



Seven steps to stellar Black Friday website performance

How to prepare your ecommerce site
for success this holiday season

Introduction

Plan early and test often - the secret to successful website performance at peak

It's a huge blow to any ecommerce operation when performance issues impact your bottom line during peak trading. Not to mention the longer-term damage to brand reputation through poor customer experience and bad PR. And it's frustrating for business and tech teams, when your website can't support the traffic driven by marketing campaigns over flash sales.

The commercial stakes are high, but by planning ahead and focusing on delivering an optimal customer experience, you can avoid disaster and capitalise on this opportunity to increase conversion rates and boost online revenue.

BLACK FRIDAY PREPARATION

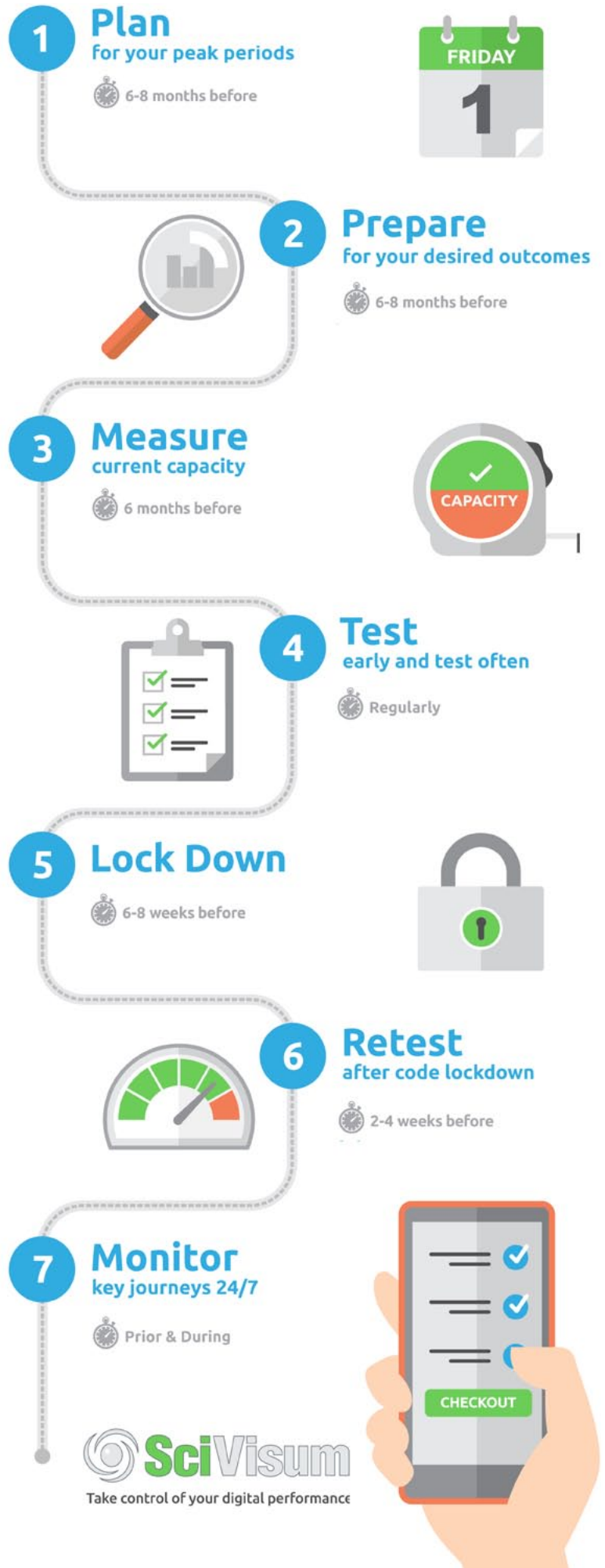
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step plan to Black Friday success



Preparing for Black Friday success

We've put together a short guide to help you with best practice for peak preparation.

1 Integrate load testing early on in your peak planning process

Prepare a comprehensive load test plan at least six months before Black Friday. Load testing is often more of an afterthought – an activity that can be delayed until nearer peak. However, a longer-term view of testing will save you time and money in the long run.

Load testing should never be considered a one-off process. Even when budget only allows for testing during a very specific pre-sales period, re-tests are essential to ensure that your changes have been successful. So it should be part of a carefully planned process that builds in time to effect change based on a cycle of outcomes and re-testing.

Leaving load testing until the last minute puts a squeeze on the time available to fix problems and allows no margin for re-testing to ensure the fix has worked or to evaluate its impact on performance. It's often much more expensive to make changes at the last minute than if they're implemented earlier.

So, include testing and contingency dates in your plan and build in enough time to implement, test, fix and re-test following changes well before code lockdown.



2 Define your desired testing targets based on realistic outcomes

As with any testing, it's essential to define targets before you begin so you can evaluate performance against your KPIs in a targeted way. Without testing against realistic outcomes, you may believe your site is prepared for your peak traffic; in reality, it may not be able to handle traffic levels and real users performing activities across your site.

Defining a successful outcome doesn't have to be overly complicated, it just needs to contain some specific performance-related goals. These outcomes may be quantitative or may be focused on enhancing user experience. Whatever your criteria, they should be firmly defined before load testing begins.

Use analytics from the previous year's performance to better understand how and when the traffic may arrive and to create an accurate and realistic Load Test Model. This will help you test realistic customer journeys including specific landing pages and promotional codes. We routinely review past performance for clients and map our findings into proposed changes.

Ensure this preparation is a cross-departmental process. Consensus on how the site needs to perform to meet expectations is essential, so you'll need to pool each team's unique perspective on what constitutes a successful outcome. Only by involving business, marketing and tech teams in planning will everyone be aware of deadlines, thereby avoiding any last-minute pressures for new features on your tech team.



3 Measure current capacity

In order to prepare for your peak sales period, you need an accurate assessment of web performance under normal loads. We recommend that a load test is performed around five - six months ahead of peak to measure current capacity and to flag any performance issues that may adversely impact the customer experience. If you can spot areas of weakness at this point, you can begin making changes to fix or improve performance and capacity.



If you are planning an independent stripped down version of the site ready to go for Black Friday this should be load tested in isolation to get a benchmark on its capacity and performance under load.

4 Test early and test often

We advocate regular load testing, with increased frequency in the run-up to code lockdown. The best routine to implement testing after making changes to improve performance to understand how your improvements are working or how they've affected the performance of other components.

Sticking to this process can save time and money in the long run as it's easier to manage and enables smaller changes at each stage whilst ensuring each change is verified before moving on to the next stage.

Although a comprehensive load test programme for six months leading up to Black Friday is the optimum solution for peace of mind we understand that's not always realistic within the budget.

One thing you shouldn't cut back on though is a load test prior to and following code lockdown with enough time to implement, test and fix any issues so there's no last minute pressure on tech teams to deliver the impossible.



5 Lockdown code right on time

The best performers on the big day will be those that stick to the schedule, so you should aim to begin code lockdown six to eight weeks prior to Black Friday. That's not the end of the story, though. Obviously, you'll want to update your website with special Black Friday sections and deal codes but these must be implemented before final code freeze.

There are some practical considerations that will make your peak season online experience more manageable at this stage:

- If you are planning to strip down your site to deliver only essential functionality - such as reducing the range of products offered - in favour of performance gains now is the time to do it while you still have time to test and fix issues before deep freeze.
- Keep pages small to optimise performance on mobile devices.
- You may want to consider stripping down your site to deliver only essential key functionality – such as reducing the range of products offered for the flash sale period for the best speed, stock control and experience at busy times – and keep pages small to optimise performance on mobile devices.
- A queuing system such as Queue is always a good contingency plan but bear in mind you'll need to test your site with and without the queuing system in place.
- Before freezing code it's important to review your infrastructure configuration and server-side optimisation. Check back-end systems are configured and implemented correctly including load balancing and autoscaling. Review server side optimisation; ensure caching is enabled, consider pre-rendering and confirm CDN implementation is working for appropriate content. Ensure all this functionality is covered by your 24/7 monitoring journeys.



6 Retest after code freeze

You'll need to retest after code freeze – we suggest two to four weeks ahead of time – to check performance of the final system on the live environment, while allowing enough time to remedy any last-minute issues. Testing during staging will never give a true picture of your site's performance on the live environment so it's essential not to skip this stage.

7 Make it work for your customers...

It's important to recognise that any change to a site carries the risk of additional performance problems. You want customers to enjoy a smooth, glitch-free experience right through to checkout. So make sure you monitor key journeys 24/7 prior to and during your peak period to identify any problems before they impact your customers. Remember to monitor mobile journeys and also right to the journey's end, including 'Click and Collect' or delivery options.

An extension to your technical team Increasing resources and experience on demand

In reality you probably don't have the resources, time or capacity to plan, prepare and test for seasonal peaks. A fully managed service offers the benefits of experienced test experts acting as an extension of your technical team. This expands your resource, time, experience and not to mention test capacity as and when you require it.

It's not worth basing financial decisions on metrics that aren't 100% accurate. For peace of mind that your site won't let you down when it counts and for results that can really be trusted, today's load testing needs to be realistic enough to test the increasing complexity and sophistication that ecommerce platforms are delivering.

Further Resources

If you'd like to find out how SciVisum's unique combination of load testing realism and proactive insight could help you prepare for peak demand through a fully managed service that's tailored for your operation, [read more about our load testing service](#) or [get in touch](#).

For more information on preparing your website for peak traffic [download our free guide 'Realistic load testing for peak'](#).

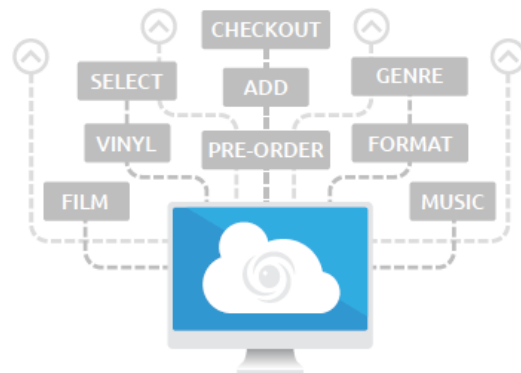


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About SciVisum



Our portfolio of “dynamic user journey” based monitoring and load testing services enable business wide understanding of the impact of website performance on user experience and the bottom line.

With over 10 years performance testing experience, helping clients such as Debenhams, Boden, Joules and Dixons to maximise performance and protect their brand, our highly experienced team of test professionals help clients implement monitoring programmes and proactively oversee testing - saving time and money



To find out how SciVisum can help you implement the best monitoring or load testing programme to suit your organisation please contact us on 01227 768276 or visit our website at www.scivisum.co.uk

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Peace of mind with realistic load testing

SciVisum provides a fully managed load testing service precisely tailored to each client's business and designed to optimise web performance.

If you'd like more information about how taking a more realistic approach to load testing could help improve your customer experience, **download our free guide [here](#).**



Realistic User Journeys

SV-Load emulates realistic journeys. Performs tasks, checks page content and makes choices just like real users



Accurate and reliable results

Provides the most accurate results on which to base decisions and deliver the best customer experience



Fully managed service

Independent Load Testing makes it possible to manage the complexities of a load test with minimum disruption



Test your anticipated peak

Initiates thousands of journeys and scales them up to - or even beyond - anticipated peak traffic levels

[Read more on our website](#)

