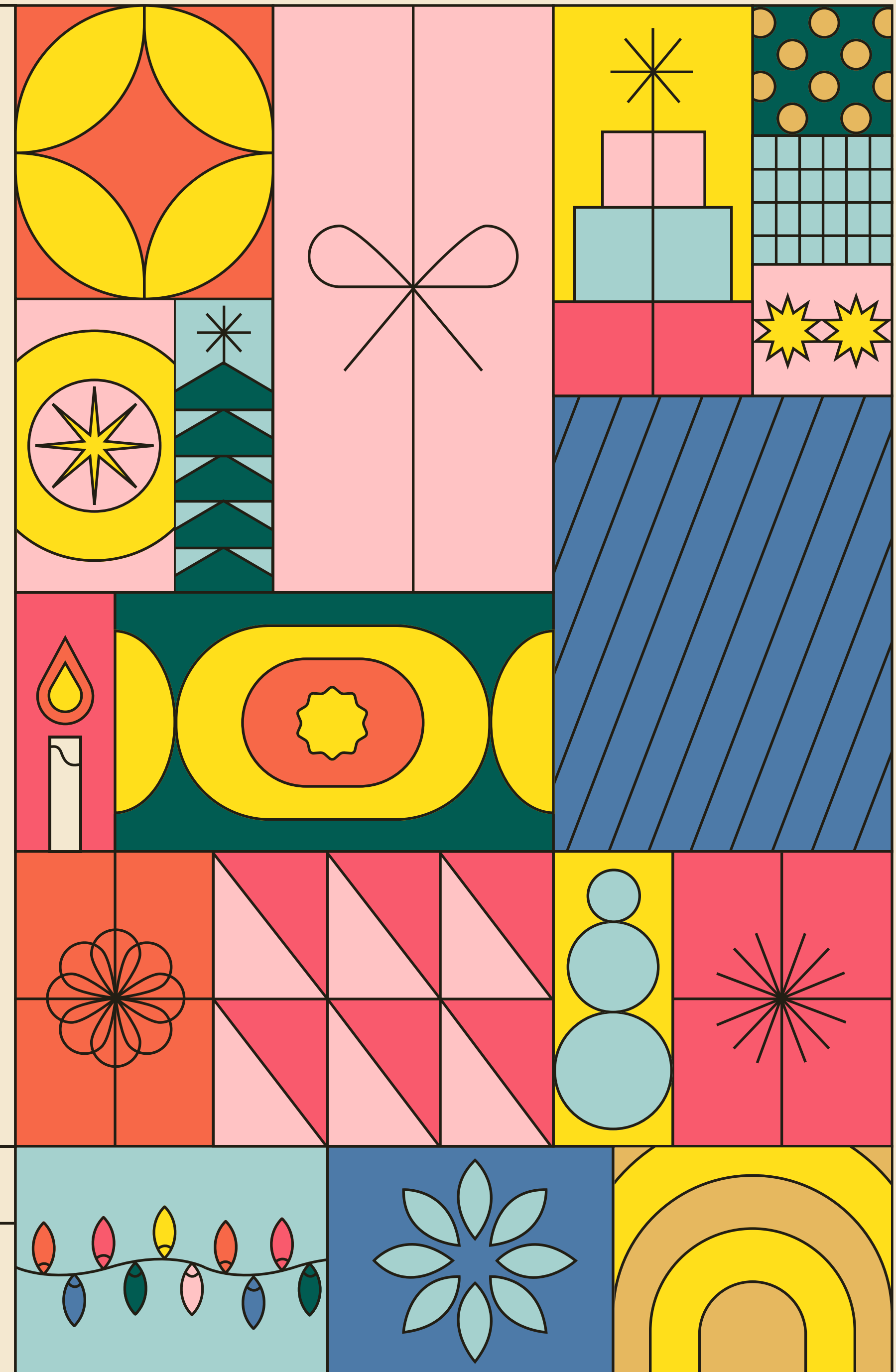


Holiday Shopping Unwrapped

Marketing Strategies for
the Moments That Matter

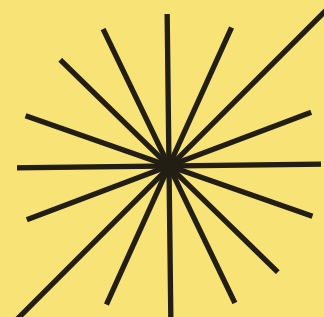


This report is based on a commissioned survey and was written in partnership with

CANVAS8

TOM FISHBURNE
marketoönist™

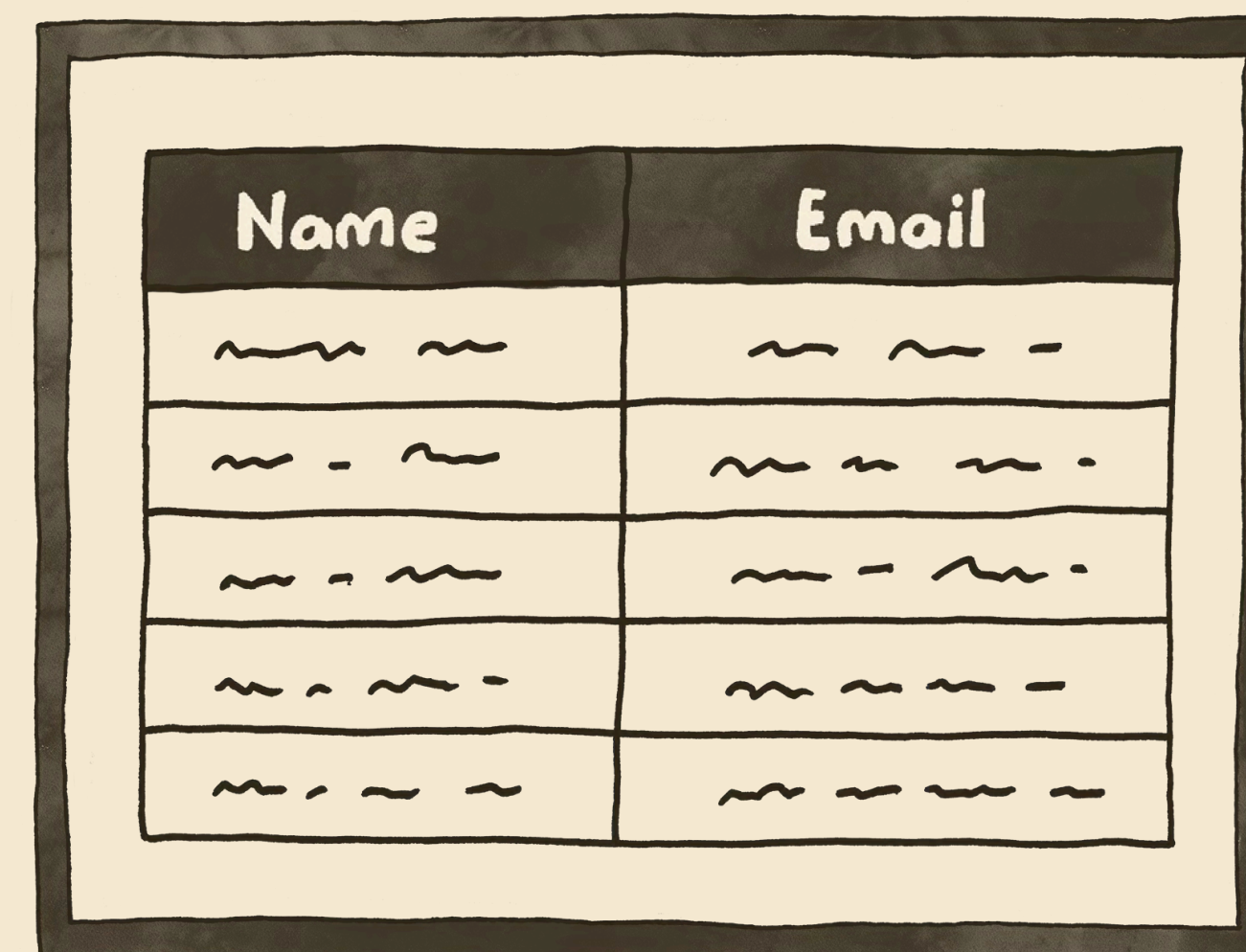
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Holiday Shopping Unwrapped

The holiday season once had a clear beginning and end—there was a defined window of twinkling lights, bustling stores, and time-bound sales events. But today, those boundaries are vanishing. As revealed in Mailchimp’s recent report, [The New E-Commerce Calendar](#), brands are no longer waiting for traditional markers like Black Friday or Cyber Monday to engage shoppers.

Instead, we’re seeing a new, extended rhythm of commerce, with holiday promotions beginning earlier each year and digital noise becoming constant, reshaping how and when marketers connect with consumers.



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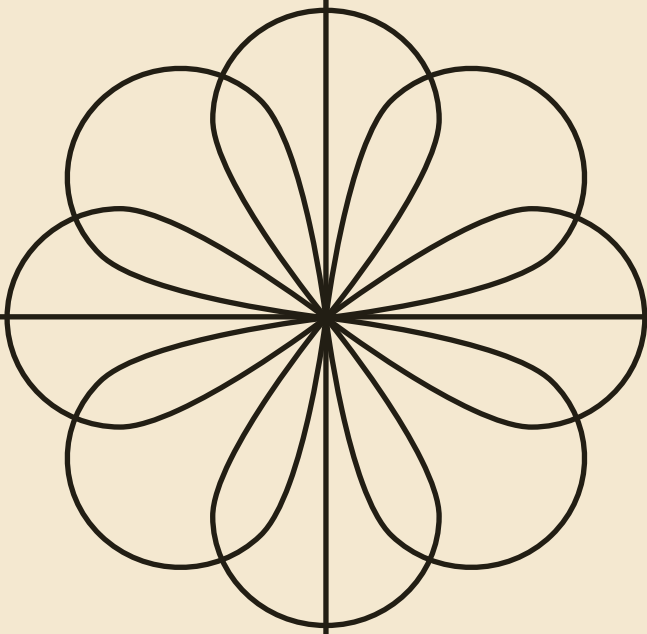
I'm making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out who's likely to convert in key holiday shopping Moments.



This evolution sets the stage for a more nuanced understanding of the holiday season—one that goes beyond sales spikes and discount strategies. Because, at its heart, the holidays are about people. They’re about coming together—around tables, in places of worship, at Thanksgiving with close friends, and at community events. They’re about generosity, connection, and shared rituals that span cultures and continents.

This desire for connection with others resulted in **52%** of shoppers globally saying their top motivation for holiday gift-giving is to bring others joy. In the words of Julian Givi, associate professor of marketing at West Virginia University's John Chambers College of Business and Economics,

“People are generally quite generous when it comes to spending on gifts, perhaps even overly so during the holiday season.”



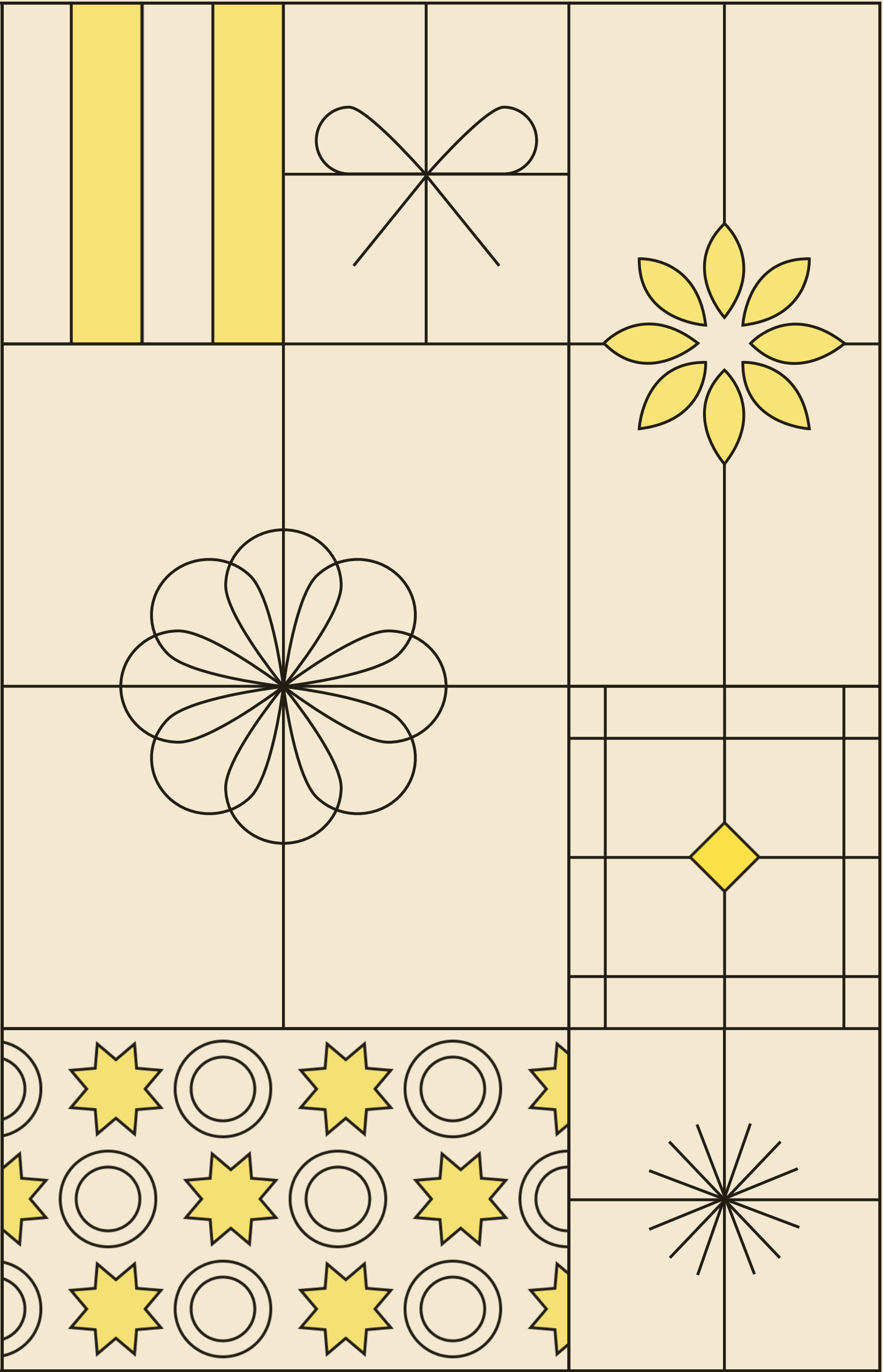
52%

of shoppers globally say their top motivation for holiday gift-giving is to bring others joy

This season offers more than just a chance to sell; it's a powerful opportunity to stand out by addressing real, timely needs. Brands that succeed won't just act as sellers but as storytellers—supporters of the human experience during one of the most emotionally charged times of the year.

For marketers, the question becomes: how can you meet shoppers where they are—physically, emotionally, and culturally?

This report is a deep dive into the evolving dynamics of the holiday season. Building on the foundations laid by [The New E-Commerce Calendar](#), we'll identify what shoppers are thinking, feeling, and doing at every stage of the season. For brands, understanding these evolving emotional states is key to revealing which audience segments are ready to spend and how to craft messages that are relevant, timely, and emotionally attuned.



Marketoonist's View on Holiday Moments

For the last 20-some years, I've been drawing a weekly cartoon inspired by our collective experiences in marketing.

I'm a big believer in laughing at ourselves to help us do our best work. Holding up the mirror to what we do helps us bond over everything we're trying to figure out together. Humor gives us a way to talk about the challenges and opportunities we face along the way.

So I was thrilled when Intuit Mailchimp offered the opportunity to collaborate on this report about marketing during the holidays. Figuring out how to reach shoppers in festive Moments that matter to them is an evergreen marketing challenge, made even trickier by the evolving state of play during the holidays.

Mailchimp created Holiday Shopping Unwrapped to be an uncommonly useful handbook on how to make the most of festive Moments in the calendar. Based on expansive survey results and deep expert opinion, this research helps unlock the code on the ebb and flow of holiday shopping.

We thought cartoons could help the proverbial eggnog go down. I used all of this research as source material to create cartoons capturing some of the main insights and takeaways. They span the holiday gamut—from the marketing planning season, to “Christmas Creep,” to the never-ending shopping list, to the holiday spirit, the last-minute sprint, and starting all over to do it again.

As you navigate these stages to keep pace with holiday shopping, we hope this guide reminds you that you're not alone. This report balances levity with practical guidance on what other marketers are grappling with. The goal is that it helps us become better marketers and reminds us of the benefits of “laughing all the way.”

Tom Fishburne
Creator of Marketoonist

Want to know more?

Tom Fishburne is the creator of Marketoonist, a business cartoon hand-drawn nearly weekly since 2002, based on Tom's experiences in marketing. Tom draws, writes, and gives keynote talks on the power of humor to help us do our best work.



TOM FISHBURNE
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Expert outlay



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JESS CERVELLON
Customer experience expert, podcast host, and founder of Open Late Collective
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UK



DR. RACHEL LAWES
Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing* and *Using Semiotics in Retail*, and fellow of the Market Research Society
UK



DR. JASON PALLANT
Senior Lecturer of Marketing at RMIT University and global retail expert
Australia



THOMAS RAMSØY
Applied neuroscientist, founder of Neurons
Denmark

Our survey uncovered:



Consumer expectations of brand characteristics by product category



Perceptions of key calendar Moments and promotional calendar Moments



Spending propensity and behaviors during key calendar Moments



Spending propensity and behaviors during promotional calendar Moments



Influences and purchase triggers associated with key calendar Moments and promotional calendar Moments

Goal of the research

Intuit Mailchimp helps businesses find their place in the e-commerce landscape through tailored and user-centric solutions. To help businesses on this journey, we collaborated with our research partner, Canvas8, on 3 rounds of expert interviews and a quantitative survey to understand what's shaping the calendar and how brands can authentically join in.

Quantitative survey methodology

We surveyed more than 9,000 people in Australia (n=1,004), Belgium (n=453), Canada (n=1,035), Denmark (n=274), Germany (n=1,006), Italy (n=1,034), Luxembourg (n=101), the Netherlands (n=455), Norway (n=354), Spain (n=1,108), Sweden (n=385), the United Kingdom (n=1,005), and the United States (n=1,142), aged 18 and over. The survey was designed to unpack how people shop across different product categories, their attitudes toward promotional events, and what factors influence their purchases throughout the year. It gave us insight into which events and occasions they've taken part in—and spent money on—in recent years to better understand which Moments are pivotal or emerging in The New E-Commerce Calendar.

For all Canvas8 statistics and figures: Canvas8 conducted a panel-sample online survey on behalf of Mailchimp from February 14–20, 2025. The survey reached 9,356 respondents (a minimum of 1,000 respondents per region: Australia, Benelux (Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), Canada, Italy, Spain, Germany, Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), the United Kingdom, and the United States). The margin of error is +/- 5.5%, as reported at a 95% confidence level.

Decoding the Holiday Season

When does the holiday season actually begin and end? For some marketers, it starts with distinct Moments—like Halloween, Thanksgiving (in the US), or the first sighting of a Christmas ad. For others, it's when Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" hits the airwaves. For those south of the equator, the saying "Christmas in July" feels all too familiar.

But knowing when the season starts isn't just a matter of dates—it's about understanding when shoppers shift into a holiday mindset. In *The New E-Commerce Calendar*, we saw that the season is shaped by a series of Moments, where the motivation to buy is less about consumption and more about fostering emotional connections through Joy and Giving Glow. So the real question becomes: when do those feelings kick in, and how can marketers align their efforts accordingly?



Phases and key audiences of the holiday season

Our research reveals that the holiday season unfolds over 7 distinct phases, each marked by unique emotional drivers, spending patterns, and shopping behaviors. Understanding these phases—and the archetypal shopping behaviors that define them—can help brands plan, time, and tailor their holiday strategies for maximum impact.

It's important to note that these refer to archetypal shopping behaviors, not fixed personas; a single consumer can embody different archetypes, such as being a Discount Devotee in one phase and a Self-Gifter in another, as the season ebbs and flows.

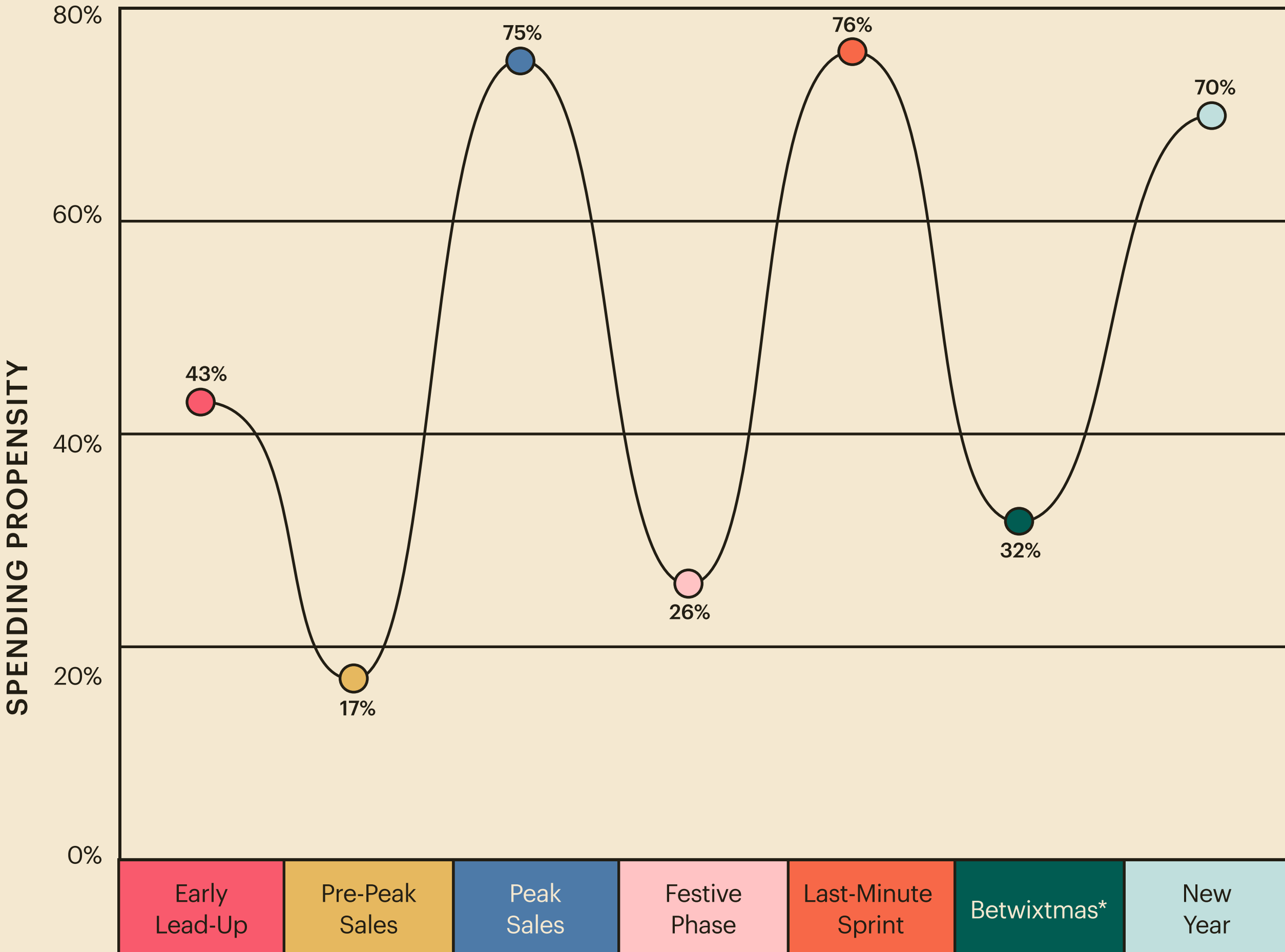
01	Early Lead-Up October 1 to 31	KEY AUDIENCE: Gift-Giving Lifers
02	Pre-Peak Sales November 1 to mid-November	KEY AUDIENCE: Joyful Shoppers
03	Peak Sales Mid-November to November 30	KEY AUDIENCE: Discount Devotees
04	Festive Phase December 1 to mid-December	KEY AUDIENCE: Curators
05	Last-Minute Sprint Mid-December to observational days	KEY AUDIENCE: Last-Minute Listers
06	Betwixtmas Observational days to December 30	KEY AUDIENCE: Self-Gifters
07	New Year New Year's Eve to early January	KEY AUDIENCE: Self-Improvers

The ebb and flow of holiday shopping

We've plotted out how shoppers' mindsets guide their spending patterns during each phase and, as a result, where marketers' key audiences lie throughout the holiday season.

We'll walk you through each of the phases, offer practical tips on when and how to engage, and break down what shoppers are really looking for across the holidays.

Share of shoppers purchasing during ≥1 Moment per phase (out of applicable Moments)



HOLIDAY SEASON PHASES

*Betwixtmas is based on shoppers from Australia, Canada, and the UK, as the Moments that make up this phase were only shown to shoppers in these regions, n=3,044.

01

TOO SOON FOR COMFORT?

OCTOBER 1 TO 31

Early Lead-Up

Holiday cheer might hit the shelves early, but for many, it feels less like festive fun and more like Christmas crashing the party uninvited.

It looks like your husband
has been exposed to too
much holiday marketing
too early in the season.



What's happening?

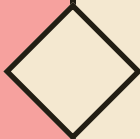
The idea that holiday promotions start earlier each year is a well-worn cultural trope. Every autumn, social media lights up with complaints about Christmas chocolates hitting the shelves before Halloween has even had its moment. This phenomenon, often dubbed “Christmas Creep,” can alienate consumers. With October filled with other Moments of celebration and commemoration—Diwali, Black History Month in the UK, and Canadian Thanksgiving—the general feeling is that people’s heads aren’t in “holiday mode” yet.

“In October, I believe the majority of people dislike the idea of thinking about Christmas; it feels premature and gives many a sense of unease.”

Julian Givi
Associate Professor of Marketing at
West Virginia University's John Chambers
College of Business and Economics

Watch this audience:

Gift-Giving Lifers



But there is one key audience of early birds worth watching: what Julian Givi calls the Gift-Giving Lifers. These are shoppers who base a significant part of their identity on being well-prepared. “They’re more receptive early on and want to get their shopping done before Black Friday,” Givi says. They’re inherently motivated by a sense of validation—and “part of their motivation might also be the satisfaction of telling others they’re finished.”



of shoppers made a purchase tied to at least one Moment during the Early Lead-Up.

Major Sales Moments like Target Circle Week and Amazon’s Prime Big Deal Days, which both fall in early October in 2025, are already designed to capture this early demand—and the promotions are working.

29% of US shoppers reported making a purchase tied to Prime Big Deal Days. Out of the Americans who would consider making a purchase during Prime Big Deal Days, 66% are buying gifts for themselves, but 69% are buying gifts for others, suggesting these are likely early holiday gifts.

Of the US shoppers who would consider making a purchase during Prime Big Deal Days

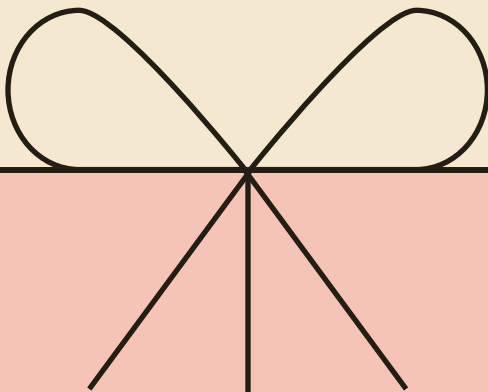
69%

are buying gifts for others



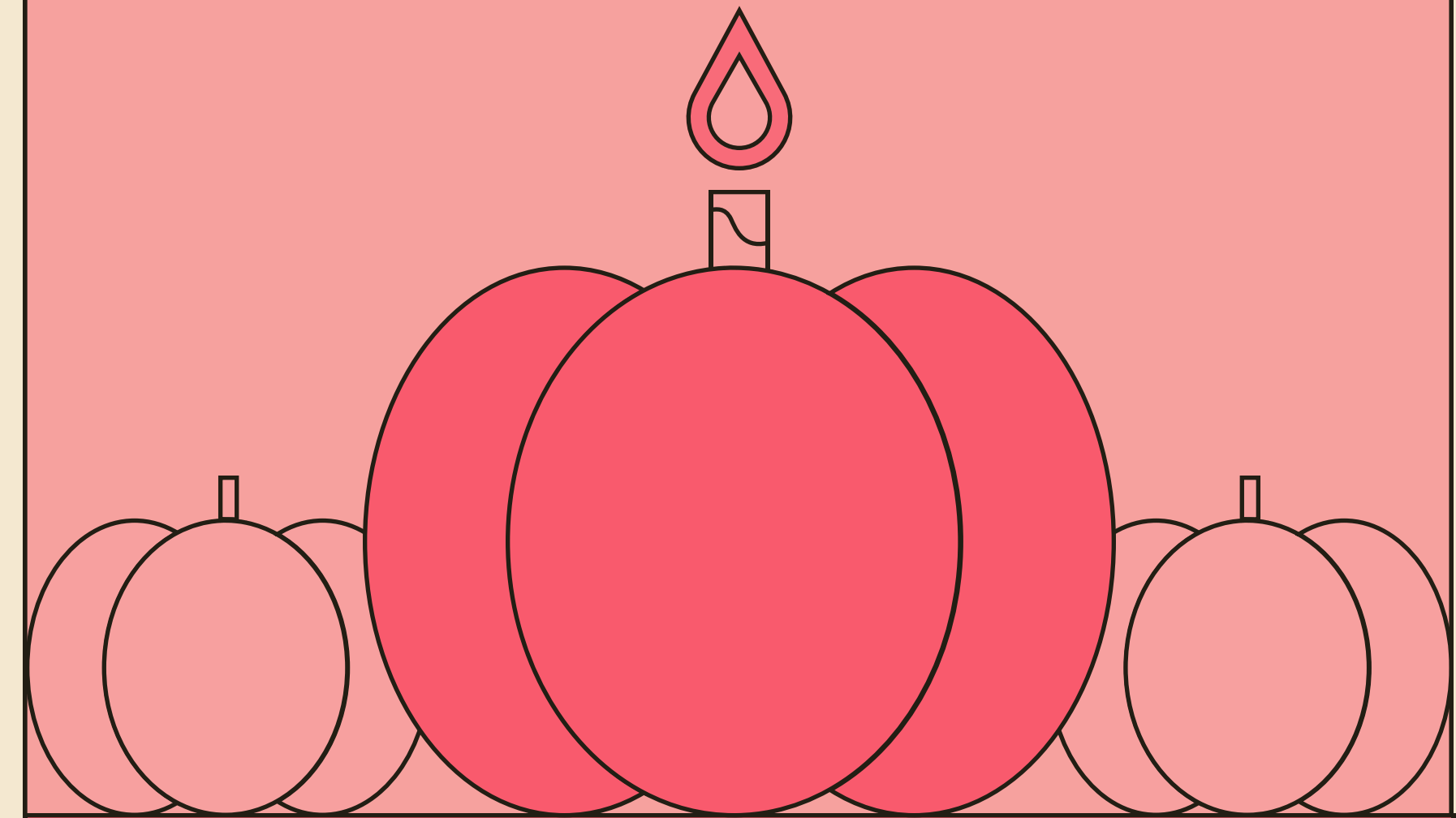
66%

are buying gifts for themselves



Actions for marketers

While October might feel too early for holiday jingles and tinsel, it's far from a quiet retail period. Most shoppers are engaged—they're just focused on different Moments, like Halloween.



The big opportunity

Cater to the Gift-Giving Lifers by capitalizing on events like Prime Big Deal Days, but reframe the messaging around smart planning and joyful prep—position it as a savvy move, not a frenzy.

Marketers would be wise to hone in on the Gift-Giving Lifers. These consumers are highly receptive to early holiday engagement and motivated by the satisfaction of being prepared. Marketers can identify and target this group with tailored incentives and messaging that celebrates the pride and satisfaction of preparation.

Top 3 shopping Moments in the Early Lead-Up

40%

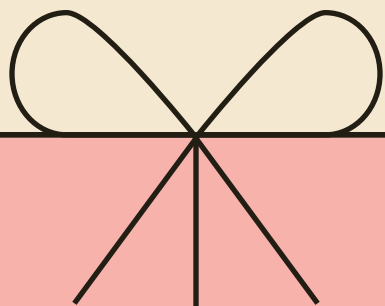
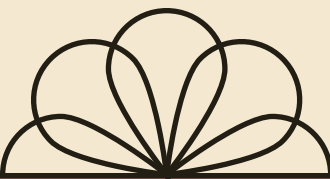
Thanksgiving
(US)

40%

Halloween
(Global)

29%

Prime Big Deal Days
(US)



Pre-Peak Sales


By the time November rolls around, people begin to feel the festive pull and they become receptive to holiday cues such as music, films, and holiday-related merch.



What's happening?

The beginning of November is widely considered the unofficial start of the holiday season. It's when holiday films appear on streaming platforms, Mariah Carey famously declares, "It's time," and gift shopping begins to feel acceptable rather than premature.


Brands play a key role in marking this cultural shift. Take Starbucks' iconic red cups: "Once you see those red cups, it's a powerful semiotic sign saying, 'The holidays are nearly here. Get excited now,'" says Dr. Rachel Lawes, a futurist, marketer, author, and a fellow of the Market Research Society. Similarly, Tuborg's annual Christmas beer release serves as another festive cue. "It's very much tied to that seasonal sensory experience," says Thomas Ramsøy, an applied neuroscientist and a founder of Neurons. He notes that brands that have successfully latched onto seasonal cues create a powerful evergreen campaign. "You can't have the seasonal event without the product."



"Once you see those red [Starbucks] cups, it's a powerful semiotic sign saying, 'The holidays are nearly here. Get excited now.'"

Dr. Rachel Lawes
Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing* and *Using Semiotics in Retail*, and fellow of the Market Research Society

But despite these sensory markers signaling that the holiday season has commenced, most people aren’t deeply engaged in holiday shopping just yet. Aside from local celebrations like Guy Fawkes Night in the UK and Father’s Day in Sweden and Norway, shoppers’ spending propensity is relatively low during this phase. In the past 2 years, only **14%** of consumers globally have made a purchase associated with at least one of the other 8 Moments* in this phase.



17%

of shoppers made a purchase associated with at least one Moment during the Pre-Peak Sales phase.

*These Moments are Click Frenzy The Main Event, Day of the Dead, Disability History Month, Movember, National Entrepreneurship Month, Native American Heritage Month, Singles’ Day, and Veterans Day.

Top 3 shopping Moments
in the Pre-Peak Sales phase

20%

Guy Fawkes Night
(UK)

12%

Click Frenzy The Main
Event (AU)

9%

Veterans Day
(US)

Watch this audience:

Joyful Shoppers

However, while some hold out for the upcoming sales, a subset of shoppers won't hesitate if they find the perfect gift. In fact, according to research from EY, **48%** of shoppers globally say they'll buy a priority gift regardless of whether it's discounted. For these people, the desire to give something meaningful often outweighs the lure of a deal. We call them the Joyful Shoppers.



fewer shoppers say price is an influential factor when buying gifts for the holiday season compared to when they purchase during other times of the year.

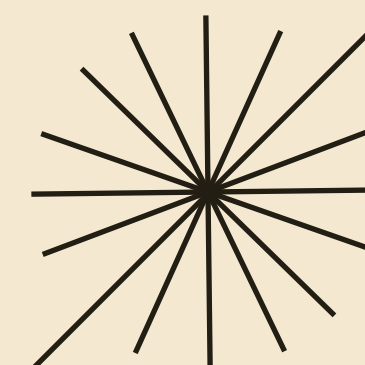
The Joyful Shoppers are likely to be older shoppers, who are nearly **25%** more likely to purchase during the holiday season. Less driven by urgency or limited-time offers, this group tends to be more deliberate—motivated by joy and nostalgia, not just savings. As Nancy Harhut, behavioral scientist, founder of HBT Marketing, and author of *Using Behavioral Science in Marketing*, explains:

“As people age, they tend to develop more perspective and balance, making them less reactive to the fear of missing out.”

Older cohorts often shop for multiple generations, and emotional impact drives their decisions. When buying gifts for others during the holiday season, **59%** say they're motivated by the joy of giving and, in comparison to purchases made outside of the holiday season, the importance of price drops by **35%**.

59%

are motivated by the joy of gift-giving

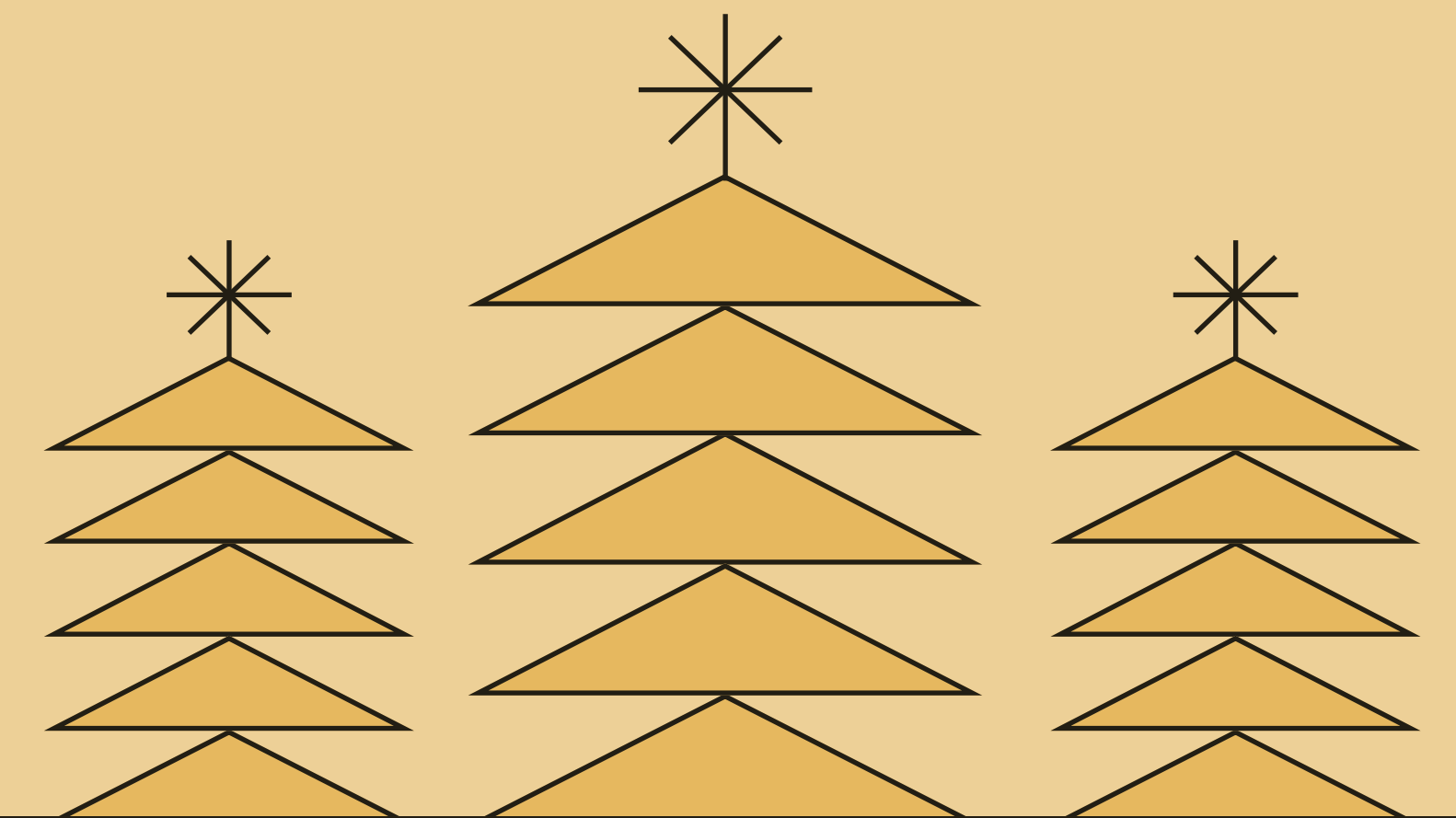


35%

drop in the importance of price for holiday gift purchases vs. non-holiday purchases

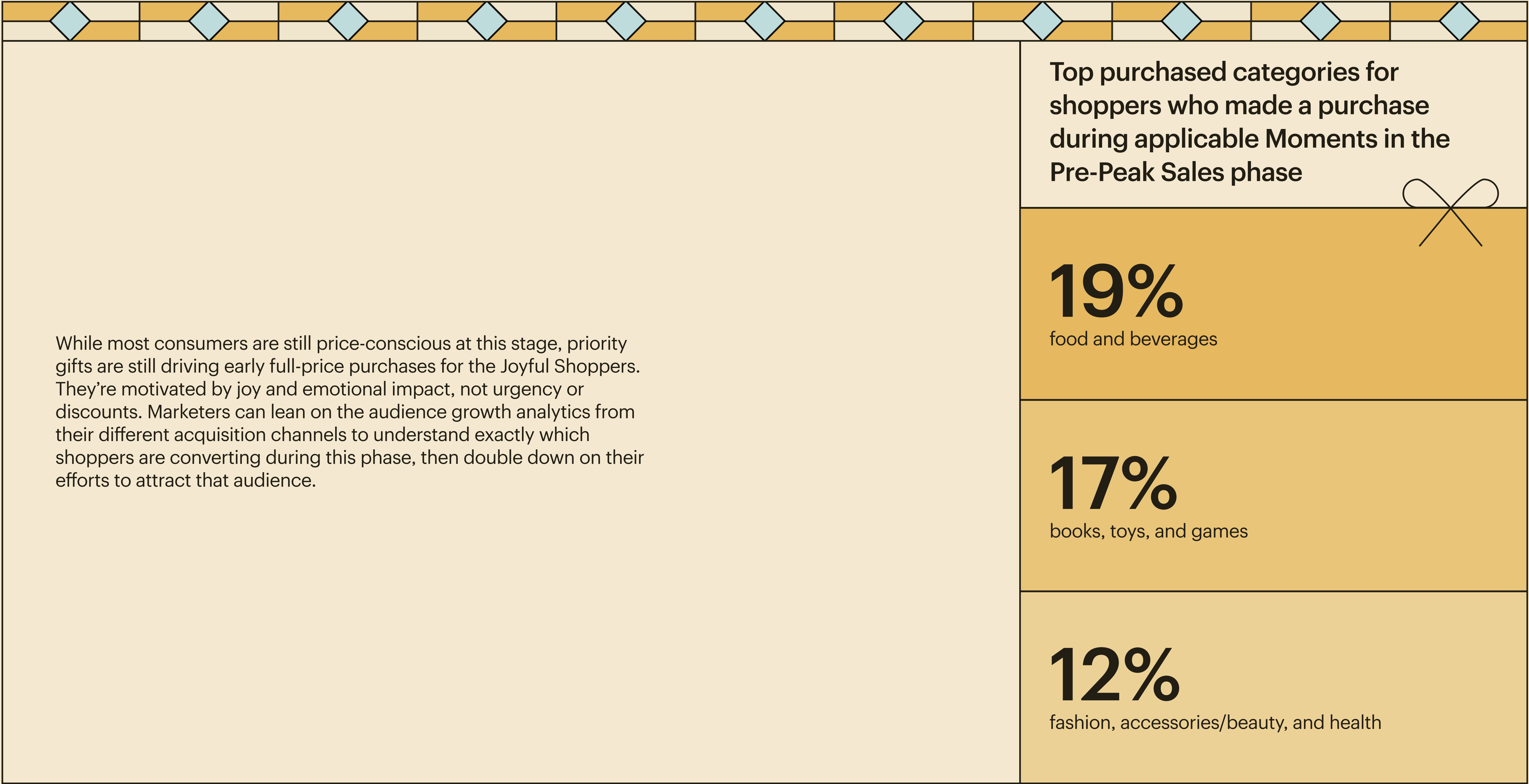
Actions for marketers

Storytelling, seasonal sensory cues, and branded traditions can help make early engagement feel meaningful, not premature. Consider gradually rolling out campaigns that build anticipation and use light-touch holiday messaging to activate intent without overwhelming shoppers.



The big opportunity

Cater to the Joyful Shoppers by leaning into joy and the satisfaction of finding the perfect gift for a loved one. Highlight emotionally resonant products and gifts that offer meaning, connection, and cross-generational value.



Peak Sales

In this sales-driven phase, most shoppers are using the peak sales events as an opportunity to buy gifts for others—and themselves.



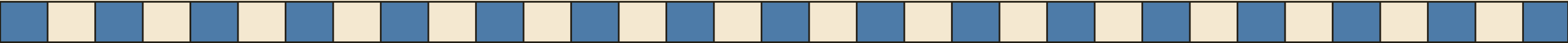
What's happening?

As November draws to a close, consumers get hit with a wave of holiday messaging. From TV ads to email reminders, the signals are clear: Peak Sales season has arrived, and shoppers are quickly shifting into a buying mindset. Whether it's splurging on a dream hair styling tool for themselves or picking up a toy the kids are begging for, this is the time shoppers start ticking off their lists in earnest.

“Everybody gets involved for a very good reason, especially when it comes to holiday spending. A lot of these events, like Black Friday, are designed to kickstart peak shopping.”

Natalie Berg

Retail strategist, author, and founder at NBK Retail

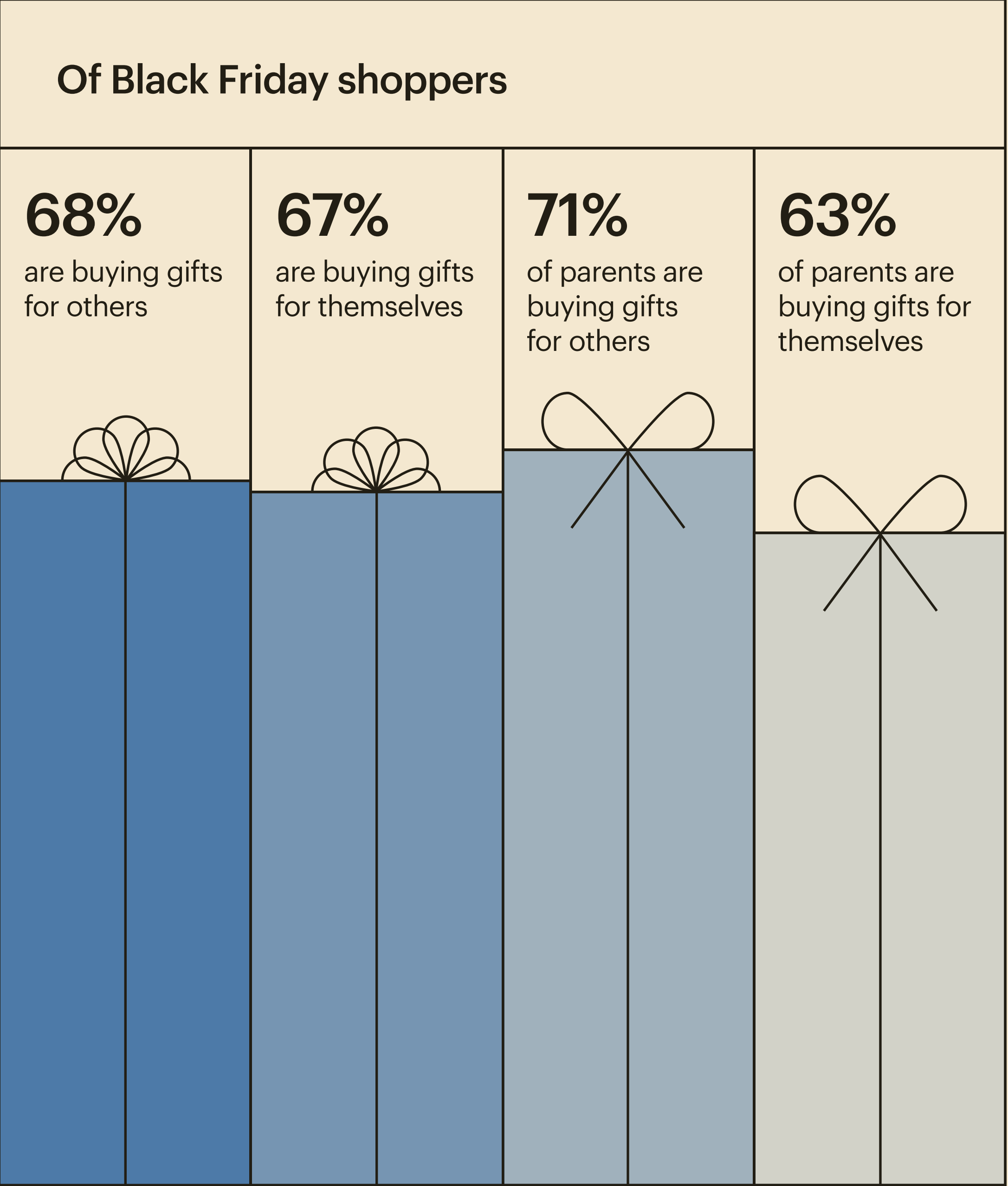


Unsurprisingly, Sales Moments are the dominant influence on shopping behavior during this phase. Miya Knights, a strategic consultant and the owner and publisher of Retail Technology Magazine, adds that this is due to a feeling of “FOMO”:

“These events drive a fear of missing out. Scarcity and [the fear of] losing out on a good deal play a big role in the popularity of seasonal events and are a huge lever for shoppers.”

Globally, the FOMO trend holds strong

Among shoppers who consider making purchases during these events, **68%** buy gifts for others on Black Friday and **67%** do so on Cyber Monday. Parents are especially active, with **71%** buying for others during Black Friday in comparison to **63%** of non-parents doing so.



Watch this audience:

Discount Devotees

While most shoppers do hope to tick items off their list during the sales, they “participate because it's the traditional time for holiday shopping,” according to Julian Givi. They’re open to discounts but don’t actively seek them out.

A clear subset of shoppers stands out from the crowd. Meet the Discount Devotees, a broad group united by their relentless pursuit of a great deal. For some, this means adding items to their cart ahead of the sale or getting up early and waiting in line so that they’re first through the door on Black Friday. These are the shoppers who, as Julian Givi puts it, “absolutely need those discounts.” For them, the savings aren’t just a perk—they’re the whole point. This high-stakes hunt often comes with intense shopping stress, driven by the pressure to score the best possible deal.

Other Discount Devotees take a more calculated approach. They don't need the discount, but they'll rarely pay full price. These savvy consumers are fiscally cautious—and proud of it. They watch for promotions, stack coupons, and time their purchases with precision. For both types, value is everything, and timing is critical. These people actively seek out discounts and are on the hunt for the lowest price.



of global shoppers have made a purchase associated with at least one Moment during the Peak Sales phase.

Top 3 shopping Moments in the Peak Sales phase

75%

Black Friday (Global)

71%

Thanksgiving (US)

37%

Cyber Monday (Global)

Actions for marketers

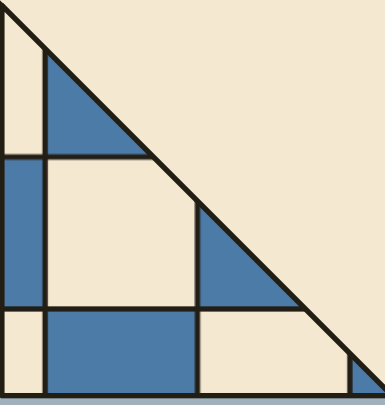
At this stage in the season, many shoppers will be receptive to altruistic and indulgent messaging, appealing to both the joy of giving and the treat-yourself mentality. Marketers should meet consumers with clear value, compelling offers, and emotionally resonant messaging that reflects both sides of the holiday mindset.

But capturing the Discount Devotees takes more than just offering deals—it's about creating a sense of reward, urgency, and strategy. They want to feel like they're getting a deal that's unique to them—and that makes them highly responsive to well-timed, clearly communicated, or personalized promotions. Marketers can also look at e-commerce funnel analytics to identify where shoppers are dropping off and target them with automations that encourage them to complete their purchases.



The big opportunity

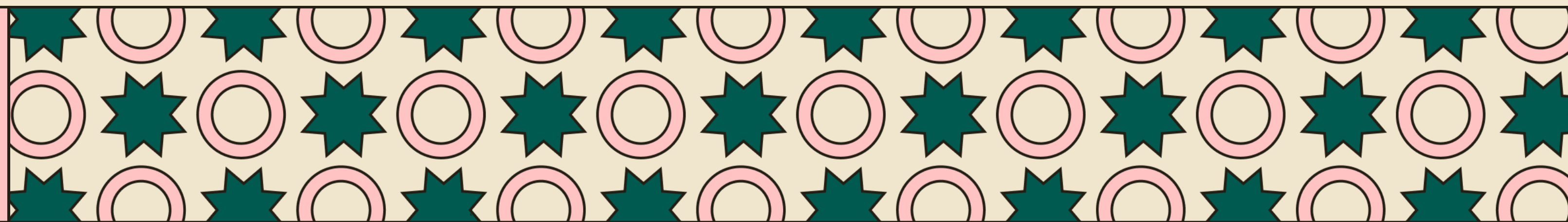
Cater to the Discount Devotees by appealing to their sense of reward—make them feel like they've outsmarted the system.



“[Brands should] literally say: ‘I’m so excited about Black Friday for you. Here’s your exclusive first access’—maybe their tiered rewards, whatever it is. Highlight the exclusivity for those VIP customers.”

Jess Cervellon

Customer experience expert, podcast host,
and the founder of Open Late Collective



Festive Phase

Early December is a dynamic and emotionally charged shopping period, with consumers in the middle of holiday shopping—or just getting started.



What's happening?

As December kicks off, homes light up with festive décor, calendars fill with gatherings, and the rituals that define the season come into full swing. It's one of the busiest periods of the year—not just for in-store and online shopping but for events and celebrations across regions and cultures.



“A lot of consumers come into the actual Christmas season looking for new stuff: exploring, trying to get something even better, maybe trying to surprise somebody with something.”

Dr. Jason Pallant
Senior Lecturer of Marketing at RMIT
University and Global Retail Expert

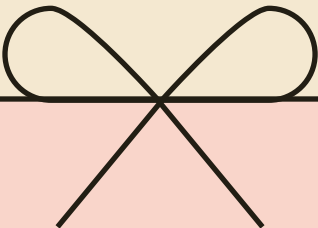


In places like Germany and the Benelux region, for example, the season kicks off with St. Nicholas Day, a beloved tradition centered around family, gifts, and cozy celebrations. Nearly half (**48%**) of shoppers in these areas have made purchases tied to the day in the last 2 years—primarily buying food, drink, books, toys, or games—setting the tone for a month filled with meaningful Moments and active consumer engagement.



of Beneluxian and German shoppers have made a purchase associated with St. Nicholas Day in the past 2 years.

Top purchased categories
for St. Nicholas Day



23%

food and beverage

23%

books, toys, and games

12%

pet supplies



But December shopping is far from over. Shoppers tend to shop in 2 waves; many first tackle what Dr. Jason Pallant calls "Christmas admin," focusing on essential purchases from wishlists to reduce their mental load. Once these items are ticked off, their mindset shifts, with people coming “into the actual Christmas season looking for new stuff, exploring, trying to get something even better, maybe trying to surprise somebody with something.”

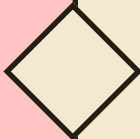


of shoppers made a purchase associated with at least one Moment during the Festive Phase.



Watch this audience:

Curators



As most shoppers move quickly through their holiday lists, one group stands out: the Curators. These shoppers aren't just looking for quick deals or rushing to check off gifts—they take their time, searching for something special.

For Curators, it's not about spending the most money but about finding a gift with a story behind it—whether that's a one-of-a-kind vintage find, a handmade item from a local market, or a cool trinket from a second-hand shop.

Often younger—according to recent research, **50%** of Gen Z and millennial consumers in the US said they were more likely to buy or give a personalized gift in 2024 compared to previous holiday seasons—and price-conscious, Curators get real satisfaction from the discovery process and enjoy browsing across multiple retailers. What drives them is the joy of giving something memorable and meaningful and the pride in saying, “I found this for you.” Their gifts stand out not because they’re expensive but because they’re thoughtful, personal, and unexpected.

Top 3 shopping Moments in the Festive Phase

48%

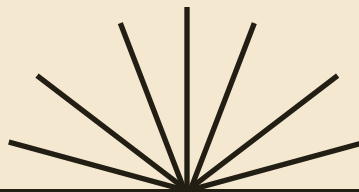
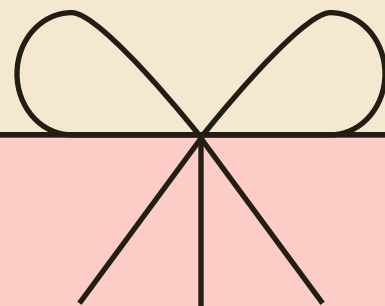
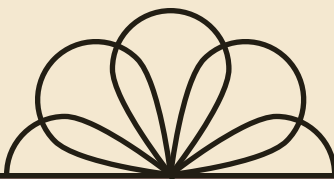
St. Nicholas Day
(Benelux, DE)

25%

Advent sales
(Scandinavia)

12%

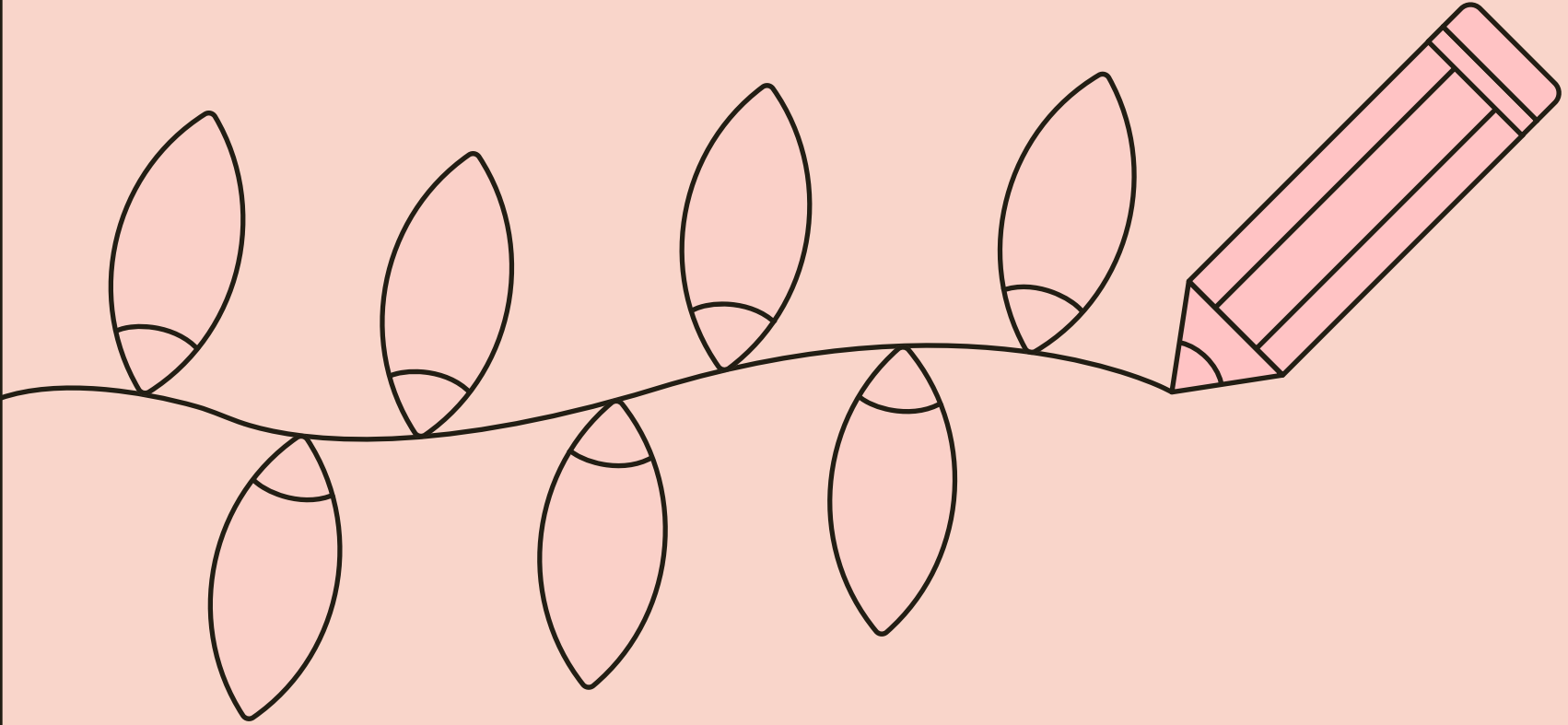
Advent season
(Global)





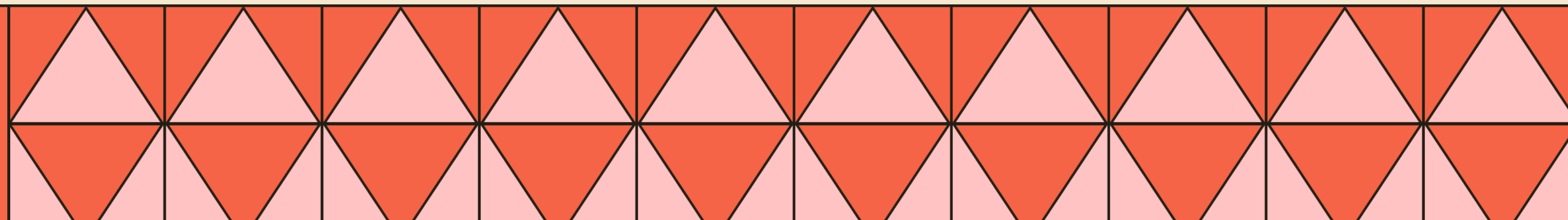
Actions for marketers

To win over the Curators, marketers should pivot their tone and tactics accordingly. Move beyond product features and highlight the narrative behind your items. Focus on where products come from, how they're made, and any unique history or craftsmanship involved—Curators are drawn to a gift with a genuine “story behind it,” whether it's a handmade touch, a local origin, or a unique design.



The big opportunity

To capture the Curators, shift from transactional marketing to emotional storytelling. Capture them with campaigns that celebrate craft, community, or a cause—and tell a good story.



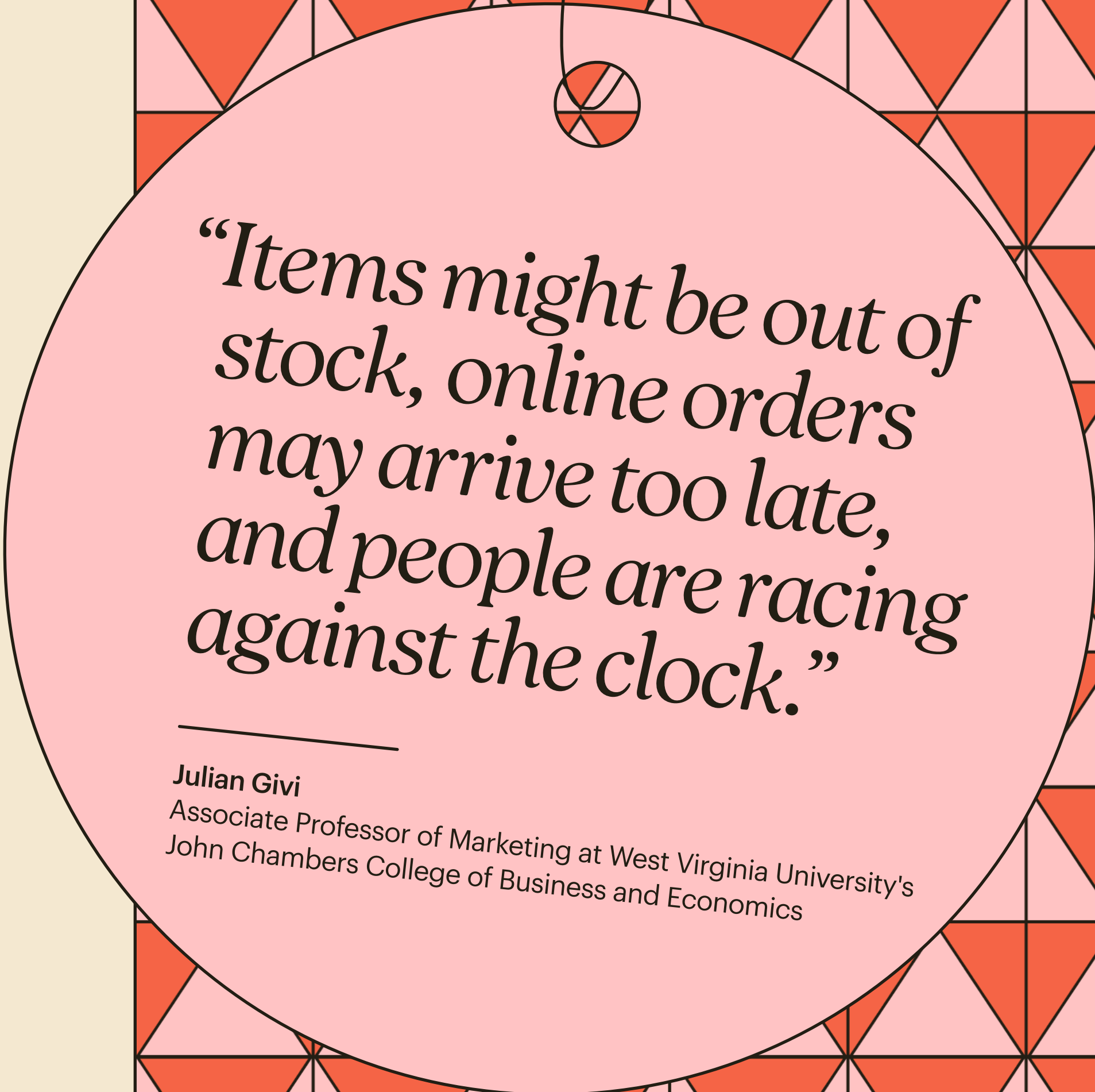
Last-Minute Sprint

Mid-December is a mix of festive celebration and last-minute prep, as some settle into holiday rituals while others rush to wrap up their plans.



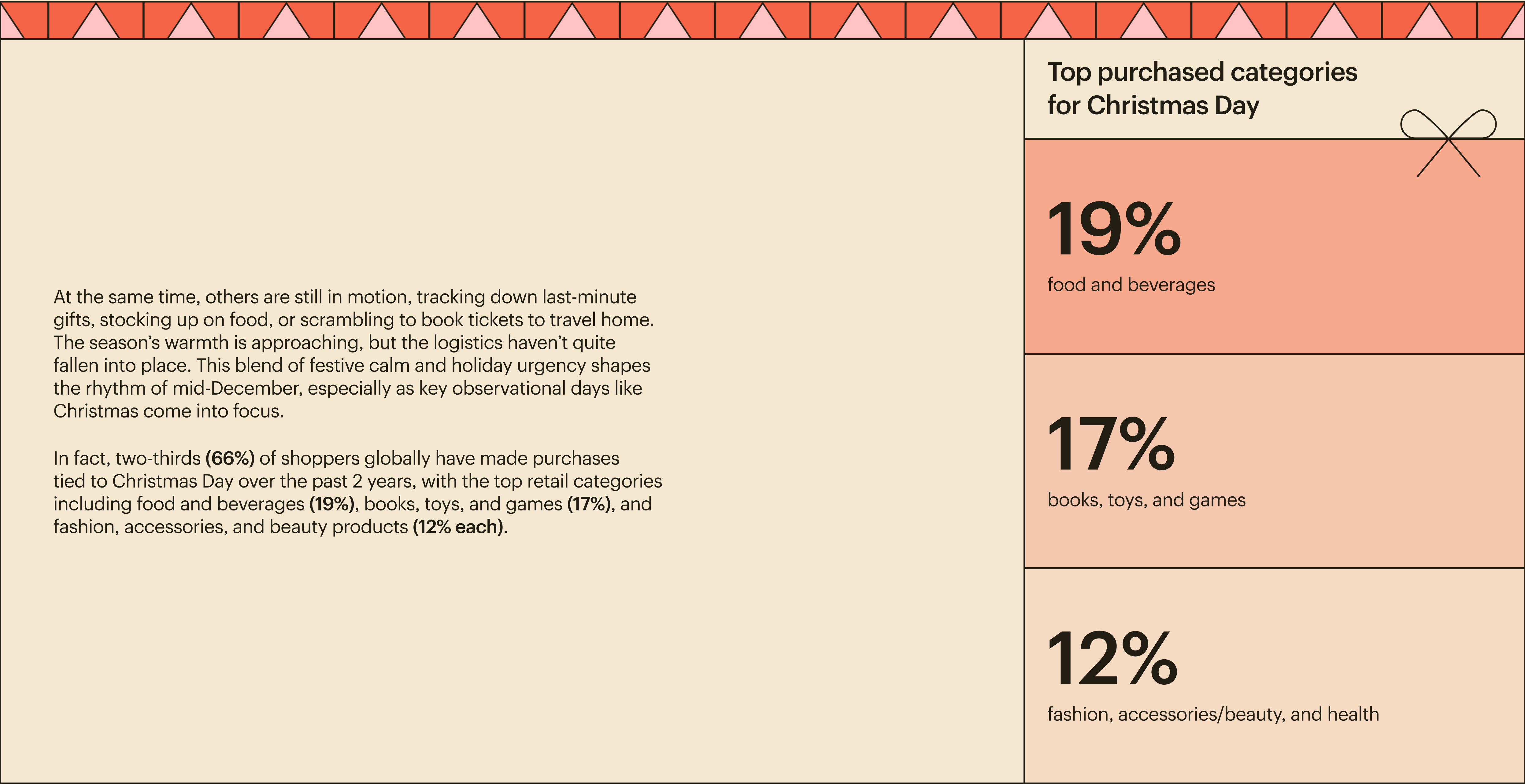
What's happening?

By mid-December, the holiday mindset deepens—but not everyone is in the same place. For some, it's time to fully lean into the spirit of the season. Laptops are shut, to-do lists are paused, and attention turns to loved ones and meaningful traditions. Whether it's gathering around a fireplace with hot chocolate in Scandinavia or enjoying a sunny barbecue in Australia, people around the world are embracing the quiet joy of togetherness.



“Items might be out of stock, online orders may arrive too late, and people are racing against the clock.”

Julian Givi
Associate Professor of Marketing at West Virginia University's
John Chambers College of Business and Economics



Watch this audience:

Last-Minute Listers



For the Last-Minute Listers, this phase marks the final sprint to buy gifts—and the pressure is on. As December 15th approaches, stress levels begin to climb. “Items might be out of stock, online orders may arrive too late, and people are racing against the clock,” explains Julian Givi. It’s the point in the season when plans meet panic, and the calm of the festivities gives way to the chaos of last-minute shopping.

Unlike most shoppers, the Last-Minute Listers still have boxes to tick. In fact, **16%** of shoppers globally have made a purchase associated with Super Saturday—the last Saturday before Christmas—in the past 2 years. Among those considering making a purchase during this Moment, **78%** are buying for others, while **51%** are also picking up gifts for themselves. Even with the clock ticking, there’s a balance between generosity and self-indulgence.



of shoppers are picking up gifts for themselves during at least one Moment during the Last-Minute Sprint phase.

Top 3 shopping Moments in the Last-Minute Sprint

66%

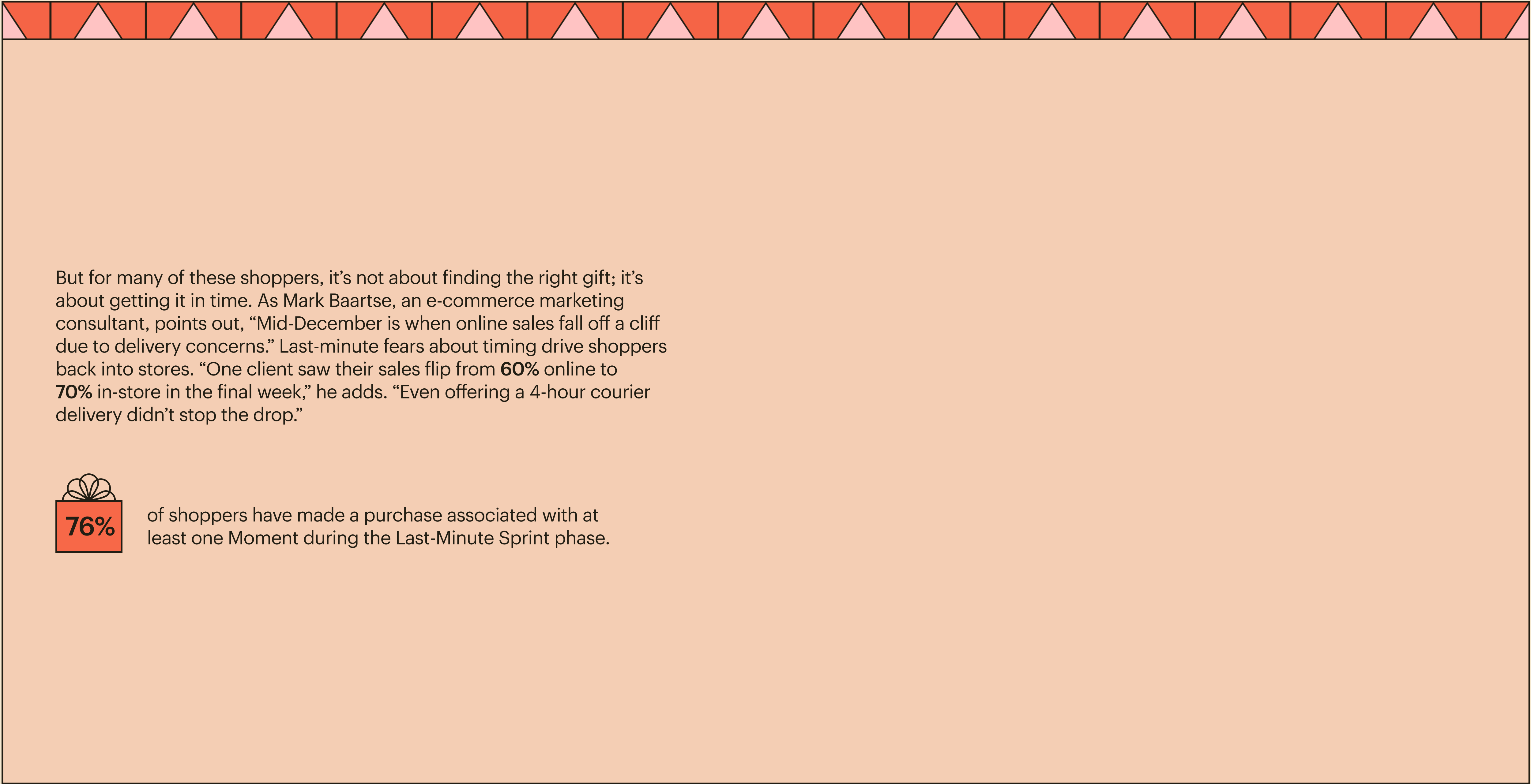
Christmas Day
(Global)

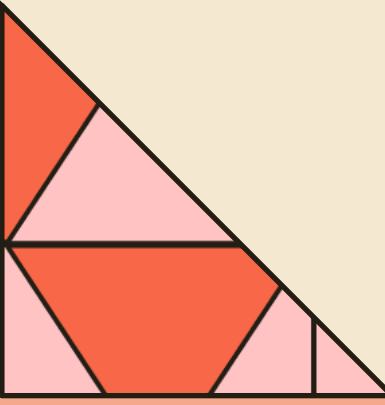
52%

Christmas Eve
(Global)

16%

Super Saturday
(Global)





“Mid-December is when online sales fall off a cliff due to delivery concerns. One client saw their sales flip from 60% online to 70% in-store in the final week. Even offering a 4-hour courier delivery didn’t stop the drop.”

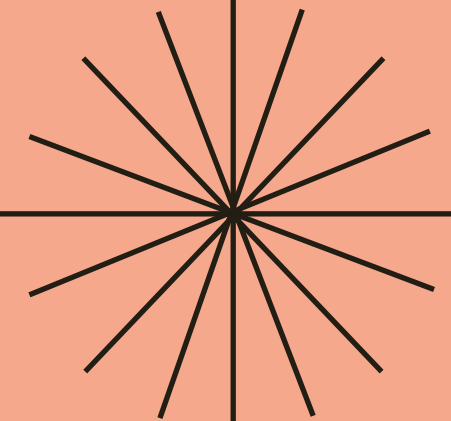
Mark Baartse

Outsourced CMO and e-commerce marketing consultant

Actions for marketers

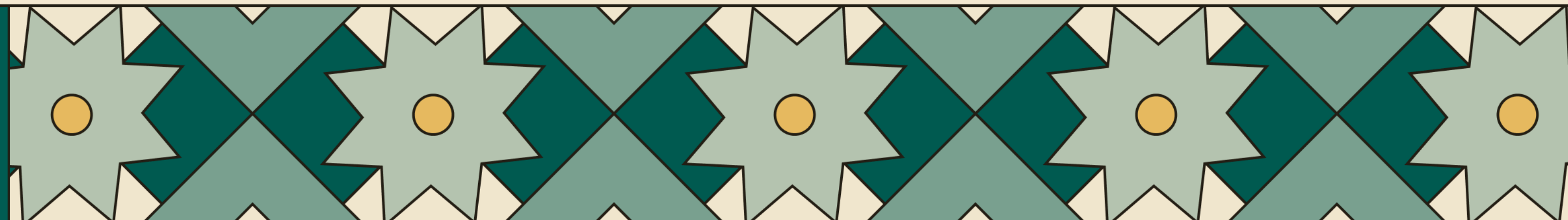
In this high-stress window, brands and marketers have an opportunity to step in as problem-solvers for the Last-Minute Listers. Small touches—like gift-wrapping services, premium express delivery options, or even money-back delivery guarantees—can ease the burden and foster customer loyalty. At this point in the season, reducing cognitive load is as valuable as offering a discount.

To stay relevant and useful during crunch time, brands should emphasize their speed and reliability. For marketers, reorient your messaging around the idea of stress relief, show empathy for the pressure shoppers are under, and position your brand as a stress-solving ally.



The big opportunity

Appeal to the Last-Minute Listers by shifting from inspiration to intervention. Provide practical, low-friction solutions that help frazzled shoppers cross the finish line, both online and in-store. Segment your audience to target those who've started to check out or have viewed certain products and reassure them that their gift will arrive in time.



Betwixtmas

Between Christmas and December 30th, consumers enter an indulgent phase driven by post-holiday relief.




What's happening?

As December draws to a close, a noticeable shift in people's mindsets takes hold. The frenzy of holiday shopping subsides, and people begin to retreat into a quieter, more introspective state. For many, this is a time of rest and personal indulgence—a break in which they can finally exhale after the social obligations and gift-giving of the weeks prior. “It’s all about you and treating yourself. You’re off the hook now. You don’t have to cook for other people or wrap presents for the children,” explains Dr. Rachel Lawes.

“It’s all about you and treating yourself. You’re off the hook now. You don’t have to cook for other people or wrap presents for the children.”

Dr. Rachel Lawes

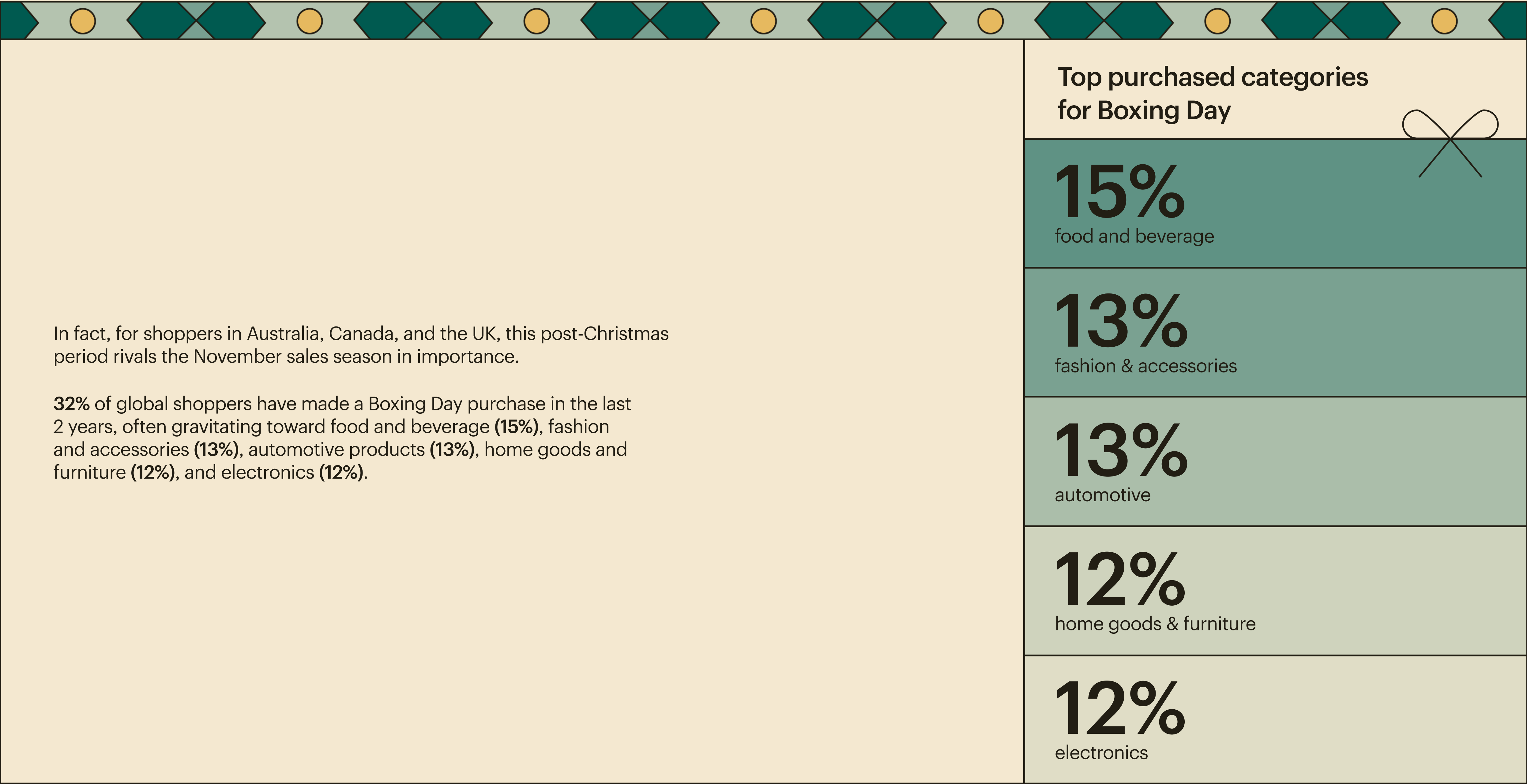
Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing and Using Semiotics in Retail*, and fellow of the Market Research Society



But while the season of giving may be over, spending hasn't come to a complete halt. On the contrary, this period presents a second wave of shopping opportunities. Many consumers are making returns—and, in the process, they find themselves exchanging rather than abstaining, often taking advantage of lingering deals by picking up new items for themselves. Having spent a lot of money in the past few months, the leftover discounts from holiday sales continue to entice, especially in markets where Boxing Day remains a significant commercial event.

“Some brands have started launching their Boxing Day sales early, like on December 20, to steal in-store revenue before it happens.”

Mark Baartse
Outsourced CMO and
e-commerce marketing consultant



Watch this audience:

Self-Gifters

Enter the Self-Gifters, people who see this quieter window as an opportunity to indulge in what they truly want, on their own terms. Of the Australian, Canadian, and UK shoppers who would consider making a purchase during this period, Boxing Day is the only time in the gifting season where people are more likely to buy gifts for themselves **(68%)** than for others **(56%)**.

Non-parents, in particular, are more likely to fall into this group. They're **17%** more likely than parents to buy gifts for themselves during this phase, while parents are **26%** more likely to continue buying for others. In short, Betwixtmas becomes a time of pure self-indulgence when the motivation is no longer generosity but the desire for a well-earned reward.

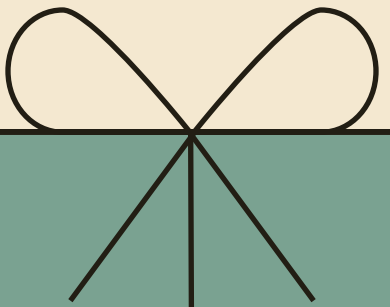
Top shopping Moments during Betwixtmas

32%

Boxing Day
(AU, CA, UK)

14%

Click Frenzy Boxing
Day Sales (AU)




Actions for marketers

This phase presents a prime self-gifting opportunity. This isn't the end of the shopping season; it's a phase driven by emotional self-care and practical replacement gifting. For marketers seeking to capture the Self-Gifters, consider positioning your brand as a personal reward—whether through aspirational messaging (“you deserve this”) or practical utility (“get what you really wanted”).



The big opportunity

Capture the Self-Gifters by leveraging this “me-first” mentality and shifting the focus of messaging from giving to gratifying.



“Let’s imagine you might have been slightly disappointed by the gifts you received from other people [...] This is your time to get the gift that you wanted for Christmas and to enjoy eating fancy food items and not sharing them.

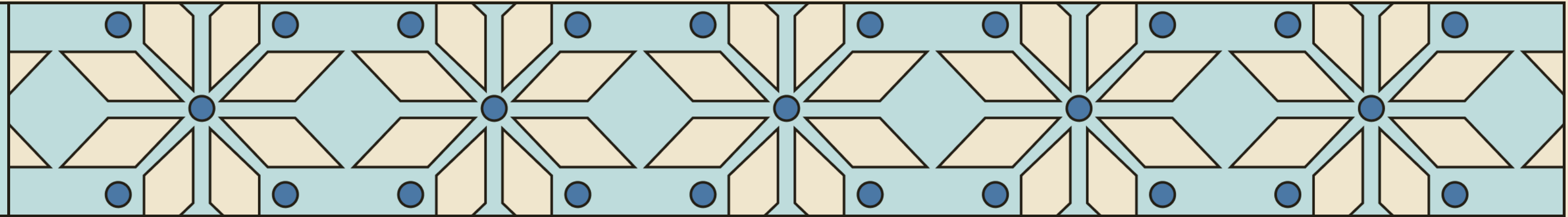
So, I think that’s what ‘Betwixtmas’ is good for. It’s when you get to treat yourself by getting all the things you wished Santa had brought you.”

Dr. Rachel Lawes

Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing and Using Semiotics in Retail*, and a fellow of the Market Research Society

07

NEW YEAR, NEW ME
NEW YEAR'S EVE
TO EARLY JANUARY



New Year

During the New Year period, consumers shift from festive giving to self-reflection and renewal.

FINISH

Phew, we made it through the holidays!



Ready to start planning for next year?



START

What's happening?

The holiday season culminates in a distinctive phase characterized by a profound sense of renewal and a forward-looking mindset. As the New Year approaches, consumers are mentally turning the page, embracing the “New Year, new me” ethos.

Dr. Rachel Lawes notes, “New Year is very linked to a fresh start—let's eat healthy, go to the gym, all that stuff you may or may not want to do.” This sentiment drives a desire for self-improvement, manifesting in everything from investments in personal care, such as getting a facial, to purchasing new activewear in the pursuit of fitness goals.

Following the holiday season, the early January sales Moments emerge as major consumer events.



59%

of shoppers from surveyed European regions engage with these early January sales, often seeking value after heavy holiday spending.

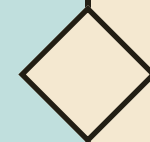
“New Year is very linked to a fresh start—let's eat healthy, go to the gym, all that stuff you may or may not want to do.”

Dr. Rachel Lawes
Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing* and *Using Semiotics in Retail*, and fellow of the Market Research Society

Watch this audience:


Self-Improvers

A distinct audience emerges during the January sales:
The Self-Improvers. While sales appeal to many, a significant
63% of European shoppers participating in these sales are
purchasing items for themselves.



This trend is especially pronounced among non-parents and women in places like the Benelux region, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Specifically, **65%** of non-parents buy gifts for themselves compared to **57%** of parents, and **63%** of women do so compared to **55%** of men.

They wouldn't quite consider these to be gifts for themselves, though. Instead, the Self-Improvers are highly motivated by a desire to support resolutions, making practical purchases associated with wellness, fitness, or home refreshes. Nonetheless, the Self-Improvers are mindful of their spending and still subject to the "pain of payment," the negative psychological reaction to spending money," explains Julian Givi—which is particularly prominent when purchasing products for oneself.



41%

of global shoppers made a purchase for New Year's Eve.

Top 3 shopping Moments in the New Year phase

60%

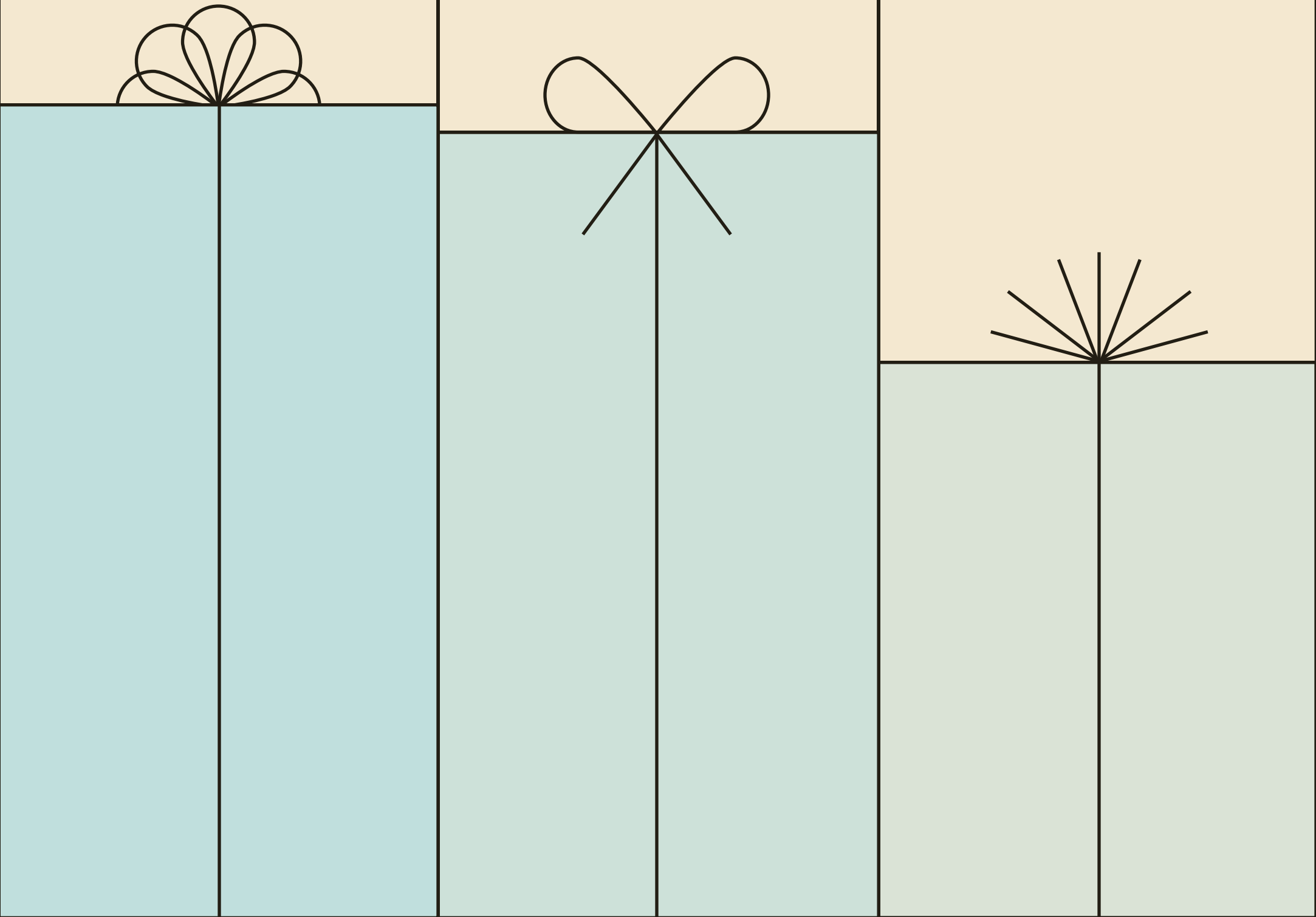
January sales
(UK, Scandi)

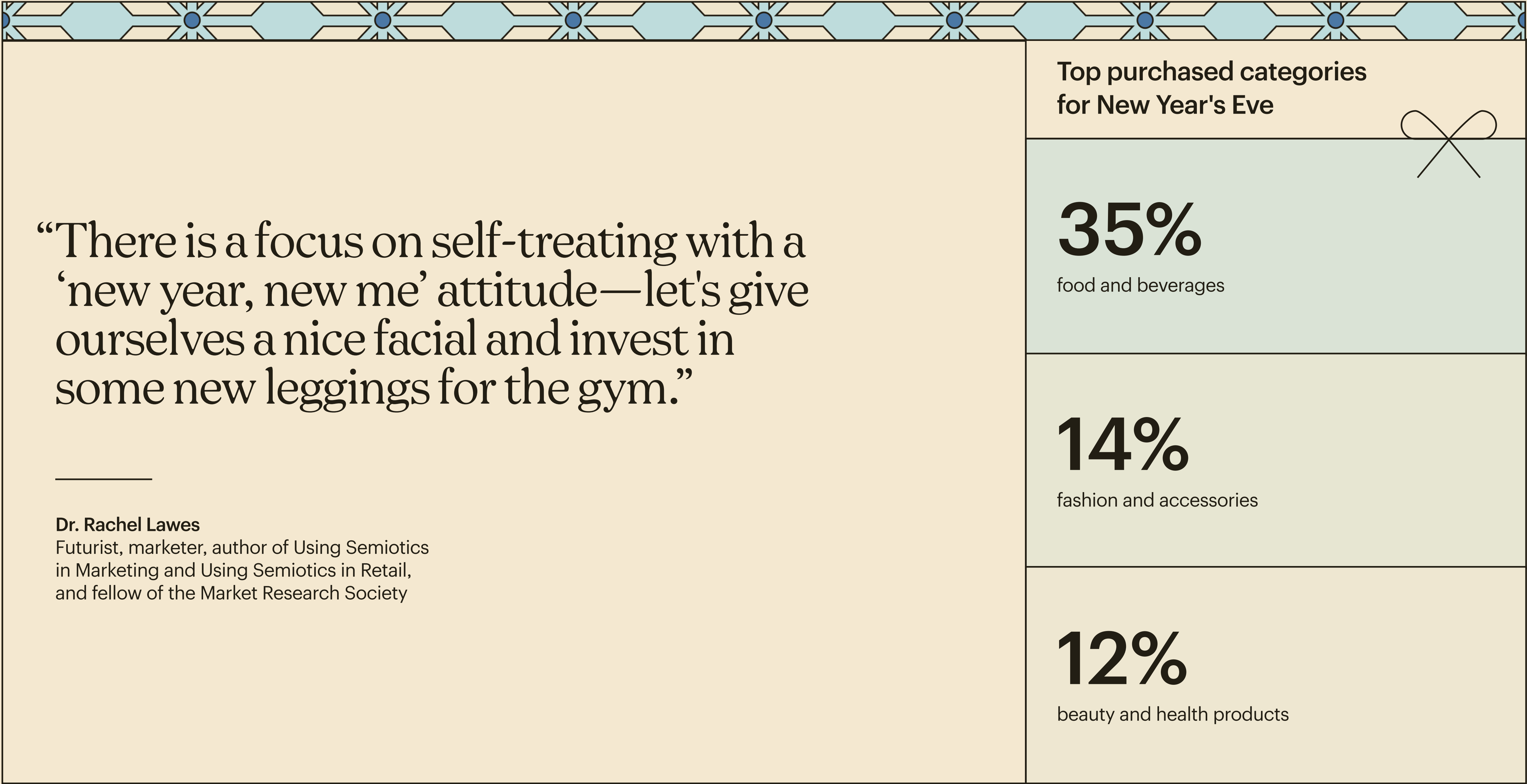
58%

Winter sales
(Benelux, DE, IT, ES)

41%

New Year's Eve
(Global)





Actions for marketers

For marketers, this period of renewal presents a prime opportunity to connect with consumers focused on self-improvement and new beginnings. Campaigns centered on health, wellness, personal care, and fitness are particularly timely, aligning with the “New Year, new me” mindset that peaks in early January. This makes early January sales Moments a critical opportunity to re-engage audiences with emotionally resonant messaging focused on self-care, transformation, and value.

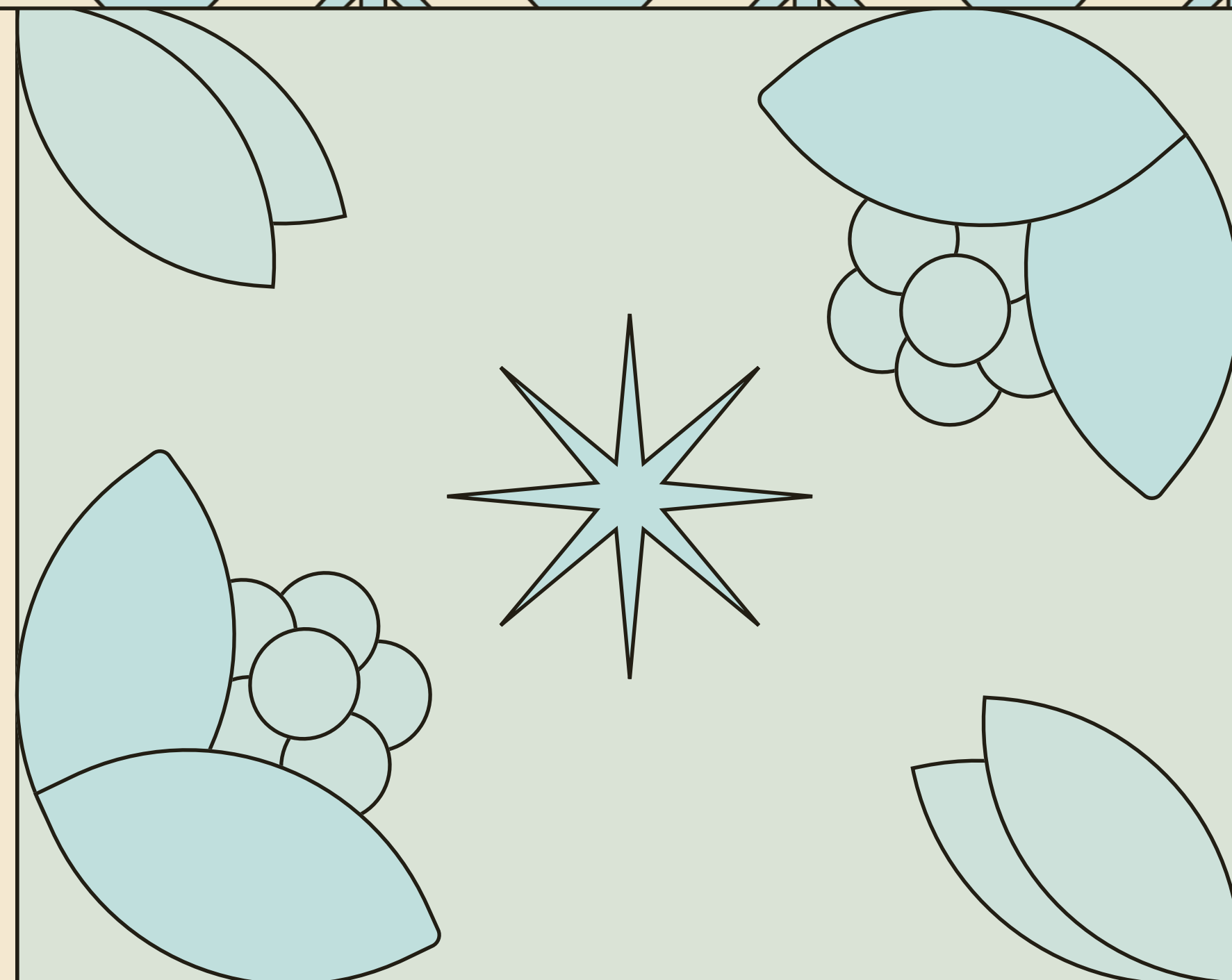


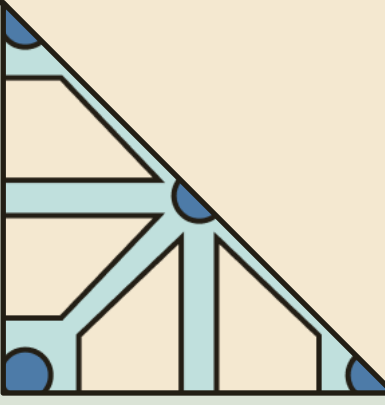
70%

of shoppers made a purchase associated with at least one Moment during the New Year phase.

The big opportunity

Cater to the Self-Improvers by emphasizing savings, self-gifting, and progress-oriented purchases.





“Temporal landmarks are days that are different from all the other days in the year. Obviously, holidays are temporal landmarks. Just about any time there’s a new beginning, there’s a temporal landmark.

During these transition periods—some are universal (like New Year’s Day) and some are personal (like your birthday)—people are more likely to try new brands.”

Nancy Harhut

Behavioral scientist, founder of HBT Marketing,
and author of *Using Behavioral Science in Marketing*

4 Steps to Make the Most of Every Holiday Moment

The holiday season brings huge opportunities—but also plenty of challenges. Now that we’ve laid out the key opportunity audiences for each phase, there are 4 steps you need to take to win over these customers (and their wallets).



Let's see if adding "FIRST NAME" will make our holiday communication even more personal!

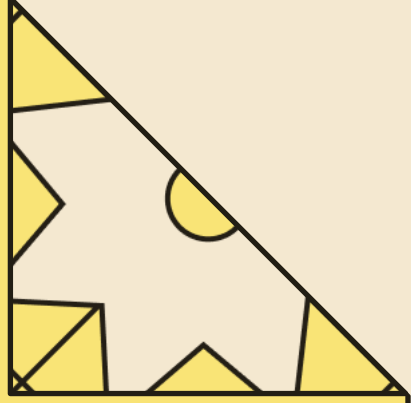




STEP 01

Start early, be agile, and follow the data

To make the most of the entire holiday season, marketers need to begin planning no later than September, ensuring both strategy and operations are ready to capture the Gift-Giving Lifers during the Early Lead-Up.



“Brands should start planning their discounts and strategies by September—at the latest. If you wait too long, it’s likely your execution will be poor and revenue will suffer.”

Mark Baartse

Outsourced CMO and e-commerce marketing consultant

Execution matters. Successful brands aren't just early; they're also agile. During crowded sales periods like the Peak Sales phase, being launch-ready—even just a few days ahead of schedule—offers a competitive edge. Monitoring competitor movements and being ready to pivot your timeline can make or break your campaign for Discount Devotees.

Once live, real-time responsiveness becomes critical. Use live data to inform your decisions, whether those are adjusting email send times based on engagement or dynamically segmenting audiences based on behavior.

Success hinges on a balance between proactive planning and real-time reactivity—backed by AI-driven tools that surface insights quickly and support on-the-fly decision-making.



*“It’s about aligning
the right product
with the right
person, not just
offering another
discount.”*

Jess Cervellon
Customer experience expert, podcast host,
and the founder of Open Late Collective

STEP 02

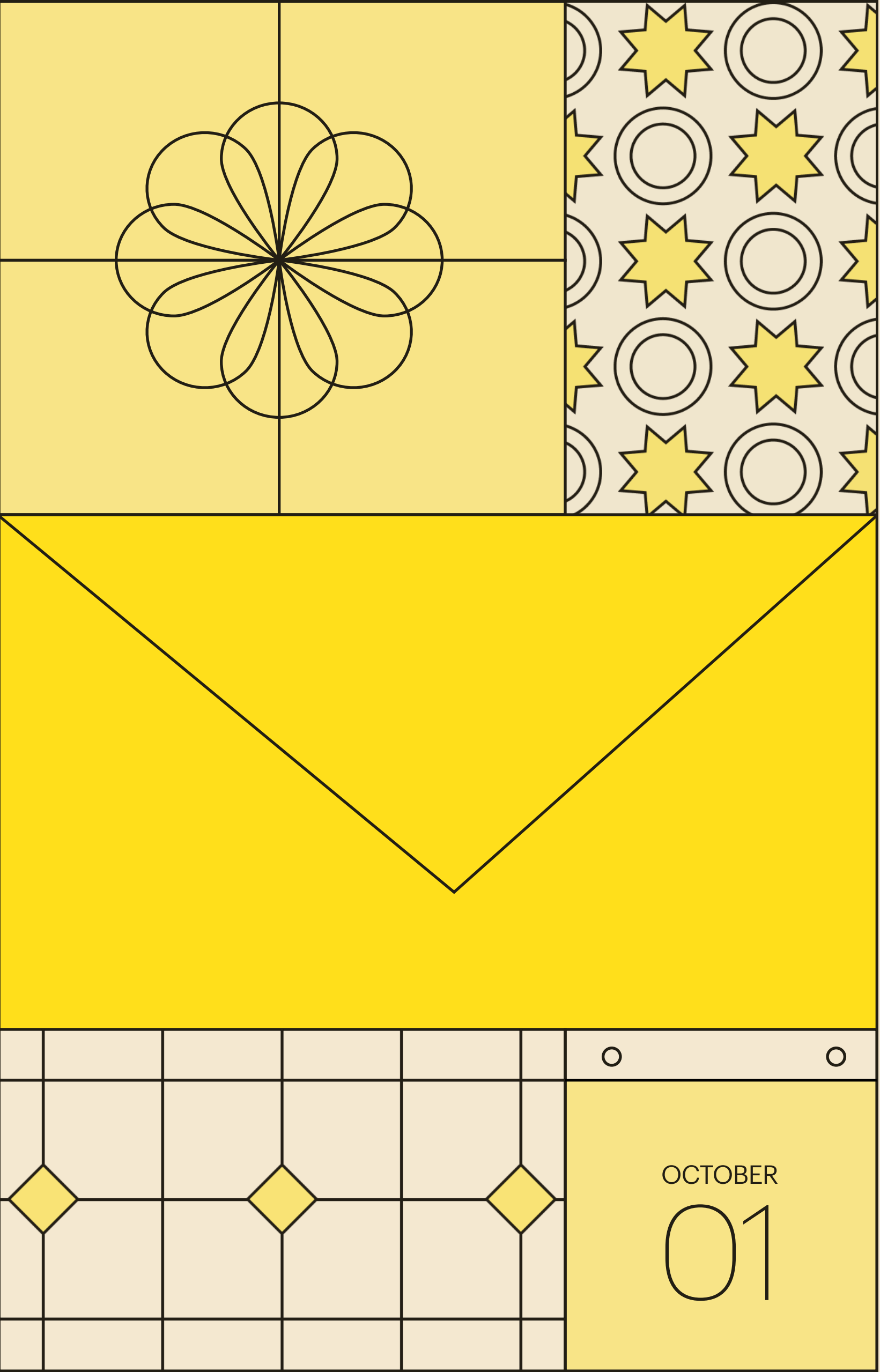
Create a full-funnel experience for customers with an omnichannel mix

Not all channels serve the same purpose—and during the holiday season, timing and context are everything. To drive impact across the different phases of the season, marketers should take a strategic approach with an omnichannel mix that aligns with shoppers' mindsets.

With the holiday season stretching across weeks dominated by different shopper behaviors, your omnichannel mix should reflect that complexity.

Remember to lean on your analytics to understand which channels are driving customer acquisition and sales so you can double down on the best channel and create a steady stream of new contacts for the holiday season.

Utilize data and insights to help you continuously adapt and a campaign calendar to visualize your holiday communications across channels. Pivot your strategy from appealing to Gift-Giving Lifers, with messaging around smart planning in early October, to delighting Self-Gifters during Betwixtmas with indulgent, me-first offers.





Email

Early in the season, email is a powerful tool for seeding ideas and staying top of mind with customers. With its capacity for storytelling and visual inspiration, it's ideal for nurturing intent and highlighting gift guides for organized early birds.



SMS and WhatsApp

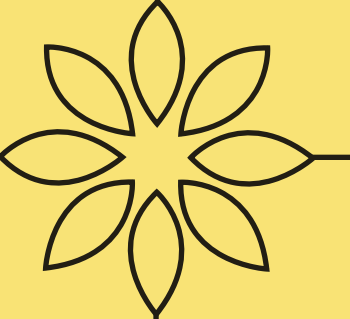
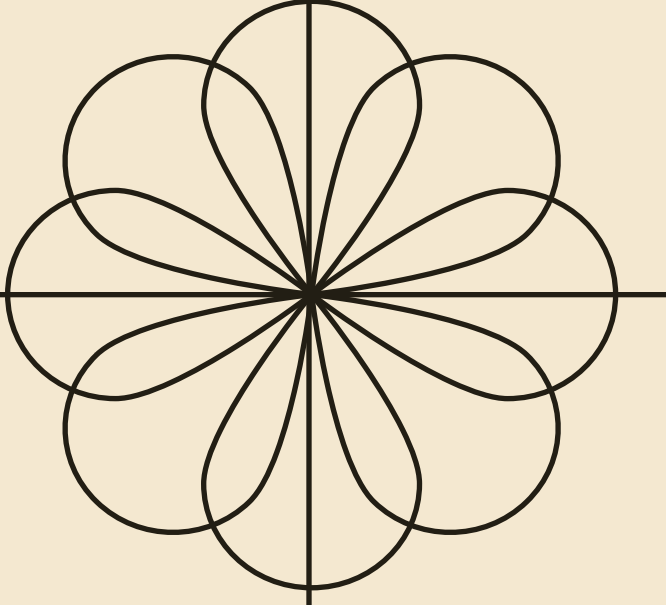
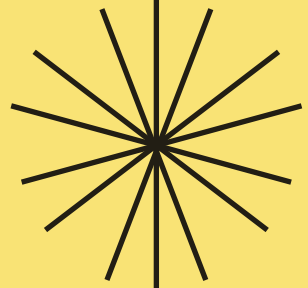
As the urgency builds during the Peak Sales and Last-Minute Sprint phases, messaging channels such as SMS and WhatsApp become key. Their immediacy makes them perfect for limited-time offers, restock alerts, and last-chance reminders—when customers need to act fast and stress is high.

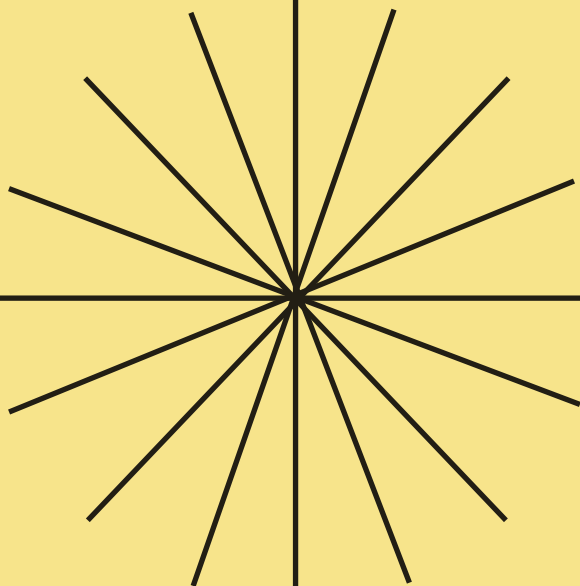
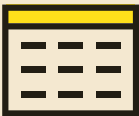


Email and messaging play distinct but complementary roles

While email helps build deeper engagement through rich content, SMS cuts through the noise with direct, action-oriented messages. The key is knowing when—and how—to use each.

Segmentation plays a valuable role in personalizing your email and SMS campaigns, enabling you to create tailored communications for distinct audiences. You can segment based on demographic data sets associated with factors like location, or consider how behavioral insights—like web page views or items added to a shopping cart, for example—can help deliver targeted and effective campaigns.

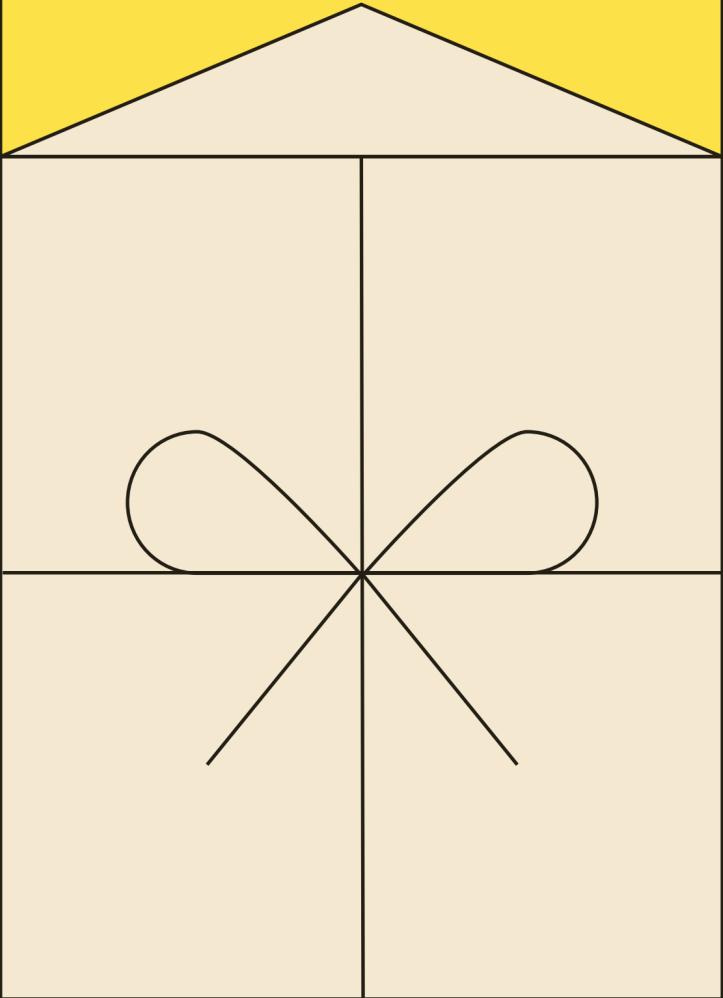
Also, be sure to set up your automations and flows in advance of the Peak Sales phase. Doing this will allow you to have ready-to-go omnichannel campaigns that nurture new or existing customers with thoughtful engagement and connections. These could include post-purchase automations that contain vital shipping updates or automations designed to re-engage lapsed shoppers with an inspiring brand story or a limited-time offer they won't be able to resist.



<p>Remember, though, that email and SMS don't work in isolation. If you're investing in targeted ads during the holidays and expect increased traffic as a result, the following tools can help you capture new contacts, reconnect with existing customers, and keep them all engaged as you head into the new year.</p>			
<div>Popup forms</div> <p>Consider using popup forms, lead capture forms, or special offers for first-time shoppers. Lean on your marketing tech stack to simplify your workflow and help you turn website visitors into loyal customers.</p>	<div>Reporting and analytics</div> <p>Review reporting and analytics data to review the performance of last year's marketing—while AI-powered growth assistants surface insights from your current campaigns in real time—so you can make strategic decisions that reflect the needs of your audience.</p>	<div>Integrations</div> <p>Ensure that all your touchpoints are connected. Integrations can help you sync customer data, product information, and purchase behavior across the various tools in your tech stack, allowing you to deliver a seamless, personalized experience—whether customers are browsing a holiday sale email, clicking through an Instagram ad, or placing a last-minute order from their phone.</p>	



STEP
03

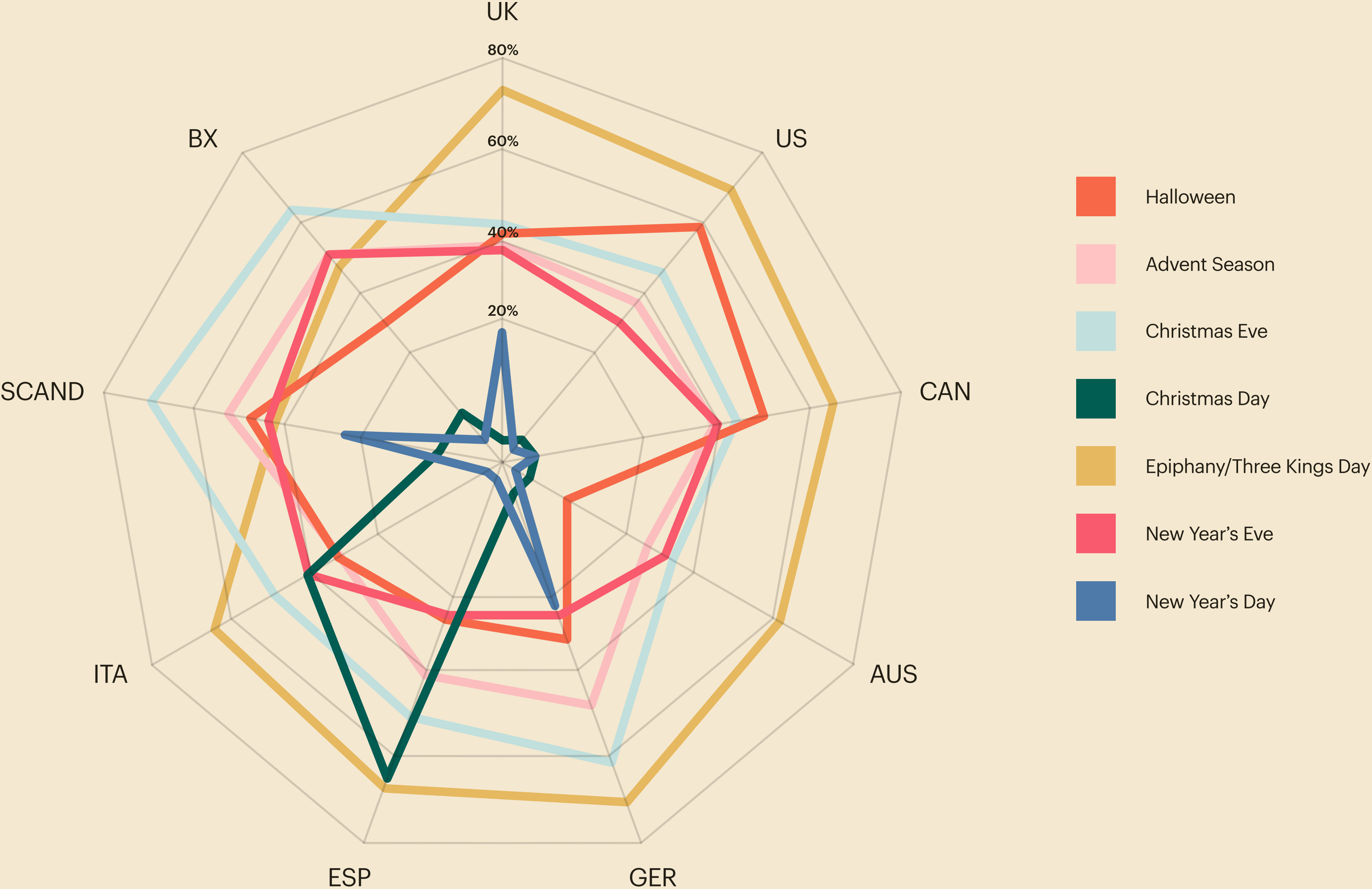
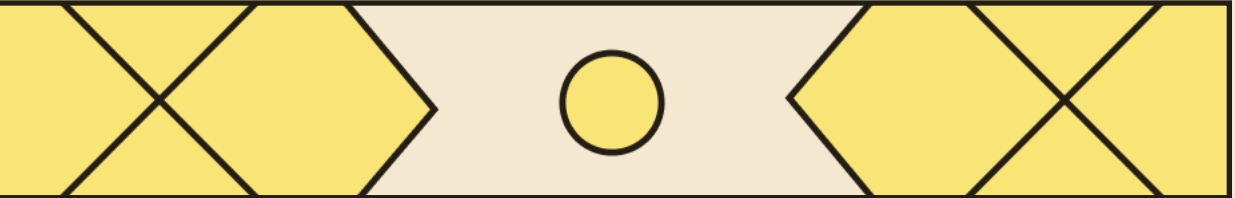


Understand the local Moments that matter in your key target markets

The holiday season isn't a one-size-fits-all experience. While global events like Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas tend to dominate the conversation, shoppers also engage in a wide variety of regional and cultural celebrations that shape how—and why—they shop.

<p>For example, major holidays like Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa all play a role in seasonal purchasing. Christmas represents the biggest opportunity by far, with 66% of people globally making purchases tied to the occasion. By contrast, 2% of shoppers globally buy for Hanukkah and 1% for Kwanzaa—but these numbers rise notably in markets like the US, where 4% shop for Hanukkah and 2% for Kwanzaa.</p> <p>Understanding where these events are more culturally prominent is key. From St. Nicholas Day in Germany and the Benelux region, to Father’s Day in Scandinavia and Boxing Day in Australia, Canada, and the UK, regional holidays shape not just when people shop but the motivations behind their purchases. For instance, Christmas Eve takes center stage in Scandinavia and the Benelux region, while Spanish consumers are more focused on Epiphany in early January.</p> <p>These varied traditions present valuable opportunities for brands to engage shoppers in more meaningful, culturally relevant ways. By using consumer data—associated with things like geography, past behavior, and local trends—marketers can move beyond broad messaging and tap into nuanced, often overlooked micro-moments. Done well, this approach fosters deeper connection and can offer a competitive edge in an increasingly crowded holiday landscape.</p>		Global purchasers	
		2%	1%
		Hanukkah	Kwanzaa
		US purchasers	
		4%	2%
		Hanukkah	Kwanzaa

The Top Holiday Moments with the Highest Spending Propensity Per Region (Spider Graph)



Regional Takeaways

- Christmas Day is the most shopped for Moment in all places, except for Scandinavia, the Benelux region, and Spain.
- Christmas Eve is the most shopped for Moment in the Benelux region and Scandinavia.
- Epiphany is the most shopped for Moment in Spain.
- Those from the US, Canada, Scandinavia, and the UK are more likely to shop for Halloween.
- New Year's Eve is more important than New Year's Day in Germany and Spain.

The Top Holiday Moments with the Highest Spending Propensity Per Region (Heat Map)	SPENDING PROPENSITY <div> 0 <div></div> 80 </div>								
	UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA	GERMANY	SPAIN	ITALY	SCANDINAVIA	BENELUX
HALLOWEEN	42%	59%	50%	25%	36%	26%	36%	48%	32%
ADVENT SEASON (1ST TO 24TH)	18%	4%	6%	4%	23%	12%	12%	24%	8%
CHRISTMAS EVE	44%	46%	44%	35%	61%	53%	50%	69%	62%
CHRISTMAS DAY	76%	74%	68%	61%	75%	73%	67%	41%	57%
EPIPHANY/ THREE KINGS DAY	4%	4%	4%	4%	6%	77%	41%	14%	17%
NEW YEAR'S EVE	39%	34%	38%	33%	48%	42%	32%	52%	50%
NEW YEAR'S DAY	38%	33%	39%	37%	34%	25%	43%	48%	55%




STEP 04



Be sensitive to your audience's traditions, values, and religions

During the holiday season, it's essential for marketers to focus on truly understanding their audience—their values, traditions, and the holidays that matter most to them. With so many Moments happening in the holiday season—Diwali, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa—it can be tempting to create broad, blanket campaigns in the name of inclusivity.


But this approach often falls flat or, worse, offends. Dr. Rachel Lawes notes that successful brands like Starbucks excel by acknowledging the variety of winter celebrations to resonate with diverse audiences.



“Some brands and retailers will take the view that we can be inclusive of the Jewish community by just doing things in blue and white—this leads to terrible decisions like a blue and white Christmas tree. It’s really patronizing [and] not relevant to Jewish culture at all.”

Dr. Rachel Lawes

Futurist, marketer, author of *Using Semiotics in Marketing and Using Semiotics in Retail*, and a fellow of the Market Research Society

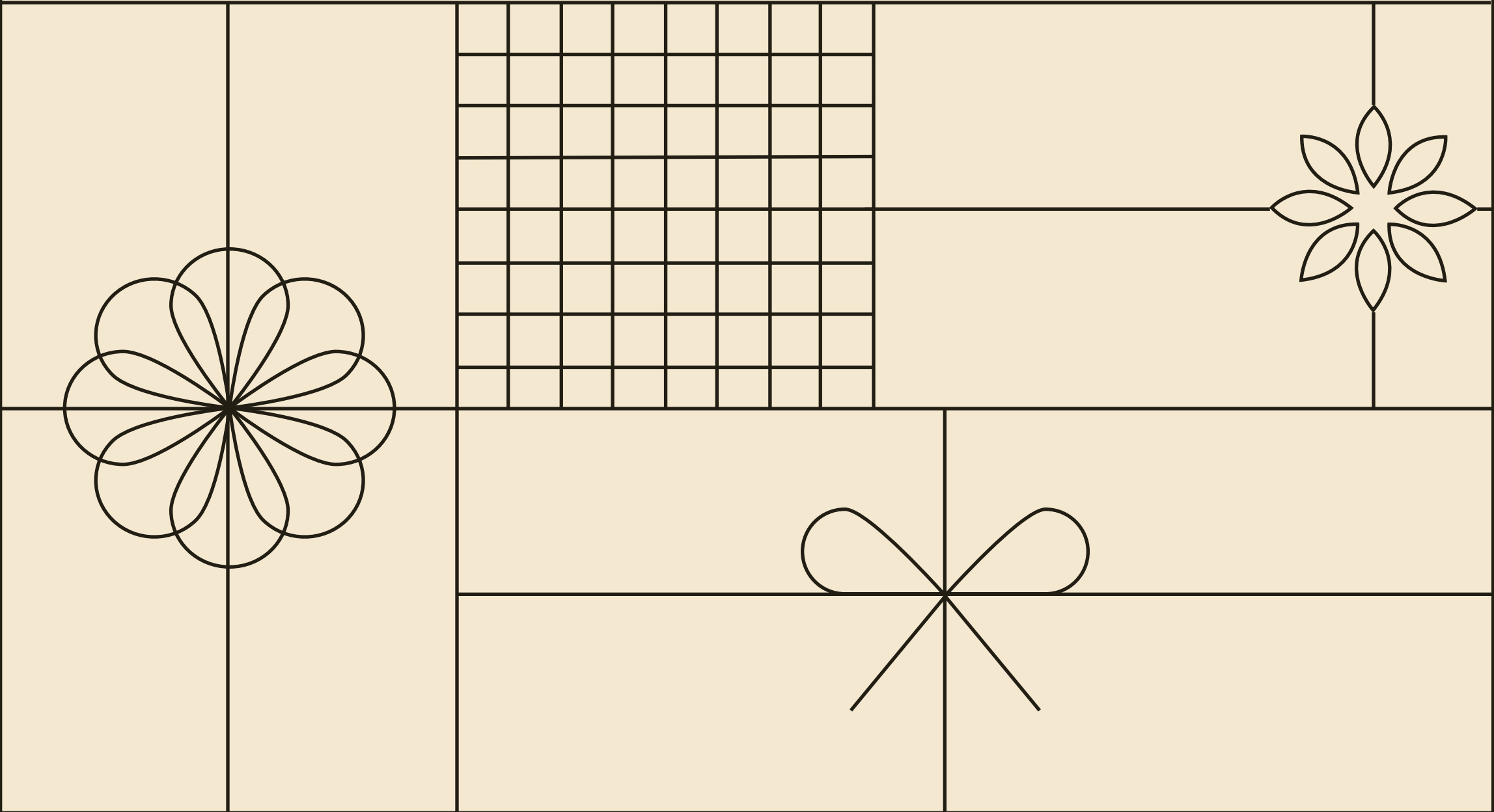


Dr. Lawes adds that the same applies to holidays like Kwanzaa—using vague symbols or colors without context isn't just ineffective; it risks alienating your audience. Instead, thoughtful, culturally informed campaigns are key. Jess Cervellon emphasizes that culturally specific holidays can have broader resonance when approached with respect.

“You can leverage those to embrace other cultures, in a way, and embrace your brand's storytelling within those types of cultures without appropriating them.”

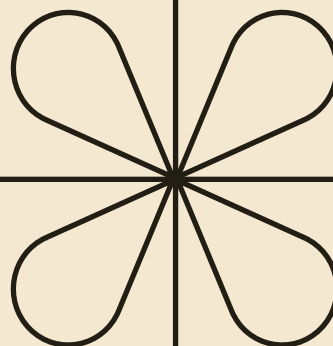


The bottom line? Invest the time to understand your audience's cultural context and bring in voices who know what they're doing. Authenticity and insight will always outperform generic gestures.

The Gift-Giving Roadmap



There’s a lot to consider when planning for the holiday season. Shoppers are navigating an emotionally complex time; they’re jumping between festive events, buying gifts, and trying to take advantage of good deals—and you need to find a way to meet them where they’re at.

At the end of the day, it’s about understanding how shoppers are thinking and feeling during each phase and how that impacts their spending. To help you cover all the right bases, we’ve created a simple overview called The Gift-Giving Roadmap. Use it to navigate the ebbs and flows of key audiences in each phase of the holiday season.

		<h1>The Gift-Giving Roadmap</h1>						
		Early Lead-Up	Pre-Peak Sales	Peak Sales	Festive Phase	Last-Minute Sprint	Betwixtmas	New Year
Date range		October 1 to 31	November 1 to mid-November	Mid-November to November 30	December 1 to mid-December	Mid-December to observational days	Observational days to December 30	New Year's Eve to early January
General shopper sentiment		Marketers are pushing holiday spirit, but shoppers aren't quite ready.	Consumers are slowly getting in the mood, but they're not shopping yet.	Shoppers are looking for a bargain—and don't want to feel like they're missing out.	Some folks are already finishing their holiday shopping, while others are just getting started.	Half of people are ready and relaxing; the other half are rushing to get everything done.	People are cocooning and patiently waiting out the year.	People are ready to start fresh, mentally turning the page.
Watch this audience		Gift-Giving Lifers	Joyful Gifters	Discount Devotees	Curators	Last-Minute Listers	Self-Gifters	Self-Improvers
How they think		They want to be the person that has everything sorted before everyone else does—and tells everyone about it.	Their desire to give something meaningful often outweighs the allure of a deal—and they're not waiting around for the sales.	They need to get the best possible deal and they're willing to do whatever it takes.	They want the gift with the perfect backstory—and enjoy the process of finding it, too.	They're anxious about not getting their gifts in time and will turn to any brand that can help them cross the finish line.	They're taking matters into their own hands and getting themselves the gift they wanted but never received.	They're using the January sales to support their resolutions—buying their way to self-improvement.
Their emotional motivation		Preparedness	Nostalgia, Joy	Validation	Discovery	Stress	Indulgence	Progress, Practicality
Marketer actions		Cater to the Gift-Giving Lifers by capitalizing on events like Prime Big Deal Day, but reframe the messaging around smart planning and joyful prep. Position it as a savvy move, not a frenzy.	Cater to the Joyful Gifters by leaning into joy and the satisfaction of finding the perfect gift for a loved one. Highlight emotionally resonant products and gifts that offer meaning, connection, and cross-generational value.	Cater to the Discount Devotees by appealing to their sense of reward; make them feel like they've outsmarted the system.	To capture the Curators , shift from transactional marketing to emotional storytelling. Capture them with campaigns that celebrate craft, community, or a cause—and tell a good story.	Appeal to the Last-Minute Listers by shifting from inspiration to intervention. Provide practical, low-friction solutions that help frazzled shoppers cross the finish line, both online and in-store.	Capture the Self-Gifters by leveraging the 'me-first' mentality and shifting the focus of messaging from giving to gratifying.	Cater to the Self-Improvers by emphasizing savings, self-gifting, and progress-oriented purchases.
								

Drive results this holiday season

Let's talk!



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TOM FISHBURNE marketoonist™

Tom Fishburne is the creator of Marketoonist, a business cartoon hand-drawn nearly weekly since 2002, based on Tom's experiences in marketing. Tom draws, writes, and gives keynote talks on the power of humor to help us do our best work.