



How Canadian Marketers Can Win the Back-to-School Shopping Moment

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Almost as soon as school's over, busy parents begin preparing to send their kids back. They rely on their mobile devices for back-to-school shopping and do their homework to get the best deals. Here are a few trends marketers should know about to take advantage of those many I-want-to-buy moments.

think with **Google**

Summer vacations are now in full swing, and already the back-to-school season is upon us. With free time at a premium, some busy parents can barely find the time to [shuttle their kids](#) to camp, let alone shop around for the best products and deals. They're relying on mobile more than ever to help with their back-to-school shopping, ticking off their checklists in [I-want-to-buy moments](#) throughout the day. To better understand consumer behaviour around back-to-school shopping—[one of the busiest shopping periods of the year](#)—we studied Google data and surveyed shoppers online. Here's your cheat sheet.

Canadian back-to-school shoppers are doing more research and going to fewer stores

Before they even step inside a store, more Canadian shoppers are turning to their computers and phones to search. Last year, search interest for ["back to school"](#) grew 35% from the previous year.¹ We're only in July and already in the past three months, "back to school" searches have grown 10% since last year.²

Among Canadian university students, one-fifth (20%) are keeners and will finish their back-to-school shopping a month before school starts, whereas the majority (55%) will finish before Labour Day.³ Retailers should note that more than one-fourth (26%) of university-age Canadian students say they will be shopping online more for back-to-school items this year as compared to last year.⁴ The shopping journey to the store is also changing: Thirty-five percent of university-age students will be shopping at fewer stores than last year and more than one-third (36%) will be going to two stores or fewer.⁵

This trend of consolidating actual shopping time isn't just limited to students; we found that 71% percent of parents finish their back-to-school shopping in a week or less.⁶

Compare that short span of shopping time with the increasing use of upfront online research, and you'll see a new consumer journey taking shape. In all likelihood, shoppers already have their minds made up by the time they arrive at the store. The message for marketers is clear: To influence purchase decisions, be helpful and be online.

Canadian mobile searches for “back to school” almost doubled last year.

Parents are shopping in micro-moments throughout the day

When do busy parents have time to do all this research? In hundreds of [micro-moments](#) throughout the day on their smartphones—whether they're browsing their favourite YouTube videos until camp ends or multitasking in front of the TV at night.

The smartphone is such an important part of everyday life. In fact, we found that before they leave the house, Canadian smartphone users check for their phones (and keys!) more than they do other things such as their wallets or jackets.⁷ Last summer, searches for “back to school” on mobile devices almost doubled; and already this year, mobile search volume for “back to school” has grown by more than 50%.⁸

Having information ready at their fingertips has made it easier for shoppers to decide what to buy. Forty-eight percent of smartphone users say they are making purchase decisions more quickly now as compared to a few years ago because they research on their smartphones.⁹

Mobile devices have become personal shopping assistants, helping drive shoppers into the store. Location-based searches have also increased, and searches containing the words “near me” doubled over the past year.¹⁰ During back-to-school season, search interest in “shoe stores

near me” has spiked in August the past two years in a row, and there was a 70% year-over-year growth during the last-minute back-to-school shopping season last August and September.¹¹ At the same time, “shoe store locations” searches steeply declined,¹² suggesting that Canadians aren’t necessarily planning out their shopping trips the way they used to. Instead, they’re shopping in I-want-to-go moments and relying on mobile to tell them where to head.

Brands that make mobile a central part of their digital marketing strategies are seeing results. Take Walmart’s 2014 back-to-school campaign in the United States. Mobile spend affected more consumers per dollar spent than both broadcast and cable TV, driving 14% of the change in overall shopping intent despite accounting for only 7% of the spend, according to a [study from the Mobile Marketing Association](#).¹³ The campaign also drove foot traffic. The same study reported that Walmart’s use of proximity targeting, which lets you deliver ads to consumers within a certain distance, was far more effective than when location targeting wasn’t used.

Back-to-school shoppers are turning to YouTube

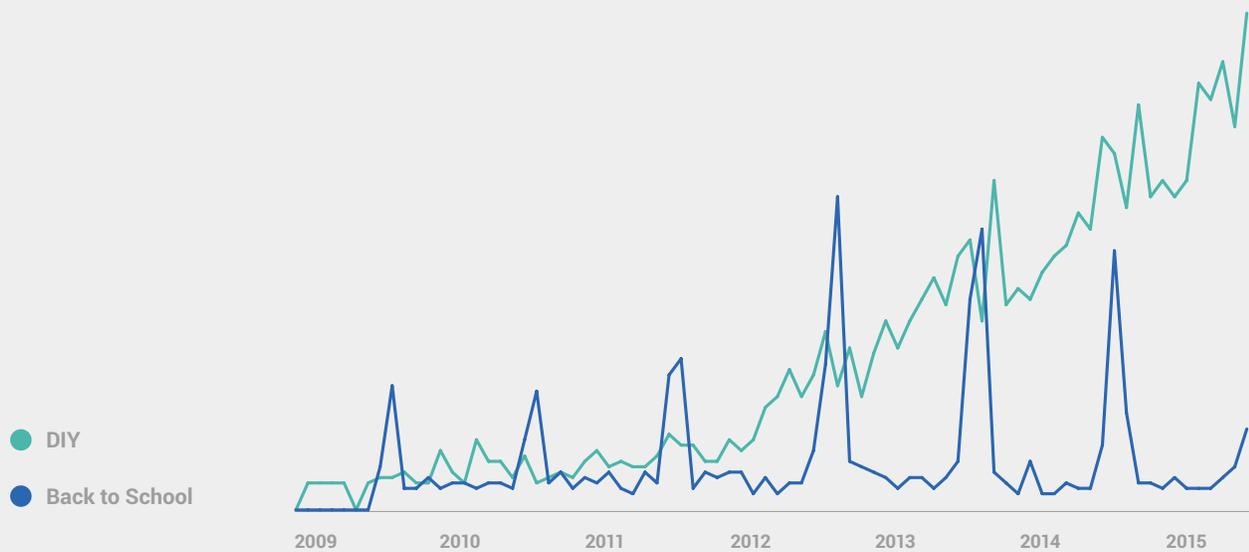
Shoppers are increasingly turning to YouTube to get DIY ideas or scope out the season’s hottest outfits. We like to call these [show-me-how moments](#)—and YouTube is becoming the destination people turn to for help. Two-thirds of Canadian millennials agree that they can find a YouTube video on anything they want to learn.¹⁴ And searches for “back to school” on YouTube grew 67% last year. DIY experienced the same growth (68%) and is already up 63% this year.¹⁵

Shoppers are clearly hungry for this type of content, and YouTube creators are responding. It’s only July and globally we’ve already seen 2X the number of back-to-school videos posted as compared to last year.¹⁶

Here are a few of our favourite back-to-school videos:

- [5 Study DIYs & Tips to Stay Organized at School!](#) (LaurDIY)
- [DIY Organization! School Supplies & Room decor!](#) (Bethany Mota)
- [Back to School Outfit Ideas!](#) (Makeup by Mandy)

YouTube Searches for Back-to-School and DIY



Source: YouTube Trends, January 2009–July 2015, Canada.

Go-to items on back-to-school checklists

Fashion

Some of the must-haves for back-to-school season 2014 (which are still hot in 2015) included [Birkenstock sandals](#), [faux leather](#), and [ankle boots](#). And college students got formal with [grey suits](#) and [trench coats](#). What's in style this year? Based on Google Shopping interest, we expect to see

students rocking [boho chic](#) with their [Fjallraven backpacks](#), or you might see students in school halls donning [Nike Roshes](#) and [Zanerobe pants](#).

 **What's IN in Canada:**
Top Rising Searches

bralette	shirt dress	ripped jeans	boho chic
midi skirt	nike roshe	chukka	chelsea boots
fjallraven	zanerobe		

 **What's OUT in Canada:**
Top Declining Searches

oversized sweaters	muscle shirt
jean vests	high-waisted shorts
maxi skirts	

 **What's Still IN in Canada:**
Seasonal Growth

birkenstocks	grey suit
ankle boots	trench coat
faux leather	

Source: Google Shopping Data, January 2014–June 2015, Canada. (Top rising defined by search terms with strongest YoY growth. Top declining defined by search terms with largest YoY decline.)

Consumer electronics

Back-to-school shopping isn't complete without the hottest tech. Expect to see techies sporting wearables from the [Apple Watch](#) to [Android watches](#) (such as the [Samsung Gear](#)) and equipping their home TV sets with [IPTV boxes](#), and maybe even [Android Boxes](#). And if 2014 was the year of the selfie, it's only fitting that 2015 will usher in the rise of the [selfie stick](#).

 **What's IN in Canada:**
Top Rising Searches in Consumer Electronics

apple watch	selfie stick	raspberry pi	android box
IPTV box	android watch	privacy screen	wireless charger
samsung gear	xiaomi		

Source: Google Shopping Data, January 2014–June 2015, Canada. (Top rising defined by search terms with strongest YoY growth.)

Pop quiz: What are the three things to remember this back-to-school season?

1. **Be online.** More consumers are using the web to research purchases, and they're selective about what they buy and where they shop. Capitalize on these moments of intent so that you're top of mind when they head to stores.
2. **Bridge search to store.** A great mobile web experience and mobile-specific ads, such as location extensions or product listing ads, can make the transition from research to purchase (whether in-store or online) a quick and seamless one.
3. **Watch rising product trends.** Use [Google Trends](#) to see what people are searching for in your category. That way you can stock and promote your merchandise accordingly. Rising back-to-school trends can also be good indicators of the upcoming holiday season and beyond.

Sources

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- 2 Google Search Data, April–June 2014 and April–June 2015, Canada.
- 3 Google Consumer Survey, July 2015, Canada. Based on Canadian online population, n=844.
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- 9 Google Consumer Survey, July 2015, Canada. Based on Canadian online population, n=698.
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- 11 Google Search Data, August–September 2013 and August–September 2014, Canada.
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- 13 Mobile Marketing Association, "Smart Mobile Cross Marketing Effectiveness," 2015.
- 14 Google Consumer Survey, July 2015, Canada. Based on Canadian online population, n=399.
- 15 YouTube Data, January 2013–June 2015, Canada.
- 16 YouTube Data, January–June 2015 vs. January–June 2014, Global.