BFCM PLAYBOOK

The BFCM readiness playbook

A brand leader's guide to building a trusted data foundation, acting with agility, and turning Black Friday and Cyber Monday results into next year's strategy. Plus, a readiness diagnostic questionnaire to find your team's biggest gaps before the rush hits.

audiense

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Introduction

In 2024, U.S. online spending during Black Friday reached $10.8 billion (up 10.2% year over year), while Cyber Week total global online spend reached $315 billion. BFCM might be the most extreme example of peak season pressure, but the same principles apply to any commerce surge throughout your year.

This playbook reveals how leading commerce executives can use technologies to drive incremental revenue during BFCM and other peak seasons by:

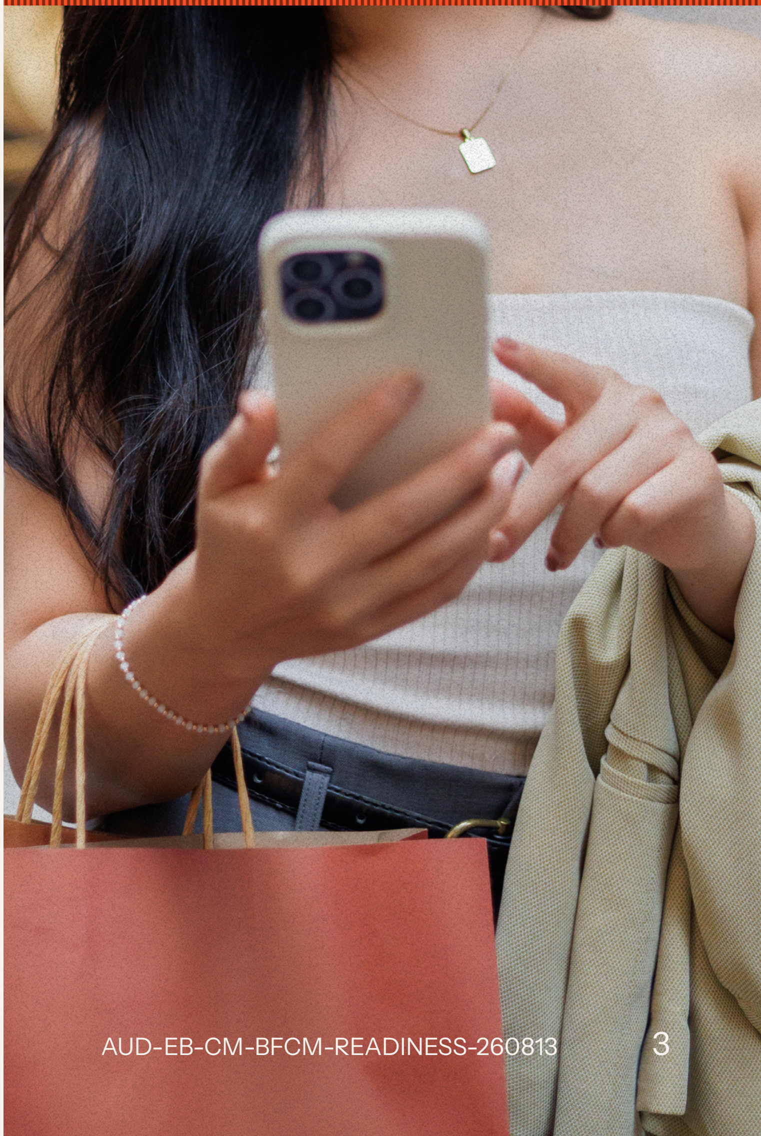
- Connecting data across every touchpoint
- Enabling faster decisions
- Creating visibility that lasts long after the rush

Whatever you're planning for the rest of the year, it starts with a rock-solid foundation. Here's how to build it.

About Audiense Online

Audiense Online, powered by Elevar, is a server-side tracking and conversion optimization platform for ecommerce brands, It captures clean customer data at the source and feeds it to the platforms brands use for attribution and reporting.

Throughout this playbook, you'll find sidebars like this one. Each presents ways Elevar can help solve ecommerce challenges.



The stakes, and importance of trust

When customer demand surges during BFCM and other key shopping events, your team's ability to make confident decisions on a minute-by-minute basis comes down to answering one question:

Can we trust the conversion, attribution, and spend data we're seeing in the moment?

Brands that have this trust can act decisively, smartly reallocate ad spend, adjust pricing, and double down on what's converting *while surge sales are still happening.*

The brands who don't have this trust are guessing… and they often suffer for it in wasted spend, missed conversion windows, and slow reactions to traffic spikes that've already passed by the time they catch up.

The gaps are real… and reveal themselves in real-time

According to Salesforce's State of Marketing report, only one in four marketers say they're fully satisfied with their ability to unify customer data across sources. This means most brands head into peak season working from an incomplete picture before the traffic even hits.

That can wreck a company's measurement. Under heavy traffic, weaknesses in tracking, attribution, or governance magnify *fast*. Our research indicates that without reliable server-side tracking, brands can lose visibility into 20% to 25% of conversions and site-wide events — all caused by factors such as ad blockers, browser restrictions, and privacy changes like iOS opt-outs.

If your team is unwittingly making decisions on incomplete or inconsistent data, you'll hit the same problems every peak season: budget shift to the wrong channel days after it should've moved, and promotions activate off data that was already stale.

Some of the most common data gaps we see include:

- **Fragmented tracking:** Key events such as add-to-cart, checkout, and Purchase aren't captured the same way across platforms (so Meta, GA4, and your own dashboard can each report a different number for the same afternoon)
- **Attribution conflicts:** Marketing sees one number for a campaign's return, while finance sees another for the same campaign's actual revenue impact. Spend shifts become reactive guesswork instead of strategy
- **Delayed insights:** Data reconciliation that should take hours instead takes days. By the time the numbers are trustworthy, the traffic spike they describe has already passed
- **Team misalignment:** Marketing calls a campaign a win based on clicks. Meanwhile, engineering calls the same campaign a strain on infrastructure. Elsewhere in the business, finance calls it a wash on margin. It's essentially three competing definitions of from three separate dashboards

These gaps (and others) compound the moment peak conditions hit, not before. This is exactly why the confidence gap we're describing is so dangerous.

A 2025 Nielsen report found that while 85% of marketers are confident in their ability to measure ROI, only 32% actually measure it holistically across channels. This is the "everyone's arguing about different numbers" problem, at scale.

MARKETING • META ADS

CAMPAIGN
BFCM_Main_Push

REPORTED CONVERSIONS

1,847

▲ Campaign performing

Client-side pixel. Ad blockers and iOS opt-outs not accounted for.

Last synced 2:47 PM • Nov 29

ANALYTICS • GA4

CAMPAIGN
BFCM_Main_Push

REPORTED CONVERSIONS

1,412

◆ 24% lower than Meta

Different attribution window. Different session logic. Same afternoon.

Last synced 2:47 PM • Nov 29

FINANCE • SHOPIFY

CAMPAIGN
BFCM_Main_Push

ACTUAL PURCHASES

1,203

▼ 35% gap vs. Meta

Verified transactions only. This is the number margin is measured against.

Last synced 2:47 PM • Nov 29

Ingredients for great data-driven decision making

A strong data foundation comes from having the right data, not just more of it. It must be robust, accurate, and trustworthy enough to act without a second guess.

Here's what high-performing brands with strong data foundations have in common:

- **Unified event tracking** that connects every customer interaction to a verified outcome
- **Conversion integrity** backed by a single, accurate source of truth
- **Real-time visibility** that lets your team shift ad spend and adjust on-site promotions while campaigns are still active
- **Cross-functional alignment** built on shared definitions of success
- **Governance and monitoring** that keeps accuracy intact as your tech stack evolves

When these pieces are in place, data stops being a report and starts being an operational advantage. In short: no guessing, no reconciling, no arguing about whose numbers are right.

Bringing clarity to chaos

Most sites don't have one source of truth for customer-level actions (such as add-to-cart, checkouts, or purchases). They have a dozen tools, each presenting its own version of the story.

Elevar builds this structure once and keeps 50+ downstream destinations — such as Google Analytics, Meta, and Klaviyo— reading from the same accurate source.

This means your team isn't reconciling three versions of "what happened" during the exact week you can least afford the confusion.

The data readiness framework

It turns out that most brand leaders think they're ready for BFCM... until peak traffic exploits the gaps they didn't know they had. Deposco's post-peak analysis of the 2024 holiday season found that while 70% of executives entered peak season confident in their fulfillment systems, only 42% achieved successful system performance.

That's the gap the following exercise is built to catch before it literally costs you. Below are four questions that can help identify your brand's possible vulnerabilities to the four foundational gaps described above.

It'll take about 30 seconds to complete.

What's your state of readiness?

Question	Score
Visibility: Can you access and review any conversion event, on any channel, within minutes of it happening?	0 / 1 / 2
Validation: Can a team member check those events for missing or mismatched data before your team acts on the numbers?	0 / 1 / 2
Access: Can your team access the insight they need themselves, without filing a ticket or waiting on IT?	0 / 1 / 2
Alignment: Are marketing, analytics, and finance all measuring performance from the same source of truth?	0 / 1 / 2

Total: ____ out of 8

Now add up your score to find where you land.

0-3: Exposed

You're heading into peak season without a reliable picture of what's converting, and the gaps most likely to hit first are already in motion. These likely include fragmented tracking across platforms, and marketing and finance working from different numbers before the first spike even arrives.

> **Your first move:** Fix fragmented tracking. Until add-to-cart, checkout, and Purchase fire the same event names and parameters on every platform, attribution and alignment both inherit that same gap.

4-6: Half-Ready

Parts of your foundation should hold during a major shopping event, but others won't survive contact with peak traffic. A low score on Validation or Access in the table above points to the same failure mode: insights are arriving too late, or lacking proper verification, to act on when it counts.

> **Your first move:** Put an automated check between your events and dashboards. A team that can see events but can't trust them without manual checking is still too slow for peak-hour decisions.

7-8: Ready

Your team is entering peak season working from one trusted picture... which is exactly what turns fast decisions into good ones instead of guesses.

> **Your first move:** Take note of what's working now, so it survives your next platform migration or team change.

Whatever your results might be, you're leaving speed and clarity on the table until every answer above is at least 2. Otherwise, the gaps you identify will translate directly into lost revenue during peak season.

Here's the good news: Just as foundational gaps compound, so do foundational gains. Every improvement in visibility and confidence carries into the next peak season. Your forecasts become more accurate, and your business gets more efficient and profitable along with them.

Operate with agility through real-time clarity

Once peak season begins, the foundation you've built collides with real-world conditions: rapid shifts in demand, fluctuating ad costs, and unpredictable customer behavior.

For the unprepared, that pressure finds every weak point at once. New Relic's 2025 Observability Forecast for Retail & eCommerce found that nearly one in three retailers experience high-business-impact outages weekly, and peak season is exactly when that frequency turns into real revenue lost.

Instant information for immediation action

During peak season, "we'll know by tomorrow's report" isn't fast enough.

Elevar provides a live event feed that tracks page views, add-to-cart, and Purchase events as they happen. It also provides debugging tools that catch a broken or missing tracking event right away (before it quietly costs you a day of bad decisions).

These capabilities are built for the brands that need to know by the next refresh... and fix it before the next hour of traffic hits the same gap.

Agile organizations treat data like a feedback loop instead of a static report. Marketing, analytics, and operations adapt as results evolve, and don't wait for a post-season debrief to figure out what worked.

The result is **a positive culture of experimentation** where teams test, measure, and iterate without waiting for perfect conditions.

When you build this rhythm, your team acts fast without losing control: shifting ad spend mid-campaign, adjusting an on-site promotion, or catching a broken checkout flow before it costs you a day of lost conversions.

Proof in practice

The brands that win peak season find their edge before the rush hits through testing and experimentation.

One Elevar customer — a wellness brand — recovered data lost to cookie limits and ad blockers, unlocking sharper attribution and a 44% revenue lift within 90 days of implementation.

Another customer — a French retailer — grew its email subscriber list by nearly one-third and had its best holiday season on record after a single change to signup copy. (No dev work was required.)

The real lesson here isn't the tactics that were used. It's having clean data early enough to know changes were working before the traffic made it obvious.

Combating costly delays

During BFCM and other peak traffic events, speed matters because delay compounds. The New Relic report mentioned above found that retailers take a median of 30 minutes just to detect a critical outage, and another 42 minutes to resolve it.

This can mean a median cost of $1 million per hour of downtime during peak trading.

Even a next-day report means you've spent your peak-hour traffic events making decisions on yesterday's numbers… and every hour of that lag is another hour compounding at the same rate the we just put a price on.

To be clear, agility means shrinking the distance between insight and action, so your strategy moves at the same speed as your customers. Speed on its own, without that connection to insight, is just motion.

When data clarity meets operational speed, decision-making becomes proactive. That's the difference between a brand that adapts to peak season and one that's just enduring it.

How to build a culture of agility

Technology and data might make agility possible, but company culture makes it stick. Your team should be empowered to act on live data and feel confident that what they're seeing is, in fact, true.

It comes down to three company-culture themes:

- **Trust the data:** Your team must believe in the integrity and compliance of the metrics in front of them
- **Permit fast decisions:** Cut unnecessary approval layers during peak moments and replace hesitation or groupthink with clear thresholds for action
- **Learn continuously:** Treat every campaign and shift in customer behavior as a lesson and feed it back into next season's strategy

In agile organizations, clarity drives confidence, and confidence drives execution.

Moving quickly and smartly

Agility becomes possible once your data systems work together. Elevar transforms tracking and analytics into a live, reliable network of insight through:

- **Source-level validation:** Data is checked for accuracy and compliance right where it's collected
- **Real-time visibility:** Your team monitors performance continuously, not after the fact
- **Automated alerts:** Discrepancies or changes are flagged right away
- **Unified reporting:** One clear view of performance across every channel

With this network in place, your team moves quickly because they can see clearly.

Turn results into strategy

When the rush of peak season ends, the most valuable asset collected is data, not revenue. Every impression, click, and conversion becomes part of a bigger story: how your customers engage, what shapes their decisions, and where your brand creates value.

This is why the most successful brands don't treat peak season like a finish line. They treat it like a classroom... one that refines strategy for the whole year ahead.

The value of a post-mortem

Once the pace slows after peak season, your data is fodder for next year's strategy. A 2026 Reach survey found that 40% of retailers say BFCM doesn't deliver strong profitability despite high sales volumes. At Audiense, we see this as proof that revenue captured and value captured aren't the same thing, and this gap only shows up if you go looking for it afterward.

This means asking questions that connect the recent peak shopping event with the next:

- Which campaigns delivered the highest incremental return?
- Where did we lose efficiency to data or operational gaps?
- What shifts in customer behavior signaled a new opportunity?
- Which metrics predicted success across channels?

The answers reveal more than what happened. They reveal *why* they happened... and the lessons you uncover can decide whether next year's growth is reactive or intentional. That's the bridge between performance and planning.

Turning insights into advantage

Every peak season is a testing ground for your data foundation. It shows where your data systems and team held up under pressure, and where improvement opportunities showed up that you didn't expect.

Acting on those insights becomes a cycle of continuous improvement. Data stops being a report on what happened and starts predicting what comes next. Here's how strategic brands turn peak season learnings into year-round returns:

- **They invest in infrastructure** that scales data foundations alongside business growth
- **They expand first-party data** to stay ahead of ongoing privacy changes
- **They align cross-functional teams** around one clear definition of success
- **They build agility into planning,** not just execution

Follow these guidelines, and your business can weather volatility and grow through it, guided by data that's trusted, compliant, and actionable.

Incisive profit analysis

Every peak season produces a pile of short-term numbers. Elevar is built for the question that matters more: *Which of those numbers held up over time?*

This tracks cohort profitability across retention, subscriptions, and lifetime value. Instead of asking "did this channel drive revenue in November?", you can ask "is the customer that channel brought in November still profitable in March?"

That's the difference between a peak season that just happened and one that's informing next year's plan.

Get your strategic edge before the peak

Peak season certainly tests your site's performance, but it also tests your org's readiness and agility — and *your* leadership.

Remember the questionnaire you took earlier in this playbook? Consider it the new standard for growth:

- **Fix tracking first** if fragmented events are still the gap. Nothing else compounds until this one closes.
- **Fix trust in the data next** if your team can see events but can't act on them fast. Validation is what turns visibility into speed.
- **Document what's working** if your foundation already holds. Protect it against the next platform migration or team change.

Audiense Online, powered by Elevar, is built to solve the challenges found in this playbook. It delivers server-side tracking that captures conversion events with near-100% accuracy and flags issues as they happen.

Peak seasons like BFCM might last a few days, but the brands who learn from them, build on them, and lead with them turn that one surge of demand into a competitive edge that lasts the rest of the year.

Learn more about Audiense Online here →

Schedule a demo today →