BIG ANNOUNCEMENT:

You've unlocked BLACK FRIDAY & CYBER MONDAY marketing tips!

By Kat Dessenon and Dan Gingiss

[PERSADO]

It's the most wonderful time of the year – for retailers and bargain-hunting shoppers, that is. The four days in late November that encompass Black Friday, Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday are often make-or-break for retailers in terms of hitting or exceeding annual sales goals.

According to the Canadian e-commerce company Shopify, merchants on its platform collectively generated more than $1 billion US in sales during those four days last year. Put into further perspective, buyers were placing orders at a rate of 2,800 per minute and spending $1 million per minute at the peak of Black Friday. The top three shopping categories: Apparel, Accessories and Housewares.

Overall, according to Adobe via TechCrunch, last year's Black Friday was a record-breaker for online sales in the U.S. – to the tune of $5 billion. Cyber Monday was even bigger for online sales, which makes sense given its digital focus. Adobe says that it was the largest online sales day in history with sales coming in at a whopping $6.59 billion.

Another incredible statistic: Adobe projects that 58 out of 61 $1 billion+ retail revenue days will occur between November 1 and December 31 this year, with sales totaling $108 billion during that 61-day span.

And which marketing channel drives the most conversions? With apologies to Mark Twain, the reports of email's death are greatly exaggerated.

Email actually led all channels with a conversion rate of 4.29% last year, according to Shopify. Search came in a distant second at 3.04%. And marketers are beginning campaigns weeks ahead of the actual events.

With more than 10,000 marketing campaigns and more than 100 billion impressions delivered by those campaigns, Persado has collected an abundance of data about what works and what doesn't in direct response marketing channels.

In analyzing more than 1,500 messages containing the phrase "Black Friday" or "Cyber Monday," several patterns emerge that can help marketers plan for this critical sales event and avoid contributing to the buyer fatigue that can plague these massive shopping days.

First, our data indicate that it's effective to specifically call out Black Friday and Cyber Monday in marketing, even though buyers are likely to already be aware of the events. In fact, using ALL CAPS to highlight the events in an email subject line has a positive impact during both Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

Second, don't treat Black Friday and Cyber Monday as the same things – they are distinct "holidays." An analysis of the emotional language used in marketing campaigns during this time of year shows that shoppers respond to different emotions on Black Friday than they do on Cyber Monday.

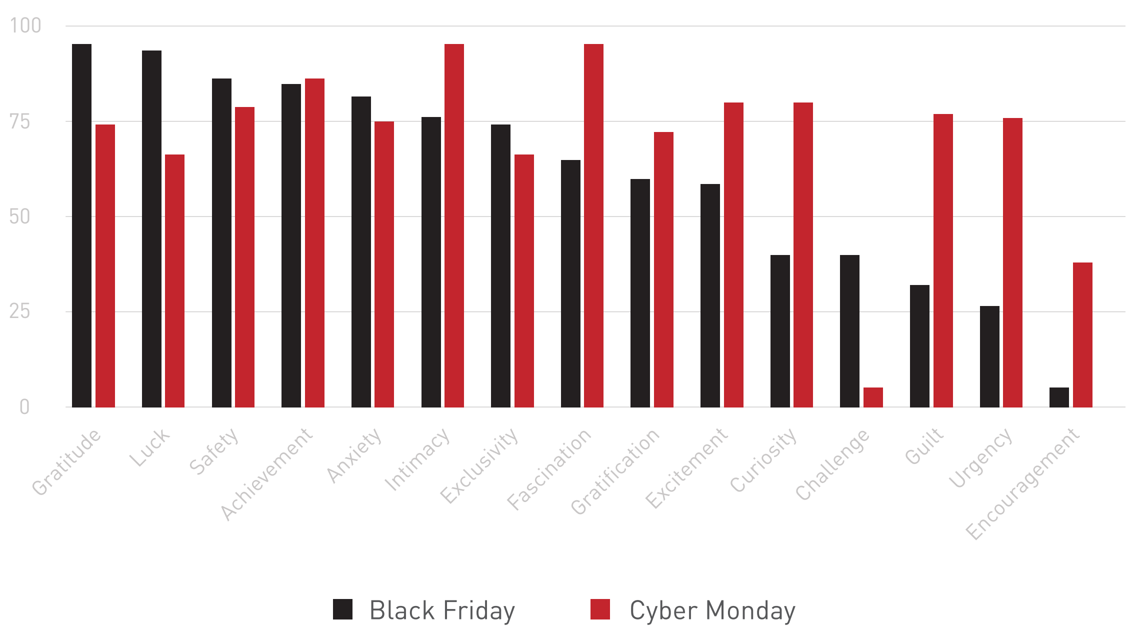
Some quick background: Persado has observed that emotional language contributes an average of 60% to the performance of a message, as compared to other message elements such as descriptive language, calls to action, formatting and positioning. The importance of this contribution is demonstrated by the response variance between the best- and worst-performing messages, which can be as much as 800%.

Persado's language classification with description and example

For Black Friday, the top-performing emotions from 2014 through 2017 were Gratitude, Luck, Safety and Achievement, whereas the worst-performing emotions were Encouragement, Urgency and Guilt. It may be surprising to some that Urgency makes the "bad" list, but consider how many emails in your inbox use this tired technique.

Cyber Monday, on the other hand, favors Intimacy, Fascination and Achievement, with Challenge, Encouragement, Luck and Exclusivity bringing up the rear.

Both Excitement and Fascination performed significantly better on Cyber Monday than on Black Friday. These emotional categories are about announcing something big and new, so perhaps consumers don't feel the fatigue of deals as much on Cyber Monday.



Even within each emotion, the specific words and phrases that resonate with consumers can differ significantly. Consider these examples:

CURIOSITY

Phrases like "it's happening," "now live," and "happening now" perform poorly on Black Friday. However, they are top-ranked for Cyber Monday campaigns, where similar terms like "look what's happening," "something huge is happening," and "it's happening" drive strong engagement.

Black Friday: Bottom Performers

it's happening

now live

happening now

Cyber Monday: Top Performers

it's happening

now live

happening now

look what's happening

something huge is happening

EXCLUSIVITY

Words that "let people in" appear to be more effective for Black Friday than they are for Cyber Monday, perhaps because of the physical nature of Black Friday vs. the online-only nature of Cyber Monday. Phrases such as "Admission granted," "Your access to [deals]" and "This is your ticket in" performed well during Black Friday, whereas similar phrases like "Access granted," "Just for you" and "You're first in line" did not perform well on Cyber Monday.

Black Friday: Top Performers

Admission granted

Your access to [deals]

This is your ticket in

Cyber Monday: Bottom Performers

Access granted

Just for you

You're first in line

ANXIETY

While it isn't as highly-ranked for Cyber Monday, the phrases that work well and don't work well are similar to those on Black Friday: "Alert" and "Big announcement" drove response rates higher, whereas "Attention" and "Reminder" drove responses lower.

Black Friday &
Cyber Monday: Top Performers

Alert

Big announcement

Black Friday &
Cyber Monday: Bottom Performers

Attention

Reminder

URGENCY

In this case, similar values work well for both Black Friday and Cyber Monday: Compelling someone to "open asap" is much more effective than telling them that an offer "ends soon" or that "time's running out."

Black Friday &
Cyber Monday: Top Performer

open asap

Black Friday &
Cyber Monday: Bottom Performers

ends soon

time's running out

Third, don't be afraid to use emojis! Just use them sparingly.

What works:	What doesn't work:	Split decision:
😊 :-)	⌛ ⌚ ⏰	✅ ☑ ✓

Using smiley faces generally performs well for both events, whether you use a symbol (😊) or old-school characters (:-))

Avoid cliched emojis that imply time limitations (⌛, ⌚ , ⏰) as they are not strong performers for either event

Split decision: Checkmarks (✅, ☑, ✓) appear to perform slightly better on Cyber Monday vs Black Friday

For both events, more emojis are not better! Email subject lines that were bookended by symbols lost out to subject lines with no symbols at all. In addition, repeating a symbol (***, $$$) did not positively impact response rates.

Here are some other Do's and Don'ts that our data revealed about marketing on Black Friday and Cyber Monday:

Do: Use coupon codes

Users generally engage well with subject lines that mention coupons, codes, and bonuses for both events. If you can offer a code up (rather than a general sitewide discount) you may be surprised at the response! The secret? Don't be as explicit in your subject line about how much the discount is. Values that contain a specific discount (25% coupon) do not work as well as more generic concepts (promo code).

Do: Use a BIG discount

If you are going to call out how much people will save, you better make it big! Savings greater than 50% are worth mentioning in your subject line. Less than that drives engagement down.

Don't: Supersize it

Consumers don't respond well to oversize adjectives (huge savings, save big, major deals, massive offers). They respond better more enthusiastic ways of describing discounts (amazing, awesome, incredible).

Don't: Put limits on it

Consumers don't engage well when presented with "limited-time offers" or "limited quantities available." It could be that they don't want to open or click because they assume they've already missed out on the deal. Similarly, "supplies are limited" and "while supplies last" are ineffective at generating customer responses.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

[PERSADO]

A large electronics retailer used Persado to generate the perfect message for its Black Friday sale email campaign. Starting with the company's control message, Persado tested multiple variations of the message, exploring six different emotions.

CONTROL MESSAGE:

> Black Friday Presale is almost over.
> See the deals. ▶

EMOTIONS EXPLORED
IN THIS EXPERIMENT

ALTERNATIVE MESSAGE #1:

> **Special announcement:** BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE **confirmed** - Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics ▶

ALTERNATIVE MESSAGE #2:

> **Special announcement:** BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE **confirmed** ▶

The main difference between the two alternative messages was the specificity of the offer, namely detailing the products on sale.

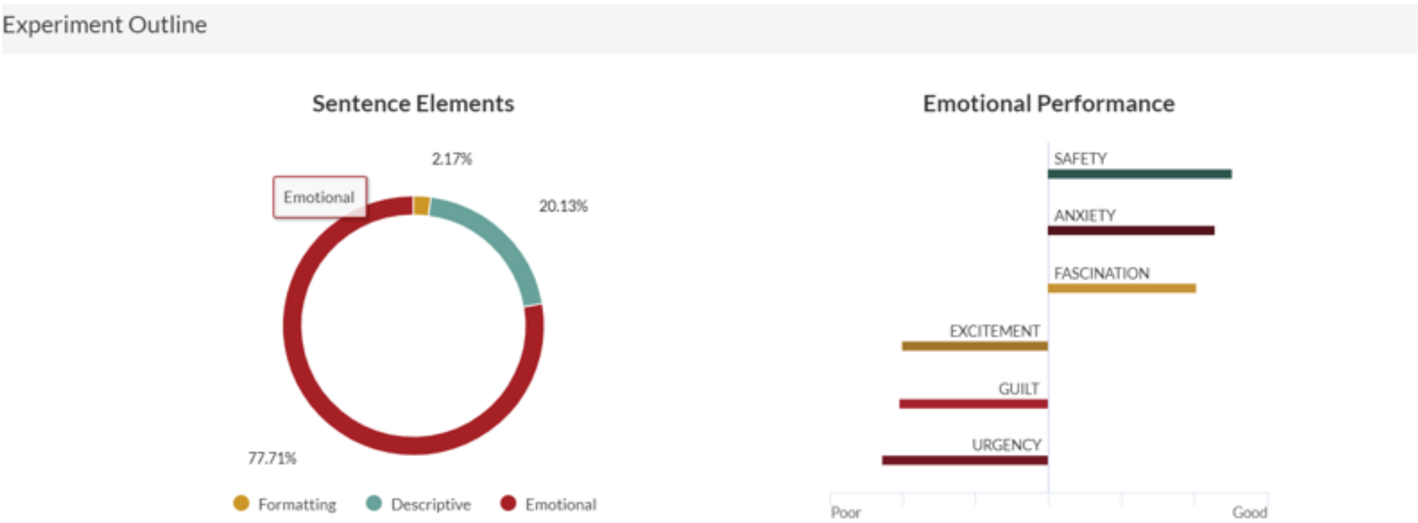
After in-market testing, it was determined that the offer specificity did not contribute much to the results, and Alternative Message #2 was declared the winner, handily beating the control. "Special announcement: BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE confirmed ▶" was a statistically superior subject line that incorporated a combination of the Anxiety and Safety emotions.

The client's results were incredible, with the retailer seeing an open lift of **10.72%**, a click lift of **31.09%** and a huge conversion lift of **184.82%** – leading to an overall revenue lift of **395.25%**!

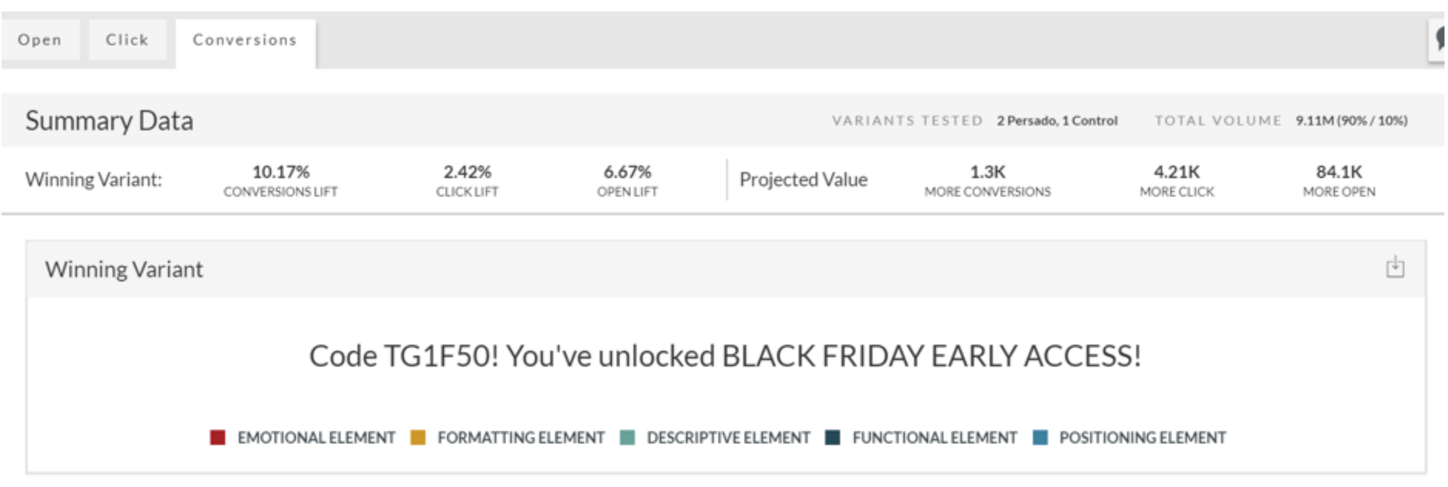
WINNING VARIANT:

184.82%	31.09%	395.25%	10.72%
CONVERSION LIFT	CLICK LIFT	REVENUE LIFT	OPEN LIFT

We also provided the client with insights into why the winning message won. In this case, the emotional language components contributed 77.71% to the results, above the campaign average of 60%. The descriptive language components ("BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE") contributed most of the remaining lift, with the formatting (ALL CAPS) not making much of a difference – only 2.17%.



Similarly, a major fashion retailer identified this winning email subject line for Black Friday using Persado's technology:



Notice the specific coupon code, the mention of Black Friday, and the use of ALL CAPS – three things we've identified as driving higher response rates. This subject line defeated a computer-generated alternate: "50% OFF: BLACK FRIDAY EARLY ACCESS UNLOCKED" and crushed the company's control message: "EARLY (50% off) ACCESS".

So how does it work? Let's look at one final example.

We start with all 16 variants.

Starting now: The Black Friday Presale you waited for

Starting now: Please don't pass up Super Low Prices – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Starting now: We're excited to present our PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Starting now: BLACK FRIDAY SPECIAL confirmed – Massive savings!

We're excited to present our Black Friday Presale – Massive savings!

Super Low Prices confirmed – Up to $1,000 OFF!

The PRESALE you waited for – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Please don't pass up the BLACK FRIDAY SPECIAL

Special announcement: BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE confirmed – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Special announcement: We're excited to present our SUPER LOW PRICES

Special announcement: Please don't pass up the Presale – Massive savings!

Special announcement: The Black Friday special you waited for – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Seriously: Please don't pass up the BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Seriously: The SUPER LOW PRICES you waited for – Massive savings!

Seriously: Presale confirmed

Seriously: We're excited to present our Black Friday special – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Then, we detect which phrases & elements make the most impact

Starting now: The Black Friday Presale you waited for

Starting now: Please don't pass up Super Low Prices – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Starting now: We're excited to present our PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Starting now: BLACK FRIDAY SPECIAL confirmed – Massive savings!

We're excited to present our Black Friday Presale – Massive savings!

Super Low Prices confirmed – Up to $1,000 OFF!

The PRESALE you waited for – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Please don't pass up the BLACK FRIDAY SPECIAL

Special announcement: BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE confirmed – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Special announcement: We're excited to present our SUPER LOW PRICES

Special announcement: Please don't pass up the Presale – Massive savings!

Special announcement: The Black Friday special you waited for – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Seriously: Please don't pass up the BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Seriously: The SUPER LOW PRICES you waited for – Massive savings!

Seriously: Presale confirmed

Seriously: We're excited to present our Black Friday special – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

...and ditch the phrases that fall flat.

We rearrange everything for optimal positioning...

Starting now: The Black Friday Presale you waited for

Starting now: We're excited to present our PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

We're excited to present our Black Friday Presale – Massive savings!

Special announcement: BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE confirmed – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

Special announcement: We're excited to present our SUPER LOW PRICES

Seriously: Please don't pass up the BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE – Up to $1,000 OFF!

Seriously: The SUPER LOW PRICES you waited for – Massive savings!

Seriously: Presale confirmed

Seriously: We're excited to present our Black Friday special – Limited-time deals on PCs & Electronics

And... voilà: we've generated your Scientifically Superior Message! ↑8%

Seriously: we're excited to present our BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE

The system also tells clients the relative contribution of each element of the message, giving objective, statistical weight to internal debates that inevitably occur about messaging. So in the email subject line below, the word "Seriously" has the strongest contribution to Response Rate, with "we're excited to present our" having moderate contribution, and "BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE" having low contribution. The takeaway? Every campaign is different!

Best Predicted Message

Seriously: we're excited to present our BLACK FRIDAY PRESALE

STRONGEST CONTRIBUTION TO RR   MODERATE CONTRIBUTION TO RR   LOW CONTRIBUTION TO RR   WEAK TO NO CONTRIBUTION TO RR

Want to know which emotions you are currently using and whether they are effective? Get a free personalized marketing assessment to see if Persado can help you crush your next Black Friday or Cyber Monday campaign!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kat Dessenon

Kat Dessenon Vice President Campaign Management, North America at Persado. Over the past seven years, she has designed thousands of marketing experiments in nine languages for Persado's clients and now leads a team of 17 to deliver compelling, on-brand content to increase customer engagement. She firmly believes in the power of testing to improve performance. Her past work has taken her all over the United States and beyond—from San Francisco, CA to Athens, Greece—and she now resides in New York City where she spends equal time in the gym and scrolling through the Gmail's Promotions tab for inspiration (sometimes simultaneously). She holds a BA in English from Douglass College.

Dan Gingiss

Dan Gingiss is Vice President, Content Marketing at Persado. His 20-year career has consistently focused on delighting customers, spanning multiple disciplines including marketing, customer experience, social media, and customer service. He has held leadership roles at several big brands, including McDonald's, Humana, and Discover – and is even a two-time Persado client. He is the author of the book, Winning at Social Customer Care: How Top Brands Create Engaging Experiences on Social Media, and is the co-host of the Experience This! podcast. Dan has a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

ABOUT PERSADO

Persado revolutionizes the way marketing content is created by applying data and machine learning, not guesswork, to produce jaw-dropping results.

Persado delivers content to the world's leading brands, helping marketers drive meaningful results and build stronger customer relationships.

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