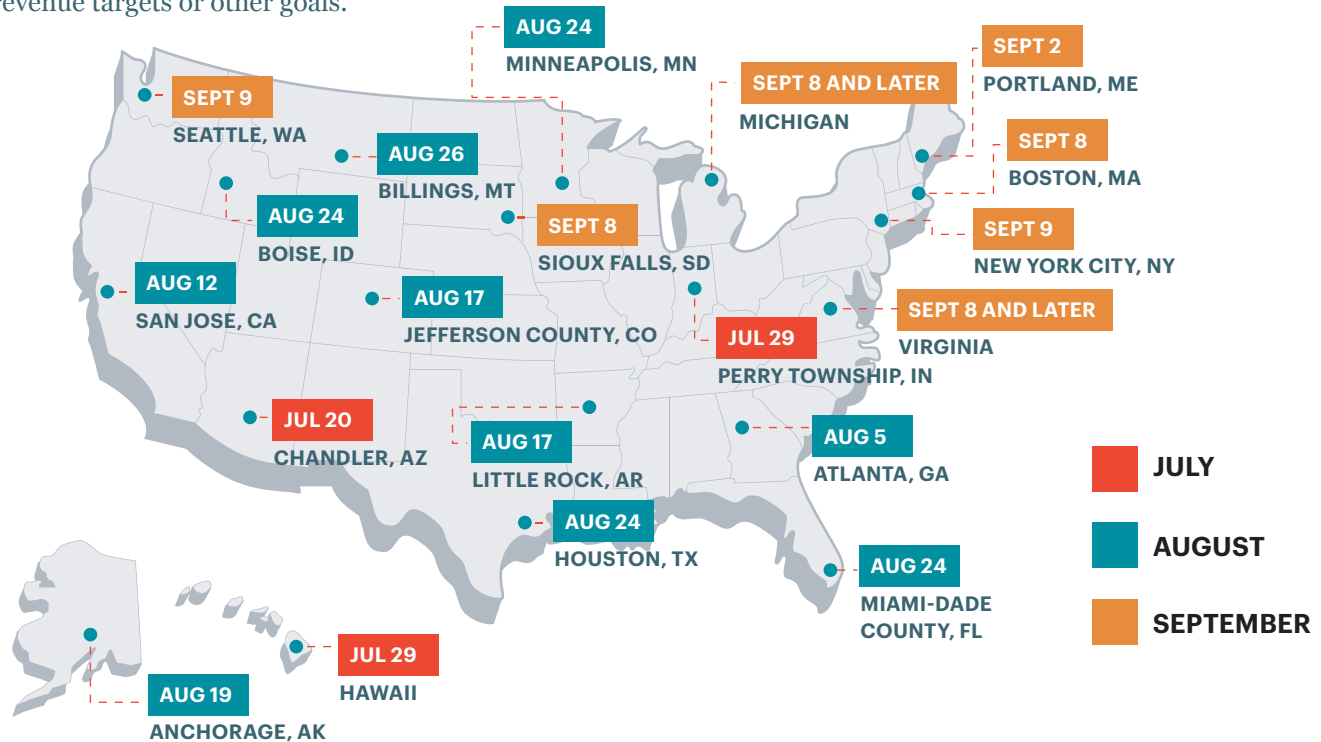




## What's the takeaway?

The extension of the retail shopping season is in response to consumer behavior, not despite it. Consumers are experienced, savvy and perhaps most importantly, they're patient. There is a delicate balance between consumers casually checking deals out early and pulling the trigger on these purchases. If they believe there is still room for a price drop, they'll wait it out. Consider starting your very best deals earlier and then extending them for longer rather than creating deep price drops at the last minute. Doing so will encourage consistent purchases throughout the shopping season, rather than all in one mad rush. Consumers have time to make purchases based on their own return-to-school schedules (see below image for historical return dates by region), and brands have the ability to adjust and course correct should they find revenue performance is not meeting revenue targets or other goals.



Get to know when your audience is in-market for different or specific product categories as shopping spikes differ across categories. For example, computer purchases peak from July to early August while clothing peaks Labor Day through late September. Getting to know who's buying what and when allows you to better reach your target consumers. Necessities including dorm-room staples, tend to be purchased most often in August right before classes begin. The same is true for boarding college students and teachers stocking up on cleaning supplies ahead of Labor Day. Non-essentials, including apparel and footwear sales, tend to ring up a bit later once students have had ample time to scour the halls for all the looks they love (see, they are learning!). Bottom line: connect with publishing partners on campaigns based on timing and product-specific buying trends to ensure the best outcomes.

## Mobile continues to be teacher's pet when it comes to shopping devices

While many kids spent their summers with their eyes glued to their phones (much to their parents' dismay), mobile remains a strong purchase closer. One plausible theory is that mobile works so well in the summer since families are typically enjoying their time off either by traveling or just lounging poolside and are more apt to be browsing on their phones than on a clunky laptop. Data suggest this spike in mobile purchases is especially apparent in July and August. Another interesting fact? Data suggests that unlike previous years, mobile is no longer relegated to last-minute purchases—sales have proven steady throughout the course of the shopping season.

### **What's the takeaway?**

If all eyes are on mobile, then it makes sense to work closely with your most mobile-adept publishers who have the best chance at reaching consumers early on in their quest for the perfect product. Keep in mind, that you'll need to supply your publishers with the content they need to set your product apart from the others and you'll need to make sure this content renders well on mobile or the point (and your effort) will be moot. Look at top mobile app publishers including: TopCashback, rewardStyle, Groupon, Coupons.com, Brad's Deals, CouponCabin, dealmoon and Lyst, who have honed their mobile strategy. And perhaps most importantly, it's not just about being present on mobile devices, it's more about where Gen Zers spend most of their time (we're looking at you, Pinterest and Instagram), so don't disappoint visually—make sure your brand looks fresh stands out from the competitors.

### **You also need to be aware of cross-device action (and what that means for your publishing partners)**

Even though mobile was the big shopping device winner in 2017, it doesn't mean that desktop wasn't. In fact, desktop purchases accounted for higher AOVs with most computer and high-tag electronic purchases completed on desktop.



### **What's the takeaway?**

If browsing starts on mobile, it doesn't mean that it will end there. Shoppers may very well complete the purchase on desktop, which is especially true with higher-priced items.

Exclusive code tracking can be employed as a mechanism to track the effectiveness of your marketing message across channels. Simply allocate codes for back-to-school promotions to publishers, and no matter where they advertise the code, transactions associated with exclusive codes will be attributed not only to the assigned publisher, but also to the affiliate channel. With exclusive code tracking, you can harness the power of publishers' omni-channel reach, and capture cross device shoppers, regardless of device, medium or channel.

### **Seasonal shopping spikes are perfect for increasing foot traffic in-store**

There's good news here if you have a brick-and-mortar store: Deloitte reports that 57% of back-to-school spend will happen in-store. And holiday and seasonal shopping cycles are prime times to cash in on in-store sales, so leverage your digital campaigns to drive actual foot traffic to your locations.

### **What's the takeaway?**

There are big wins to be had in brick-and-mortars for shoppers who prefer to see and feel back-to-school items before making their purchase. If you also operate a brick-and-mortar store, you can sweeten the deal by leveraging digital in-store incentives and coupons, card linked offers, and/or buy online pick up in-store to increase foot traffic. Work with publishing partners who have the best track record driving in-store purchases for you and use tracking data you have available to support these cross-channel tactics including: Ebates (card-linked offers), RetailMeNot (in-store promotions) and Ibotta (in-store cash back).

## Consider Labor Day the Cyber Monday of back-to-school season

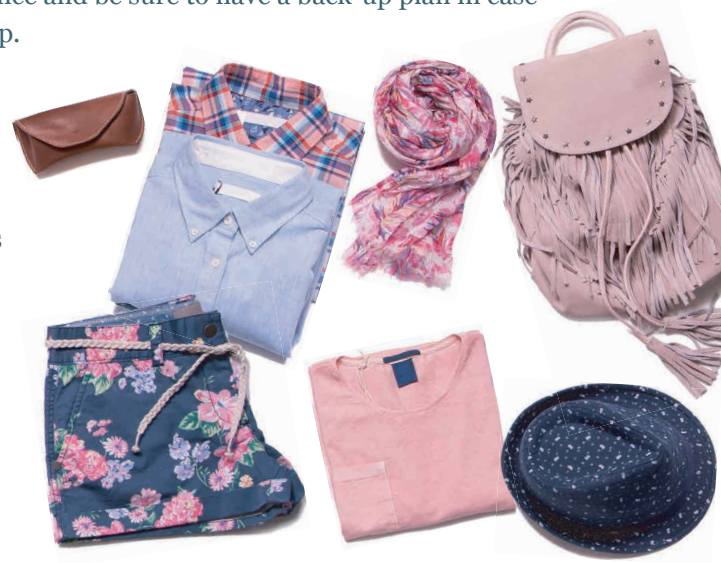
During Q3, Labor Day (the entire weekend, in fact) is one of the biggest and best times to shop. Not only does it give shoppers 3 full days of shopping while offering amazing savings on seasonal items, but in many parts across the country, it's the first Monday after kids have returned to school (remember what we said about kids wanting to see styles before buying?).

### What's the takeaway?

Labor Day is already a national treasure—a 3-day weekend for many Americans who will get a day off to relax and enjoy some much-needed R&R. Marketers should celebrate that time too and build up the anticipation of offers to come ahead of Monday. Provide publishers with advanced notice of promotions via newsletters and then be sure to upload your scheduled promotions so they are visible to publishers. Additionally, secure prime placements on publisher sites during this period to drive performance and be sure to have a back-up plan in case your promotional strategy doesn't work allowing you time to recoup.

## Apparel wins back-to-school spending

This may come as little surprise as apparel has long held one of the most coveted spots on the back-to-school essentials list, but there's just something about looking good on the big day that trumps all else—and the sales support it. According to the NRF, money spent on clothing is set to reach more than \$236 per shopper, with electronics trailing behind at a little over \$187 per shopper (think calculators and other tech gadgets). Shoes and stationary supplies rank next at \$136 and \$122 spent per shopper, respectively.



### What's the takeaway?

Buying basic supplies will always be necessity: there will be demand and there will be supply. However, the one constant in apparel is that styles are constantly changing and evolving. Styles wax and styles wane, and purchases are made accordingly. So, while school supplies account for roughly 20% of the average shopper's budget, clothing and accessories account for a whopping 55% of the budget—an increase of more than 10% between 2016-2017! This puts the average back-to-school shopper at a spend of \$104 on supplies and \$284 on apparel. If you are a Clothing and Apparel brand and are wondering whether your affiliate program metrics make or break the grade when it comes to back-to-school, check out our benchmark statistics from Q3 2017 Clothing and Apparel vertical to see how your program stacks up:



## 2017 Q3 Clothing/Apparel Stats

3%

Conversion Rate

6%

Commission Rate

\$17

ROAS

\$86

AOV

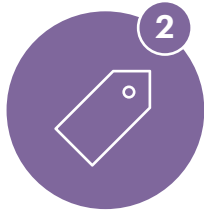


## Get to the head of the class: Quick tips for an A+ back-to-school affiliate optimization strategy!



### 1. Establish your KPIs

Having a clear understanding of your back-to-school KPIs is critical to setting expectations not only for your overall affiliate program performance, but also for individual publishers. Setting goals around revenue, traffic and other metrics helps you figure out what to focus on, and in turn, helps your publishers align and optimize against your target objectives.



### 2. Plan promotions

Plan consumer promotions and messaging in advance. Back-to-school placements on publisher sites are secured early, and promotion detail may be necessary to lock in a placement. However, though it may be August, it's not too late to secure remnant inventory or identify publisher placements that are deeply discounted. A robust promotional strategy across back-to-school season is recommended to maintain consumer interest. Think BOGO, dollars off and percentage off promotions across varying dates, publishers and product assortments.



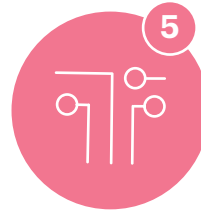
### 3. Negotiate and secure paid placements

Work with key publishers to secure premium placements and exposure on their websites and mobile applications. Negotiate rates based on the consumer promotions and/or cashback rate provided to publishers and ensure maximum coverage and ultimately, reach to consumers.



### 4. Communicate with publishers

After goals and promotional strategy are established, communicate key promotions and dates to publishers to ensure they are prepped and primed to run your brand's content and messaging on their sites. The more advanced notice you can provide, the better.



### 5. Execute and optimize

Have all your relevant back-to-school creative ready to go to support your strategy. Take care to monitor publisher sites to ensure appropriate messaging and placement. And of course, don't forget to run reports to determine performance outcomes and whether adjustments need to be made.



### 6. Apply learnings

Tracking the effectiveness of promotions, placements, products and publisher activity this year, will enable you to be even more effective next year, and primed for a successful 2019 back-to-school season!





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