

How to compete with the e-commerce giants this Black Friday



By [James Bayhack](#)

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Black Friday shopping mania has been with Mzansi for over 10 years now. SA online retail giant [Takealot launched](#) its first Black Friday sale in 2011, generating a turnover of R1 million. Seven years later, before the pandemic hit, their turnover was almost 200 times that.



Source: [Pexels](#)

South African consumers wasted no time getting behind this global trend. But it's not always smooth sailing for big e-commerce players. Over the years, we've witnessed site crashes, disrupted servers, payment issues, and delivery disasters – not to mention the recent outrage over [inflated prices](#) and discounts in disguise.

But, every year, the popularity of Black Friday and Cyber Monday continues to increase. Last year, FNB recorded spending increases of [up to 19%](#) compared to 2020. Online payment gateway PayFast saw a 30% increase from the previous year in the value of processed transactions. So, it seems, the 'add to cart' extravaganza is here to stay.



South African e-commerce hit its stride this Black Friday

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There's no denying there are many things e-commerce giants get right. But, as always, there's also room for improvement.

If you're gearing up to make the most of this year's Black Friday frenzy, here's what you can learn from the big fish...

Deliver on your promises

Because Black Friday has been around for a while, and because many South African consumers are now also ordering from international retailers, customer expectations are high. Buyers want a seamless shopping experience, and a successful e-commerce organisation should be able to deliver one – especially because technology exists to facilitate easy and convenient online interactions.

If a company promises efficient customer service and an unparalleled shopping experience, consumers are primed to expect the best. It's important to invest in quality technology and infrastructure that can support increased web traffic and sales volumes. Site crashes and payment disruptions will only leave consumers frustrated and disappointed – especially if they're shopping 'on the clock'.

Now, more than ever, it's critical to stick to the prices you advertise. If, in the lead up to Black Friday weekend, a company promises never-before-seen discounts and specials on the majority of their products, they should offer consumers exactly that. Thousands of rands go into promoting Black Friday campaigns and, if customers ultimately come away with a negative impression of a brand, that money will have gone to waste.

Even if you can't offer as much of a discount as the main players, stick to your promises and customers will be satisfied. The last thing you want to incur over the Black Friday weekend is damage to your company's reputation.

While names like Takealot, Yuppiechef, Superbalist, Checkers and Clicks may have the upper hand when it comes to price – largely benefiting from economies of scale and the power to undercut other retailers – there's nothing stopping smaller local businesses from making the most of Black Friday shopping. It's about playing to your strengths.



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Personalise, streamline, simplify

Something the e-commerce experts often overlook is the importance of personalised interactions. This is an area where smaller businesses can thrive, and where customised marketing plays a critical role. Two or three months before Black Friday, think about promoting targeted Instagram or Facebook ads, asking customers to 'opt in' for your WhatsApp channel – because talking to customers on channels they love has proven to be an efficient way to improve the customer experience.

On WhatsApp, you can use chatbot-enabled messaging to find out more about a customer's preferences and interests. Then, closer to the sale weekend, start sharing relevant offers and discount codes via WhatsApp or SMS. This way, the consumer receives targeted information about deals they're interested in, and you learn more about your customer.

Hyper-personalised automated campaigns are easier to initiate than one might think. These days, a single mobile services company should be able to facilitate multiple campaigns for Black Friday over email and SMS, using WhatsApp as a communication support feature. This is something few big e-tailers are offering, giving smaller businesses a chance to stand out from the crowd.

There are also various technologies available to help you streamline and simplify marketing campaigns. Look for martech offerings that will help you communicate personalised offers at a moment's notice.

Another way to improve the online shopping experience is to offer as many payment options as possible. Making the final transaction fuss-free will play a significant role in customer satisfaction, especially on a sale day like Black Friday when shoppers are likely to be spending slightly more. Include options like SnapScan, Zapper, Visa and Mastercard, Ozow, and even credit facilities like PayFlex and Mobicred to cater to a wide range of shoppers.

Something as simple as an SSL certificate can be used to authenticate your site's identity and give customers peace of mind that they're transacting on a secure, credible platform. Just because an e-commerce site is vast, doesn't mean it's foolproof.



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Black Friday and beyond

While these solutions can help make the Black Friday sale weekend that much more successful, businesses should aim to maintain high levels of service and personalisation if they're going to retain loyal customers. Communication tools and automation techniques can help you stay in touch with customers and give them a satisfactory shopping experience time and again.

Think about integrating instant customer service via popular messaging channels, sending important information about things like return policies and payment options well in advance, and focusing on personalisation in every step of the purchase process.

On the biggest online shopping day of the year, smaller players can get ahead by having a deliberate plan of action, and thinking a little laterally. Tech-enabled creativity is the name of this game.

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