

Back to School Shifts Online for 2020

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[eCommerce Trends](#), [Email Marketing](#)

Three little words define yearly delight for both parents and marketers: back to school. The challenge this year is defining what that means in practical terms when the persistence of the pandemic prevents us from getting back to normal. Though it's not marked as an event on a calendar, shopping for back to school ranks right behind holiday shopping. The National Retail Foundation ([NRF](#)) calls it "retail's second biggest spending event of the year."

That holds true under the old normal and even more so under the new normal. Back to school means a lot more business for eCommerce this year.

The smart money is on data-driven back-to-school marketing, this year more than ever. Reach out to your customers now to make the most of this opportunity.

Spending is way up this year

This is the first year in which back to school spending will exceed \$100 billion, according to [NRF](#) as it hits \$101.6 billion. That represents a huge jump in sales to the tune of \$19.9 billion more than last year.

Elementary and high school spending is anticipated to total \$33.9 billion, a substantial increase over last year's \$26.2 billion, and also a sizable increase of the record of \$30.3 billion set back in 2012.

College spending is to be more than double that. With the average family spending amounting to \$1059, it all adds up to \$67.7 billion, quite a jump from the \$54.5 billion for last year.

What's behind the 2020 spending boom

Why are parents expecting to spend more this year than last year? The uncertainty that persists combined with many schools opting for at least some remote learning setup is prompting parents to purchase whatever tools they think will improve their children's educational experience.

As nearly ¾ of parents expect most or all of their children's classes will take place at home, they are set to purchase the same kind of things people have to set themselves up for working from home, not just computer equipment and accessories but chairs and desks to work at, as well as school-specific items like workbooks.

While this is good news for retailers in general, it's even better news for eCommerce. Across both K-12 and college shopping, more purchases are taking place online. The findings of the [2020](#)

[Deloitte back-to-school survey](#) concur that online purchases are boosted by the fact that 50% of customers are still hesitant to do their shopping at brick-and-mortar stores.



5 tips for online sales for the season

To make the most of this shopping season, meet your customers on their terms. Draw on both your own data and data on trends to optimize sales.

1. Set your campaigns now.

The back to school season varies around the country. Some schools resume in early August and others only after Labor Day. While no single date fits all, it pays to market early because the majority of parents begin their shopping over a month ahead of their school's reopening.

2. Know what's driving purchase decisions.

Like customers in general, those shopping for school needs are very price-driven. That remains the primary consideration for 82%, according to Deloitte. To target these customers, offer [promotions and coupons](#).

But remember, price is not all that matters to customers. Convenience is a very close second concern, cited by 80%. Concerns about the right product are right behind that, referenced by 70%.

For 2020, though, there is a new category of concern: that of safety. Deloitte found 59% of shoppers expressed concern about maintaining a safe shop experience. For tips on offering the assurance customers crave, see [The Right Tone For Communicating With Customers During a Crisis](#).

3. Show your customers that you can meet their needs.

You want them to know that you've got them covered, whether they are going back to school like last year or adapting to remote learning or a hybrid solution,

To be sure to tailor your messaging to reach the right segments, allow your customers to identify their own expectations about school needs, and then deliver them to the right landing pages. They may even lead to some of the same products — just in different contexts.

For example, you can show a desk organizer either as an item on the list for the dorm or a must-have at home when you are attending remotely.

For students who will be attending classes in person, likely masks will be required, and all kinds of retailers are now carrying that item as not just necessity but fashion.

4. Become a helpful resource.

This is an opportunity to serve as a resource to help your customers get what they need and offer organizing tips.

While many sellers would only list their own products, that is very obviously salesy. Do your customers a favor by being thorough enough to include whatever they need. You'll be repaid in trust and a stronger relationship.

You can draw on your own data here by letting new college students know what college students usually order from you and offer them recommendations for both individual products and bundles of things that go together — like accessories for the computer or all the items needed to make a dorm room like home.

5. Customize for a personal touch.

While general tips and lists can be good, personalized ones are even better.

Drawing on your customer's purchase history, you can see what they bought last year and offer similar products in this year's versions. You can then offer them a personalized list to remind them of what they might want to order now.

This approach can even extend to things beyond standard school products. For example, you can send an email reminding them to be sure to get a set of their favorite skincare products for the dorm.

In conclusion, while preparing a checklist for your customers, also check off your own list to design data-driven marketing campaigns. Remarkety's platform helps you access that data and deliver your messaging effectively to make the most of the back to school season.

