers to reveal the inventory facts:

- **Sales velocity:** What are your bestsellers? How fast do they sell?
- **Timing:** Are your bestsellers hot year round? If not, what sells best in Q4?
- **Location:** Where are your buyers located?
- **Channel:** Which channel yields your biggest returns?
- **Return:** What's the payout on this product?
- **Cost:** Is the profit margin worth it?

Step 2: Get Technical

Now that you're moving into the big leagues, you need an inventory system that goes far beyond static spreadsheets.

Higher volumes and unpredictable markets call for a more advanced system than whatever comes out-of-the-box in your [marketplace or ecommerce platform](#). The ideal forecasting partner offers:

- **Real-time metrics:** Think of Q4 like a football game. You can go in with a game plan, but when your star quarterback goes down with an injury everything turns upside. Current and accurate numbers give you the agility to adjust.
- **End-to-end inventory tracking:** Excellent customer service hinges on accuracy.
- **Increased accuracy:** It's all about getting the right products in the right amounts, at the right time.

Looking for a data partner? SellersFunding **has your back**. Here's how it worked for Jon Drummond of Drummond Gaming Tech:

"Now I have a datasheet that I can use to compare weeks and months and show my growth. It makes it easier because it's connected to the marketplace so you know what's going on."

Step 3: Implement

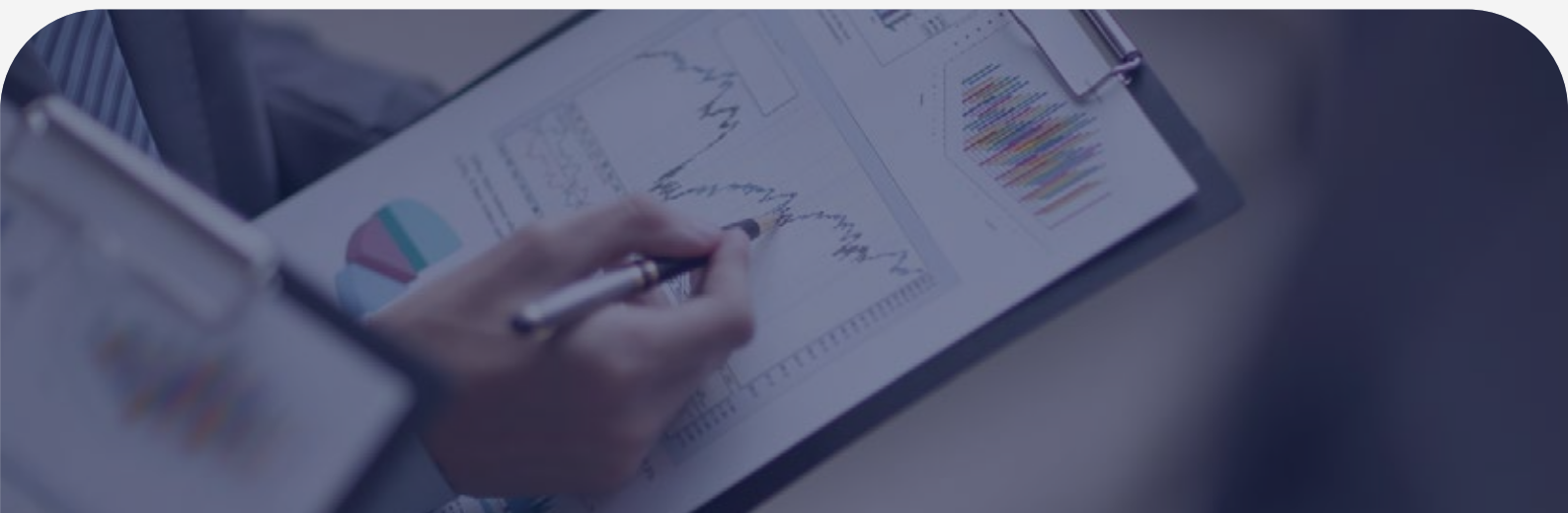
Your homework should have revealed some important trends and information for Q4. Now you're going to use that data to choose your top performers as well as what you're not going to sell this holiday season.

Take a look at:

- ➡ Which products don't do well vs. those that are always a seasonal success
- ➡ Ways to reduce slow-movers to save money and reinvest in top-sellers
- ➡ How you can increase marketing and promotion on your best-sellers
- ➡ Which items may not see a seasonal spike but sell well year-round
- ➡ Which items **would** have sold well if you hadn't gone out of stock

"I had two days to find money because Black Friday is the biggest day for online sales."

Find out how sellers like Simba went from cash-strapped to \$5 million in revenue with a little help from SellersFunding.



Mastering your holiday marketing

All this crucial inventory prep gets you nowhere if customers don't know you exist. That's where some seriously savvy holiday marketing comes into play.

A solid **Q4 marketing strategy** maps out the **key dates** you want to target (Black Friday, Cyber Monday, the week leading up to Christmas, etc.) and pairs them with your core offers and messaging. The result is a cohesive approach to winning your shoppers' attention, with social media, email and advertising all aligning.

Audit your data (and your competitors)

By now, you've probably guessed that the first step in each core area of Q4 planning is to audit your past data. By taking a look at your last two to three years of holiday marketing data, you'll be able to pinpoint the strategies that work and focus your resources on the highest-ROI channels and campaigns.

Of course, it's never a bad idea to revisit the past campaigns from competitors in your niche to understand the overall landscape your shoppers are navigating this time of year and position your store to rise above the noise.

Here are the areas to investigate:

- How did your social media vs. email vs. advertising perform in the past?
- Which channel delivered the most traffic?
Conversions? ROI?
- Which subscriber-only offers did your competitors promote?
- What were your top-performing products and bundles last year?
- What products did your competitors waitlist for?
- What were your reviews like during last year's Q4?
Any key customer insights?
- How about your competitors' reviews?
Do you outperform in any key areas?
- How can you elevate your past and current promos for Q4?



Pick your channels wisely

While it can be tempting to try to be everywhere all at once during the high sales season, targeting your customers across multiple channels is more than ok. In fact, it's encouraged.

Because, let's face it, you have a better chance of catching Santa in your living room than achieving a 100% email open rate. Putting equal effort into all channels dilutes your effectiveness and wastes your marketing budget. So why not focus your efforts?

Broadly speaking, there are three buckets ecommerce marketing fall into:

1. Email
2. Social media
3. Digital advertising

Each has their own unique value and purpose in your Q4 ecommerce plan. Across all channels you should be asking yourself who you're trying to reach. Some ways to qualify your audience include:

- Age
- Education
- Income
- Product needs
- Location

Elevate your email marketing

Email is a single snowflake compared to the unfocused avalanche of social media. It's unique, solitary, targeted — and incredibly easy to ignore. But don't lose hope!

Believe it or not, the first step in a successful holiday [email marketing campaign](#) isn't writing. It's cleaning up your lists.

Organizing your subscriber list (a.k.a. segmenting) can be focused around a couple of factors:

- Demographics
- Open rates
- Location
- Product interest

Writing comes next. Start by consulting that content calendar you drafted months in advance (see where we're going with this?), to tap into the right inspiration for your messaging. Then, work in any relevant angles and differentiators based on your past data and competitor audit.

Step it up on social media

Don't worry. A successful social media Q4 plan doesn't have to include awkward TikTok dances involving tinsel, two pounds of frosting and reindeer. Unless...? No, the content itself should be unique and appropriate to your brand. And while a little **influencer marketing** may not be a bad thing, ultimately your approach is for ***you*** to determine.

When it comes to organic growth, the point of social media is less direct advertising and more brand affinity. Think of your social media efforts as a Trojan horse that lures people in, with a sales pitch hidden inside.

But, be warned. You need to be crystal clear on who you want to reach and where they camp out in the digital world. Facebook and Instagram are the gimmes, but don't discount:

- Pinterest
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Snapchat

Obviously there's crossover between the platforms, but broadly speaking you'll find certain demographics (mainly age) stick to certain platforms. And remember, make sure it's easy for your social media followers to get signed up to your email list!

Double down on digital advertising

While social media serves as the soft sell, digital advertising is the sledgehammer. It's where you'll invest a good chunk of your Q4 budget. (Because you started building reserves in March, right? 😊)

Some of the digital advertising channels to consider include:

- Paid social media ads
- Google pay-per-click (PPC) ads
- Retargeting

Ideally, you'll have your content complete and in place by September, with your advertisements running full tilt by October. Here's why:

- It gives consumers who are nervous about shipping delays a convenient outlet to buy gifts early.
- You have enough lead time to A/B test products and discounts.
- Optimizing your content and copy is still possible

Q4 store readiness, simplified.

Now that you've built an airtight Q4 plan, it's time to help your store deliver on your and your customers' expectations. After all, you'd hate to discover in November that your freight forwarder is less reliable than one-ply toilet paper or that your product bundles are about as enticing as Aunt Edna's fruit cake. 😬

Some of the key store readiness tasks you'll want to undertake include:

- Setting and communicating clear fulfillment standards and delivery times
- Testing the reliability of suppliers, freight forwarders, and shipping carriers
- Optimizing your website and mobile shopping experience for increased traffic
- Creating the perfect seasonal shopping experience for your customers

Refine your fulfillment strategy

Getting your products out of the warehouse and onto your customer's doorstep is a crucial part of the process. Upfront promises about delivery times is a great selling point but at the same time, slow delivery can seriously damage your brand.

Advance planning for a successful Q4 gives you time to test the reliability of your third-party logistics providers (3PLs). Your chosen 3PL should be able to ramp up services during Q4 without affecting quality. The returns process should also be transparent and dependable.

Other areas where you should grade your 3PL include:

- Speed
- Error rate
- On-time shipment rate
- Warehouse site security

Run a health check on your website and mobile experience

No matter how awesome your products or airtight your fulfillment, slow site times and clunky checkout processes can rob you of your well-earned holiday sales. And with a cart abandonment rate of nearly 86% on mobile, you definitely don't want to skip this step.

- Try out one-click or single-swipe shopping features
- Reduce checkout to just one page
- Check site speed and page load times
- Test your third-party integrations
- Work with your developer/platform to optimize for spikes in traffic
- Switch on cart abandonment notifications
- Review all URLs
- Trial run your discount codes
- Test your mobile shopping experience to make sure it's 100% seamless

Offer the seasonal bells and whistles

During the hustle, bustle and outright stress of the busy holiday season, shoppers are quick to give their loyalty (and their dollars) to brands that make the shopping experience fun and easy.

Here are some proven ways to uplevel your merchandising and site navigation to help make holiday shopping a breeze.

- Champion your bestsellers on your home page or in the [Buy Box](#)
- Make it easy for shoppers to find similar products
- Create irresistible offers and product bundles
- Offer personalization options on relevant items
- Make sure your buttons and CTAs are easy to find
- Ensure [payment services](#) are clear and easy to access

Optimize for peak customer service

Nail the holiday shopping experience, and you could be looking at a whole new set of loyal shoppers year-round.

Here are some areas to optimize:

- Use a ticketing system, chatbot or AI virtual assistant
- Hire additional temporary staff to offer human support
- Advertise your shipping cut-off dates to set the right expectations

Get clear on cash flow

Getting on your suppliers' good side is always recommended, but that's especially the case in Q4. One of the best ways to do that is paying them quickly with a borderless payment solution like the [Digital Wallet](#).

The Digital Wallet allows you to:

- Store and transact in multiple currencies using the [Mid-Market Rate \(MMR\)](#)
- Exchange money at affordable rates (without hidden fees!)
- Pay [local expenses](#) in local currencies





Cash flow is king in Q4. When your product goes gangbusters in Q4 (and it will because you have a great advance plan...right?), you'll need to be ready. Favorable terms with suppliers, large upfront stock orders and unexpected costs can all be covered with a flexible solution such as the [Daily Advance](#) or a [Working Capital](#) line of credit.

At SellersFunding, our Daily Advance gives you early access to marketplace sales you've already generated and doesn't tie your cash flow down with monthly payments. If you require larger inventory purchases, a Working Capital credit limit allows you to invest in the stock, tech and human resources you'll need for a smooth holiday season.

The best part? We can approve credit limits of up to \$5 million in 48 hours or less, and you'll only pay interest on the amount you use.

The Q4 bottom line

There's a **lot** of work involved in preparing for a successful Q4. Realistically, you should be preparing for Q4 as soon as you've finished the last of the eggnog in January.

That being said, upfront preparation spreads out the workload and minimizes the post-Labor Day panic. Building a plan in the areas of inventory, logistics, marketing and store readiness sets you firmly on the track for success.

And remember, SellersFunding [is in your corner](#) for any questions or assistance you might need.



Learn more about SellersFunding [here.](#)