



8 action points you need to maintain 99% ops performance during peak trading

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Executive summary

Thanks for downloading this white paper. It's a ten-minute read but if you're pushed for time, here are the key takeaways:

- Planning early is key.
- Recruitment calls for specific skills.
- Management style should be adapted during peak.
- Invest in a tangible rewards scheme.
- Keep an eye out for signs of stress.
- Don't over promise to your customers.
- Don't overlook reverse logistics.
- Be adaptable and flexible.

These eight action points are distilled from decades of experience and expertise trading as Watch Shop. A few may seem obvious but getting them right is not as easy as it can seem. Others are easily overlooked, whilst some are the most common pitfalls we see across the industry. Whether this is your first experience in peak trading or want to improve on last year's performance, implementing these points will benefit your team, your managers and your business.

Introduction

The peak trading period runs from 1st November in the build-up to Black Friday and Christmas, generally running until 2nd January. Not only is this the most demanding time of the year for any operations and logistics department, but it is often the most critical quarter for business sales. Quite simply, failure is not an option.

We all live in a world where next day delivery, Amazon Prime and real time order tracking mean we expect the highest standards. UK consumers spend an average of £250 online at Christmas, representing over 40% of their total spend*. In 2019, Black Friday spending in the UK was up, despite predictions of declining interest. By mid-morning on Black Friday, Barclaycard was reporting a 12.5% increase in transactions compared to the previous year**. As e-commerce continues to grow, consumers will continue to demand more and businesses need to be agile and adaptable to meet growing demand.

Whilst the big online players have budgets and infrastructure large enough to withstand these pressures, how do smaller or scaling businesses cope? Having a great product is one thing, ensuring it reaches customers quickly and efficiently is another. Investing in operations is not just a question of money; it's a question of getting the right expertise and experience in place so your business doesn't trip up. It only takes one bad customer experience to harm your reputation and no business should take that risk.

This paper is written for small and growing businesses, for managers across all business units and for anyone who wants their next peak trading period to be better. Eight practical strategies to employ that will help keep your ops performance at 99% efficiency, no matter what is thrown at it.

*Deloitte Christmas Survey 2019

** <https://realbusiness.co.uk/black-friday-2019-results/>

#1 Planning

Depending on the size of your business, operational peak planning should start during the summer. Review the previous year's successes and challenges with senior management and gain buy-in for a recruitment plan to cover trading during November and December. Ensuring a robust staffing plan is in place by September enables temporary recruitment to begin from late October.

#2 Recruitment and training

Building a strong peak team calls for specific skills. Attitude is as important as aptitude and, during the recruitment process, focus on a candidate's ability to remain calm under pressure, their attention to detail and communication skills. Once you've secured the right people, thorough training is vital. Even though your peak team will only be operational for a few weeks, their performance is crucial to your business so invest time in training across all aspects of the logistics operation.

#3 Management style

During peak trading, management style should be more hands on. Temporary warehouse and logistics staff are required to work flexibly, under pressure and often during unsocial hours. Managers should be visible and available to get the best out of the team. During this period, be aware of the bigger picture. A team member who is a few minutes late one morning may have worked all weekend. It's important to maintain expectations and be consistent in communicating what's expected, but empathy will make a big difference.

#4 Reward and recognition

When planning for peak, consider how to reward and recognise your additional staff. To keep the momentum of peak trading, it's essential to have a team who work well together and who feel motivated and valued. Meet and greet all staff daily, make sure senior management are visible and inform the whole team of business updates to ensure cohesion. It's the detail that counts. Mince pies, chocolates, competitions and a reward scheme that is tangible and valuable. All these things boost morale by making people feel that the company is mucking in together.



#5 Stress and mental health

Peak trading is a pressured time for any business, and particularly for temporary staff who are key to its smooth running. Keep an eye on your full time and temporary staff for any signs of stress which may affect mental health. Ensure that they are taking regular breaks, communicating well and doing a good job. It's tough to be the new person which is why everyone should be made to feel welcome and valued. Know everyone's names, say thank you and nurture a culture of openness.

#6 Don't over promise

Planning for peak trading should involve all business units. Agree your delivery promises with marketing and customer services. In our 'next day' culture, it is important to be competitive in the marketplace but not to over-promise to your customers. Small and scaling businesses in particular need to agree a realistic delivery promise, both from a marketing and an operational standpoint.

#7 Dealing with returns

Whilst the focus of peak trading is getting the orders out as quickly and smoothly as possible, ensure that your returns team and process is in robust shape to deal with incoming items, especially after Black Friday and into early January. Stress test your reverse logistics so that when the pressure is on, customer returns are processed efficiently to get products back in stock.

#8 Mistakes will happen

From under or over recruiting to basic pick/pack errors, accept that mistakes will happen. What is essential is to keep track of any errors so learnings can be implemented for the following year, and to ensure that your team is able to adapt and be flexible. Byron Ross, Head of Operations for WS Ecommerce Solutions Ltd, recalls a Watch Shop peak period beset by lengthy power cuts. Ingenuity saved the day with orders being scanned and printed at a family member's house nearby, packing was moved to an area with natural daylight and a London Underground heavy duty battery was brought in to despatch the orders. The setbacks actually brought the team together and motivated them to succeed. Needless to say, a generator was brought in soon after to ensure the situation couldn't happen again.

“There will be times when things don't go to plan but if you've put the right team in place, you'll be able to get back on track quickly. It's all about a 'can do' attitude.”

Byron Ross, Head of Operations
WS Ecommerce Solutions

Conclusion

The secret to a successful peak trading period is to plan early, make sure everyone understands the objective and the detail, recruit wisely and train thoroughly. Ensure your workforce is motivated and valued by implementing a rewards scheme. Manage people with empathy and clarity. Tune in to the team atmosphere. Listen.

Managing peak trading ops performance is the ultimate in people management. Get this right and the results will speak for themselves.



We are an expert international online retailer and a market leader across luxury, classic and fashion brands. Our retail side of business, Watch Shop, was established in 2007 and now delivers to 70 international markets. We acquired Watch Hut in 2015, further increasing scale. Now a pan-European operation with seven international sites: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Poland and the Netherlands.

WS Ecommerce Solutions was established so you can benefit from our experience and expertise. Based just off junction 10 of the M4 in Reading, we can offer you and your business a bespoke retail-to-retail e-commerce and fulfilment solution. Let us help you scale your business during peak trading and business as usual.



Warehousing and Fulfilment

Flexible storage space in our Reading warehouse. Dedicated goods in team.



White Label Ecommerce Website

We can develop a bespoke full e-commerce website for your business using our mobile first approach, maximising conversion and efficiency.



Platform as a Service

Highly experienced 'in House' development team working with our own proprietary technology platform – Nexiom.



Delivery and Returns

We offer a variety of delivery options and deliver to over 70 countries. We also manage the processing of your returned stock.



Customer Service and Studio

In-house multilingual team can deal with your customer enquiries and returns, scaling for volume traffic and peak periods.



Highly Scalable Hosting

High performance cloud hosted service designed to be fast, reliable and highly scalable.



Operational and Trading Capability

We can offer a variety of services such as taking care of your operation and trading.



Digital Marketing

Strategic digital marketing services including paid search, SEO, affiliate marketing, paid social and programmatic display are available to your business.



Thank you for your interest.
Please get in touch for a no obligation chat about
how we can help your business.

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