

2021

Year-End Sales Strategies

How to use Customer Data
and Trends for Successful
Holiday Sales



How to use Customer Data and Trends for Successful Holiday Sales

Unbelievably, the holiday season is upon us. Q4 is here and your readers are looking to buy.

We'd say, "Winter is coming" but if you are reading this from Cape Town, that means winter has already come and gone. Either way, there's an interesting Q4 ahead.

The lists of challenges are long, but so are the opportunities. The best place to start is with consumer demand and the trends leading up to the holiday season.

It's a Good Time to Work in the Book Industry

In-person gatherings are influencing demand. There's been a great resurgence in sales of religion titles since churches started reopening. The expectation is similar in the academic space as students start going back to colleges and schools.

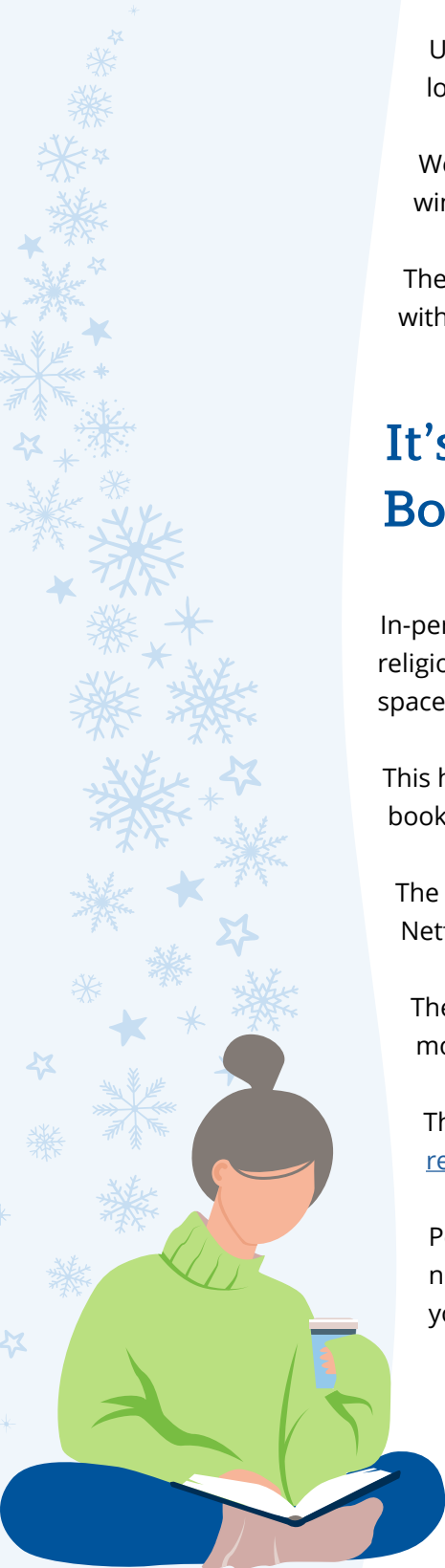
This has led to the immeasurable return of word of mouth marketing, even absent bookstore events.

The good news is not true of every market in the entertainment industry. Two weeks ago, Netflix reported that subscriber growth had slowed 85% in Q2 2021.

They lost about 400,000 subscribers in the US and Canada. As people started getting out more, fewer households decided they needed a new streaming service.

That decline can't be seen in books. Publisher's Weekly reported on July 29th that [reading time grew 21%](#) in the second half of 2020.

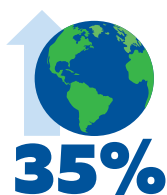
People turned to books for comfort this past year. You delivered what consumers needed and they are paying that back in loyalties. You should be proud of the work that you're doing.



Consumer Holiday Trends

Across the board, consumers are reading, buying, and searching online more than ever before.

Prior to the pandemic, despite seasonal or category shifts, there was a flat book market with small, and predictable, changes in year-to-year trade book sales. 2020 changed that radically.



of online adults reported
reading more in 2020 than ever



increase in UK trade
sales last year



9% and 12%

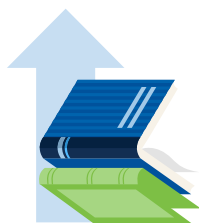
increase in print/ebook and
audiobook revenue last year

So far 2021 is outperforming the growth of 2020. NPD, or BookScan, recently reported both print and **ebook sales are up 18% through the end of the second quarter in the US.**

A Shift in Consumer Habits

Sales are strong across adult, juvenile, and young adult fiction, and non-fiction. The consumer habits right now for books and for reading are encouraging. What we know about consumers historically is habits are hard to change.

What the pandemic did was introduce tons of disruption into our daily lives, into the way we live our lives. People kept reading, and in many cases, increased or even started reading.



Consumers:

- Bought more books.
- Bought different books.
- Bought books from places they never had before.

What is encouraging as we head into this year is that habits don't appear to be shifting back quickly, if at all.

Heading into Q3 and Q4, consumers' foot traffic to stores is starting to increase. That's across product categories, and books included.

But uncertainty around the Delta variant, back to school plans, and holiday travel seasons — still leave question marks around what to expect over the next four to five months.

The Trends that Carry on Through Holiday Seasons



Consumers are looking for a middle ground between online shopping and brick-and-mortar

A [Deloitte study](#) recently showed that 50% of US consumers expect to continue shopping more online post-pandemic than they did before. Those habits are really starting to stick.

A similar study in the UK showed **32% of UK consumers expect to continue their online shopping** — but the online shopping behavior includes online delivery and buy online and pick-up in store patterns.

Consumers want to continue to support their local businesses— small stores, but want the convenience of online shopping. That middle ground is on the rise.



Consumers are drawn by discounted titles

Keep in mind, the more people shop online, the more they expect to receive a discount. Full price purchasing online, especially in books, is not the

most common or expected behavior.

Consumers want a deal. It doesn't have to be a huge one, but they are looking for a deal. They're increasingly willing to buy from different stores. Amazon is, obviously, the largest online bookseller. That continues to be true.

What you may have seen through the pandemic was consumers increasing the diversity of places they shop. That continues to hold true, though to a slightly lesser degree than last year.



Consumers are still...consumers

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Yes, consumer patterns are changing, but consumers are still consumers. They are still looking for the same value. They still buy in lots of the same ways.

As you head into the holidays, there's a seasonal buying shift. You know people buy more books for the holidays and they buy more in-person around the holidays. You can expect those things to hold true as we head into Q4.



Loyalty Reigns

Customers are loyal in their own ways.

In 2020, Walmart and Target shoppers, when they couldn't go into the store, started buying from Walmart and Target online in the US. Indie book buyers who couldn't go into their store started to buy from Bookshop.org.



The channel may change but the loyalty of a customer does not.

Specific Marketing Strategies to Help Influence Demand



Looking back at the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009, search patterns remain the same. There are still holidays when we have weird years and consumers still buy gifts.

When Thanksgiving happens, consumers look for cookbooks. There are predictable patterns that don't change regardless of the macro trends.

1 Start your planning early

Now is the time to begin your marketing planning if you have not done so already. Be specific about what the holidays are.

Think of going back to school as a holiday

and what's happening right now. There is a surge in search activity around physical books with back to school.

Key Book-Buying Dates to Plan For:

- Halloween — October 30th
- Thanksgiving — November 25th
- Black Friday — November 26th
- Cyber Monday — November 29th
- Christmas — December 25th
- New Year's — January 1st

Halloween tends to be children's books and YA and Thanksgiving tends to see a lot of cookbooks. There is some gift giving search activity that can be seen around Thanksgiving, too.

Holidays Can Be Made

You can create holidays of your own. They can be the birthdays of your best-selling authors. They can be the anniversaries of your evergreen titles and they can happen during the holiday season. Being list-appropriate is the most important to making the “fictitious” holiday meaningful.

2 Stick to the fundamentals, specifically, keywords

If you have titles that are good gifts, use keywords to speak to them. Be specific. A book isn't just a good gift. That's not how consumers search.

They search specifically. When they search for cookbooks, they search for specific kinds of cookbooks, like “Keto cookbooks for dads” or “How to cook a keto Thanksgiving meal.” Discoverability for these searches starts with your keywords and metadata.

3 Spend your advertising dollars wisely

Advertising gets expensive around Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and leading up to Christmas.

Cost-per-click goes up because you're competing with everybody in the world. Anything you can do to make use of your own platforms to reach consumers during the holidays, all the better.



websites



email lists



social accounts

Everyone knows to advertise on Black Friday. **What if you don't advertise on Black Friday?** Instead send an email to your fans, put social posts on your social accounts on Black Friday, save the dollars and spend counter-cyclically. You'll be better off.

4 Promote your ebooks after Christmas Day

People tend to get devices around the holiday season, and they tend to fill them up.

Ebooks and digital audio are two formats where search activity spikes and often lead to sales between Christmas and New Year's Day.



A Consumer Focus on Values-Based Shopping



Is there validity in Small Business Saturday?

If you look at Google Search Trends in 2020, one of the top queries was "Buying books online, not Amazon." Let's say, shopping at an independent online bookstore aligns with values-based shopping and consumers are willing to pay more to shop elsewhere.

Not only is there a channel shift, but consumers are literally typing in their interest in shifting channels.

Consumers will respond to messaging that says, "Do this because of the cause that you're supporting." Consider creative that can speak to the desire to support mission-based businesses.

Shopping with Interest, Buying with Values

Consumers aren't shopping for books most of the time, but shopping for lots of things all the time. With online marketing, you're given a chance to be relevant to whatever consumers are doing online.

The Blackout Bestseller List last year grew out of some organic shifts in buying patterns. People started buying books around social change and social justice. Then the industry, authors, and readers, made this moment around the buying pattern.

Remember, consumers and buyers are people. They're living their lives and looking for opportunities to be relevant and valuable to lived experiences. Recognizing this will increase your sales no matter what time of year.

Managing Your Q4 Supply Chain

The word right now for Q4 supply chain is volatility.

Turnaround times vary depending on where you're sourcing from, where you're printing, and where you're shipping. There are challenges here for publishers going into the back half of the year.

But what can you expect to influence your supply chain right now?

You saw earlier that a few consumer buying trends from 2020 have led into this year. However, you should expect trends around supply to be fundamentally different.

In 2020, on the supply side, there were printer closures for COVID, one large bankruptcy, and one large sale.

On the demand side, sales for certain subject categories skyrocketed. Gardening, exercise, coloring, and social justice, each went beyond what demand planners could have expected.

In 2021 though, most publisher's books are flush with cash and they're making strategic decisions around what to print. But there's continued supply disruption.

Last year, the specific nature of disruption centered around industry partners, mostly printers.

This year, the issues are more systemic, especially around freight and importing stock. Recently, [The Bookseller](#) reported freight cost for books coming from overseas was up 400% over last year.

That's going to have a measurable increase in your cost per unit.

If you're publishing primarily in children's books, art and design, anything that uses coated stock, you're going to experience a little more disruption.

When supply disruptions are within the industry ecosystems, publishers have a little bit more control over how they can get themselves prioritized. If you've been working with a printer for 40 years, you might be able to say, "Hey, I need this frontlist book moved up to the top."

That's impossible when you're competing for a shipping container against other industries. Especially, a container that could be used for shipping semiconductors.

So, which part of the supply chain process can you control?

**Freight cost on
overseas books**
↑ +400%
in 2020



Having Title Availability in Q4 is a Must

Consumer Direct Fulfillment

In Q4, online retail availability is the most important piece of metadata you can optimize for your books.

Two to three years ago, the assumptions were availability, specifically on-page availability, was not controllable by the publisher, but by the retailer. That's not the case anymore with the rise of consumer direct fulfillment.

Consumer Direct Fulfillment and Guaranteed Availability Program

Consumer Direct Fulfillment or CDF is when a publisher or a wholesaler mails a book direct to the reader without touching the retailer's warehouse. The process is entirely seamless to the reader.

In Q4 of last year, one major publisher had 75% of their total volume through Ingram Book Company go through CDF. That's up from about 35%, two years before. CDF partners with Amazon, Target, Walmart, Bookshop, and others. Ingram availability is key there.

The easiest way to keep your titles available, even if a retailer runs out, is to have the book available at Ingram.

The [Guaranteed Availability Program](#) or GAP never prints to stock, just to demand.



Last year GAP was keeping around half of The New York Times paperback best sellers available.

It continues to be a key bestseller strategy as publishers work to keep the sales momentum going. If you have books with potential for bestseller status, it's vital they're in a program like GAP coming into Q4. There's no action from you when using CDF or GAP. Take Ron Popeil's word for it, "Set it and forget it." Amid all this uncertainty you can lean on your partners to manage your supply and demand.

How to Maneuver Through International Printing Issues



1 Change Print Location

A lot of publishers have moved their book printing away from China and East Asia to Europe where there is some print capacity.

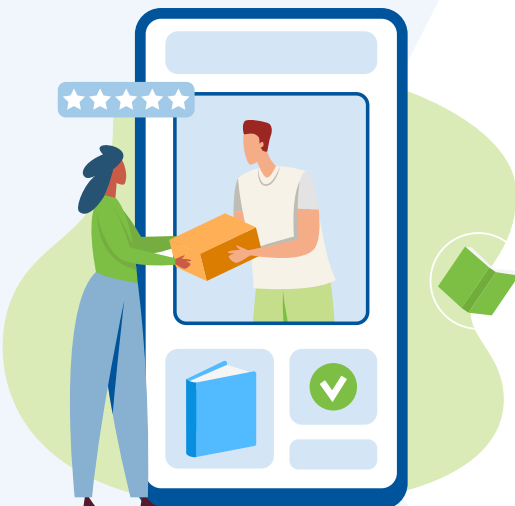
For those publishers outside of the EU, printing in Europe also gets around the paperwork and increased costs associated with freight and customs due to Brexit and EU VAT (Value Added Tax) law changes.



2 Print in Market

This is a great strategy for US publishers selling books in the UK. Previously, it's been books on boats to the UK, but with the current US carrier crunch and some of the long lead times — printing in the UK could prove a viable alternative.

Printing close to demand outweighs missing publication dates and then canceled orders and lost sales.



3 Print-on-Demand

This model provides an inventory-free global sales strategy for you to ensure availability for your titles. Not all your titles need to be in a print-on-demand model. Some publishers move to a hybrid stock position and virtual stock. A print-on-demand or POD model allows you to print closest to your customer and reduce the shipping cost.

Letting Customer Data Drive Your Strategy



Online Advertising

If you plan to shift some print dollars to the online channel and promote books, you can **run a short test for \$20 a day**.

Run for four days, see how it's going. If it's achieving your goals, carry on.

If it's not achieving your goals, either adjust the creative or copy or stop. That's the beauty of online advertising. The results are real time, and your content can be easily changed.

You have options to choose from when it comes to channels. Don't get hung up on one social media channel for online marketing. You've got [Amazon advertising](#) and Google advertising.

Within social media, there's a difference between TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and [Facebook](#). They have different demographics, different ad types, and units.

Understanding your audience, understanding where they are, and understanding what resonates with them is crucial to your online advertising.



Where's Your Category Killer?

One thing is for certain, evergreen content tends to do well during the holidays. Launching a frontlist title during the holidays is challenging because of the noise that skews towards specific holiday categories.

If you have a sizable list, consider looking at your whole list, but think of your category killers during the holidays.

Consider the books that get gifted during the holidays. It'll be the category-killing cookbook. Maybe your vegan cookbook that's going to sell, whether it's four years old or two years old or nine years old.

It doesn't really matter. It's the category killer.





Emerging Opportunities

With the challenges of the supply chain, there's a chance you can take advantage of opportunities if a competitor is having trouble with availability.

If you are aware of your audience and you're keeping an eye on competing titles, you might find opportunities to sweep in on a marketing push. If a leading title in a genre is out of stock, there is an opportunity for you to fill that demand.

The more you can focus on what you can control, what you can influence and being prepared to react across channels, the more success you'll see this holiday season.



Reader Insights Reports

We're going to be launching a series of what we're calling Reader Insights Reports. When we say a series, we're talking about hundreds of these.

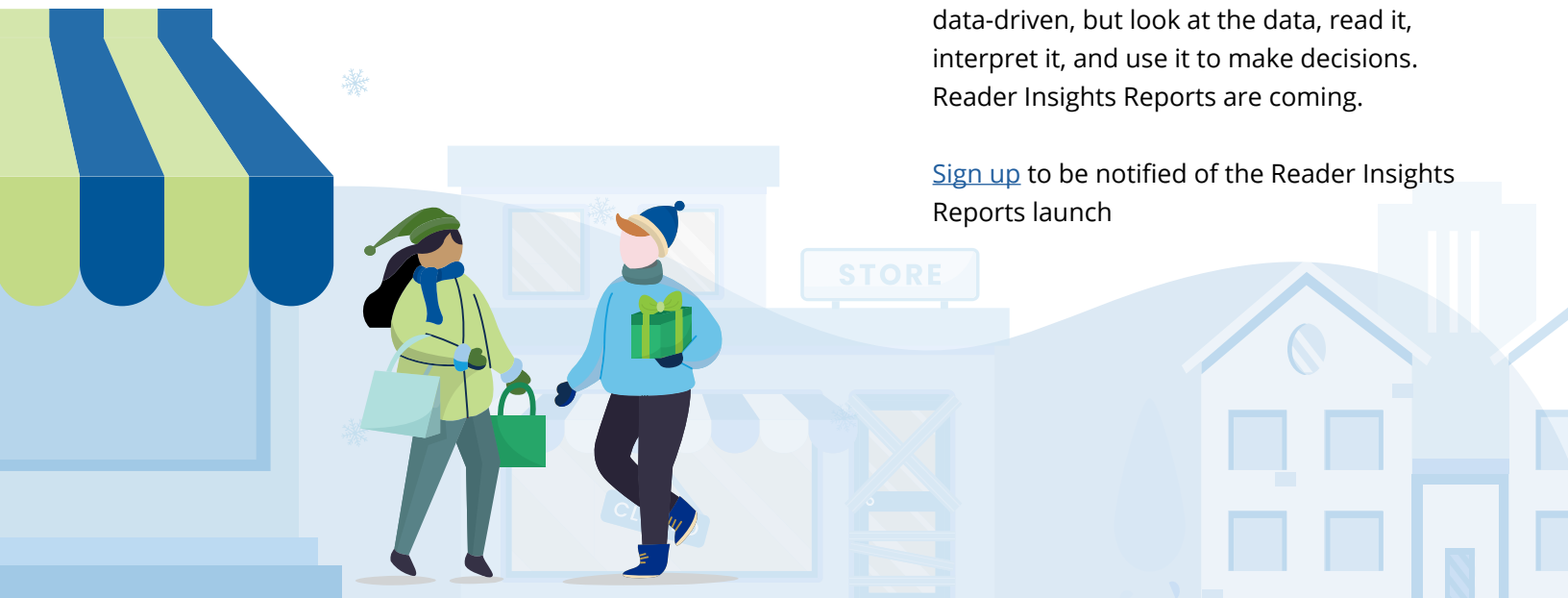
In other words, these are audience reports. They are the information you would need to understand a reader:

- Demographics
- Location
- Device types
- Preferred reading format
- Who influences them (podcasts, newspapers, etc.)
- What genres they read
- How they search
- Their seasonality of search terms
- The hashtags they use

The reports will be data-rich, very affordable, and right-sized for you in terms of price point, ranging from \$29, \$79, to \$500 for a custom report.

Pay attention to the data. Don't be blindly data-driven, but look at the data, read it, interpret it, and use it to make decisions. Reader Insights Reports are coming.

[Sign up](#) to be notified of the Reader Insights Reports launch



This guide represents thought leadership from the following Ingram innovators

Print



Margaret Harrison
Director of
Content Solutions

Margaret oversees account management, business development, catalog management, and client experience for print-on-demand clients. Prior to joining Ingram in 2015, Margaret held roles at Oxford University Press and OverDrive. Margaret is the co-author of *Metadata Essentials*, a handbook for publishers to improve online book discoverability.



Matt Mullin
Senior Key Account
Sales Manager

Matt partners with the Big Five trade publishers and large independent publishers developing their print-on-demand strategy. Before Ingram, he worked on business development for Barnes & Noble's NOOK, and held marketing positions at F&W Media and Sterling Publishing.

Ingram UK



Darragh Deering
Senior Manager of
Sales and Client
Relations

With almost 25 years sales experience in UK publishing, Darragh joined Ingram 7 years ago moving from managing the largest Trade accounts, to assuming overall responsibility for the UK Sales and Sales Services teams and UK publisher relationships.

Digital



Peter McCarthy
Director of
Consumer Insights

Peter has more than 20 years of experience in publishing, ranging from executive positions with Penguin and Random House to start-ups and consultancies, and brings a strategic, technical, and data-informed approach to selling and marketing books and other content.



Jess Johns
Consumer Insights
Manager

Jess works to better understand changing consumer behaviors and build services and solutions that help authors and publishers of all sizes connect with their readers and grow sales. She was a cofounder of OptiQly, a consumer analytics startup acquired by Ingram in 2017 (now Marketing Insights), and a partner at Logical Marketing, a marketing agency providing market research, audience analysis, and campaign recommendations for authors, publishers, and media brands.

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