

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR ECOMMERCE STORE FOR A SUCCESSFUL BLACK FRIDAY

GUIDE BY QA CONSULTANTS



Are you ready?

Is your ecommerce store ready for the busiest shopping day of the year? If not, the results could be catastrophic to your revenue and brand reputation. Beyond your store, are all your critical online assets and resources tuned up and ready to go? This guide will tell you what could go wrong, why it matters, and how to get your store ready for a successful revenue-generating Black Friday.

What could go wrong?

Major brands, along with smaller stores, have felt the pain of performance issues and failures on Black Friday. Some well-known examples include:

- **Costco** lost approximately \$11 million with their website down for 16 hours (2019)
- **J.Crew** lost approximately 323,000 shoppers and \$775,000 in just five hours (2018)
- A top fashion retailer changed from a default cart to a just-in-time cart and saw an increase of \$1 million per month in revenue

Slow software does not convert

If your website is slow, not optimized for mobile devices, or completely goes down, you risk losing major revenue on the biggest shopping day and damaging reputation and your brand.

Slow software means:

- Higher bounce rates
- Higher cloud bills
- Abandoned carts
- Lower conversions
- Lost revenue
- Lost customers
- Damaged reputation



Be proactive about site performance with this checklist

Start today and check key performance factors for your ecommerce store. By implementing the changes below, we have typically seen a 20–30% improvement in site performance. Imagine what that could mean for your revenue? The following questions will help you assess how well your site is performing and how to identify performance issues that you could encounter on Black Friday and beyond.

1

Does your store scale for one?

How fast is your page for one user, and does it meet the time requirements necessary for one user? Very few organizations ask about performance issues until they have multiple users running together in a performance test. By that time, it's already too slow, there's increased risk, and there are smaller windows to fix the issues. If you aren't asking "does it scale for one", you will get an accumulation of technical debt related to performance in the system. The amount of work you have to do to get software to work for one, to be responsive for one user, solves 80% of your problems.

2

Do you have an optimized cache plan for your Content Delivery Network (CDN)?

By checking for the existence of 304 HTTP status in your logs, you can determine if your cache plan needs to be adjusted. You can also check for fixed assets that are requested by multiple users, such as fonts, logos, stylesheets, and JavaScript files. Any files that do not change from one user to the next should be served 100% from the CDN.

3

How many marketing beacons do you have?

It's common to add more than one marketing beacon to your site to track analytics and user behavior. Some examples include Omniture, Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, and mPulse. The issue is that when you have multiple beacons loading first on a page, it slows down the rendering of your client software. Since slow software converts at a lower rate, there's a point at which the cost in sales for adding another marketing beacon outweighs the benefits of a new agent. Review and limit the number of marketing beacons. Check for marketing beacons on the GTMetrix website or with the Google lighthouse report. Also, consider using a beacon proxy.



4

Are your landing pages 100% cacheable?

Remember what happened during the Coinbase Super Bowl ad. Their landing page was not 100% cacheable and it only took a small amount of dynamic content paired with tens of thousands of visitors for their site to crash in 10 seconds. Check the cache headers on the front page and campaign landing pages. Both the page and assets should be cacheable and supported by a CDN. Landing pages fall under the informational user transactions and should be served 100% out of cache, saving finite system resources for conversion path business processes like searching inventory or checking out of your store.

5

What is your session timeout for visitors?

While this requires checking with your website admins and analyzing logs to find an optimal value, they can often be cut shorter. For example, 30 minutes might be too long based on the behavior of the user. This leads to resource starvation on web servers for high-load events. This should be set at a level that is around 5-7 minutes - roughly 150% of the maximum time between requests in the system by any individual user of the site. This will free up resources earlier to be available for new users to the site.

6

How much of your traffic comes from automated agents and bots?

Automatic agents can easily represent 25% or more of your site's traffic, so an effective bot management strategy has a big impact on performance. The first step is to identify and categorize bots, and then decide the best approach for each of them. You might be tempted to simply block all bots, but that isn't always the best response because bot developers are likely to change the bot to get around your new rule. A bot strategy could involve directing them to a BOT-only node or leveraging HTTP 503 for random periods.

7

Do you have a dedicated mobile site and is your mobile site as fast as your desktop?

Last Black Friday, mobile users accounted for over 70% of traffic. The issue with mobile is the poor user experience due to the mobile network. This means mobile converts at a lower rate than desktop. While there's nothing you can do about the mobile network, the solution is to address what you can control, which is the speed of your mobile site or app. Ensure your mobile site is fast enough to overcome the problems of the network. Benchmark it and aim to make your mobile site as fast as your desktop.



8

Are you effectively monitoring your end user experience and how are you doing this?

Are you using a tool or managing this through social media? Do you know how many times a user is frustrated by trying to use a page on your site before it has fully loaded? Two times in any given session is a certain indicator that the user will depart the site. This results in both a lost initial sale and a lost opportunity on future sales, as 4 in 5 of these site users will not return.

9

Do you have a default shopping cart?

The impact of a default shopping cart can be significant on system resources, site performance, and ultimately lower conversion rates and lost revenue. By over-allocating resources to non-converting users, resources for users on a conversion path to revenue are impacted. This results in a slower response time with high abandonment. High-traffic times like Black Friday can lead to resource exhaustion for the entire cart system.

10

Do you have a perpetual cart where you are storing items from prior visits?

Are the items no longer in inventory? Do you have carts that have not been touched in more than 90 days? Are you storing empty carts? All of these will impact your store's performance and should be examined more closely.

11

Have you mapped out your user transactions?

The default shopping cart illustrates that not all users are equal in value, revenue, or system resources. Nor should they be treated equally with system resources. It is important to map user transactions into categories such as informational, conversion path, and mission completion. A common pattern of low-performing systems is the over-allocation of resources to users who fall into the informational category. How much revenue are you missing out on by not analyzing your user transactions and spotting issues like the default shopping cart?





Ready to take the next step?

Our Performance Practice offers a Black Friday Readiness Assessment service that can address all the issues previously mentioned. By simply sharing your web server logs, we can turn around a comprehensive actionable **report** in just **4 business days**.

If your ecommerce store or site has gone down in the past and you were not able to find the root cause, then this service is designed for you. Oftentimes, an organization doesn't have the skills to identify what is causing their software to go down and that's a huge gap that QA Consultants can address.

We can help you find those skills so that you are ready for Black Friday, spot sales, or big marketing opportunities like a Super Bowl ad that drives unprecedented traffic to your website.

[Request Assessment](#)



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