



Retail Email Year-End Trends for 2008

Email volume, frequency and timing trends among the top online retailers during 2008

By Chad White

As you plan your 2009 campaigns, it helps to look back on your 2008 campaigns and to benchmark yourself against your retail email marketing peers. This reportlet includes a variety of stats and charts about retail email marketing during this past year, including...

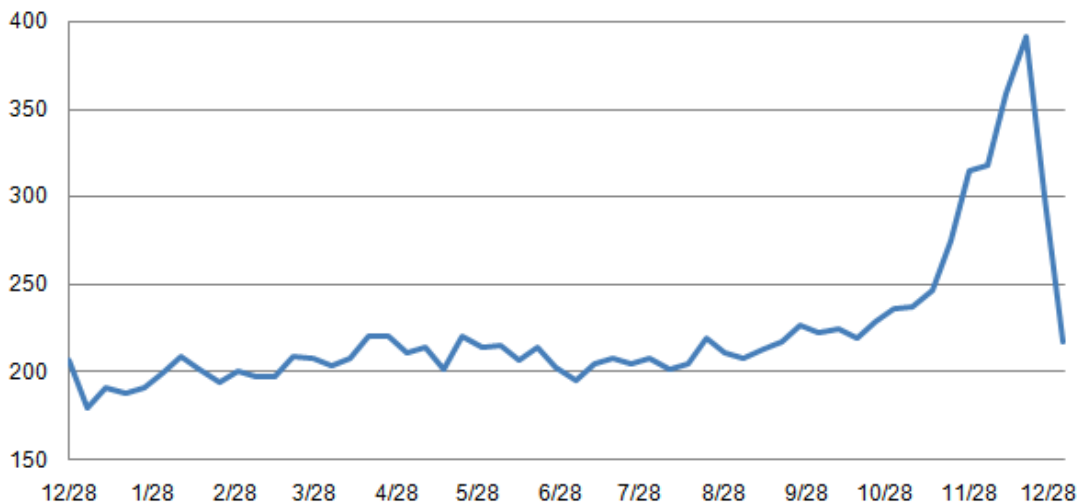
- [Retail Email Index 2008 Reading](#)
- [Annual and Monthly Average Retail Email Volumes](#)
- [Retail Email Day of the Week Popularity](#)
- [The 20 Most Popular Retail Email Days of 2008](#)
- [Relative Popularity of Retail Email Selling Seasons](#)
- [Retail Email Selling Season Windows](#)

Retail Email Index 2008 Reading

2008 saw record email volumes from retailers, as measured by the Retail Email Index, which is a measure of the promotional email volume generated by the top 100 online retailers. Nearly every weekend you can see a trailing-12-weeks reading of the Index in the [Week-End Trends posts](#) on the [Retail Email Blog](#), but to give you a better idea of how retail email volumes varied over the course of the year, here's a 54-week chart that encompasses all of 2008:

Retail Email Index for 2008

The promotional email volume generated by 100 of the top online retailers



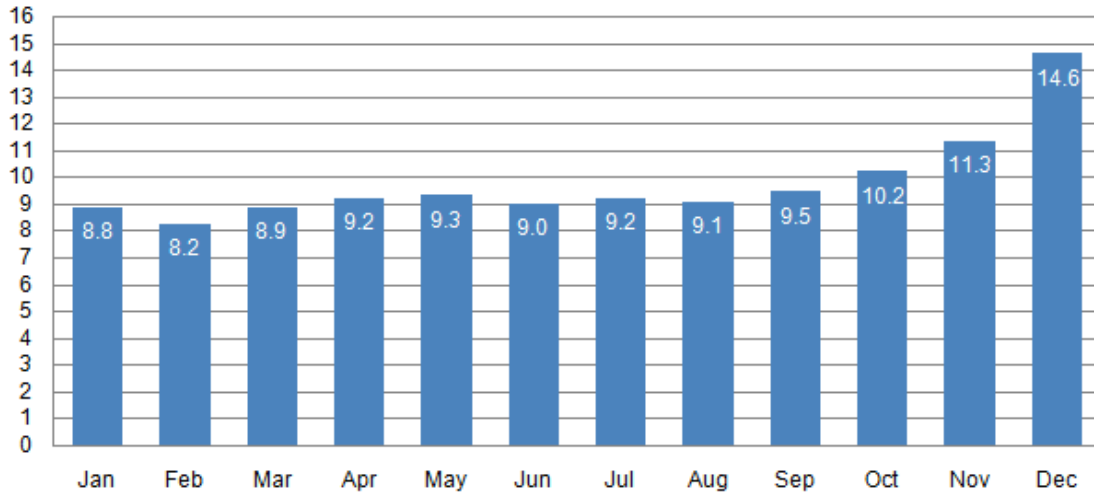
© 2009. The Retail Email Blog



Annual and Monthly Average Retail Email Volumes

During 2008, the retailers tracked by the [Retail Email Blog](#) sent an average of 117 emails each, averaging a monthly send volume of 9.8 emails and a weekly send volume of 2.3 emails. During the first three quarters of the year, retailers sent 9.0 emails each month on average; but during the fourth quarter averaged 12.1 emails. Here's how the email volume breaks down on a monthly basis:

Monthly Average Retail Email Volumes
Monthly promotional email volume generated by the top 100 online retailers



© 2009. The Retail Email Blog

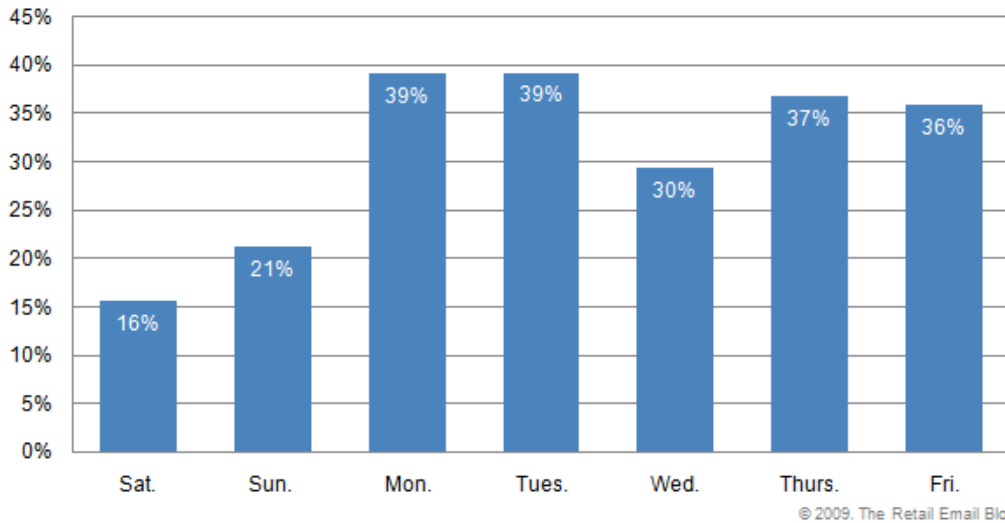


Retail Email Day of the Week Popularity

Over the course of 2008, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday proved to be consistently the most popular days to send retail emails, while Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday proved to be consistently the least popular days. Friday was in the middle of the pack, weaker during the first half of the year, but then coming on much stronger in the fourth quarter.

Retail Email Day of the Week Popularity, 2008

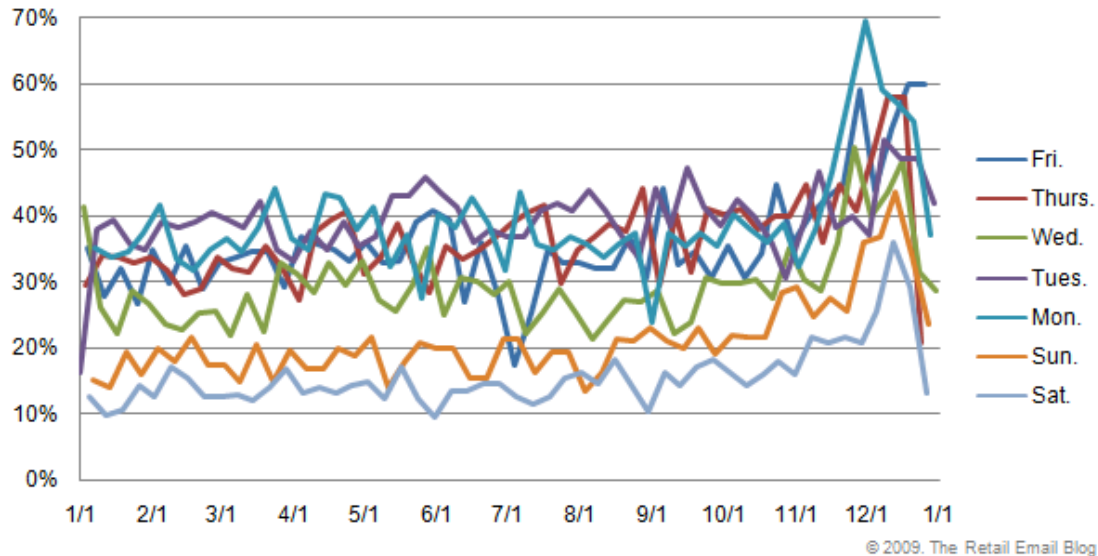
Percentage of major online retailers sending at least one promotional email



And below is a chart of the popularity of each day of the week during the year. Keep in mind that the popularity of a day during a given week is highly influenced by the timing of holidays and their corresponding standard shipping deadlines.

Retail Email Day of the Week Popularity, 2008

Percentage of major online retailers sending at least one promotional email





The 20 Most Popular Retail Email Days of 2008

Given the importance of holiday spending to retailers, it's no surprise that the vast majority of the biggest retail email days of the year come in December and November—in fact, 19 of the top 20 fall during those two months. Top days include Cyber Monday (Dec. 1), which held onto the No. 1 spot for the second year in a row, and the day after Christmas, which held onto the No. 3 spot for the second year in a row. (For more on Cyber Monday retail email activity, check out [Cyber Monday Sees Record Retail Email Volume](#).)

Outside of the holiday season, only Sept. 16 cracked the top 20. That day doesn't appear to correlate to any seasonal action, but it was around the time that the economy and stock market began to falter, so retailers may have been reacting to that or to inventory build-ups caused by it. During 2007, tax day (April 17) and Aug. 14 (in the heart of the back-to-school season) made the list.

Here's a full listing of the top 20 retail email days of 2008:

Rank	% of Retailers Sending Email	Date (Day of the Week)	Proximity to Major Holiday
1	70%	Dec. 1 (Mon.)	Cyber Monday
2	60%	Dec. 19 (Fri.)	6 days before Christmas, Black Friday #4
3	60%	Dec. 26 (Fri.)	Day after Christmas
4	59%	Nov. 28 (Fri.)	Black Friday
5	59%	Dec. 8 (Mon.)	Cyber Monday #2
6	58%	Dec. 11 (Thurs.)	14 days before Christmas
7	58%	Dec. 18 (Thurs.)	7 days before Christmas
8	58%	Nov. 24 (Mon.)	Monday before Thanksgiving
9	57%	Dec. 15 (Mon.)	Cyber Monday #3
10	54%	Dec. 22 (Mon.)	Monday before Christmas, Cyber Monday #4
11	53%	Dec. 12 (Fri.)	Black Friday #3
12	51%	Dec. 9 (Tues.)	16 days before Christmas
13	50%	Nov. 26 (Wed.)	Day before Thanksgiving
14	50%	Dec. 4 (Thurs.)	21 days before Christmas
15	49%	Dec. 17 (Wed.)	8 days before Christmas
16	49%	Dec. 23 (Tues.)	2 days before Christmas
17	49%	Dec. 16 (Tues.)	9 days before Christmas
18	47%	Sept. 16 (Tues.)	Perhaps related to timing of economic meltdown
19	47%	Nov. 17 (Mon.)	10 days before Thanksgiving
20	47%	Nov. 11 (Tues.)	16 days before Thanksgiving

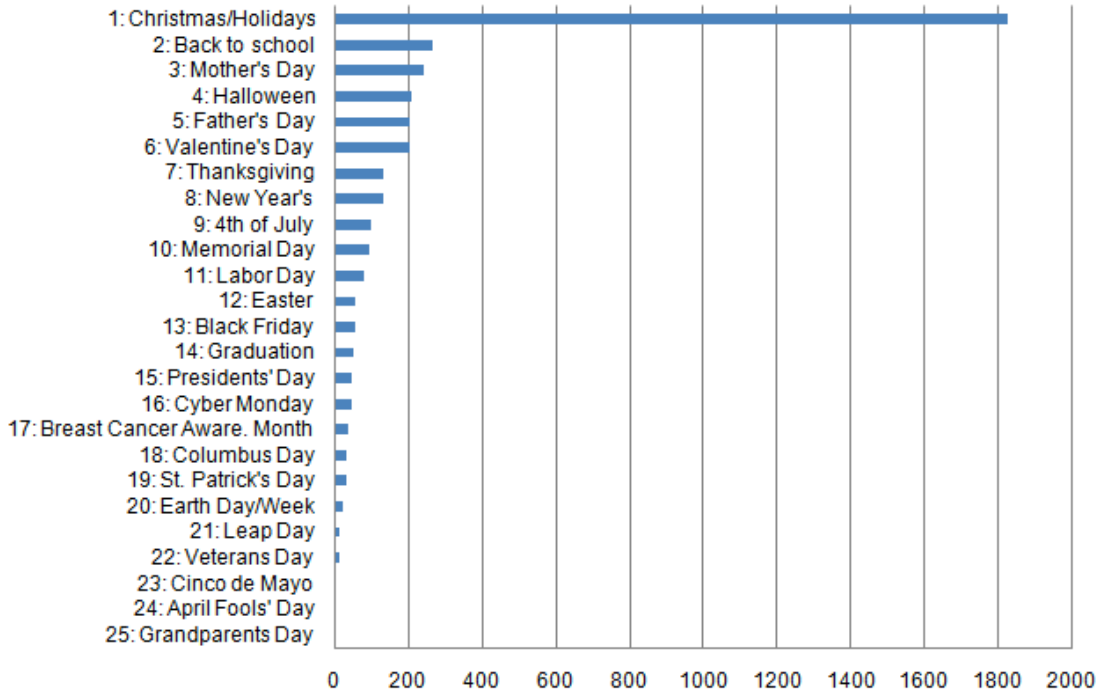


Relative Popularity of Retail Email Selling Seasons

Behind Christmas—which dwarfs everything else—the biggest retail email selling seasons during 2008 were the back-to-school season, Mother’s Day, Halloween and Father’s Day. The following chart ranks all 25 selling seasons tracked by the [Retail Email Blog](#) according to how much attention they get from retail email marketers:

Relative Popularity of Retail Email Selling Seasons

The selling seasons that garner the most attention in retailers' email campaigns



© 2009. The Retail Email Blog

A few year-over-year movements are worth noting. First, Breast Cancer Awareness Month fell from the 13th spot in 2007 to No. 17 last year. Retailers that I’ve spoken with said that in 2007 breast cancer was given too much attention by retailers—to the point that customers complained that retailers were neglecting other causes.

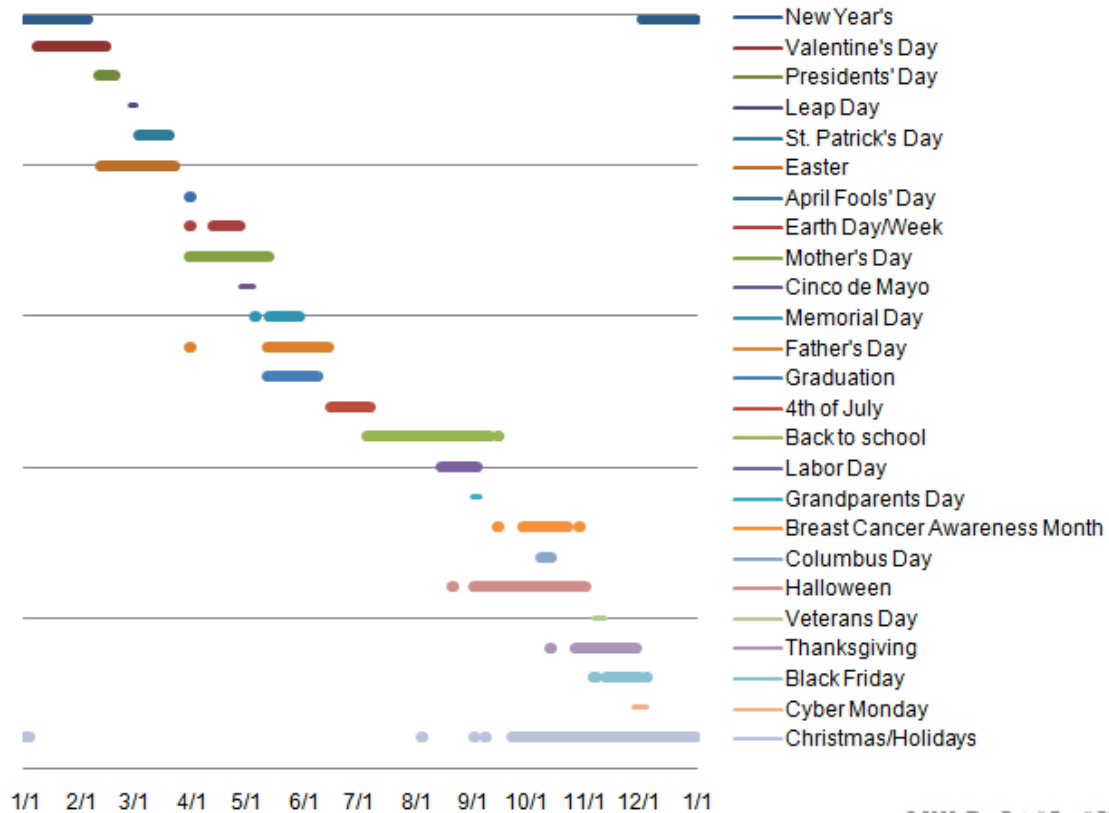
Second, Easter received considerably less attention, slipping from No. 8 to No. 12. Third, Cyber Monday climbed two spots to No. 16, gaining on its increased name-recognition thanks to plenty of mainstream news coverage. And finally, despite retailers giving much more attention to eco-friendly products, Earth Day/Week was still near the bottom of the list in the No. 20 spot.



Retail Email Selling Season Windows

Retailers' email promotions largely revolve around holidays and other selling seasons. So when you're putting together your 2009 campaign calendar, consider the timings and durations of the 25 holidays and selling seasons in the chart below. The core of the selling season is indicated by a solid line, with outliers from 2008 indicated as dots.

Retail Email Selling Season Windows
The timing and duration of select selling seasons during 2008



© 2009. The Retail Email Blog

For a look at the magnitude of the references during those windows, check out the Retail Email Blog's [Season Finale posts](#), which include detailed distribution curves so you can easily see when references to a particular selling season are at their height and when they are building or dwindling.



About the Author

Chad White is the Research Director at Smith-Harmon, an email marketing strategy and creative services agency. The founder and author of the [Retail Email Blog](#), Chad is an authority on email marketing strategies and trends in the retail industry. He regularly writes research reports on email marketing best practices and trends, is an Email Insider columnist for MediaPost, is an active member of the Email Experience Council, and supports Smith-Harmon clients with his advice and exclusive research.

About Smith-Harmon, Inc.

Smith-Harmon is a unique agency providing email marketing strategy and creative services. Since its founding in 2003, Smith-Harmon has developed a stellar reputation for email expertise, maximizing performance and driving results for leading brands from Alaska Airlines to Williams-Sonoma. Service offerings include email strategy consulting that includes innovative engagement tactics, training in-house teams to become email experts, and email creative services. Beyond serving clients, Smith-Harmon is an active member of the email marketing community, helping to develop best practices with its research and outreach efforts and its leadership roles with the Email Experience Council and the Email Marketing Roundtable.

For more information, visit <http://www.smith-harmon.com>