



Prep Your Grocery Store for the Holidays, Now

by Elizabeth Harvey

What do you see when you close your eyes and picture your grocery store during the end-of-year holidays?

Are your rosy-cheeked customers happily loading their shopping carts while singing and sipping hot cocoa? Every shelf is fully stocked, endcaps are abundant, and customers can't wait to shout from the rooftops how your grocery store is THE one-stop shop for the Most Wonderful Time Of The Year.

OR

Are your enraged customers turning on each other in long lines, complaining about empty shelves? Maybe your butcher under-ordered organic turkeys. Maybe a blizzard has shut down your inventory flow and you're ridiculously short-staffed.

Deep breath. There's still time to manifest the 1st scenario.

Planning for the holiday rush in the summer gives your grocery staff the runway they need to confidently navigate the "holidayze."

Create your store's holiday prep list now, to get everything tied in a bow before the season arrives.

We created this guide to help you get a jump on your holiday planning checklist, and so your grocery business can slay all season long:

- The holidays are the ultimate "Go Time"
- 7 ways to prep your grocery store for the holidays
- Automation eases the holiday crunch for grocery stores
- Grocery stores who plan now can crush their holiday rush



The holidays are the ultimate “Go Time”

Just like pro football players gear up for the actual Super Bowl, savvy grocery businesses prep for their Super Bowl – the November/December holidays. Instead of a single game, though, the holidays put supermarkets through their literal paces. Imagine running a string of marathons from Thanksgiving straight through to New Year’s Day, and you’ll better understand what it feels like to be a grocery store clerk, produce stocker, butcher or specialty foods buyer.

The holiday season brings the hustle.

You already know. It’s the busiest time of the year for retail food folk— independent grocery stores and major chains alike. But that means major opportunities for your grocery business to shine by planning ahead.

Prepping for the holiday rush during the summer lets you get your grocery ducks in a row so your floor staff can dish out exceptional customer experiences when it matters. Boost your store’s profits with intention. (That’s right, we’re looking at you, debt to equity ratio.)

A man wearing a red baseball cap and a red shirt is shown in profile, looking down and writing in a notebook. He is holding a pen in his right hand. The background is a blurred grocery store aisle with shelves and a shopping cart. The entire image has a blue tint.

7 ways to prep your grocery store for the holidays

Let's break down exactly how you can use the summer months to position your grocery store for a profitable Thanksgiving-through-New-Year season.

#1

Don't let the holiday rush sneak up on you

Look, you know it's coming. Every. Single. Year. The erratic shoppers, the desperation on the dairy aisle. The holidays are wild and woolly, and it's not just because egg nog drives people batty. A grocery store can be therapeutic for some, and a deeply personal "third space" to others. Add to that the emotional toll that the holidays take on people, and the scales tip toward a charged situation that grocery retailers stand to profit handsomely from—provided they prepare to accurately, promptly and enthusiastically meet their customers' needs during the holiday rush.



The Wednesday before Thanksgiving brings a **70-90% jump** in grocery traffic



Source: Grocery Dive

Track your holiday busy times.

Sneak a peek at last year's data. When were your busy days & times? Map out a plan accordingly, making contingency plans for adequate staffing, shelf stocking, regular cleaning schedules, and demo planning.

For example, according to a Grocery Dive Brief, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving (Turkey Wednesday) brings a 70-90% jump in baseline traffic to grocery stores. You want to be ready when the crowds hit.

Beef up your staffing.

Start planning your staffing strategy NOW to be ready before the holidays are in full swing. Plan for how many staff members you'll need on the schedule during each shift (accounting for rush hours).

Once you know your numbers, you can spend the summer months hiring and prepping your staff for the kickoff of the holidays

Research where to find quality part-time staff, specifically those who will stick around for November. If you happen to be hiring for Admin positions, be sure to emphasize the importance of all-hands-on-deck-in-Q4. Yes, even to that grocery store accountant job description.

Thanksgiving should be the main event on every staff member's work calendar. Better still, make sure NEXT year's Thanksgiving is also on everyone's event horizon. Rotate who gets the holiday off this year, and who can expect to take PTO next year.

Plan ahead for fully stocked shelves.

Plan out your ordering now to ensure you have plenty of stock — especially the traditional popular items (turkey, cranberry sauce, sparkling cider, champagne...)



You want to see a stressed-out customer lose their mind?

Tell them they have to wait for the next canned pumpkin delivery. Or that your distributor shorted you on eggnog. Or that you just sold your last Tofurky.

Put together this year's holiday ordering plan by reviewing your historical financial data. You want to look at the last three years. Find out your past COGS (cost of goods sold) to plan how to stock your shelves for the grocery holiday rush.

Easy access to the above info is EVERYTHING.

If you can't put your hands on the reports that show which items sold and for how much, you'll be shooting in the dark.

Plate IQ helps with automation and gives you easy access to past invoices and product prices to help you plan for the future.

#2

Know what's hot and what's not

Each holiday has certain in-demand items that folks buy year after year— fried onions for green bean casseroles, yams and marshmallows, roasted chestnuts, and whatever local ingredients are required for stuffing or “dressing.”

But holiday trends vary.

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You've got to know what the “it” items are, so you can get them in your store, on your shelves, and ready for your shoppers. Skip this important step, and you risk losing your shoppers to online markets.

Currently trending holiday items are usually easy to spot in advance if you keep an eye on Bon Appetite spreads and Food & Wine articles.

Another authority on food trends is Melanie Bartelme, a Global Food Analyst at Mintel, who dishes out insight on global innovation and consumer trends in food.

Drill down further to really serve your specific customer base by providing what they need — for example, extended grocery delivery hours or ready-to-eat weekday dinners to make life easier when relatives come to visit.

In July, send out a survey to your email list to discover what items are important to your customers during the holidays. This will help you plan and engage your current customers.

Offer some kind of countdown-to-the-holidays, maybe a date tracker or a list of tasks to tick off their list, in advance of the great Pumpkin Spice takeover.



#3

Prep your store

Now's the time to begin planning for the grocery holiday rush.

Music & aromas get customers in the mood to shop

Plan to pipe in holiday tunes & smells to enhance your customers' experience and prime them for purchasing.

Cleaning

You may need to increase or rearrange cleaning schedules & crews to accommodate the crowds. Remember, it doesn't matter how busy you are, a clean store is a top priority.

Fully stocked shelves

The holiday rush means shoppers are emptying your shelves of pumpkin, fresh herbs, and pie crusts regularly. How will you get those items restocked on the double?

If the weather outside is frightful

Plan to accommodate shoppers and your staff that are pushing carts or carrying curbside orders in inclement weather.





#4

It's all about the inventory

Let's face it. Inventory is everything.

Is it better to have more than you need, or not enough to meet your shoppers' needs?

Spoiler alert — it's the former (everyday of the week and twice on Sundays).

With the proper inventory to sell, managing the holiday supermarket rush won't be an issue. Grocers who plan ahead for the holidays can avoid the nightmare of stockouts. And you don't have to be a yahoo finance wizard to keep ahead of the game, either.

Follow these guidelines to secure your store's holiday inventory:

1. Commit to stellar, advanced communication between you and your grocery distributors and local vendors.
2. Order early to have plenty of inventory on hand. Plate IQ can help with forecasting, determining what you'll need, and even expense management and invoice tracking.
3. Purchase as much as you can, as early as possible. Then promote the heck out of non-perishables, in advance of the major holidays. Your shoppers will thank you for reminding them to buy extra TP for when the relatives come to visit. And your grocery store will survive the inevitable shipping delays that happen around the holidays.
1. Lock in prices now for popular items by working with your distributors.
2. Pay attention to trends when ordering for the upcoming holidays.
3. Plan your budget & ordering in July for a smooth holiday season. We know, we know — it's hard to rip yourself away from bbq and watermelon. But your inventory turnover ratio will thank you...
4. Talk to your vendors about early ordering, and what their supply chain looks like.





of grocers agree consumers' expectations for digital integration have increased greatly over the past year

Source: Progressive Grocer

#5

Stay on top of digital trends

In fact, the new omnichannel consumer (shoppers who regularly shop both online & in-store) digital integration expectations have increased greatly over the past year, according to 27% of grocers in a Progressive Grocer survey.

To ensure your grocery store business thrives during the holidays, keep your ear to the ground and stay up on the latest digital trends.

Once you find the digital trends that are best for your grocery business, implement them immediately so that they're running smoothly by the time the holiday rush is upon you.

Similarly, avoid implementing any new systems in November or December. The lift is just too heavy for your staff — you'll have better success in January.

Here are a few digital upgrades to incorporate now, before the fall frenzy:

1. App ordering or online ordering
2. "Mobile check out" on your store's app or website
3. Invoice automation

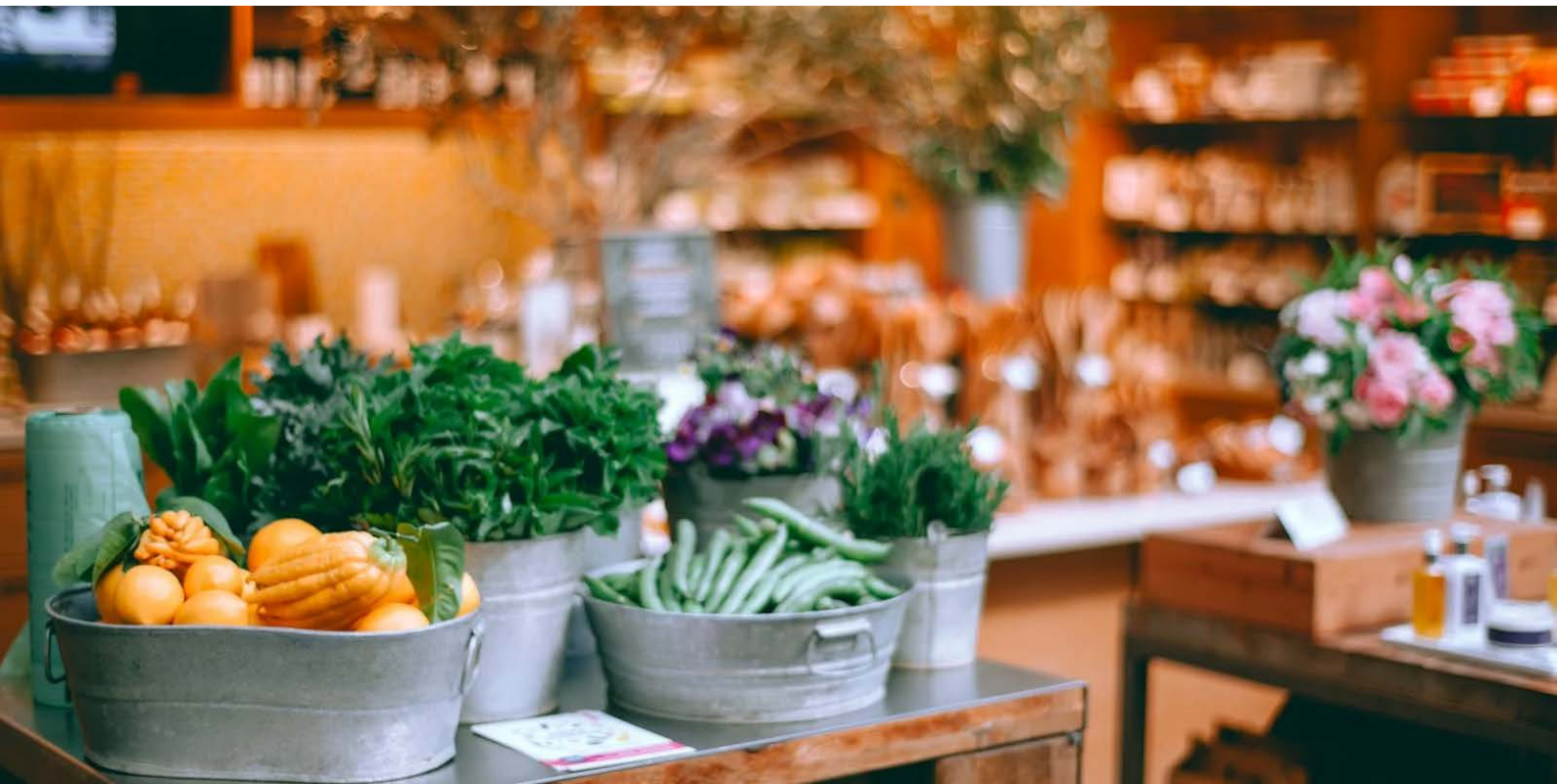
#6

Plan & Prep Staff

According to The Shelby Report, employee turnover in grocery stores costs \$67,000 annually, per store. Maintaining employees' morale during the busy holiday season will be key to mitigating staff shortages.

Your grocery business's staff is a direct reflection of your store. Proactively address potential staffing issues to ready your store for the busy holiday.

1. Pad your staff schedule according to your busy times
2. Allocate staff for filling online pickup orders & executing delivery
3. Manage out-of-stocks issues in advance, by scheduling more floor staff to stock shelves and account for the warehouse inventory
4. Prepare your staff for the crowds & train them on how to handle customers
5. Set expectations with your staff about what the holiday season will look like
6. Bring in grab & go snacks and hydrating drinks for your employees during the holiday rush, to boost immune systems and morale
7. Bonus: Gamify your staff's performance by tracking daily revenue during the busiest weeks; keep a scoreboard in the break room, and consider other ways to make everyone feel valued



#7

Plan to manage your traffic flow

While you can't avoid crowds in your store during the holiday rush hour, you can plan ahead to manage the flow of traffic around your store.

Encourage customers to come to the store when it's not normally busy. You can do this by advertising strategically-timed samples (hello, wine and cheese tasting). You can also plan flash sales and loss leaders, dialing-down the cost to retail ratio on a specific product at a specific low-traffic time.

Use your email list and social media to remind customers to place pick-up orders early, and to promote in-store sales during slow times.

If your store isn't planning sales, no problem — use these customer engagement channels to help keep your community on top of their holiday shopping.



The 1st week of November? Send out a list of non-perishables that folks should add to their shopping list.

The 2nd week? Suggest doing a home inventory of serving ware. What do they need to get ready for Turkey Day? Sometimes merely reminding your shoppers of the holiday timeline will increase traffic to your grocery store.



A photograph of two women in a grocery store, viewed from behind. The woman on the left is wearing a red top and a red beret. The woman on the right is wearing a blue and white checkered top and a white beret. They are standing in front of a large display of fresh produce, including various fruits like grapes, apples, oranges, and a pineapple. The image has a dark blue overlay.

**Automation eases the
holiday crunch for
grocery stores**



Beat inflation with automation? Yes, absolutely. But you can also beat the blistering pace that end-of-year holidays set for grocery businesses. That frenzy is not sustainable, and inadequately preparing for the annual onslaught is brutal on your staff. A little well-placed digitization and some streamlined workflows can go a long way.

The holidays mean all hands on deck in grocery stores, so implementing AP automation in advance of crunch time is critical. To help free up bandwidth for Pumpkin Spice Everything (which happens earlier every year, we swear), introduce your team to the world of zero-touch accounts payable, digitized invoice approvals and accessible data right now.

What if you could plan for holiday ordering more efficiently? Using automatic GL coding makes inventory tracking more accurate, no matter what retail accounting system you're using.

With inflation jacking up the cost of everything, put money back in your budget by using the Plate IQ Card to pay your distributors. It's simple, and fast, and you can earn up to 1% cash back to help defray your increased operating costs.

A person in a dark suit is carving a large roasted turkey on a table. The turkey is the central focus, with a lemon half on top. The person is using a knife and a carving fork. The table is set with a glass of red wine, a plate of green beans, and other side dishes. The background is slightly blurred, showing a dining room setting. The overall tone is professional and elegant.

**Grocery stores who
plan now can crush
their holiday rush**

When you spend part of your summer planning ways to crush the holiday rush, you save your grocery store and everyone on your staff a heap of holiday headaches.

Right now, you've got time. Our top three suggestions for success?

Accurately plan for staffing.

1. Ensure your buyers are promptly placing holiday purchase orders.
2. Evaluate and introduce time-saving tech.

Summer is the perfect time to implement new systems, and to sync retail accounting solutions that will proactively save you precious time and money that you'll almost certainly be grateful for during the holidays.

Plate IQ offers end-to-end automation to make the holiday season a smashing success for your grocery business.

