

Small Business Holiday Success Guide



by Rhonda Abrams

USA Today columnist
and best-selling
small business author

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Happy Holidays!

When you own your own business, every season matters. But for many business owners, the holidays are especially important. Creating a plan that helps you manage the anticipated influx of customers, extended hours, seasonal staff, not to mention family responsibilities—can quickly strip you of any holiday cheer. So how do you get it all done? Where do you begin? What are some of the important considerations? And how can you take advantage of the incredible opportunities that holidays can bring?

To help you answer these questions—and many more—Visa teamed up with renowned small business ambassador and expert, Rhonda Abrams, to create a successful holiday plan—the *Small Business Holiday Success Guide*. In this guide you'll find easy-to-implement tips to get you started on planning for the holiday season.

At Visa, we want to help you make the 2012 holiday season a successful one. We hope that you'll find this to be a useful tool that will ready you for the busiest time of year, and kick start a new year of growth and success.

Cheers to the upcoming season and a prosperous New Year!

Janet Zablock
Head of Global Small Business, Visa Inc.

@jzablock
@VisaSmallBiz



BETTER TOGETHER

Increase your holiday impact — and stretch your holiday dollars — by partnering with other businesses.

- › Create gift packages with products from related companies & sell at both company's stores or ecommerce sites
- › Throw a holiday party with a few other businesses to share each other's customers
- › Collaborate with your neighboring businesses on a printed holiday shopping guide with coupons
- › Pool resources for a direct mail piece
- › Plan holiday events and promotions (think Black Friday and Cyber Monday) with businesses in your mall, district, neighborhood, or network.

PREPARE FOR YOUR BEST HOLIDAY SEASON EVER

It's that time of year again. Probably your most important season. Holidays aren't just important for retailers and ecommerce sites: For many companies—restaurants, hotels, personal services like salons, even business services like accountants and lawyers—the holiday season is often the busiest time of year. For some businesses, the holidays can represent almost half of annual sales. Remember, during the holidays, people are in the mood to buy.

So it's time to get ready!

YOUR TOP HOLIDAY PLANNING GOALS:

- 1 Get customers**
- 2 Choose the right products & services**
- 3 Be smart about money**
- 4 Create a people plan**

33

Number of shopping days in 2012 between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day—the longest shopping period possible.



When do customers start HOLIDAY SHOPPING?*



GET CUSTOMERS

Whatever business you're in, your customers and clients are the key to holiday success. That's why your holidays begin with a marketing plan.

Start here! Reach existing customers

- › Offer "returning customer" special holiday discounts <
- › Hold a holiday party or open house <
- › Send holiday cards and gifts <
- › Send email newsletters, special offers & new products <
- › Engage them on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest <
- › Send physical direct mail & coupons <
- › Launch a loyalty program <



#1 Email marketing is the most effective way to encourage online customers to return*

RHONDA'S TIP

Corporations are customers too. So target the corporate market, especially if you own a restaurant, hotel, or sell gifts or provide services appropriate for companies to give their customers or employees. During the holidays, corporate gift givers and party planners often scramble to find solutions—even at the last minute. Remember to contact these customers again the following year—early!





- 99** ways to get **MORE CUSTOMERS** this holiday season
- 1 2013 calendars with your name on them
 - 2 Fun YouTube video
 - 3 Accept credit cards
 - 4 Holiday lunches with clients
 - 5 Bring gifts to customers
 - 6 Holiday tips on Facebook page
 - 7 Holiday open house
 - 8 Thanksgiving cards
 - 9 Cookies & cider
 - 10 Holiday 'Tweetchat'
 - 11 Decorate your store
 - 12 "Decorate" your website
 - 13 Attend holiday networking parties
 - 14 Partner with other business
 - 15 Holiday fair booth
 - 16 Take Canadian clients to hockey game
 - 17 Friends & family discount day
 - 18 Free gift wrapping
 - 19 Email greetings to customers
 - 20 Special holiday menu
 - 21 Holiday bundles
 - 22 Holiday banner outside
 - 23 Pumpkin carving ad
 - 24 Holiday search ad
 - 25 Coupons!
 - 26 Holiday webinar
 - 27 Sign holders dressed like Santa
 - 28 Put a sign on your dog and go for walks
 - 29 "Buy-one, get-one" specials
 - 30 Direct mail
 - 31 Holiday email newsletter
 - 32 Holiday coupons in newspaper
 - 33 Advertise on Pandora
 - 34 Sponsor local holiday event
 - 35 Live band
 - 36 Offer gift cards
 - 37 Coupon in coupon pack
 - 38 Groupon valid after January
 - 39 Family shopping day
 - 40 Holiday banner ads
 - 41 Free shipping
 - 42 Contest on Facebook
 - 43 "Hang out" on Google+
 - 44 Free holiday ornaments
 - 45 Pre-season sale
 - 46 "Most-wanted gift" signs
 - 47 Holiday window display
 - 48 Pre-wrapped holiday gifts
 - 49 Radio ad
 - 50 Ladies night
 - 51 Guys night
 - 52 Discount on Facebook
 - 53 Encourage Yelp reviews
 - 54 Carolers!
 - 55 Roll-back-the-clock sale
 - 56 Deal-of-the-day on social media
 - 57 Create a holiday guide
 - 58 Celebrate more than just Christmas
 - 59 Hold charity food drive
 - 60 Build your mailing list
 - 61 Extend your hours
 - 62 Holiday music
 - 63 Cute dog in window
 - 64 Affiliate program for your online store
 - 65 Create holiday landing page
 - 66 Create holiday search terms
 - 67 Santa hats!
 - 68 Black Friday special
 - 69 Cyber Monday special
 - 70 Weekly email holiday specials
 - 71 Bundle holiday dinner with hotel stay
 - 72 Go mobile with "Square"
 - 73 Free gift for kids
 - 74 Early-booking discounts
 - 75 Free desserts for liking you on Facebook
 - 76 Create Pinterest page
 - 77 Holiday recipe book for your restaurant
 - 78 Cookie-baking contest
 - 79 Shopping bags with your logo
 - 80 Holiday sidewalk sale
 - 81 Create gift baskets
 - 82 Holiday picture taking day
 - 83 Photo contest on your Facebook page
 - 84 Visit from Santa
 - 85 Tree trimming day
 - 86 Gift ideas on your website
 - 87 Deliver locally
 - 88 Offer shopping 'concierge'
 - 89 Fresh poinsettias
 - 90 Holiday scavenger hunt
 - 91 Partner with nearby merchants
 - 92 Google Ad Words Express
 - 93 Organize parade on your street
 - 94 Huge ribbon around store
 - 95 Gift wrapped "doggy bags"
 - 96 Holiday coloring contest
 - 97 Create a loyalty program
 - 98 Develop a holiday app
 - 99 After Christmas sale



Holiday Hint:

Offer a free dessert or appetizer when customers check-in on social media. They'll spread the word about your restaurant to their friends!

SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

Social media is the name of the 2012 holiday marketing game, especially if your customers have liked you on Facebook, followed you on Twitter, pinned you on Pinterest, checked in on social media. You've got a built-in following—use it throughout the season.

S	M	T	W	R	F	S

BEST TIME TO POST:

Weekdays, mid-day eastern time

S	M	T	W	R	F	S
Twitter	Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter

HOW MUCH TO POST:

Twitter, once a day;
Facebook, 3-5 times a week



Solution:

Tools help you pre-load social media posts so you don't have to interrupt your busy holiday schedule. Try:

[Hootsuite](#) • [Tweetdeck](#) • [Manageflitter](#)

RHONDA'S TIP

What works on social media? Pictures! Use photos, illustrations, or videos to increase engagement and make your offerings come alive.



52% of Facebook users visit the site every day*

41% repost photos and/or videos*



SOCIAL MEDIA 411*

	FACEBOOK:	#1 among top sites	Best for: Announcing specials; customer stories; interaction	Quick Tip: Use eye-catching pictures and videos	Audience: 43% ♂ 57% ♀
	YOUTUBE:	#3 among top sites	Best for: Videos	Quick Tip: Add "how to" videos using your products or services; give "tours" of your restaurant, hotel, spa	54% ♂ 46% ♀
	TWITTER:	#9 among top sites	Best for: Quick useful information; links to images and video	Quick Tip: Pre-load in advance; look for "retweet"-worthy content	41% ♂ 59% ♀
	PINTEREST:	#38 among top sites	Best for: Anything visual; food, beauty, fashion, travel, home, health and fitness	Quick Tip: Saturday mornings a peak-pinning time	18% ♂ 82% ♀
	INSTAGRAM:	#108 among top sites	Best for: Announcing specials; customer stories; interaction	Quick Tip: Use eye-catching pictures and videos	47% ♂ 53% ♀
	GOOGLE+:	(not ranked)	Best for: Announcing specials; customer stories; interaction	Quick Tip: Use Hangouts for video conferencing or broadcasts	71% ♂ 29% ♀

Review sites

Even though it's the holidays, take time to manage your reputation on review sites like [Yelp](#), [TripAdvisor](#), and [Zagat](#). Customers often use—and rely on—sites like these before making reservations, appointments, or purchasing.

- Encourage satisfied customers to post reviews
- Monitor your reviews at least weekly
- If a site allows "owner's response," add clear, non-argumentative explanations and thank positive reviewers
- Prevent negative reviews: Train your employees on excellent customer service
- If available, "claim" your page; add business info, pictures, and coupons
- Don't try to "game" the system; concentrate on building a great business

★

“A one-star improvement in a Yelp rating increased independent restaurants' revenue by 5-9%.*”

Customers check online reviews for local businesses! **76%** read reviews to help them choose businesses to use. **72%** trust online recommendations as much as personal recommendations. **65%** read just 2-10 reviews before making decision. **58%** trust businesses with positive online reviews. **52%** more likely to patronize a business with positive reviews.*



COUPONS

Even in this digital age, physical coupons still exist; that's because they work. Ways to distribute coupons:

- › Direct mail
- › Ads in local newspapers
- › Coupon books, such as [Valpak](#)
- › Hand out at your business
- › Distribute at holiday fairs & other events

DISCOUNTS & DEALS

Everyone loves a deal, especially during the holidays when customers need to make their money go as far as possible. That's why coupons and discounts bring customers in.

Holiday Daily Deal Strategies

Daily deal sites, such as [Groupon](#) and [LivingSocial](#), or discount sites like [Restaurant.com](#) can bring in lots of new customers. View them as advertising as much as sales, since they make more people aware of your business. But these deals can easily result in little or no profit. Use them wisely, especially if holidays are your busiest time.

- › Place a cap on the number of deals available
- › Offer deals in November or December as gifts redeemable only after January 1
- › Offer holiday gift bundles, rather than individual products, to increase price point
- › Limit redemption of service to off-hours or slow days
- › Offer discounts only on products or services with high profit margins
- › Sell a "subscription"—multiple visits instead of one-time services

61%

Adults with household income of \$100,000+ who use coupons*



Solution:

Fill every holiday hour by using an online scheduling tool like [Schedulicity](#). Your clients can book appointments online, on their mobile phones, even with Facebook.

GET OUT THERE!

During the holidays, opportunities abound to meet new customers. Especially if yours is a service business, word-of-mouth marketing is essential. So pack your social schedule!



**Want customers to remember you?
Let them know you remember them:**

- Send greeting cards to your customer, prospect, and vendor lists
- Give affordable gifts to your best customers
 - Throw a holiday party or open house early in the season
 - Invite your best customers to lunch or dinner as a thank you
 - Planning ahead makes the most of your holiday budget

Worksheet: *Who will you connect with during the 2012 holiday season?*

Name	Company	Card	Gift	Entertainment	Budget

WAYS TO MEET MORE PEOPLE

- Look for community, industry, and neighborhood holiday parties and mixers
- Volunteer at a local food bank, toy drive, or other cause
- Offer your place of business for a charity's holiday event
- Organize a holiday get-together at a local sporting venue
- Set up a "meet up" to turn online contacts into real-life connections
- Anyone up for caroling?

Networking Techniques

- Always bring your business card
- Have your business "elevator pitch" ready
- Ask people what they do and listen
- Include your company name on your name tag
- Ask others for their business card (they'll ask for yours too)
- Approach people, especially wall flowers
- Come early—it's easier to meet early arrivals
- Mingle and move around

ADVERTISING

In this busy holiday season, make sure customers see you. The time-tested way is to advertise.

- › **Broadcast.** What radio stations, if any, do your customers listen to? Radio ads can get your holiday message to a highly targeted audience. Remember Pandora and Spotify.
- › **Search engine ads.** Capture customers at the moment they're looking for what you're selling. You only pay when someone clicks on your ad. For best results, link to a special page on your website with holiday promotions.
- › **Facebook ads.** On Facebook, not only can you purchase display ads to be shown to an audience you target (by location, gender, interests), you can "promote" your post to make sure it is seen by those who have liked your page and forwarded to their friends.
- › **Print ads.** Local newspapers are still a great way to target nearby customers. Include coupons in your ads.

Worksheet: *Your Holiday Marketing Plan*

Tactic	Will you use it?	How?	Budget
Holiday cards & gifts	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Social media	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Direct mail	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Email	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Party/entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Daily deals	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Coupons	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Search ads	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Other online advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Print or broadcast ads	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Networking	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		



Solution:

Want to advertise on a search engine but don't know where to start? [Google AdWords Express](#) makes it easy to set up and manage search ads and [Bing Ads Quick Launch](#) provides personal support for first-time advertisers.

SELL MORE SERVICES

- Offer a range of services and price points to serve more customers
- Bundle products with your services
- Turn a frequent service into a monthly “subscription”
- Cross-sell additional services (make sure they’re necessary or useful) at the same time
- Make customers aware of the benefits of premium services
- Price services so customers are motivated to choose more expensive options
- Turn your service into a “gift” — offer gift cards or certificates; pair with physical product

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

The key to getting customers opening their physical and digital wallets is offering the right things at the right price. Help your customers solve their holiday dilemmas (“What do I buy for Dad?”, “How can I get my house ready for the relatives?”), and they’ll buy from you.

How much to buy?

The perfect amount of inventory: just enough. The perfect inventory management system: just-in-time. “Just-in-time” inventory is just what it sounds like: You stock products or material just in time to sell or fill orders. You don’t tie up your money; you don’t buy excess inventory; you don’t disappoint customers. But just-in-time inventory is hard to achieve, especially during the holidays.

RHONDA’S TIP

Inventory is money in a different form. Keep as little as possible, avoid waste. Don’t purchase something just because it’s a good deal. Remember: It’s your supplier’s busy season too, so understand their lead times.



“Think like a holiday shopper! What do they need or want during this season? Focus on those products and services.”

HOLIDAY MERCHANDISING IDEAS TO SELL MORE

› ECOMMERCE SITES

Create “themed” areas on your website 🎄 Offer free gift wrapping ❄️ “Decorate” your website 🎄 Package products together in bundles and display together 🍷 Show inviting pictures of your products in gift packs 🎄 Refresh content and offerings frequently ❄️ Post useful or fun content on your social media and link to your site

› HOTELS

Create holiday destination packages with dinner and tickets to nearby attractions 🎄 Announce “shopper special nights” with concierge transportation to nearby shopping malls, and free gift wrapping 🍷 Create “gift packages” wrapped with future-stay gift cards and a bottle of champagne

› RESTAURANTS

Create holiday-themed drinks, desserts, or meal items 🎄 Schedule dates with special holiday meals ❄️ Pre-wrap gift card with menu for gift-giving 🍷 Sell products with your restaurant’s name imprinted such as aprons, oven mitts, T-shirts ❄️ Tie “doggy bags” with holiday ribbon

› RETAIL

Pre-wrap holiday gift bundles for easy purchase and higher price points 🍷 Place stocking stuffers near cash registers 🎄 Create displays of products that go together well as gifts ❄️ Create “themed” areas, such as *Gifts for Kids*, *Perfect for Pets*, *Gifts for Him* 🎄 Spotlight certain products or services as “Employee Gift Picks”

RHONDA’S TIP

Get customers in a holiday mood! Decorate. Make your place of business and your website festive. Add lights, trees, wreaths, garlands. And don’t forget the music!



\$28.7 BILLION: total value of gift cards purchased in 2011

8 of 10 holiday shoppers give gift cards



AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT

\$164.24 **\$147.06**



55%
shop more
than once
with card



GIFT CARDS*

WHY THEY'RE GOOD FOR BUSINESS

#1 most requested
holiday present
(18% of all 2011 holiday season
gift purchases were gift cards)

\$43.23

Average
amount
per card
purchased



\$2 BILLION:

unused gift card
total in 2011

\$300 average
per household

Offering gift cards is one of the
best ways to ring up more sales
during the holidays.

Gift cards are great for those
who buy them, those who get
them — and especially for those
who sell them.

TYPES OF CARDS PEOPLE BUY

department
store

restaurant

book stores

entertainment
venue

coffee shops

discount
stores



38.7%



33.8%



19.8%



18.2%



15.9%



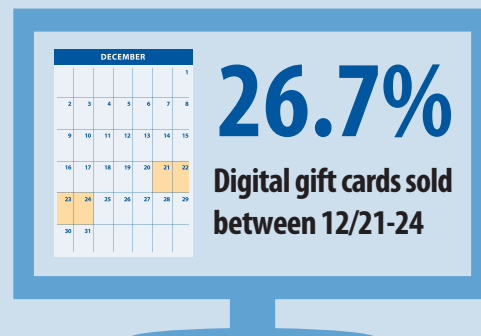
13.0%



40% do not redeem
full amount



61% spend more than
value of card (25% more on average)



26.7%

Digital gift cards sold
between 12/21-24

DECEMBER

12

Biggest
day for
online
sales of
plastic
gift cards

HOLIDAY MONEY MANAGEMENT

Cash flow

The first three rules of small business money management are “cash, cash, cash.” Sure, it’s absolutely necessary to be profitable, but “profit” is a number that shows up at the end of the year. Cash in the bank enables you to open your doors and pay your bills. During the holidays, the first goal of money management is to increase the money available to you and even out cash flow. Then, if business is better than expected, you’ll have the cash to hire more people or order more inventory. And you’ll sleep a lot better!

Sales ≠ Cash

In every business, there’s a lag between expenses and income. Holiday merchandise may arrive in September, but your customers won’t show up ‘til November or December. Or, you may work for clients in October but not get paid ‘til January. When customers pay with a credit card, you get your money faster. And when cash flows faster, you can do more for your business.

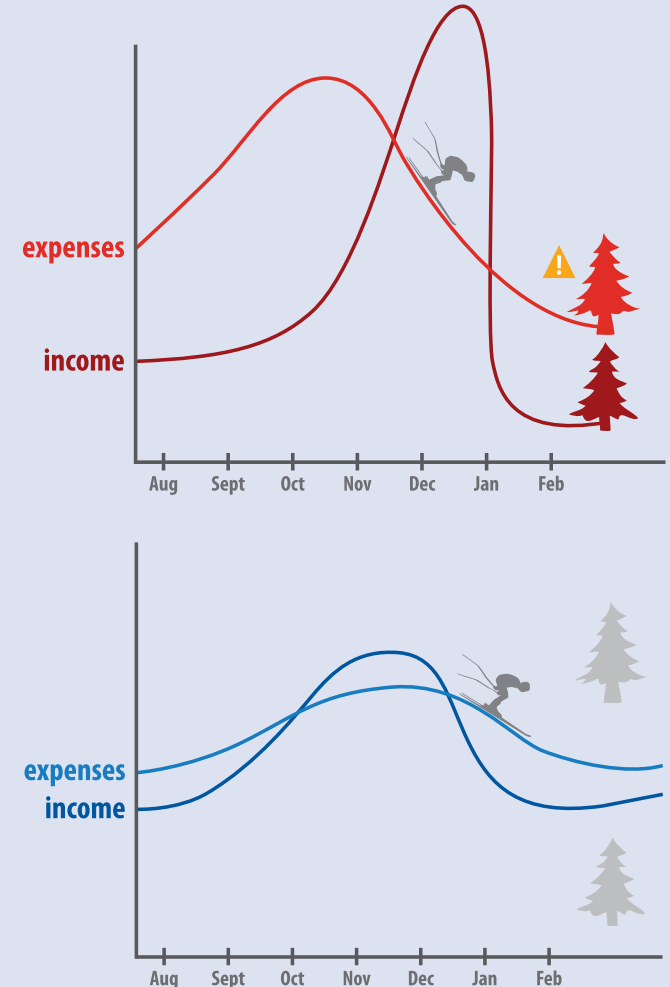
“Cash flow is cash coming into a business versus cash going out.”



Holiday Hint:

Two Visa resources help you get better control of your finances:

- **Visa Savings Edge provides automatic discounts on qualifying purchases when you enroll your Visa Business card**
- **Download the free Visa/Score Financial Management Workbook**



Get off the scary cash flow “slopes”

- Sell sooner
- Get paid faster
- Reduce expenses
- Defer payments

HOLIDAY MONEY MANAGEMENT— INCREASE AND ACCELERATE INCOME

The first step in improving cash flow is increasing the amount of money coming in to your business and getting money in your bank as fast as possible. How do you accomplish this? Sell sooner. Get paid faster. Early money means happy holidays.



Sell Sooner

➤ PRE-SALES

Wouldn't you like to have your hotel fully booked and paid for the holidays well in advance? Your salon's staff time paid by November 1 for services in late December? Offer discounts for pre-paid services or products when purchased early in the season—such as \$100 worth of goods or services for \$80 when paid before November 15. You may have lower profit margins, but you'll have cash sooner.

➤ EARLY SEASON SALES

Offer special deals and hold special events before the height of the holiday rush. If you can get customers to buy from you early, you'll turn over merchandise quickly, ease your busiest periods, and improve cash flow. Market your offers through social media, direct mail, your email newsletter, ads, and so on.

➤ GIFT CARDS

Gift cards are, in essence, pre-sales. You've got the money in your account long before a customer purchases the actual product or service. A great way to improve cash flow.

Get Paid Faster

➤ REDUCE OR ELIMINATE BILLING

If you typically bill your clients for goods or services, it often takes at least 30-60 days after delivery or time of service for you to get paid. The holidays are a challenging time for you to tie up your funds like that. Instead, request pre-payment or require payment on delivery. You'll have your money faster and less paperwork too.

➤ ACCEPT & ENCOURAGE CREDIT CARDS

More than half (58%) of consumers are likely to avoid a business that doesn't accept payment cards for purchases.* When you accept credit cards, you enable more customers to pay you immediately and you get the money in your bank fast—often the day after processing. Yes, you pay a small transaction fee for this benefit, but you don't have to worry about checks bouncing or invoices not getting paid.

➤ MOBILE CREDIT CARD READERS

New services like [Square](#) or Intuit [GoPayment](#) enable you to accept credit cards on the go, or accept credit cards even if you've never accepted cards before. A small card reader attaches to your mobile phone or tablet. These are great for many businesses, especially if you sell at holiday, crafts, or street fairs, run a mobile business like a food truck, set up a kiosk in a mall, or have staff that are on the move.



RHONDA'S TIP

Use a credit card to pay your vendor in full and on time. They get money in their bank quickly—easing their cash flow—and you can pay off the balance after your holiday sales are in.

HOLIDAY MONEY MANAGEMENT: REDUCE EXPENSES AND DEFER PAYMENT

The other half of improving cash flow is reducing expenses and deferring money going out. It's obvious, but the best way to lower your costs is to avoid buying stuff you can't sell or don't use. And if you keep money in your own bank account longer, you have more flexibility to respond to changing holiday conditions.

Reduce expenses

- **Forecast costs.** What do you realistically need this season: products for your retail or ecommerce store, supplies and staff for your service business, vehicles for your catering company? Be conservative.
- **Purchase carefully.** Examine past sales records, do your research and forecast sales. Choose vendors not only for their competitive prices, but for fast turnaround times, good payment terms, reliability, and the ability to pay with credit cards.
- **Read financial statements.** Know where your money goes every month. During the holidays, watch your finances even more closely.
- **Reduce waste.** Whether it's extra inventory, shipping materials, utilities, or trips in your van, if it's unnecessary, you're spending money for something you didn't use.

“ *Holiday gifts aren't just for clients. If you have a particularly good relationship with a vendor, be sure to send them a little something too.* **”**

Defer Payments

- **Negotiate payment terms.** Ask your vendor to extend the amount of time you have to pay your bills, ideally to Net 60 or Net 90. This is rare, and you must have a stellar track record. But it doesn't hurt to ask.
- **Ask for installment payments.** For large bills, ask vendors if you can pay in installments over three to six months. Installment plans are unusual, but again, it doesn't hurt to ask. Be sure to make every payment on time.
- **Pay by credit card.** This automatically provides you with longer payment terms, keeping more money in your bank account during the holidays. Look for vendors who accept credit card payments.
- **Arrange for a vendor to directly fulfill your customer orders, especially for ecommerce sites.** You hold little or no inventory, and receive cash before you make the expenditure. You'll likely have a smaller profit margin—vendors may charge more for the product as well as the fulfillment service—but you tie up far less money and reduce risk.

Thank You

HOLIDAY EXPENSES BUDGET

Download
Full-Size
Worksheet

Worksheet: *Estimate Your Extra Holiday Expenses*

FORECASTING SALES TECHNIQUES:

- Look at your previous years' sales. What sold? When? What did you mark down or write off?
- Talk to other companies in your industry and vendors. What are the product trends? What is selling well in pre-sales? What didn't sell last year?
- Interview nearby stores and businesses. Ask about their peak and slow times and how local sales are so far this year.
- Keep in mind economic conditions, local concerns, trends, or other issues that make this year unusual.

Expense	Amount	Date(s) Expense Incurred	Date(s) Bill Due	Payment Terms and Method
Inventory				
Supplies				
Marketing and advertising				
Staff (overtime, seasonal)				
Staff-related costs (uniforms, training)				
Holiday cards, gifts, and parties				
Décor				
New/additional technology				
Added utilities				
Shipping and delivery				
Other:				

PEOPLE PLANNING

Successful holidays depend on having enough well-trained staff to handle the additional workload you'll face during this season. It's likely you'll have extended hours, more customers, more orders. That means increased demands on your staff—whether the shipping department of your ecommerce site, housekeeping team in your hotel, wait staff in your restaurant, or sales staff in your store.

700,000
Seasonal employees
retailers will hire in 2012
holiday season*

Extra Staff? Extra Hours?

How will you handle the increased workload?

- **EXISTING WORKERS:** Your staff may welcome extra hours and the money from overtime, but you may already be stretched to your limit. Watch for burnout and no-shows.
- **NEW TEMPORARY, SEASONAL WORKERS:** Line up workers now. Try for flexible work schedules. Train well, so your customer service doesn't lag. Be careful about security.
- **DO IT ALL YOURSELF:** Really?



Holiday Hint: *To reduce annual training needed, seek seasonal employees who can return to work for you year-after-year, such as retirees, college students, or off-season (summer) workers.*



Train, train, train

Employees can make or break your holiday season, so you must take time for training. Yes, you're busy, but your success depends on your workers knowing what to do and how to treat customers. Good employees lead to higher sales, repeat customers, and positive write-ups on review sites.

What employees need to know:

- **PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:** Thoroughly know and understand what products or services you offer, be able to explain them to customers, locate them (in a store)
- **COMPANY KNOWLEDGE:** Know about the company, and details such as hours of operation, credit and return policies, added service
- **CUSTOMER SERVICE:** Be well trained on how to greet and work with customers, how to deal with dissatisfied customers, the general attitude and demeanor you expect
- **SALES ABILITY:** Know about special offers, gift packages, how to recommend related or complementary products or services
- **PROCEDURES & POLICIES:** Understand and follow your company policies regarding work hours, dress code, time tracking, sick leave, or benefits

Worksheet: Seasonal Hiring Plan

Position to Be Filled	Hours/Week	Pay Rate	Qualifications	Training Needed
Salespeople				
Order fulfillment/shipping				
Marketing				
Customer service				
Administration				
IT/tech staff				
Returns processing				
Production				
Other:				
Other:				

CAPTURING CONTACTS

- Add a sign-up for a monthly email newsletter to your website
- Hold a holiday drawing and get business cards
- Put 3x5 cards or a notebook by the register for sign-ups for your mailing list
- Offer free desserts in return for a business card
- Offer a discount for following you on social media
- Train staff to prompt customers to join the mailing list
- Make sure to ask for your customers' permission before you add them to your mailing list

MAKE THE PEAK SEASON LAST

How do you stretch the success of your holiday season? You want your bank account bulging year 'round, not just October through December. The holidays are the perfect time to add to your mailing list, expand your social media reach, and create new loyal customers. Don't have a mailing list? Start one! Think of every name on your list, every fan on Facebook as a corporate asset. Catch them while you can.



- **Build your mailing list.** Every holiday customer can be a year 'round customer, but you have to be able to stay in touch. Make sure you capture their name and contact information—and ask their permission to add them to your contact list. And then use it—right away. Send specials, tips, a newsletter right after the first of the year.
- **Engage with fans.** Keep your social media momentum going after the holidays. Post pictures and tips on your Facebook, Pinterest, Google+ pages.
- **Sell “subscriptions.”** Sell a service? Package it as a “gift subscription”—monthly dinners, quarterly oil changes, “pet gift of the month” club. Whatever you sell, look for ways to have a recurring relationship with a customer.
- **Offer deals for 2013.** In November and December, offer discounts for products or services used in 2013. While you even out your workload, you'll have a chance to serve customers when you have more time and attention to build a relationship.
- **Establish reserve accounts.** When your bank account's high, set aside a reserve for taxes, unexpected expenses, and the slow months.



Solution:

To make staying in touch easy, use an email marketing service such as:

- [Constant Contact](#)
- [Vertical Response](#)
- [MailChimp](#)
- [Emma](#)
- [iContact](#)


(iContact is part of Visa Savings Edge, giving automatic discounts on qualifying purchases with an enrolled Visa Business Card.)

YOUR HOLIDAY CALENDAR

Download your calendar to fill in the following information applicable to your business:

- Days of extended holiday hours
- Date to send out holiday cards and gifts
- Last day to order inventory
- Due dates of bills
- Last day to ship ground to arrive for Christmas
- Last day to ship overnight
- First day to accept returns
- Date for giving out end-of-year bonuses
- Your company holiday party

OCTOBER

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31 			

NOVEMBER

				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22 	23 	24
25 	26	27	28	29	30	

DECEMBER

						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 	25	26 	27	28	29
30 	31					



About Rhonda Abrams

@RhondaAbrams

Entrepreneur, author, and nationally syndicated columnist Rhonda Abrams is widely recognized as one of the leading experts on entrepreneurship and small business. Rhonda's weekly Strategies column for *USA Today* is the most widely distributed column on small business in the U.S.

Rhonda's first book, *Successful Business Plan: Secrets & Strategies* is the best-selling business plan guide in America. She has written 15 other books on entrepreneurship, which have been translated into 30 languages, and have sold more than a million copies.

Rhonda not only writes about business—she lives it! As the founder of four successful companies, Rhonda has accumulated an extraordinary depth of experience and a real-life understanding of the challenges facing entrepreneurs. Her current company, PlanningShop, focuses exclusively on topics of business planning, entrepreneurship, and small business growth.

Rhonda was educated at UCLA and Harvard University. She lives in Silicon Valley, CA.

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To receive Rhonda's free email newsletter on starting and growing a successful business, sign up at www.PlanningShop.com.

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