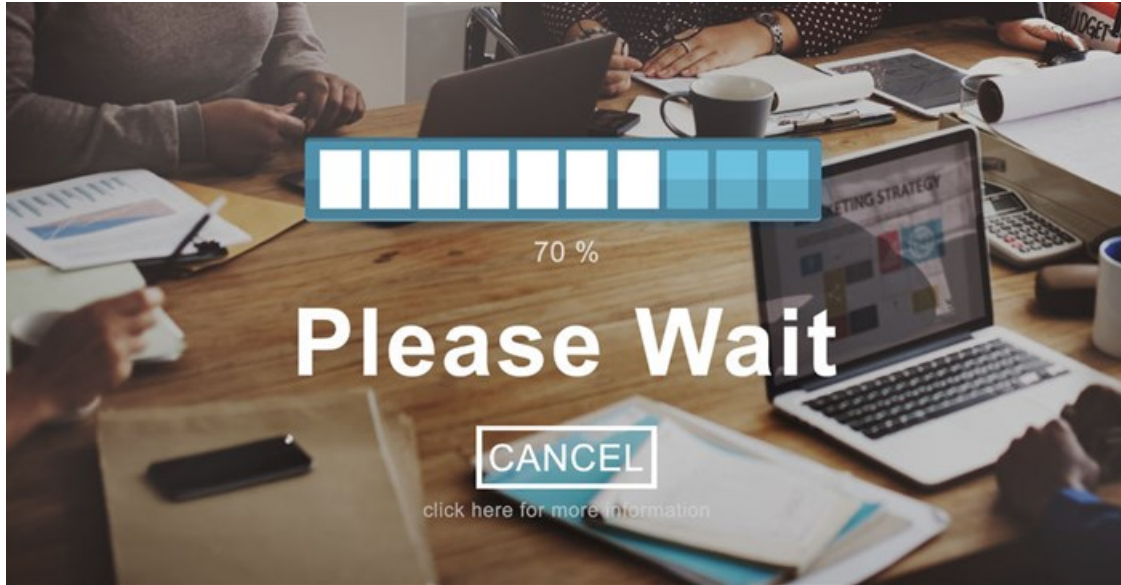


Is your website ready for Black Friday?

By  [Sven Hammar](#)

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When running an e-commerce website, downtime is the equivalent of locking your doors to the public. Not only are you not doing business, but you're also actively pushing your customers into the arms of the competition.



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Amazon found that every 100 milliseconds of downtime cost them 1% in sales, and Google found that an extra 0.5 seconds in search page generation time dropped site traffic by 20%. Slow performance affects everything from individual transactions to customer retention, and ultimately revenue.

E-commerce businesses simply cannot afford to suffer a slip in performance.

There are several failure points you have to research carefully to avoid, including having a good hosting provider and using a reliable content delivery network (CDN) to keep your traffic flowing. However, your website is your responsibility, and it's up to you to do the load testing and proactive monitoring required — seeing problems developing early and heading them off before they take you down.

Target, for example, greeted its Black Friday shoppers with a page reading: “So sorry, but high traffic is causing delays. If you wouldn't mind holding, we'll refresh automatically and get things going ASAP.” With a stress test and a concurrency test, the site could have been exercised well before the busiest online shopping day of the year, and the bottlenecks and

inefficiencies could have been eliminated.

Best Buy had their share of problems in 2014 when their website experienced problems through Black Friday and into the following Saturday. Instead of facilitating online business, their website failed because, according to a company statement: “BestBuy.com has experienced record levels of website traffic. This has affected site performance, and we have temporarily taken the site down in response. We are taking measures to restore full performance of the site as quickly as possible.” They, too, could have avoided this with a scalability test that would have let them know well in advance when they would reach the breaking point of their website.

It's not just downtime that can torpedo an otherwise irresistible website. Below are five tips for e-commerce sites this holiday season...

1. Test all device types

This is a world full of different browsers and an assortment of mobile devices with different operating systems. Each needs to be catered to if a website is going to be successful. Most consumers expect the same quality and speed of performance when shopping on mobile devices as they do when shopping online. Creating a set of tests that emulate desktop devices and mobile devices along with tests that emulate all of the popular web browsers can ferret out problems that might not otherwise be found. Overlooking those tests might launch a website that works fine on an iPhone, but is terrible on a Galaxy S6. Chrome users may see a poorly-rendered page, while Firefox users are delighted with the site. Test against all device types and your site will be stable and well-rendered regardless of the device used to get there.

2. Load test your website

Load testing is a way to control your website's performance during different types of load (traffic). Measure your e-commerce website's performance during normal variations of traffic. Test regularly before, during, and after peak season to make sure you have reliable information on your website's usual performance. Specialised companies can test and optimize your website, simulate peak loads by using synthetic traffic, and suggest improvements. These companies usually also offer cloud-based monitoring services.

3. Test your maximum load capacity

Without testing, it is nearly impossible to know what will happen at peak loads, like during the Christmas holiday. Scenarios that usually work flawlessly may become bottlenecks. Damage control is a test which shows what it will take to crash your website and how. With a damage control test, you can see how your website gets back on its feet — even at full load capacity. A specialized company can give you advice on how to avoid a website crash or slow response times when the number of visitors increases dramatically.

4. Optimise images and videos

It might feel cool and modern to have many high-resolution images and videos on your website, but it can have a bad impact on your response times. If you do want large images on your site, make sure to invest in a system that can do short response times despite high-resolution content. Use a so-called CDN/accelerator service in order to speed up the delivery of heavy content, such as images and videos.

5. Know your website speed

Even during large loads of traffic, the time it takes for a visitor to download your entire website should not be more than three seconds. E-shoppers don't have much patience. If the website is too slow, the visitor will search for the

same product on a different website. If your response time is too long, you will lose both conversion and Google ranking. We can all agree that the speed and quality of a website's performance affects consumer trust. Similarly, waiting more than a few seconds for a website to load will negatively affect your bottom line. Analyse how well your website holds up in comparison to your competitors: Are you faster or slower? How much money are you losing because of bad response times and conversions?

E-commerce has become a key part of every business. Whether a business sells its goods or services over the internet or simply advertises there, having a website with spotty performance — or one that crashes due to overwhelming demand — will ensure loss of sales and prestige. Prestige can be recouped, but lost sales can never be regained. Website testing for flash crowds, sustained traffic, and various device types can help the knowledgeable merchant keep his web presence up and servicing his clientele.

ABOUT SVEN HAMMAR

Sven Hammar is co-founder and CEO of Apica, a provider of powerful, best-in-class technology for testing, monitoring, and optimizing the performance of cloud and mobile applications. He has decade-long experience and expertise in web performance and web optimization, e-commerce, cloud services, IT entrepreneurship and the Internet. He is also a serial entrepreneur who has founded several successful IT companies over the years.

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