

No Discount, No Problem: **The Holiday Playbook for Brands** **Without Discounts**

October 2025

For consumers, value means much more than price

Consumers are entering Holiday 2025 with more caution and deliberation than ever before. Google's latest Holiday Essentials research paints a clear picture: this season will be defined by restraint, research, and a sharpened sense of value. For brands not offering discounts, that poses both a challenge and an opportunity.

61%

of U.S. shoppers say they're more choiceful with how they spend due to economic uncertainty.

38%

are doing *more* pre-purchase research than in past years.

Nearly half

are actively looking for competitive prices or promotions.

So how do you capture these shoppers if you're not offering a deal? It starts with understanding that "value" doesn't stop at price. Google's research shows the consumer value equation now includes:



Product confidence

quality, trust, and social proof



Purchase convenience

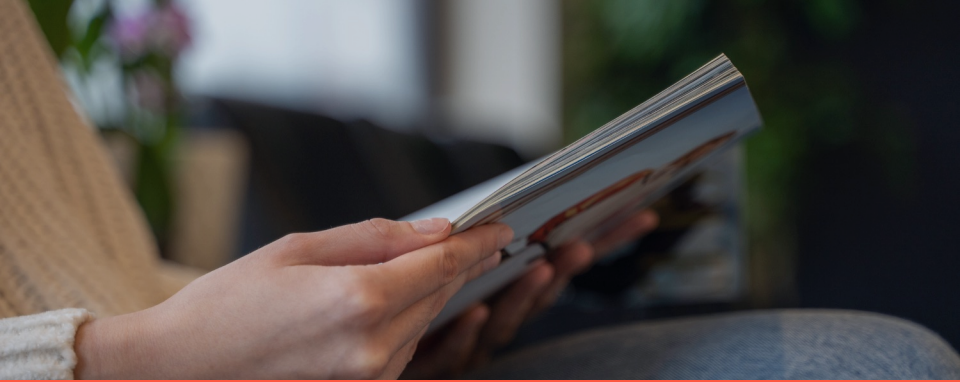
ease, speed, and flexibility

In short, discounts drive attention, but confidence and convenience close the sale.

This playbook outlines how non-discounting brands can still capture shoppers' attention this holiday season and convert them to loyalists in the new year.

Winning Holiday Shoppers **Without** Price Promotions





1

Lead with Emotional Storytelling, Not Price

Discounts appeal to logic; storytelling captures hearts. A clear, emotive narrative can motivate shoppers to choose quality over cost. Anchor your brand in what it *stands for* – craftsmanship, sustainability, local roots, or design philosophy – and help consumers feel proud to spend more on something that lasts.

How to activate

- ✓ Run short-form video creative (YouTube Shorts, TikTok, Reels) focused on identity and belonging.
 - “For the ones who ____.”
 - “Made to last more than one holiday.”



EXAMPLE

Boll & Branch highlights “the softest gift you’ll ever give” – not “20% off sheets.”



2

Create the “Gift Discovery” Moment

Shoppers are browsing earlier and more intentionally. Instead of fighting for clicks during Cyber Week, show up when they’re researching.

How to activate

- ✓ Build SEO and paid content around “**best gifts for...**” or “**under \$100**” queries. You don’t need to say “on sale” – if your brand ranks for discovery queries early, you can win the sale before promotions even begin.
- ✓ Leverage **Google’s AI Overviews** and Discover visibility – keep structured data accurate and titles descriptive.
- ✓ Use **Demand Gen** and **YouTube Inspiration campaigns** to show products in use, not just on shelves. Lifestyle imagery creates aspiration that drives attention without relying on promotions.



3

Run Timed Drops or Limited Editions

If you can't compete on price, compete on exclusivity. The urgency that drives promotions isn't only about the deal – it's about scarcity and timing. Use that same behavioral trigger to your advantage.

How to activate

- ✓ Launch capsule collections, collabs, or seasonal packaging.
- ✓ Frame them as “**limited run**” or “**while supplies last**” – urgency without discounting.
- ✓ Use countdowns for **launches** or **shipping cutoffs** rather than sale expirations.

This tactic taps into the same “now or never” impulse that drives discount response, but without undercutting brand equity



4

Harness Creator & User Validation Early

People scroll past brand messages — but stop for people they trust. In fact, **69% of consumers trust influencer recommendations more than information straight from a brand** (Shopify, 2024). Creators, reviewers, and peers now function as the new word-of-mouth, shaping consideration and purchase intent long before checkout.

How to activate

- ✓ Partner with **micro-influencers** who focus on product experience, not deals (“This bag was worth every penny”).
- ✓ Encourage gift-guide and unboxing-confidence content in October — **before sale season noise peaks**.
- ✓ Google’s research shows **YouTube is the #1 validation platform** for shoppers; consumers use it to both discover and confirm their purchases.

THE GOAL

Borrow trust from credible voices to capture attention early — then let product confidence and convenience close the sale.



5

Use Visual Search & AI Surfaces for Discovery

Shoppers are increasingly finding inspiration through images, gestures, and AI tools rather than traditional search queries.

How to activate

- ✓ **Optimize imagery for Google Lens and Circle to Search** – think shoppable, lifestyle-first photography.
- ✓ Experiment with AI-generated seasonal backdrops for ads and Product Detail Pages (PDPs) using lifestyle imagery that shows the product in realistic gifting scenarios – being opened, used, or displayed
- ✓ **Keep Merchant Center data detailed and clean** – reviews, delivery speed, and availability now act as key attention hooks, which are often as powerful as price.

Lean on Timing

Timing can be its own competitive edge. Rather than trying to outshout the noise of Black Friday or Cyber Monday, full-price brands can find power in when they show up. Aligning your media and investment cadence with meaningful seasonal moments helps you stay top-of-mind without getting lost in the sale storm.

By managing when you enter and exit the conversation, **you can outperform brands chasing short-term volume and build lasting visibility** across the entire holiday lifecycle.

How to activate

- ✓ **Start early.** Launch gifting and brand campaigns before the traditional sales rush, when consumers are still researching and making lists. Early activity builds awareness before inboxes and feeds are flooded with discounts.
- ✓ **Hold steady during peak sale chaos.** Stay visible even if you can't compete on price. Maintaining a consistent presence during the buying surge allows you to draft off heightened shopping behavior and boost performance compared to ordinary periods.
- ✓ **Capitalize on the “second wave.”** The post-holiday period brings a surge of opportunity – shoppers returning gifts, redeeming gift cards, and buying what they actually wanted once the frenzy ends. Maintain presence into January with campaigns that align with renewed intent and practical self-purchase behavior.
- ✓ **Use shipping and inventory cycles to your advantage.** Focus campaigns around key logistical milestones – last shipping dates, restock announcements, or early reorder periods – to create demand that feels organic, not promotional.



7

Leverage Owned Channels for Early Momentum

While competitors hold their budgets for Cyber Week, prime your owned audiences now. The shoppers who already know and trust your brand are your most efficient attention engine.

How to activate

- ✓ Launch “**gift preview**” campaigns for loyalty or email subscribers.
- ✓ Offer **early access** to limited runs, restocks, or new arrivals.
- ✓ Use email and CRM to **tell value narratives** – cost-per-use, longevity, and customer stories – before inboxes are flooded with “50% OFF.”

Use Media to “Match the Moment”

Discounts tend to dominate attention because they ride cultural momentum, but full-price brands can earn similar visibility through smart, moment-driven media planning

How to activate

Create your own event campaigns. Establish signature brand moments throughout the season

- “The Gift That Doesn’t Go on Sale” week
- “Confidence Week” or “Quality You Can Feel”

These act as media tentpoles that give shoppers something to look forward to without relying on markdowns.



Use creative cues that fit the season. Borrow visual signals that shoppers associate with momentum – bold layouts, timers, urgency colors – but tie them into value messages like “Lifetime Warranty” or “built to last”



Run Demand Gen campaigns with seasonal hooks like “Holiday-ready picks under \$100” or “Gifts that outlast trends.”



Leverage clearance as a strategic outlet. Clearance provides a legitimate way to tap into deal-seeking behavior without diluting your brand’s premium positioning. Feature clearance items in dedicated moments – like “Last Chance Gifts” or “End-of-Season Finds”. By framing clearance as curation rather than markdown, you maintain brand integrity while meeting consumers’ psychological need to find a deal.



Act now!

The brands that win without discounts are the ones that redefine what “value” means. Full-price items attract more intentional customers – people who buy because they want the product, not because it happened to be on sale.

Those customers convert less impulsively, return less often, and are far more likely to become loyal, repeat buyers. Over time, that builds a stronger base of advocates and a healthier bottom line – proof that protecting price integrity isn’t just good for brand perception, it’s good for profitability.

When consumers believe a product is worth it – not just priced right – paying full price still feels like the best deal in the room.

Let's chat

Collective Measures is a 100% employee-owned media agency specializing in full-funnel connections strategy and advanced analytics. With origins rooted in search and an expertise in understanding consumer intent, we are a collective of media strategists, brand engagement experts, and data scientists who make the complexities of modern marketing simple. With numerous accolades for our client work across paid media, content marketing, search engine optimization, and marketing analytics, we are simply accountable to driving results.

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