2026 holiday season: E-commerce trends for consumers

A data report from FedEx highlighting the important trends of the upcoming holiday season.



Key takeaways for the 2026 holiday shopping season

Click on a topic below to jump to the insights!

1

Peak season plans & expectations

Consumers expect holiday spending to remain largely stable, with over half expecting to shop online the same amount and planning to spend the same on gifts but becoming more selective.

However, economic uncertainty is driving smaller gift lists and more budget-conscious behavior.

35% are most concerned about disappointing their children if gifts arrive late.

2

Last-minute gifting and holiday procrastination

Difficulty choosing gifts and waiting for deals drive last-minute shopping.

Last-minute behavior leads to extra store trips and switching retailers due to delivery timing.

3

Affordability and value

Price remains critical: seven in ten prioritize the lowest overall price over guaranteed delivery.

4

AI and holiday shopping

AI is gaining traction among users, with nearly three in five AI users more likely to use it instead of traditional search engines.

But adoption remains limited and consumers overwhelmingly trust their own judgment for gift selection, primarily using AI to find deals or for gifting ideas.



Holiday season plans and expectations

Consumers are leaning toward more **budget-conscious gifting**, including **saving for major expenses** and reducing the number of gift recipients, while **online shopping patterns are largely expected to remain unchanged** and overall holiday spending is expected to remain stable.

Online shopping vs. 2025

53%

22% More	Same	25% Less

Consumers expect to shop online the same amount as last holiday season

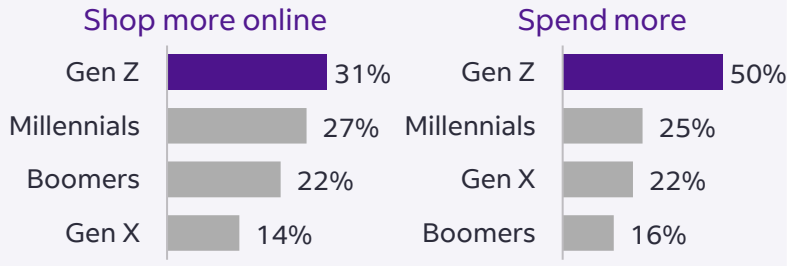
Gift spending vs. 2025

51%

24% More	Same	25% Less

Consumers expect to spend the same amount on holiday gifts as last holiday season

Share of increased online shopping and overall spending, by generation



Millennials lead in saving for big purchases, gifting fewer people, and shopping earlier, while **Boomers** are most concerned about economic uncertainty and **Gen X** leans toward experience-based spending.

Key holiday shopping behavior:

- **74%** Economic uncertainty affects my spending
- **47%** Gifting fewer people this holiday season
- **41%** Saving more for big purchases
- **40%** Starting holiday shopping earlier than last year
- **33%** Spending more on experiences than gifts

Last-minute shopping and holiday procrastination

Difficulty deciding on gifts, not procrastination, is the primary driver of last-minute shopping, followed by waiting for better prices or deals. **Making an extra store trip** is the most common action taken, and the **second week of December** is the most common point when shopping anxiety begins.

Why shoppers wait

30% difficulty deciding on gifts is the most common reason for last-minute holiday shopping, followed by waiting for better prices or deals (26%), a busy schedule (18%), and procrastination (15%)

Actions taken last season

43% making an extra trip to a store is the most common action consumers have taken, followed by buying from a different retailer due to delivery timing (37%) and purchasing a backup gift (26%)

Extra spend from last-minute shopping

43% spent less than $25 on last-minute holiday shopping

20% incurred additional costs of $25–$49

15% spent $50 or more, while 23% were unsure of the extra costs

When panic sets in



28%
2nd week of December



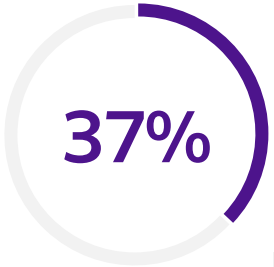
21%
3rd week of December



20%
Don't typically panic

Affordability and value

Holiday gifting is becoming more selective as consumers face **budget pressures**, with many planning to **cut back on gifts for coworkers, extended family, and neighbors**, while preserving gifting for immediate family. Direct-to-recipient gifting remains the preferred approach.



Holiday gift lists are expected to shrink

37% of consumers have already decided to **drop someone from their gift list this year who they bought for last year**. Others still remain undecided, indicating potential pullback in gift-giving.

Who consumers are most likely to stop gifting

31%	20%	19%
Coworkers	Extended family	Neighbors

70% of planned gifting reductions target coworkers, neighbors, and extended family.

Consumers are most likely to cut back on gifts for **coworkers, neighbors, friends, and extended family first**, while prioritizing immediate family, especially children, spouses, and parents, as the last to lose out on holiday gifts.

"Friends that I don't see during the year."
"I wouldn't. My fam is small and important to me."

Budget and cost pressures drive reduced holiday gifting

65%
Cut down gifting due to cost

38%
Cut down gifting due to relationship changes

34%
Cut down gifting due to too many people for gifting

Direct-to-recipient gifting remains the preferred approach

69%

Consumers will continue sending gifts directly to recipients, rather than exchanging them in person





Affordability and value

Free shipping and tracking visibility are the most important factors when shopping online, followed by easy returns.

What matters most when shopping online for gifts

Primary

85%
Free shipping

82%
Tracking visibility

74%
Easy returns

Secondary

Guaranteed delivery dates and low product prices (71% each) rank equally, while fast delivery (60%) ranks lowest among the listed factors

Impact of higher shipping costs

70% would abandon the purchase or shop elsewhere if shipping costs are higher than expected at checkout

Price vs. guaranteed delivery

70% Prioritize the lowest overall price

30% Prioritize guaranteed delivery by a date

AI use in holiday shopping

AI is gaining traction in holiday gift research, with **58% more likely to use it than traditional search**. While shoppers value AI for deals and gift inspiration, **personal judgment and family remain the most trusted sources for gift selection**.

AI usage for holiday shopping

54%

of shoppers have never used AI for holiday shopping and do not plan to. 43% intend to use it, including 30% first-time users and 13% returning users

AI vs. traditional search

58%

more likely to use AI for holiday gift research compared to last year (16% much more likely and 42% somewhat more likely). Meanwhile, 37% expect no change in their usage

How AI is used for holiday shopping

Best prices or deals	64%
Gift ideas / inspiration	60%
Brand & review research	54%

47% use or plan to use AI to compare product features, while 46% use it to discover new products. 22% use AI to track shipping or return policies

Offended by an AI-chosen gift?

74% saying they would not be offended if someone used AI to select their gift

Most trusted source for gift selection

Personal judgment (39%) and family members (21%) remain the most trusted sources for holiday gift decisions. **Only 2% trust AI the most**

Baby Boomers (66%) and Gen X (60%) are significantly more likely than Millennials (41%) to rule out using AI for holiday shopping

