

Peak Performance Guide

From AI Answer to Repeat Buyer

The online retailer's end-to-end guide to getting found, converting, and keeping more shoppers during your peak sales season. Discover the practical tips and quick wins you and your team can apply right now.



Earrings for a summer party

AI Recommended



Astra Hoop Earrings -
Silver
\$110

AI Recommended



Solatice Statement
Studs - Mixed Metal
\$85

DA

EARRINGS | NEW ARRIVALS



Astra Hoop Earrings -
Silver
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Studs - Mixed Metal
\$85

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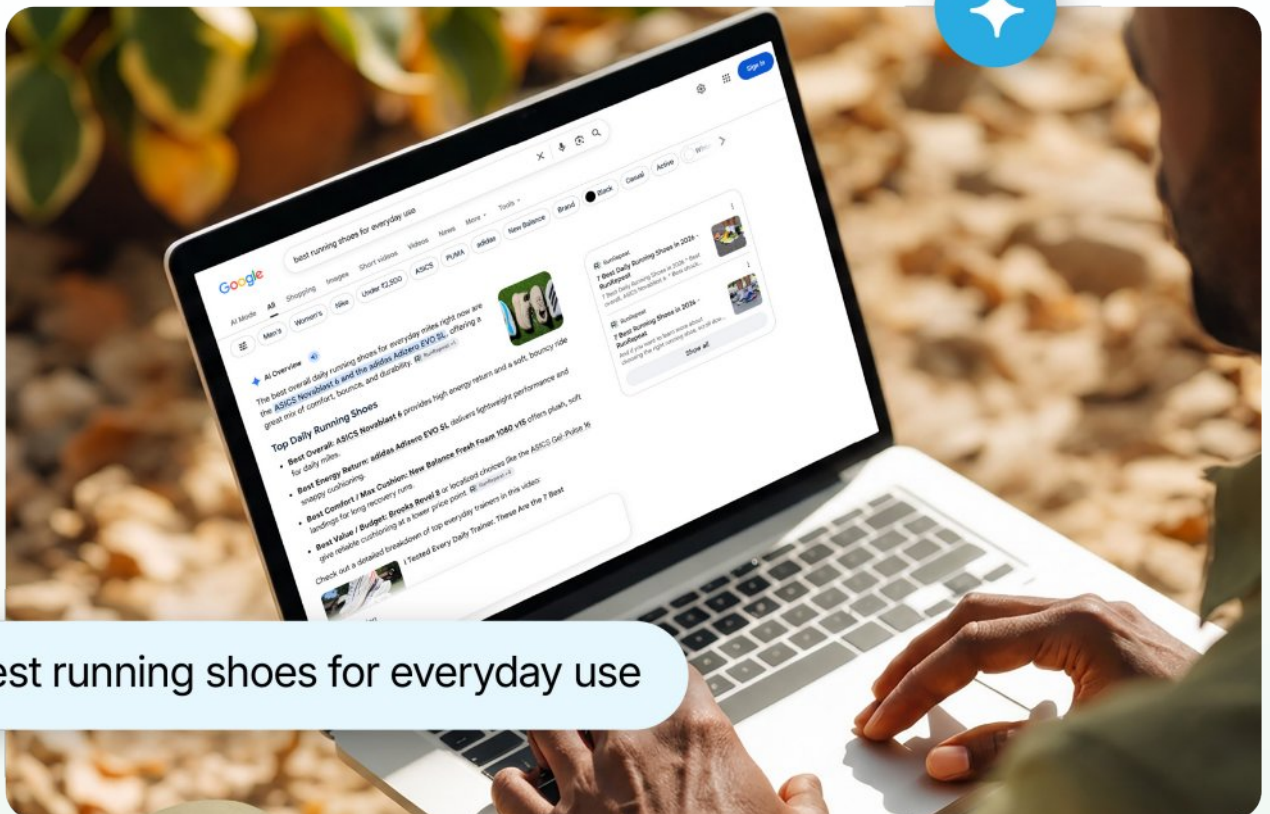
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A new evolution in retail



Best running shoes for everyday use

The two questions that decide your peak

In 1859, a naturalist named Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* and changed how we understand evolution. He spent five years watching finches, fossils, and coastlines, and came back with a single observation. The species that succeed over others are not the biggest or the strongest. They are the ones best adapted to their environment. The ones less well-adjusted fail to prevail.



Online retail is undergoing yet another evolution. On the consumer side, shoppers now discover brands and products in a very different way to even a few years ago. 60% of consumers regularly use the AI overview at the top of organic search results. However, only 1% of the AI-cited sources come from brand-owned websites.¹ What does this mean on the retail side? Despite many brands exploring AI solutions in their tech stack, few are getting found in the AI platforms that shoppers are using.

60%

of consumers now regularly use the AI overview at the top of organic search

1%

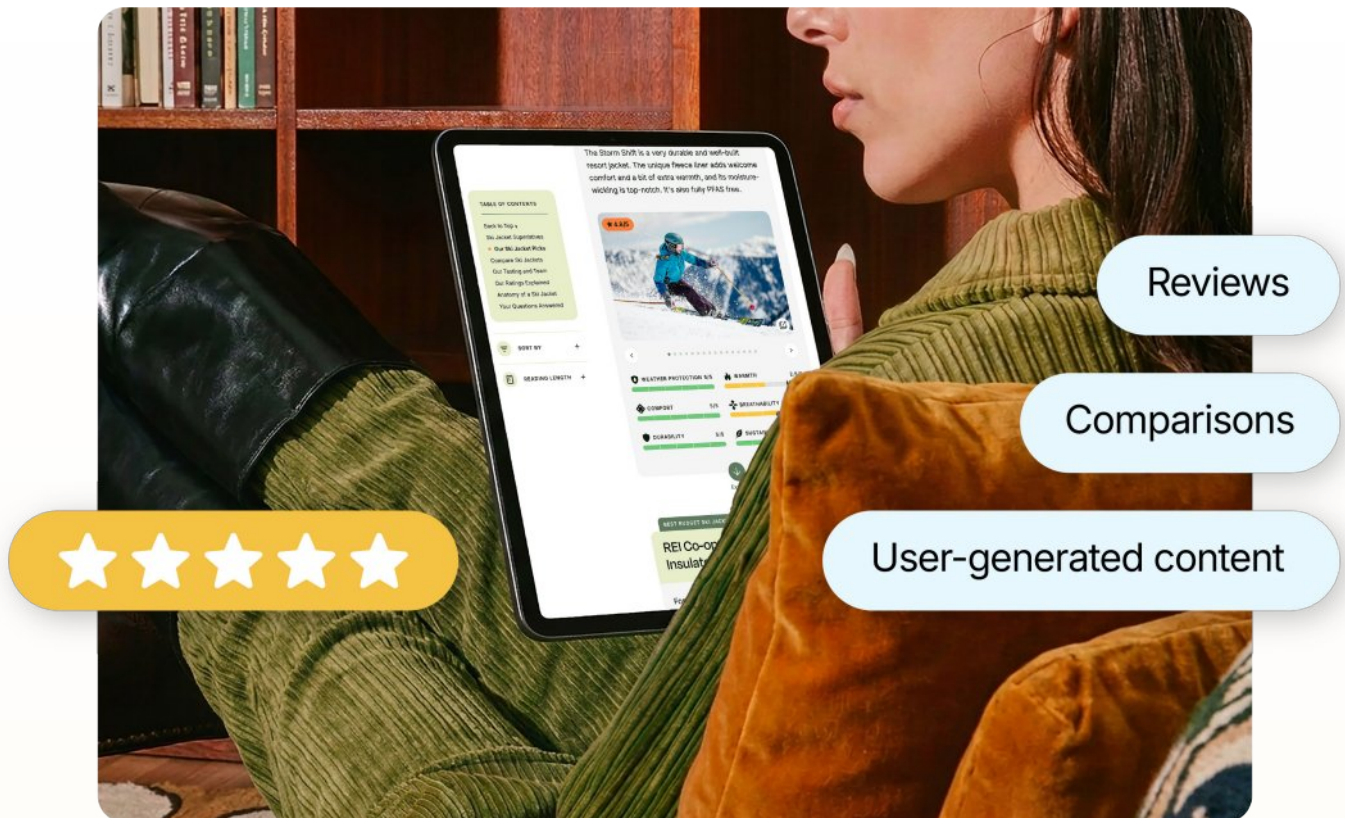
of AI-cited sources come from brand-owned websites, showing why retailers need to extend their off-site visibility

Forward-thinking retailers are already across SEO and GEO strategies to get found in AI answers and organic search. They're automating the foundational layer of product data that feeds those off-site discovery experiences. They're using AI-powered search, merchandising, and personalization on-site to increase conversion and average order value (AOV). And, they're also using AI agents and MCP connections to better understand their audiences, create campaigns faster, and uncover new insights about customers in their databases.

This guide follows that same thread: get discovered off-site, convert on-site, then retain and reconvert after the sale. You'll also find quick wins to apply now, and what to watch during your peak sales period. It's time to dive in, because evolution doesn't wait for the unprepared.

Part 1

Get found off-site



Megantic on SEO and answer engine optimization

Search now runs on two layers of AI, as Megantic sets out in its 2026 Search Landscape analysis.⁸ A visible layer writes the answer, or the AI overview a shopper reads.

An agentic layer works behind it, deciding which sources are trustworthy enough to cite. Advertising budgets alone will no longer guarantee a spot in a Google Shopping recommendations row. Visibility depends on whether machines understand and trust your brand. With ecommerce estimated to hit 21.1% of global retail sales in 2026 and continue climbing in the years ahead, what happens off-site decides how many shoppers reach a retailer's website.³



Trust is a critical ranking factor, and the data shows much of it is earned off-site. Only 1% of the sources AI answers cite come from brand-owned websites.¹ AI algorithms now build a picture of your brand from what the rest of the web says. Reviews, user-generated content, comparisons, and brand mentions carry much more weight here. A thin external presence or inconsistent product details can lower an AI model's confidence in your brand. The result is lost visibility and a slimmer chance of shoppers ever reaching your site.

21.1%

of global retail sales are predicted to come from ecommerce stores in 2026.

AI doesn't crawl your store so much as interpret it. Models read product titles, descriptions, and collection copy to understand context. They map products by type, material, use case, audience, price tier, and other important attributes. Vague copy can cause products to cluster incorrectly or be ignored altogether. Clean, structured product data is what helps retailers show up in a grounded query (where a shopper wants a specific product or price) and an ungrounded one (where the model answers a broad recommendation from memory).

Reviews, user-generated content, comparisons, and brand mentions carry much more weight here.



“ *Whether it’s a human, Google, or an AI system, make sure you disseminate all your information super transparently.* ”



Evan Pavlidis,
Megantic



Quick wins before peak



Make sure AI agents can actually access your store.

Prioritize fast load times, minimal cumulative layout shift, and a published LLMS.txt file. If an AI agent can’t read your site quickly and cleanly, you’re invisible at the exact moment it’s deciding what to recommend to a shopper.



Build dedicated sales collection pages around real search demand.

Create pages around what your customers are actually searching for, rather than leaning on a generic “40% off” banner. Dedicated collection pages give both Google and AI platforms a clear, relevant destination to surface. They also convert better because they match the shopper’s intent.



Label everything, transparently.

Put before-and-after prices in your HTML, use schema, and make discount codes readable by humans, Google, and AI agents alike. When a machine can parse your offer without guessing, it can present it with confidence; a discount hidden until checkout effectively doesn’t exist to AI.



Invest in your off-site reputation.

Encourage reviews, user-generated content, and consistent brand mentions across the web. AI platforms understand trust based on what others say about your brand and products. These earned off-site signals can often decide whether AI recommends you to shoppers.



Add semantic depth to your collections and copy.

Describe products clearly by type, material, use case, audience, and price tier so AI platforms understand the context. Models treat collections as semantic containers. The more completely you fill those containers, the more likely your products are to surface.



What to watch and optimize after peak



Track your visibility in AI answers and organic search.

Watch for non-branded terms you win or lose, and whether you're being cited across AI overviews and platforms once peak traffic settles. Improving your AI visibility starts with measurement.



Protect the collection pages that earned rankings.

Keep your top-performing sale pages live and redirect or repurpose them rather than deleting them after the sale. Deleting a high-ranking page hands back ground that may have taken months to gain. Remove them from navigation but keep them linked internally so they don't become orphaned pages.



Monitor your off-site reputation signals.

Track review volume and sentiment, brand mentions, and third-party listings over time, because these feed the model's confidence in you. A dip in earned signals tends to show up as lost AI visibility well before it shows up in revenue.



Dominate search, everywhere, with Megantic's proprietary AEO toolkit

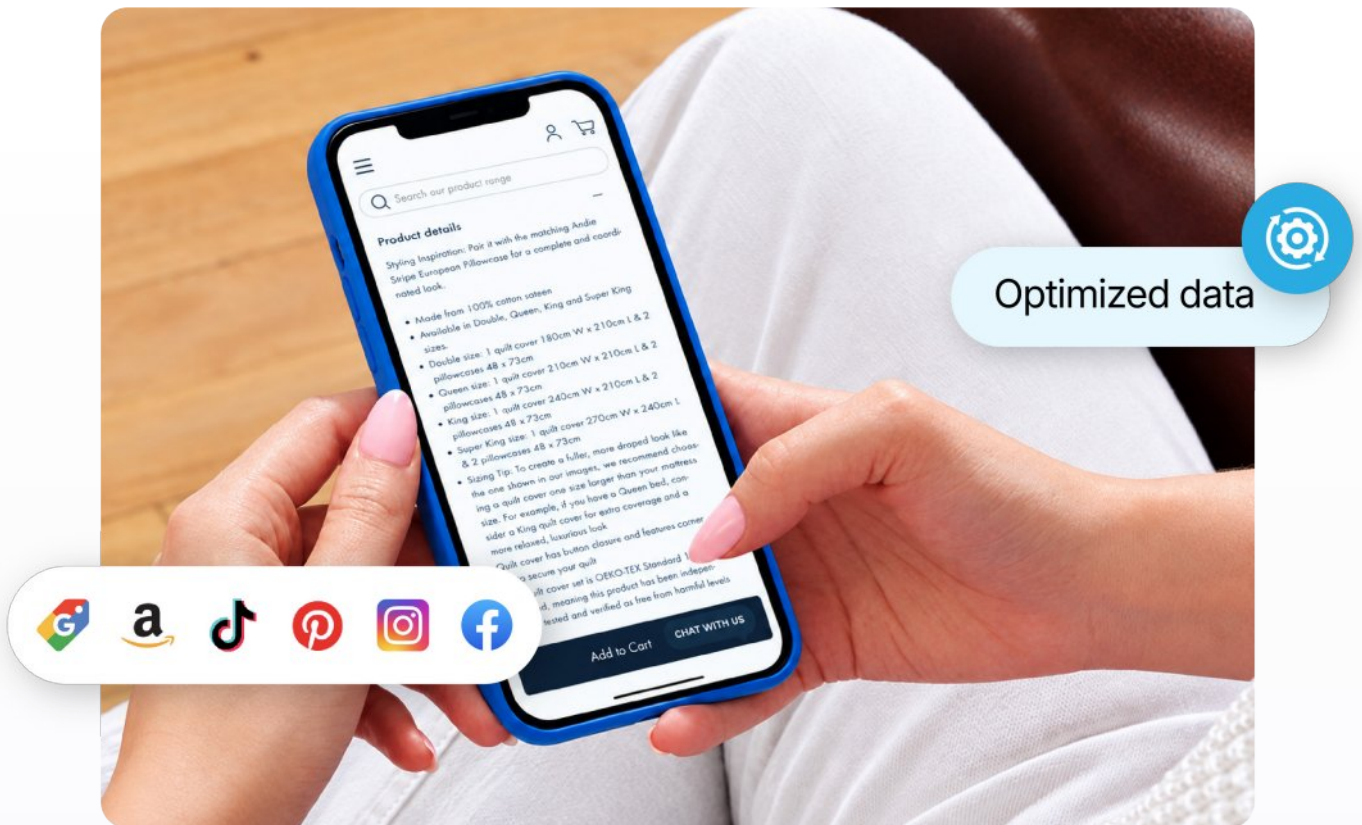
Our technology provides real-time insights, automated analysis, and data-led strategies tailored to your business goals. Take control of how shoppers find you in search and AI answers.

START WITH YOUR COMPLIMENTARY AI VISIBILITY INSIGHTS REPORT



Part 2

Convert on-site



Athos Commerce on turning product data into discovery and conversion

High-quality traffic is only of value when it converts, and product data is the thread carrying that conversion potential. One source of clean, enriched data powers both off-site visibility and the on-site experience.

83%

of the products ChatGPT displays in its shopping carousels come straight from Google Shopping's organic feed.



Off-site, your product data is the raw material AI answers are built from. Around 83% of the products ChatGPT displays in its shopping carousels come straight from Google Shopping's organic feed.⁴ If you search for a broad, non-branded term like "women's hiking shoes," the products showing up in Google Shopping listings are backed by rich, complete product data: image, title, price, availability, reviews, shipping, and local inventory. It doesn't stop at shopping listings, either. Clean, optimized data is what surfaces your products across AI platforms, social commerce, marketplaces, and Google Shopping, so a single investment in your feed compounds across every channel.

However, a few common red flags can hold products back from seeing the light of day:

1. Set-and-forget feeds.

The feed gets built once at launch and then rarely touched again, with no optimization roadmap or cadence to keep it current. If the honest answer to when you last optimized your feed is "at launch," it's already hurting your visibility.

2. Missing core attributes.

Fields like color, material, gender, size, and age group sit blank, which makes a product invisible in shopping results and to AI.

3. Missing audience attributes.

Without signals that relate products to shoppers, like age, size, or gender, AI and ad platforms can struggle to serve them to the right people. Even complete listings can miss the mark without these additional attributes.

4. Siloed teams on different data.

Performance marketing, digital, and ecommerce teams each work from their own version of the product data, so decisions conflict and budget gets wasted.

5. No shared learnings or testing culture.

Teams don't pool what they learn, so a win in one channel never carries across to the others.



Optimized data foundations also enhance the on-site experience. Strong foundational product data connects the dots between on-site search queries and shoppers' intent. 70% of site-search implementations fail on synonym queries, but stronger back-end data can set your online store apart.⁵

Personalization is also table stakes now, with 63% of shoppers wanting hyper-personalized content and rewarding it with repeat visits.⁶ Strong data delivers the right personalized product recommendations for every visitor, while also making automated merchandising more relevant to what shoppers want to see when they visit your site.

“*Your product data is what decides whether you get found and whether you get chosen.*”



Alex Ross,
Athos Commerce

Quick wins before peak



Check approvals and product and audience attributes.

Set the standard for product attributes: color, material, gender, size, and age group. Ensure all products are approved and meet each channel's platform-specific requirements. Missing attributes make products invisible in shopping results and to AI, and audience attributes like age and gender are exactly what match your products to the right shoppers.



Take a phased approach to product data.

Start with your high-impact products and stagger your optimization of product data. Think about the Pareto principle, where your top 20% of products can drive up to 80% of revenue outcomes.



Set an A/B testing and optimization cadence.

Move your feed and on-site experience from “set and forget” to a regular schedule of tests and refinements. Take an honest look at when you last optimized your product feed. Regular optimization, or automated updates if you’re using Athos Commerce, create compounding gains through peak and beyond.



Review your on-site search experience.

Shop on your own website with a use-case in mind rather than a product name. For example, if you’re searching for “yellow mini-dress for a party”, are you seeing relevant results or all yellow products regardless of occasion? Consider applying additional, unique product information in metafield blocks, such as material composition, size charts, or warranty information.



Unify your teams around one source of truth.

Get all your relevant teams working from the same product data and sharing learnings, rather than maintaining different versions. Siloed data drives conflicting decisions and wasted spend, while one source of truth lets every channel pull in the same direction.



What to watch and optimize after peak



Mine your on-site search and merchandising data.

Review zero-result and synonym-failure searches, and the terms that converted against those that didn’t. Every failed search is a shopper who wanted to buy and couldn’t find it, and your search log tells you precisely what to fix next.



Connect product-data completeness to conversion and AOV.

Look for where thin or missing data lines up with weak conversion, and prioritize closing those gaps. Tying data quality to revenue brings a clear picture of what’s costing you sales during peak, and how to optimize for the long-term.



Switch on personalization powered by your product data.

Use the same clean data to tailor search results, recommendations, and merchandising to each shopper. On-site relevance relies on that complete information and directly impacts conversion and AOV.



Book a Discovery Impact Audit

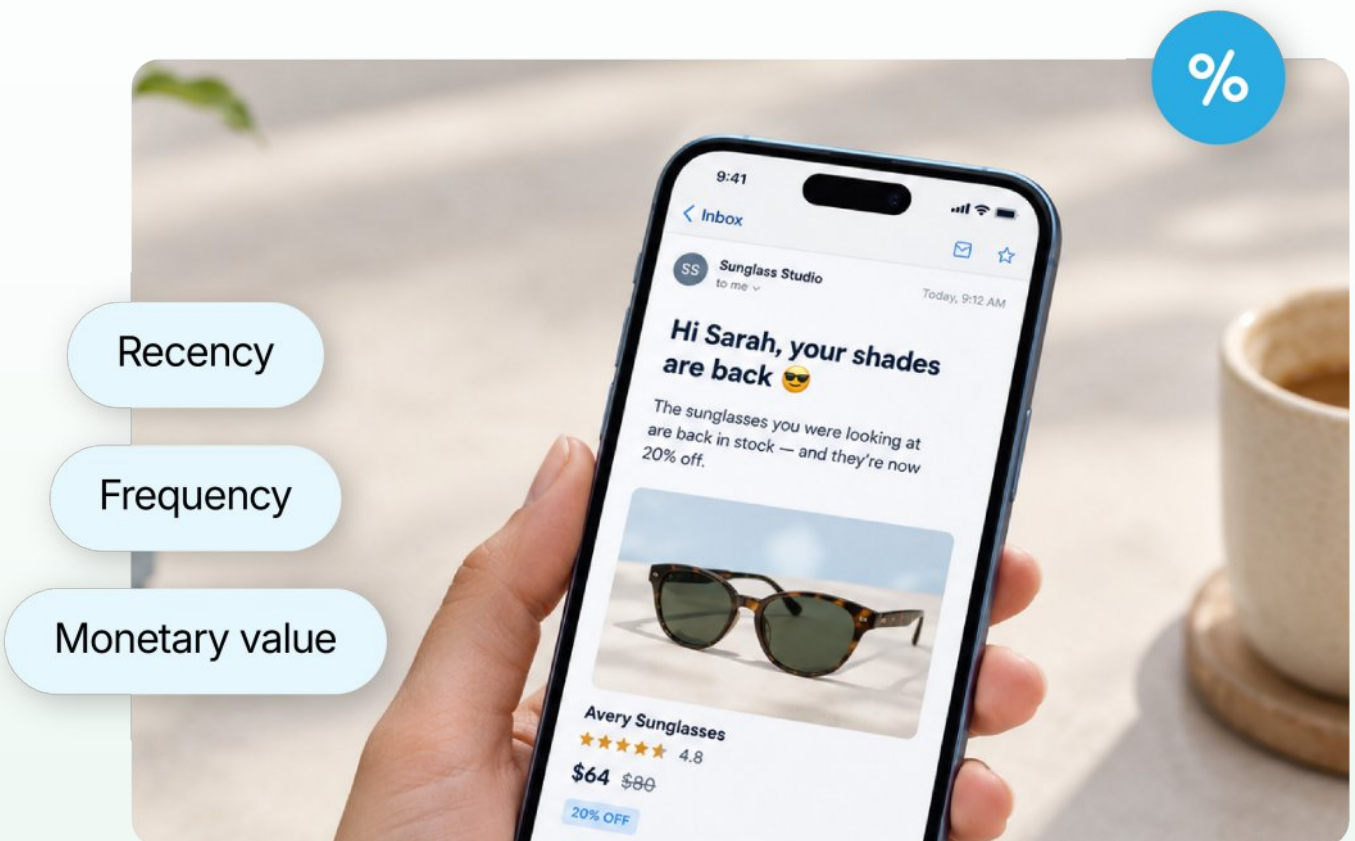
See where clean, enriched product data can lift your off-site visibility and your on-site search, merchandising, and personalization.

BOOK A DISCOVERY IMPACT AUDIT



Part 3

Retain and reconvert after the sale



Dotdigital on RFM and lifecycle flows

A discount alone buys a sale shopper, not a customer, and shoppers are calculated deal-seekers rather than impulse buyers. They're also using AI to find and compare the best deals. In PayPal's Holiday Shopping Survey, 34% of shoppers planned to use AI over the season to find the best deals, with 30% using it to compare products.⁹



With AI-driven deal-finding and product comparisons now fast and accessible, the focus for retailers now falls to bringing shoppers directly back to their site, time and again. Communicating effectively to shoppers is the critical component here, with relevance and personalization front of mind. Dotdigital's global report shows shoppers who feel brand communications are 'just right' fell from 78% to 61% in just one year, with only 15% saying marketing messages are 'very relevant', down from 23% the previous year.⁷ At its core, relevance isn't just about a first name in a subject line. It's about getting the right message to the right shopper at the right moment, backed by deep behavioral data.

Recency, frequency, and monetary value (RFM) modeling enables retailers to understand who within their database is a loyal customer, who's drifting, who's inactive, and who has high future value. The model defines custom boundaries that divide customer data into ranked scores (typically 1 to 5) for Recency, Frequency, and Monetary value. An important call-out is to keep RFM thresholds fluid. A \$50 purchase in February and a \$50 purchase during your peak sales period aren't equal value signals.

Start by identifying the channels on which customers are most willing to hear from you, then bring them back to your website after peak with automated abandoned-browse, cart-recovery, and win-back flows. Also, consider back-in-stock and event-based emails, which inspire around a third of shoppers to reconvert.⁷

Over the holiday season

34%

of shoppers planned to use AI over the season to find the best deals

Over the holiday season

61%

feel brand communications are "just right", down from 78% just one year ago



“*A discount alone buys you a sale shopper and not a customer.*”

Sales Team Lead ANZ,
Dotdigital

Quick wins before peak

Score your base with RFM before the flood hits.

Give every contact a recency, frequency, and monetary score so you know who's loyal, drifting, inactive, or high-potential before peak, not after. Knowing the difference up front lets your automated flows treat a first-time deal-seeker very differently from a loyal, full-price buyer.

Set up an early-access segment now.

Build a segment of your best high-value and dormant customers and proactively communicate sales events ahead of the mainstream rush. Re-activating proven spenders early on can capture revenue at healthier margins, before deeper “last day of sale” discounts.

Map a high-value abandoned-cart flow to customer value.

The moment a shopper abandons their cart, it's a high-intent opportunity you can still recover. Instead of one standard template for everyone, map your cart-recovery flows to your highest-value customers and those showing purchase intent.



Suppress offers that don't align with full-price buyers.

Exclude recent full-price purchasers from your deepest discounts to avoid training loyal customers to wait for a markdown. Protecting margin on people who would have paid full price can be a more profitable tactic than winning a new discounted sale.



Capture peak's anonymous traffic into email.

Use sign-up incentives and back-in-stock and browse triggers to turn unknown, deal-driven visitors into known, contactable subscribers. Email is a proven channel where shoppers are willing to share their details, and it's the perfect place to start your post-sale reconversion strategy.



What to watch and optimize after peak



Work the reconversion segment during the sale period.

Nurture one-time sale shoppers toward a second, full-price purchase before they lapse. There's often a small window to turn sale shoppers into loyal customers. Segment those customers and tailor post-sale flows towards reconversion.



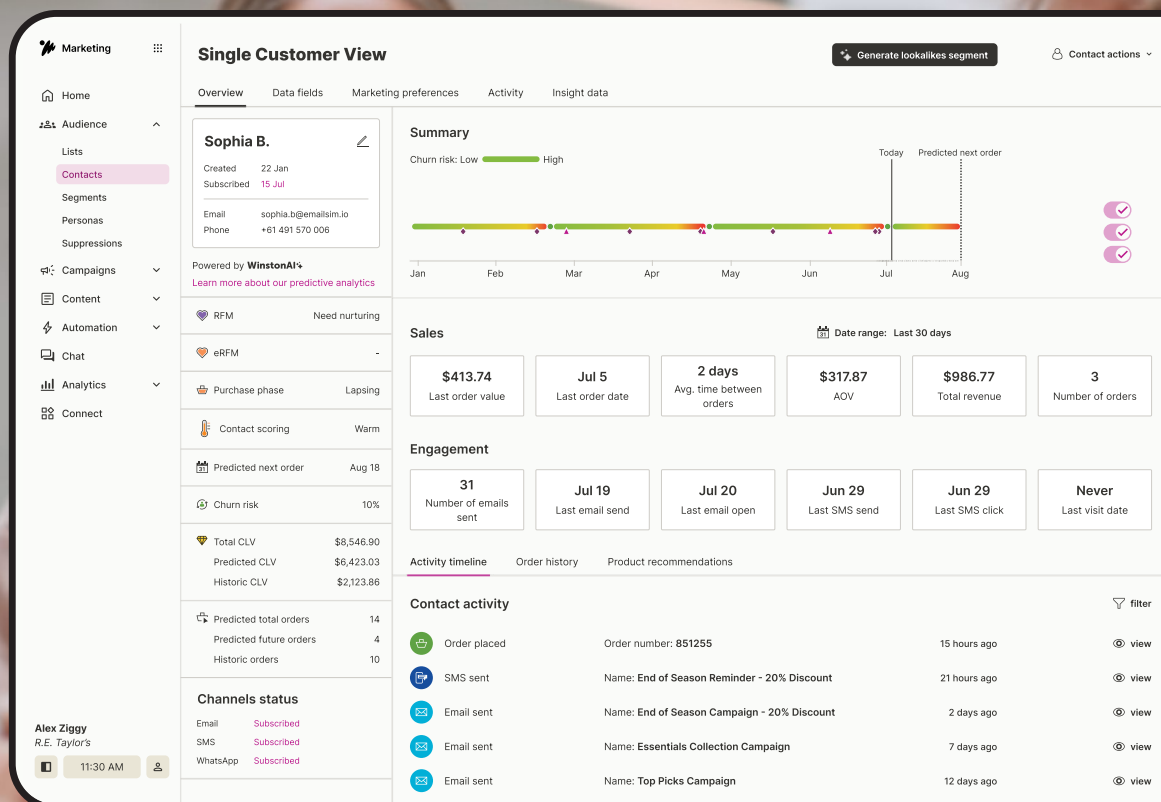
Measure the peak cohort's repeat behavior.

Track repeat-purchase rate, second-order rate, and retention for the peak cohort specifically. These numbers tell you whether peak actually grew your customer base or just rented it for a weekend, and they should feed straight into next year's flows.



Keep your lifecycle automations warm year-round.

Check that back-in-stock, browse, cart, and win-back flows are firing correctly and refreshed after peak. This is your chance to keep your brand and products front-of-mind and stay ahead of shoppers' AI-driven deal-seeking and comparison behaviors.



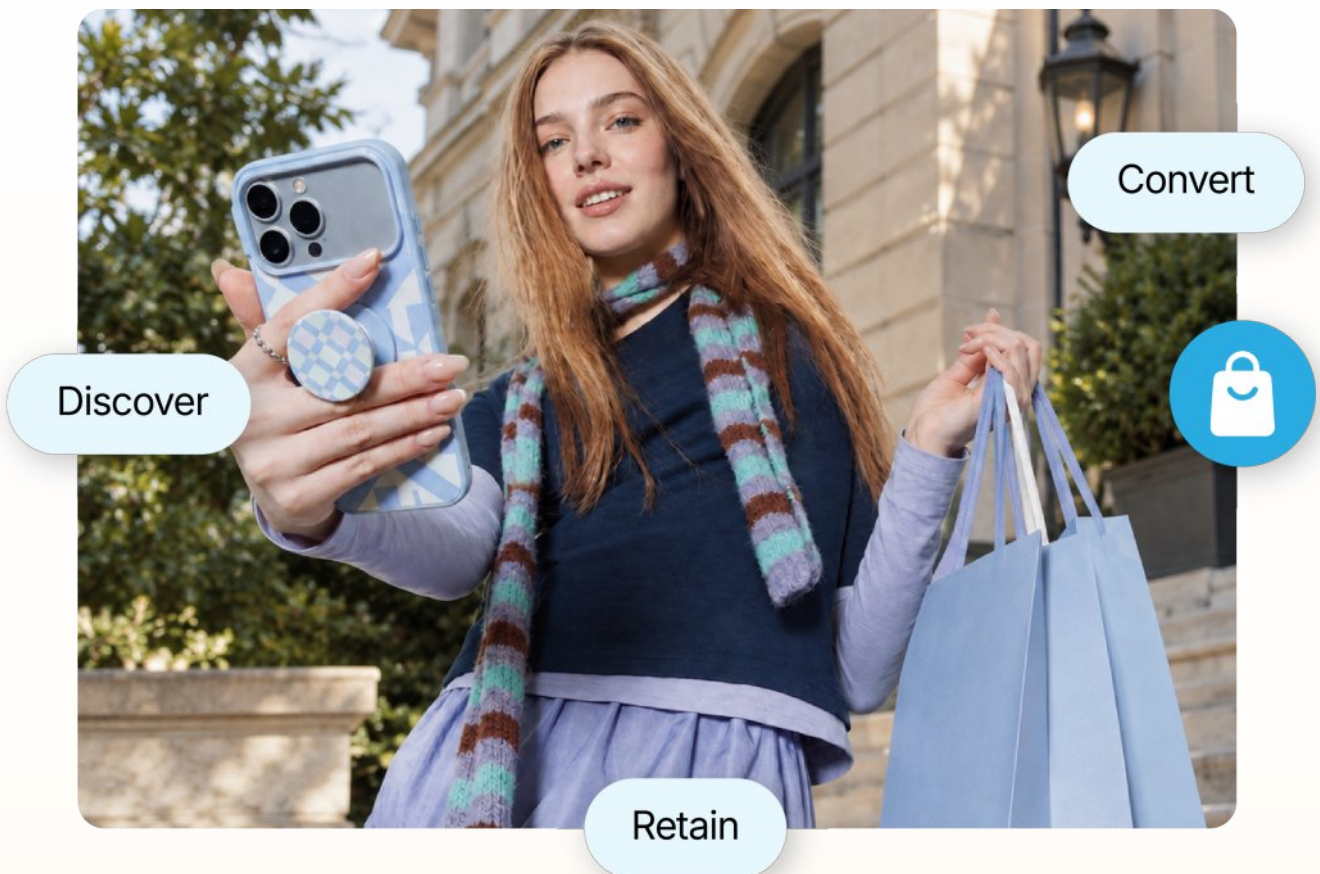
Turn peak traffic into repeat buyers

See how RFM scoring and lifecycle automation, powered by AI agents and MCP connections, turn one-time sale shoppers into full-price, loyal customers.

EXPLORE THE CUSTOMER TRENDS SHAPING RETENTION



Survival of the fittest



The retail environment continues to evolve in-line with AI-first and value-seeking consumer behaviors. In nature, survival of the fittest isn't about being the biggest or strongest. It's about being the most adaptable. In retail, it's no longer the biggest advertising budgets or the boldest discounts that drive revenue. It's about serving shoppers with exceptional experiences using the best tools available.



Get discovered off-site so AI, social channels, marketplaces, and organic search surface you. Convert on-site by turning clean product data into enhanced on-site search, merchandising, and personalization. Then retain and reconvert after the sale by scoring your customer base and building flows that bring sale shoppers back at full price.

\$262B

*of global online holiday spend last year was
AI-influenced, roughly 20% of all sales*

AI influenced around \$262 billion of global online holiday spend last year, roughly 20% of sales,² so the traffic is coming. When shoppers find you, choose you, and return directly to your website, it's proof of thriving, not simply surviving, in the ever-competitive retail jungle.

In retail, it's no longer the biggest advertising budgets or the boldest discounts that drive revenue. It's about serving shoppers with exceptional experiences using the best tools available.



Your peak-readiness checklist

Off-site: get found

- Make sure AI agents can access your store: fast load, minimal layout shift, an LLMS.txt file.
- Build dedicated collection pages around real search demand.
- Label everything with schema and transparent before-and-after pricing.
- Invest in off-site reviews, UGC, and brand mentions.

On-site: convert and lift AOV

- Set an A/B testing and optimization cadence.
- Fill the product and audience attributes that make you visible.
- Unify teams around one source of truth.
- Make sure your on-site search, merch, and personalization experience gives shoppers a reason to come back again.

Post-sale: retain and reconvert

- RFM-score your base and keep thresholds fluid.
- Set up an early-access segment and map a high-value cart-recovery flow.
- Suppress offers that don't align with full-price buyers.
- Capture anonymous traffic into email and plan your reconversion segment.

The landscape has changed, and evolution rewards those who move first. Make sure your brand isn't left standing in the wilderness.

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Hear more insights first-hand

Revisit the on-demand webinar that inspired this eBook. Hear the insights directly from Athos Commerce, Megantic, and Dotdigital panelists.



See it on-demand

FROM AI ANSWER TO REPEAT BUYER: DISCOVERY THAT STICKS PAST PEAK

