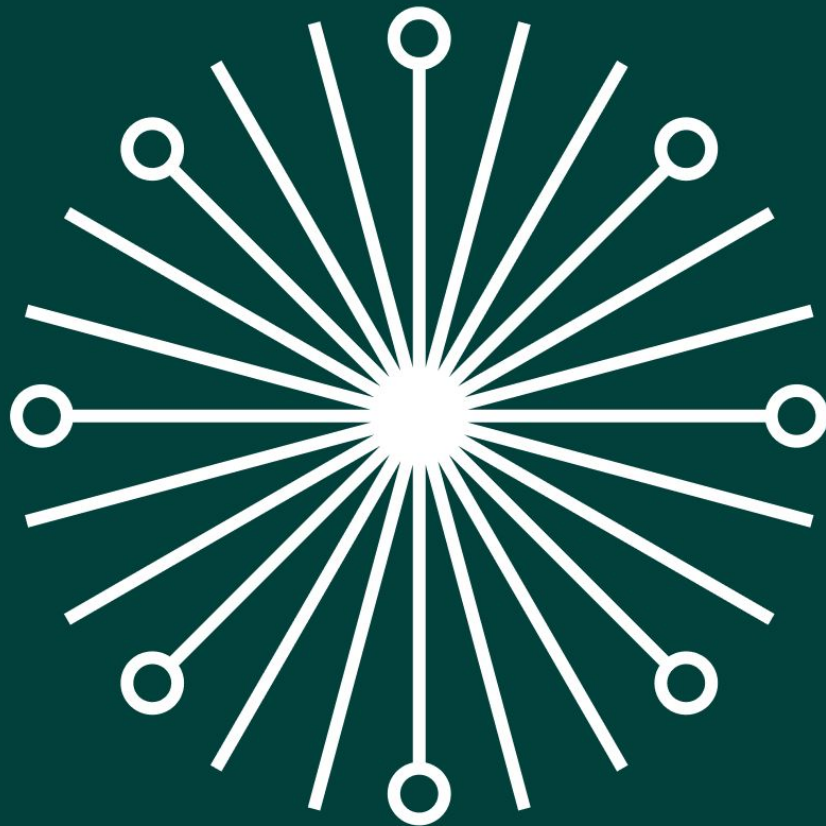


FOURSQUARE

2026 Holiday Playbook for Retail Marketers

The best gift for marketers this season is defensible holiday performance, grounded in reality and powered by real-world, location-based outcomes.



What's in this guide

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Introduction

Why is location-based advertising crucial for 2026 holiday retail campaigns?

In an increasingly unpredictable market, shifting consumer spending habits are colliding with fragmented, multi-channel journeys, making it even more difficult for retailers to accurately identify conversion drivers. With pressure to make every dollar count, location-based advertising lets you connect with true high-intent audiences during the holidays, optimize spend, and drive meaningful outcomes.

In this guide, we'll break down:

- Key trends shaping holiday shopping behavior
- Holiday campaign-ready strategies
- Why marketers rely on Foursquare to prove ROI with tighter budgets

Dive in to see how location intelligence can help your holiday campaigns shine this season & beyond.



90%

Of marketers saw higher sales with location-based marketing.



73%

Of retail shoppers are using multiple channels throughout their journey.



80%

Of retail transactions still happen in the offline world.



01

Shopping Trends & Predictions For Holiday 2026



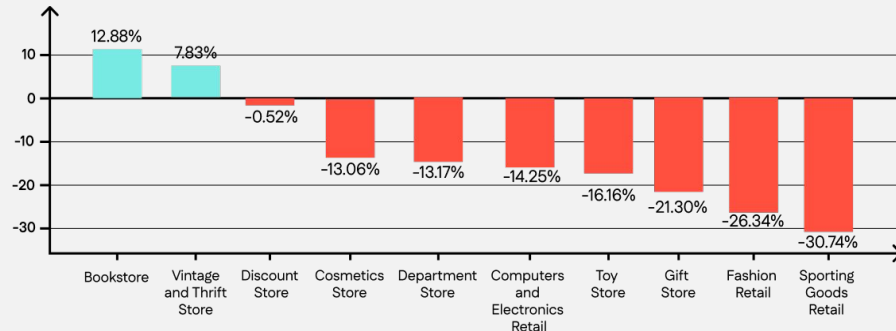
What to Expect for Holiday Visitation & Spend

While 2026 holiday spending is projected to rise, consumers will be more selective about where they shop and what they buy.

Despite typically strong seasonal demand, December 2025 data shows foot traffic declined year-over-year to traditional holiday shopping categories, while value-based categories proved most resilient.

When foot traffic is down, each visit becomes a much stronger signal of purchase intent. Location targeting ensures you reach these high-value, in-market shoppers who are actively engaging with your category.

Year-over-Year % Change in Foot Traffic to Key Retail Categories (2025 vs 2024)



Source: Foursquare



69% of shoppers plan to purchase products in physical retail stores this holiday season, up 11% from 2025.

Source: [Salsify](#)



The week of **Black Friday 2025** reveals a sharp shift to value: discount stores held steady at **-2% YoY** foot traffic, outperforming premium sectors like fashion and jewelry which saw declines of **-13% or more**.

Source: Foursquare (2025 week-over-week data)



Warehouse & Wholesale clubs dominated early **Thanksgiving prep (+5.8% WoW)** but dropped -8.4% during the holiday week. Last-minute grocery runs shifted to Big Box stores (+8.3%) and Grocery Stores (+4.5%).

Source: Foursquare (2025 week-over-week data)



The week of **New Year's Eve** only saw marginal foot traffic growth to social categories like Bars, Night Clubs, and Restaurants, signaling a strong consumer preference for at-home celebrations.

Source: Foursquare (2025 week-over-week data)

Why Shoppers are Choosing Their Preferred Retailer

This year's consumer is less brand loyal, more intentional, and increasingly value-driven. They want a retailer that supports them throughout their entire journey, across all channels and touchpoints.

Brand trust and value are driving consumer purchases

46% Of shoppers will abandon their cart due to high prices.¹

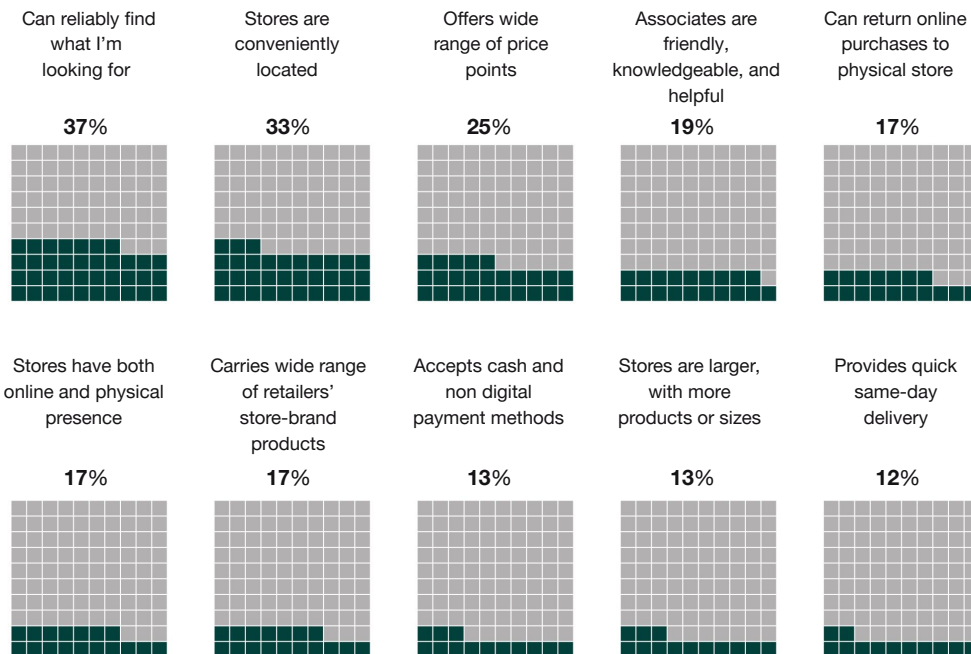
67% Of consumers say product quality and value influence whether they trust a brand, making it the single strongest driver of brand credibility.²

68% Of consumers paid more for a product in the past year because they trusted the brand.²

Source: [Salsify](#)¹, [Salsify](#)²

When forced to prioritize, shoppers choose retailers based on availability, convenience, and pricing flexibility.

Factors increasing likelihood to shop at given retailer, % of responders selecting as top 3.



Source: [McKinsey](#)



Adapting to In-Store, Online, and AI-Driven Shopping

Consumers are increasingly using new channels to discover, research, and buy products. Retailers that embrace these digital tools while maintaining a seamless, connected in-store experience will win.

AI is increasing brand discoverability and confident purchase decisions, but human connection still closes the deal

2x

AI users' likelihood to try new brands and put more items in carts. ([Locus](#))

3x

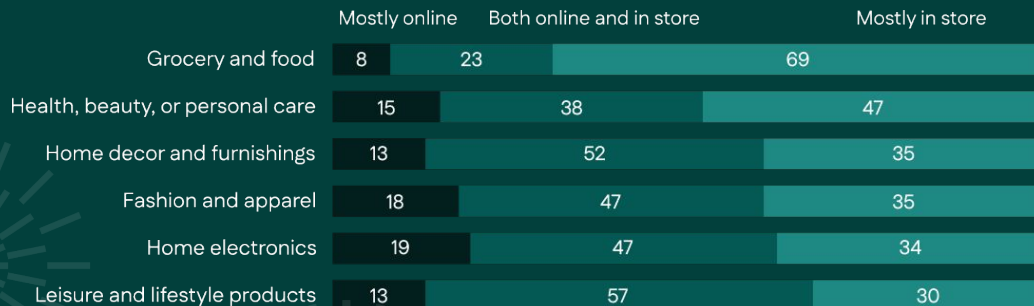
AI users' likelihood to feel confident buying fewer items. ([Locus](#))

65%

Of shoppers feel less stressed because of technology, but 74% still value in-person assistance during in-store service, and 66% during purchase decisions. ([CapGemini](#))

Consumers prefer to shop mostly in store for groceries and food and for health, or personal care products

Preferred shopping channel, by category, % of responders.



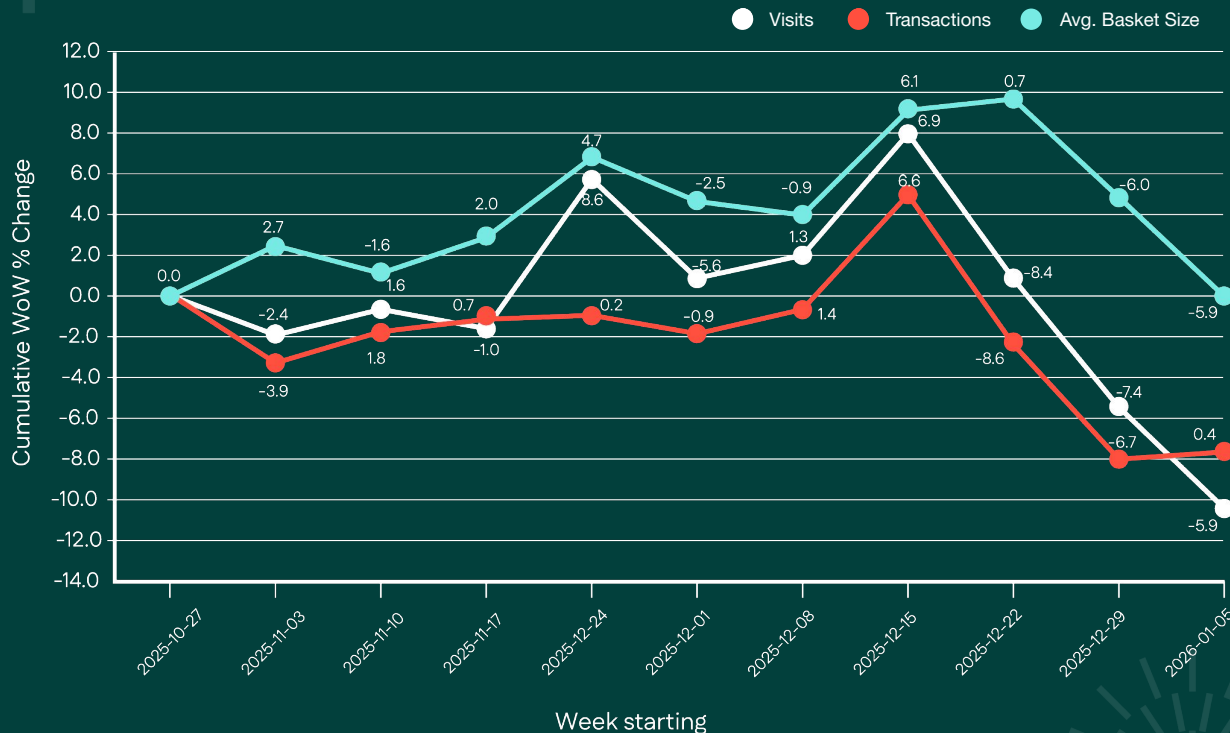
Source: [McKinsey](#)



Shoppers start early, but late-season momentum remains strong

A late-season spike in foot traffic means marketers can't cross the finish line early. Keep a close eye on campaign performance in these final weeks: continuously optimize top-performing tactics, adjust targeting to capture last-minute intent, and lean heavily into final promotions to maximize holiday revenue.

Store traffic and transactions peaked the week before Christmas, with rising basket sizes signaling late-season, big-ticket purchases.



Cumulative week-over-week % change in visits, transactions, avg. basket size to Retail category

Source: Foursquare

02

Real-world Targeting & Measurement Holiday Strategies



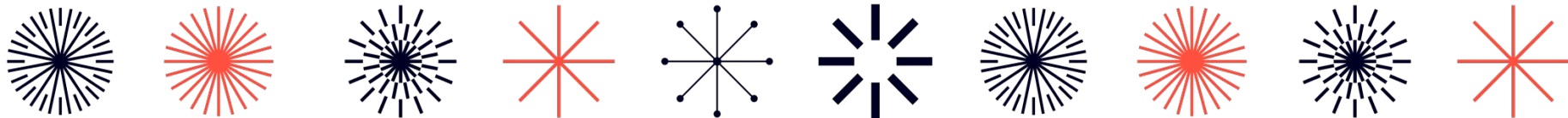


Planning A Successful Holiday Campaign

FSQ

Before you plan, decide:

- ✓ What is the **optimal frequency** we should reach our audience during the holiday season?
- ✓ What is the **optimal allocation of budget** for each channel? How are our channels currently working together?
- ✓ What **audience segments** should we build to reach early holiday shoppers vs. last-minute buyers?
- ✓ How will the metrics we care about impact the way we **plan** and **optimize** during the peak shopping season?
- ✓ What audiences are **responding the most** to our advertising efforts? How can we better reach them?
- ✓ How do we reach shoppers who are **planning major gift purchases**? What about **budget-conscious** buyers?
- ✓ What **offline behaviors** indicate someone is in the market for our products right now?
- ✓ What **KPIs** do we care about the most for driving more sales during the holiday shopping season?



Smarter Targeting & Better Measurement With Location Intelligence



Connect with high-intent consumers

Location-based targeting uses real-life behaviors like past visitation patterns and real-time movements to help retailers engage shoppers with more relevant messaging at key moments in their journey.



Use in-flight results to optimize in real-time

In-flight campaign reporting allows advertisers to optimize campaign tactics in-flight to double down on what's working, while it's working.



Measure real-world outcomes

With deduplicated, omnichannel measurement, retailers can understand their media's true impact on driving in-store visits and sales.



Contextualize performance

Media-independent visitation patterns provide context to understand if your campaigns are riding market momentum, missing conversion opportunities, or successfully defending share in a down market.

Holiday-ready Audience Strategies



Engage your ideal holiday shoppers, using **historical visitation & purchase patterns** that strongly indicate their in-market interests.

Gen-Z Clothing Shoppers seen at apparel retailers and department stores, especially during seasonal sale periods.

Black Friday and Cyber Monday Shoppers seen shopping during this time last year at shopping centers, malls, big box stores, department stores, and other major retailers.

Value-Conscious Shoppers who have recently been seen visiting discount retailers, outlet malls, or dollar stores to stretch their budgets.

Luxury Retail Loyalists who are frequently seen visiting designer boutiques, high-end malls, or flagship retail locations, indicating affluent spending habits.

High Income Holiday Travelers who have a HHI of \$150k+ and have been frequently seen at airports during the holiday season.

Online Shoppers who are rarely seen at retail locations, indicating they likely shop online. Filter by age to better personalize your campaigns.

Early Toy Scouts who visit toy retailers like LEGO, Build-A-Bear, or Disney Store, suggesting holiday shopping for kids has already begun.

Weekday Shoppers who do most of their shopping during the week and are rarely seen at retailers on the weekends.

Lapsed Holiday Customers who visited your stores last holiday season, but haven't recently been seen visiting your storefronts.

Bookstore Enthusiasts frequently seen at bookstores before holidays or year-round to reach gift givers or book-worms.

Active & Outdoor Enthusiasts frequently seen at sporting goods stores and outdoor retailers. Filter by age and frequency to align with back-to-school, winter sports, or holiday fitness trends.

Experience Buyers who frequently visit entertainment venues (like zoos, aquariums, and theme parks), likely in market for experiential gifts.

Off-the-Shelf Audiences

Activate today in major platforms like Google, LiveRamp, The Trade Desk, and more.

Location-based audiences:

- Past Black Friday Beauty and Personal Care Shoppers
- Past Cyber Monday Consumer Electronics Shoppers
- Past Halloween Celebrators
- Past New Year's Party Planners
- Recent (30d) - Candy and Sweets Enthusiasts
- Frequent (30d) - Rideshare Users

Purchase-based audiences:

- (Recent Repeat Buyer) Beer, Wine and Spirits
- (Active High Spender) Vintage and Thrift
- (High Frequency Buyer) Home Improvement Shoppers
- (High Frequency Buyer) Department Store and Big Box Store Shoppers
- (Active High Spenders) Fast Casual Diners

Holiday-ready Proximity Strategies



Reach active shoppers in real-time, using **custom geofences**, to influence purchase decisions when intent is at its highest.

Early Holiday Shoppers who kick off their holiday shopping early by visiting gift shops, malls, and shopping centers during late summer, Labor Day, or Veterans Day weekends.

Mall Crawlers while they are browsing at outlets or shopping malls during the months of November and December.

Electronics Shoppers seen at electronics and tech retailers like Best Buy, Sony, InMotion Entertainment, Brookstone, Fry's Electronics, etc. during holiday deal cycles.

Blockbuster Moviegoers seen at major theater chains during peak holiday release weekends.

Gym Regulars & Fitness Enthusiasts seen at fitness centers and boutique studios; highly receptive to wellness gifts, athleisure, tech wearables, and health food brands.

Last-Minute Gift Shoppers actively seen at gift stores, department stores, or malls during the week leading up to the winter holidays.

Black Friday Competitive Shoppers actively seen at your competitor locations the weeks leading up to Black Friday and during the holiday weekend to influence shoppers to choose your brand instead.

Holiday Host Entertainers who visit party supply and grocery stores the weeks leading up to key Q4 holidays.

Post-Holiday Self-Gifters seen browsing luxury boutiques, cosmetic stores, or athleisure retailers between December 26th and early January.

Skiers & Snowboarders spotted at ski resorts, mountain lodges, winter apparel retailers, and specialized ski shops during the late fall and winter months.

Coffee & Café Lovers seen at local coffee shops and major chains; ideal for real-time mobile targeting while they are waiting in line or enjoying a break.

Planning campaigns around other **Q4 tentpole events**?

- NFL & NBA Season
- Fall & Winter Travel
- Veterans Day Weekend
- Thanksgiving & Black Friday
- Winter Holidays
- + more

Get the full Q4 Targeting Guide for high-impact segment recommendations

[Download the guide](#)

How to get started?

Build custom segments in our self-serve Targeting Designer, choose from over 5,000+ off-the-shelf audiences for quick activation, or tap into our team of location experts who will help you build custom segments to reach campaign goals.

Get in touch [here](#).

Holiday-ready Attribution Strategies



Keys to measuring holiday success



You run on several channels. Your provider should have **preferred** relationships across all of them. Make sure your MTA results are **deduplicated**, so credit is not double-counted and accurate.



Get reporting **in-flight** to not waste dollars on strategies not working. If you wait for post-campaign reporting, your team will already be on to 2027 plans without direction on what to improve.



Analyze beyond basic topline metrics. Insights are often hidden in **granular** data cuts. Ideal providers offer **custom** reporting, **overlapping** performance across channels & tailored to your KPIs.

Why optimize for both visits + sales outcomes

Connect store visits to actual purchases with in-flight reporting in a single UI. Key metrics include: visitation & sales lift, average basket size, incremental sales, and more.

Identify funnel leaks

Pinpoint where the journey breaks. Did your ads successfully drive traffic that failed to convert, or did the messaging miss the mark?

Balance efficiency with scale

Identify when you've exhausted the high-profit, but smaller pool of "mission-shoppers" and pivot back to a high-volume market share strategy.

See proof of incrementality

Distinguish between "business as usual" and driving new behavior, validating if revenue came from larger baskets or simply more shoppers coming in store.

✓ Optimization Dos

Focus on a few smart adjustments at a time

Holiday campaigns move fast. Prioritize tactical, high-impact changes instead of overhauls.

Optimize toward tactics with strong confidence levels

Use data to guide your budget decisions, especially when every dollar counts.

Give it time...but not too much

Holiday attribution reports start showing results ~2 weeks post-launch. Use early directional signals to act fast.

Shift budgets gradually

Avoid drastic reallocations. Incremental shifts let you test and learn without losing momentum during peak shopping days.

If lift is absent or low

Find high performing areas to optimize towards those other KPIs during higher visitation shopping days.



✗ Optimization Don'ts

Don't skip clear goal-setting

Going into the holiday season without well-defined KPIs will derail meaningful optimization.

Don't ignore the full customer journey

The holiday shopping journey is non-linear. Deduplicated multi-touch attribution is key to understanding where to invest.

Don't optimize to vanity metrics

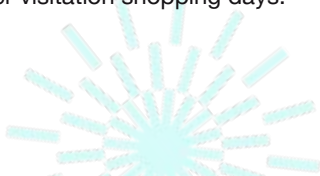
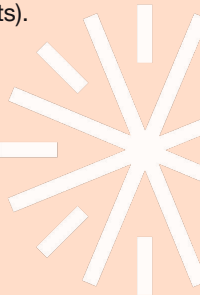
Impressions or clicks don't equal revenue. Stick to KPIs that directly reflect actual outcomes (e.g., incremental sales or visits).

Don't delay real-time adjustments

A week of underperformance during the holidays can be impactful. Act early when data shows clear behavior shifts.

Don't trust poor-quality data sources

Holiday media spend is too valuable to waste. Only act on results from proven and trusted measurement partners.



Your Smarter Holiday Checklist



FOR SMARTER TARGETING



Stay agile and creative in your targeting strategy

Think outside the box to identify unique consumer behaviors, lifestyle patterns, or complementary service visits that indicate intent beyond basic store traffic.



Personalize segments by shopping mission

Build distinct audiences of gift givers, last-minute buyers, and deal seekers based on real-world behaviors and tailor messaging accordingly.



Meet shoppers where they already are

Activate proximity targeting near malls and high-traffic retail zones to catch consumers while they're in a buying mindset.



Align targeting to inventory & promotions

Activate segments in geos where specific SKUs are in stock, activations/events are held, or holiday discounts are live to drive qualified foot traffic, especially in prime shopping weeks.

FOR SMARTER CAMPAIGN ATTRIBUTION



Plan early for better optimization

Launch campaigns before peak dates to gather early insights. Optimize creatives and bids before holiday spikes.



Don't assume shoppers will pay full price

With budgeting top-of-mind for many consumers, value-driven messaging outperforms other positioning for most categories.



Test creative variations with urgency

Highlight "last chance," "limited stock," or "fast-shipping" messages, and rotate frequently to avoid ad fatigue.



Use real-time signals & try new audiences

Leverage in-flight reporting to adjust spend and test tactics based on foot traffic, sales, and key holiday shopping windows.

Contextualize Campaign Results with Foot Traffic

74%



Of marketers have killed a marketing idea due to inability to measure business outcomes (Haus).



So what?

Combining media-agnostic foot traffic trends with in-flight MTA measurement gives advertisers the precise context needed to make smarter optimization and strategic decisions.

Media-Agnostic Foot Traffic

Missed In-Store Opportunity

Foot Traffic ↑ Campaign Lift ↓

Strategy: Fix the Disconnect

Shoppers are active, but your campaign is not converting. Refresh creative, refine targeting, or align messaging to in-store intent signals.

Market Expansion

Foot Traffic ↑ Campaign Lift ↑

Strategy: Maximize Momentum

Demand is strong and your campaign is converting effectively. Increase spend, expand high-performing audiences, and double down on what's working.

Defend Your Position

Foot Traffic ↓ Campaign Lift ↓

Strategy: Hold Steady

Evaluate performance vs. category. If you're declining less than the market, you are winning. Keep measuring and optimizing to maintain or win back position.

Competitive Conquesting

Foot Traffic ↓ Campaign Lift ↑

Strategy: Steal Share

Overall traffic is soft, but your campaign is driving results. Double down on conquering tactics and high-intent segments to win customers from competitors.

03

Why Retailers Rely on Foursquare





Holiday-Ready Location-Based Marketing Solutions:

Retailers use Foursquare's suite of marketing solutions to improve targeting and gain insights that allow them to optimize their holiday campaigns.



Foursquare Audience

Build custom audience segments based on real-world visitation behaviors or easily activate over 5000+ off-the-shelf location or purchase-based audiences.



Foursquare Proximity

Create custom geofences to connect with shoppers based on their real-time location to influence shopping decisions when consideration is at its highest.



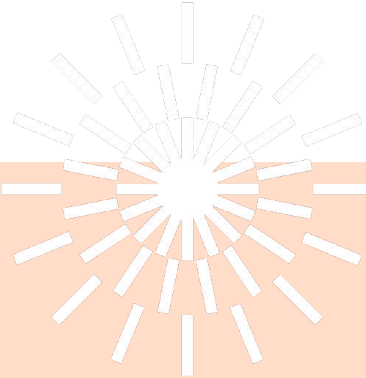
Foursquare Attribution

Measure the holistic, omnichannel impact of your holiday campaigns on in-store visits and sales to optimize strategies before the season ends.



Foursquare Store Conversions

Gain daily directional insight into holiday tactics driving conversions directly in your programmatic platform for in-flight optimization.



#1

Leader in Location Intelligence

Named by CBInsights

FSQ



Quality

With a database of **over 100M POI** — spanning gift stores and toy stores to airports and shopping malls — we understand places and the movement between them.



Flexibility

We offer retailers an unmatched global network of **550+ partnerships** across channels. Our data is readily accessible via your preferred partners, just in time for the busiest season.



Expertise

With **15+ years** of experience, we've perfected our location technology to deliver both scale and accuracy in targeting and measurement to make every holiday ad dollar count.



Privacy

Foursquare is an industry leader in privacy advocacy, with a focus on **privacy-by-design** principles, responsible data practices, and partner accountability.

Activate Everywhere You Buy Media

Our solutions are available to activate anywhere you buy. We're plugged into the 550+ platforms where your customers discover: DSPs, DMPs, social, CTV, out-of-home, and retail media networks. Your platforms are our partners.

All Leading
DMPs and DSPs

amazon ads

/LiveRamp

theTradeDesk

Google Display
& Video 360

Adobe

Leading
Publishers



pandora

ESPN

yelp

CONDÉ NAST



Leading Social
Media Platforms



reddit



Meta



Tik Tok

nextdoor

Leading
CTV & OOH

NETFLIX ADS

hulu

Roku

SAMSUNG Ads

vistar media



04

Wrapping Up



Make the most of every **holiday** shopping trip

The time to make a plan for holiday is here, especially for marketers facing increased pressure to deliver strong results in a budget-conscious climate. The key to success is investing in cost-efficient and effective marketing strategies.

Location-based advertising helps you find the shoppers actually in market, connect with them during the right moments in their journey, and prove where your media is actually making an impact. Shoppers are still going to stores, but do you know the right combination of tactics, channels, and creative to make it a sale at yours?

Foursquare's solutions help retailers connect with high-intent shoppers, understand how to optimize campaigns mid-flight, and maximize ROAS across every channel.

Join the hundreds of leading retailers using Foursquare to drive real-world results. We're here to help this holiday season!

FSQ





Give yourself the gift of real, defensible
results this holiday season. Get in touch with
Foursquare today.

foursquare.com