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How to turn your seasonal marketing plan into year-round profits

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Most brands are influenced by some type of seasonality. In theory, seasonal marketing helps capitalize on times of year when consumers are most likely to purchase your product. However, looking beyond the calendar to predict revenue lift across channels and weeks of your plan can uncover opportunities to increase marketing returns with a different approach.

Let's give an example. Marketers of an automotive maintenance product know car owners spend the most on cleaning and maintenance at the start of summer. Their marketing plan aligns with their selling cycle, with spending concentrated in early summer and zeroed out during the winter, on the assumption that all the snow and salt on the roads deters folks from worrying about their automotive interiors.

At least, this is what they told themselves until they modeled their marketing plan on Keen's platform and encountered scenarios that led to some interesting questions, including:

- **Why concentrate our marketing spend when consumers are buying our product anyway?**
- **What if we backed up our plan and started building awareness before the peak selling weeks? How would that impact overall sales, and could it extend our selling seasons?**
- **We maintain our product on shelves year-round. What effect on sales would we see if we allocate some spend—even a small amount—to winter marketing as opposed to going dark?**

In this guide, we'll take a closer look at the influence of seasonality on your sales and marketing with examples and key takeaways from models that top consumer brand leaders have built and optimized, algorithmic analyses that illustrate how to increase marketing's contribution year-round, and four strategies you can use to improve your seasonal marketing and deliver more profitability.

Know your consumer traffic patterns

Before you can optimize your seasonal marketing campaigns, you'll want to first analyze your annual sales cycle to identify seasonal, cyclical spending patterns. Some ways you can do this include the following:

- **Review web analytics.** An uptick in visitors during specific weeks or months can reveal the ups and downs of your brand's seasons.
- **Understand seasonal keyword trends.** Google Trends is a great resource for exploring which keywords trend during particular times of year.
- **Monitor fluctuations in advertising rates.** Online advertising costs increase and decrease over the course of the year in response to supply and demand. Understanding these cycles can also help you understand changes in the cost of marketing during various weeks.

Optimize seasonal marketing with these four strategies

Now you have a basic understanding of how seasonal marketing works, but what is the best way to convert that knowledge into action? Here are four strategies that can help optimize your campaigns:

1. Use short-term seasonal tactics in-season

Short-term tactics allow you to drive sales over a specific time period of a few weeks or months by creating a sense of urgency and prompting consumers to take immediate action. These low-cost, short duration tactics are particularly valuable to seasonal marketing campaigns.

2. Adjust your peak spend to the point of diminishing return

During peak season there is a point where each additional dollar you invest returns less than one dollar. When you know where that point is you can adapt your plan to spend up to that level for each channel and week of your plan, or knowingly choose to invest past that point for a lower but continued lift.

This is the type of calculation Keen's Bayesian predictive modeling generates to inform the scenarios that marketers use to "war game" their channel mix and timing.

3. Push the perimeter of your peak season

While you can land sales year-round, it is important to know which season(s) will yield the highest return for your brand. Once you pinpoint when your brand is in season, you can begin building and nurturing sales beyond peak.

After all, the buyer's journey begins before intent and purchase. Said another way, for each consumer product there is a timeframe of varying length during which consumers become aware of their need and consider their options before making that purchase.

An easy way to start is to extend each end of your peak curve by a few weeks, activating marketing before the peak and continuing after it wanes to help extend and sustain the buying cycle.

4. Don't go dark

No matter how cyclical your buying cycle is, you should maintain marketing activity year-round for two reasons. First, as long as a product is available for purchase, your marketing support helps build awareness and stimulate sales. And second, your brand's equity relies on continually earning consumer mindshare. When you go dark, brand equity decays and your cost of marketing long-term will increase.

To better illustrate this fourth strategy, let's revisit the automobile care example given at the beginning of this guide.

In that instance, the brand team used Keen to model the past two years' marketing plans, and then ran scenarios to see what a year-round spend might look like. The following chart shows the brand's cyclical marketing spend in 2020 and 2021 alongside the always-on scenario. Keen's modeling suggested the same budget could deliver $3 million more in revenue to the business.

The team decided to support its brand year-round with a lower-level digital marketing campaign, resulting in more sales and happier customers.

See seasonal impacts on top brands and products

To further show the value in thinking beyond the seasons when it comes to your marketing campaigns, here is an example to highlight how seasonality has impacted a familiar brand:

Twinings

Profit maximization beyond the tea drinking season

The marketing team at Twinings was inspired to rethink seasonality beyond the peak tea drinking season. Keen's model showed that decreasing investments during the peak tea drinking season and reinvesting throughout the year could maximize profits.

By working with Keen, Twinings created scenario objectives for their Specialty tea brand that included tactic-level optimization against a fixed budget and maximize profitability. Additionally, **sales volume increased by 16.5% and there was a 28% increase in revenue** during a six-month time period compared to the same time the prior year.

"It can be intimidating for marketers to consider shifting dollars out of their peak sales period, no matter what the data is telling you," Keen Account Director Brandon Crowling explains. "We walk our clients through how to balance the model's future-focused recommendations with their risk tolerance, and often recommend testing the opportunity with a small re-allocation first before making major changes."

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Use predictive software to maximize your profits

Effective seasonal marketing planning decisions rely on your ability to understand your seasonal cycles and adapt your plan to invest profitably across both high and low sales cycles. And thinking through the four strategies highlighted in this guide will help you take your plan forward and begin to drive more lift, more consistently, year-round.

Do you want to take the next step and get a deeper understanding of where your profit threshold is across each channel and week of your plan? Keen's technology was built to deliver the type of complex calculations and modeling to make that happen so you can optimize your seasonal marketing and deliver more revenue.

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About Keen Decision Systems

Keen's unified marketing measurement and optimization platform helps B2C marketers make the data-driven decisions that build winning brands. Keen offers the only software-as-a-service solution that unifies all marketing channels (digital, traditional media and in-store); calculates the full financial contribution for each channel, rather than a short-term ROI; and builds scenarios that specify the optimal investment level by channel by week.

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