For retailers, the holiday season is critical to a successful year. In 2013, 19.2 percent of annual sales occurred just during the holiday season. The 2014 holiday season saw $72.03 billion in ecommerce sales and the 2015 season is expected to grow to $82.4 billion.

The holiday season offers multiple opportunities for sales and promotions. The weekend of Black Friday through Cyber Monday was responsible for an incredible amount of revenue, with online sales quickly becoming a major player. According to Adobe, Thanksgiving Day 2014 saw $1.33 billion in online sales and Black Friday saw $2.4 billion, setting new records for ecommerce over the popular shopping weekend.

Failing to capitalize on this incredible source of revenue will leave companies struggling as they enter the new year. Fortunately, there are a few steps and tools that you can leverage to properly engage your website and prepare for the holiday season of 2015.

1. Understand where the best search demand is on a query basis

Organic is still the major driver of traffic to websites regardless of industry. At BrightEdge, we found that search is responsible for an estimated 40 percent of traffic to websites in retail alone. Display, email and referred email comes in second, followed by paid search, with social revenue falling into a distant fourth. Within the holiday season, it was reported that more than 20 percent of online holiday retail sales originated through organic search in 2014, surpassing all other sources of traffic.

For you to have a successful online holiday season, ensuring that you understand what your customers search for is crucial. It is only when you understand the types of information and products that your customers seek that you will be able to optimize your pages for the impending holiday traffic.

The BrightEdge Data Cube allows you to identify specific keywords and understand the activity of industry customers. By monitoring activity across millions of websites, the data produced will tell you exactly what people are searching for online.

For example, consider the travel and hospitality industry. In 2014 the Data Cube enabled identification a hot hospitality keywords that customers were looking for:

- Flight deals Cyber Monday

- Winter getaways in New England

- New York winter getaways

- LAX airport

- Flights to Florida

Using Data Cube also enables the breakdown of the information by type of transportation, such as air versus train, as well as the most popular sites, such as Expedia.com versus Kayak.com. Businesses could then use this information to optimize their own sites, such as a bed and breakfast in Vermont leveraging 'winter getaways in New England'.

You can search by URL or through keywords and see information in real-time in Data Cute. With goal-based research you can specifically select what you are trying to accomplish with your optimization efforts, for example finding high-value or long-tail keyword, and the platform will then help you identify the best ways to capitalize on the holiday demand.
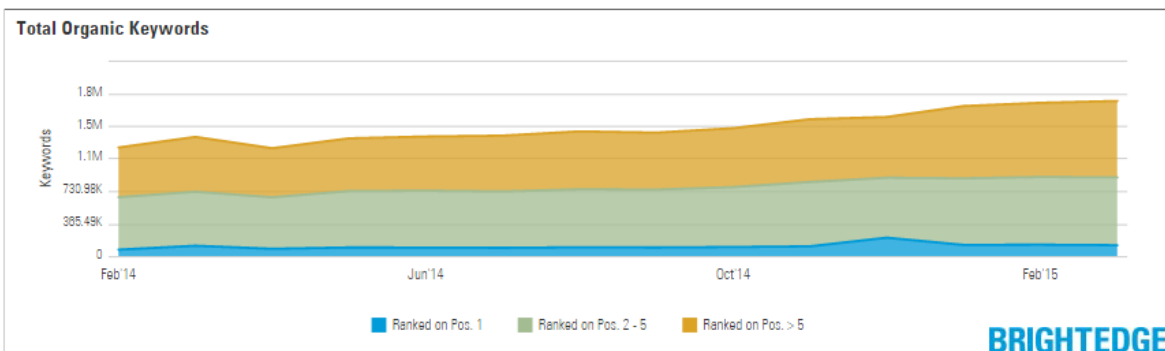
2. Understanding your competitors' strengths and weaknesses in desired keywords

It is not enough for you to know what your intended audience seeks-- you must also know how the content of your competitors performs. This can offer you insights on where gaps in their keyword usage or content development are that you can use to improve your own rankings and visibility. You can identify strengths, such as particular keywords or optimization efforts, that might be helping them outrank you. This can then help you adjust your own strategies.

The BrightEdge Data Cube can also provide you with this data you need about the performance of your competitors. You can see how their sites rank along with their traffic and the keywords for which they have optimized their content. Under Goal Based Research, you can even identify specific videos and rich content strategies that your competitors are using so that you can learn from their successes and implement your own.

Data Cube

Leverage the industry's most powerful on demand research technology to analyze your competitors' and your own organic search footprint

| Google (US) | What do you want to research? Enter a domain, URL or keyword | 🔍 Search |

Identify high ranking keywords used by competitors
Enter a competitor domain/URL

Discover long tail keywords
Enter a domain/URL/keyword

Explore content strategies used by competitors
Enter a competitor domain/URL

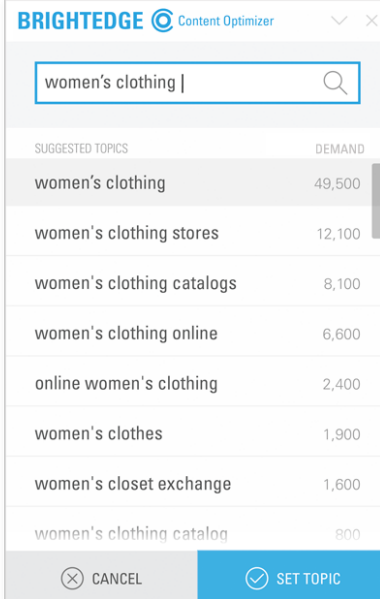## 3. Leverage steps 1 and 2 to create a targeted keyword list

To create a valuable, targeted keyword list, you need to take the information you gathered through your demand research and your investigation into your competitors' sites. You also need to carefully monitor the performance of your own site and know which words are producing the best conversion rates and the best value. These three sources of information should then be combined to create the optimal targeted list.

BrightEdge makes it easy to track the necessary analytics to accomplish these goals. You have access to some of the most sophisticated analytics reporting in the industry. It includes viewing an in-depth analysis of your traffic, such as how long they spend on the site and the total pageviews. You can also map performance goals, how specific keywords drive revenue and access Google Analytics or other platforms' metrics, such as bounce rates. This information will enable you to monitor your targeted keyword list and its performance continuously, allowing you to make necessary adjustments to capitalize on the holiday season.

4. Develop content to focus on those keywords

Once you have your optimal list of keywords, you then need to create high-quality content that will rank AND encourage people to convert. The content produced should focus on filling a need for your customers and provide them with information that they seek online. Creating compelling product descriptions and using adjectives that appeal to the senses of your customers are two excellent ways to create the type of content that will serve your business well.

For longer types of content, such as blog posts or articles, the BrightEdge Content Optimizer allows you to focus on topics that people are currently interested in. This makes it easy to take advantage of the various trends and topics that are high in demand yet low in competition to help get your site noticed.

BRIGHTEDGE ⓒ Content Optimizer   ⌄ ✕

| women's clothing | | 🔍 |

SUGGESTED TOPICS	DEMAND
women's clothing	49,500
women's clothing stores	12,100
women's clothing catalogs	8,100
women's clothing online	6,600
online women's clothing	2,400
women's clothes	1,900
women's closet exchange	1,600
women's clothing catalog	800

| ⊗ CANCEL | ⊘ SET TOPIC |

5. Optimize your landing pages to improve conversion

Your landing page is your prime opportunity for bringing in traffic and driving them towards a specific conversion. Landing pages should therefore be optimized to help people find the website and motivate them to convert.

BrightEdge will soon be offering a landing page optimizer that will help ensure that you meet these goals. BrightEdge is an Adobe Accredited Application Partner and will be releasing a Landing Page Optimizer that seamlessly integrates with Adobe Experience Manager. You will be able design test ideas and test different potential pages while also getting real-time recommendations and comparing your projected performance with your competitors.
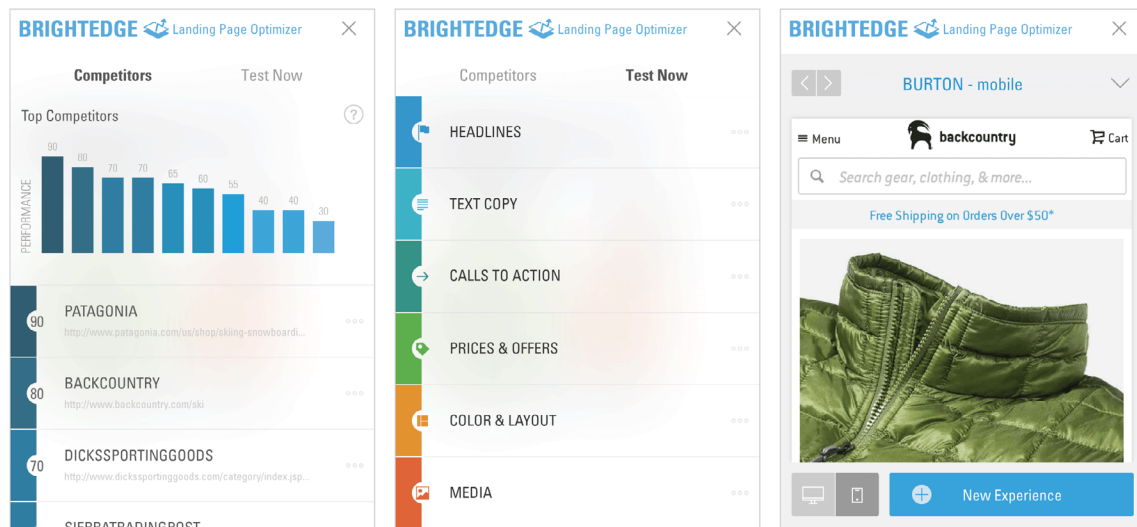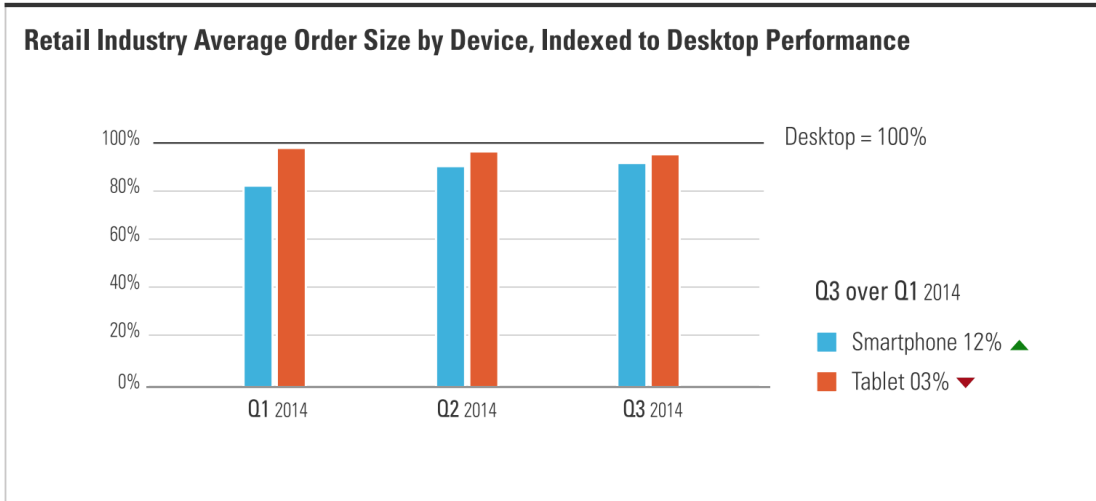

6. Use a platform that gives you a full picture

You want to make sure that the platform you use to monitor the organic traffic around your site takes into account your competitors' sites and supplies you with all the necessary information so that you can ensure that your holiday season will not be spoiled by a better-prepared competitor. You should be able to accurately identify their optimization efforts and how that corresponds to their progress, so you can preventively take steps to avoid any loss in traffic or revenue before the peak of the holiday shopping season hits.

7. Prepare for mobile and offline/online cross-channel

According to our own data at BrightEdge, we found that e-commerce is no longer dominated by desktop. In fact, over the course of the first three quarters of 2014, we found that the average order size was almost equal between smart devices and desktop-- within a 10 percent range. Customers are clearly willing to buy both large and small items on mobile as well as desktop. No holiday optimization effort, therefore, would be complete without paying attention to mobile performance.

Retail Industry Average Order Size by Device, Indexed to Desktop Performance

Desktop = 100%

Q3 over Q1 2014

Smartphone 12% ▲
Tablet 03% ▼

Q1 2014   Q2 2014   Q3 2014

Customers also commonly use mobile in conjunction with activity offline, such as making a purchase in-store. Customers want to see improved cross-channel cooperation. For example, 69 percent say they expect prices online and in stores to be the same, but 31 percent say they can find better prices online. Another 69 percent say that the customer accounts they have in store and online are not connected. Customers want to see consistent promotions, prices and access to information about product availability. Creating these links between the various parts of the customer experience can improve satisfaction and the reputation of the brand.

Additionally, mobile and social, mocial if you will, influence buying behavior as people use apps, like Instagram, Snapchat, and Whatsapp to consult with friends and family to purchase items for themselves or their loved ones. Consider ways you can encourage that behavior and of course leverage customer social networks by incentivizing sharing of promotions and purchases.

Online sales has been playing an increasingly important role in the marketplace, particularly during the holiday season where people are often shopping on the go. BrightEdge offers the solution that uses data to create highly effective marketing campaigns that will catch the attention of your customers.

Marketers that invest correctly will reap the maximum reward from the high-powered holiday season. From identifying keywords to developing content opportunities to monitoring revenue on a comprehensive platform, with BrightEdge every step of the process is backed by concrete numbers that help deliver the bounty of holiday revenue.