



FIRST IN CLASS: The 3 Back-to-school Shoppers Canadian Marketers Need to Know

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THE **RUNDOWN**

While our Canadian kids cheer the final bell of the school year and fly off to summer camps, popsicles and sunscreen, retailers who used to wait until August to wind up their marketing campaigns may want to reconsider in light of new Google research. There now exists three distinct back-to-school shoppers whose activity starts at the end of June and continues deep into September. Understanding this new shopping behavior will help brands win this important and extended shopping season. Learn more about the Canadian back-to-school consumer.

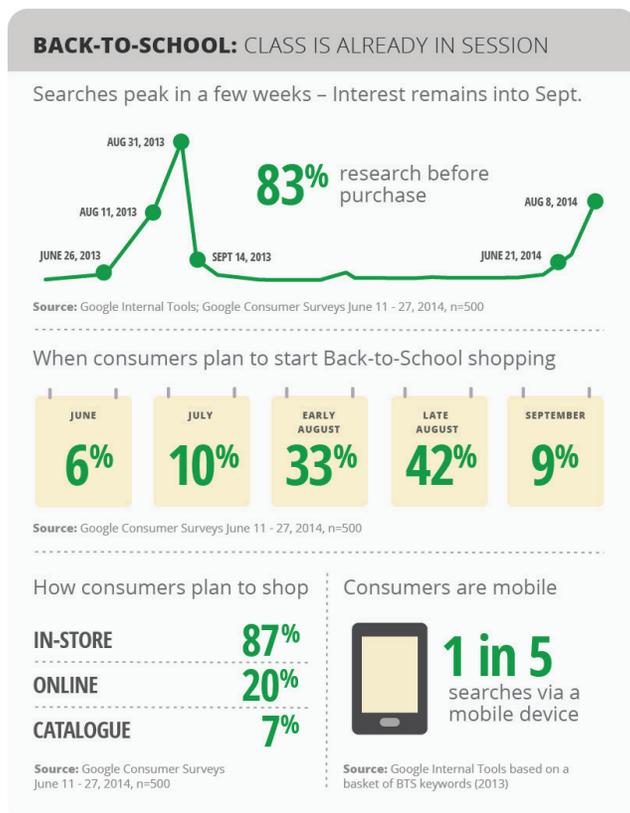
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Canadians are already heading back to school—at least online. Although the first day of school is still over a month away, students and parents have begun to scope out deals and to shop for back-to-school essentials. In fact, online searches for back-to-school in Canada have increased by nearly 60% in the past week alone.

Next to the December holiday period, back-to-school is the single most important shopping season for many brands and retailers. And the way that Canadians shop during this key retail window has changed dramatically in the past few years.

Gone are the days of heading to the store and simply picking items off the shelf. Our latest research reveals that the majority of consumers who are planning to shop for back-to-school will first turn to trusted sources to research ahead of time (83%), and over half of those surveyed (54%) tell us that they'll be buying from lists they will make before they purchase.

Most importantly, our research indicates three distinct back-to-school shoppers: the early bird, the traditionalist and, thirdly, the wait-and-see. As today's consumers are a little of each, understanding their timing and behavior is essential to capitalizing on this longer shopping season.



Early bird shoppers can't wait

Our research shows that there is a dedicated group of early bird shoppers who start researching next year's purchases as soon as the final school bell rings. We see a rise in back-to-school queries online beginning the last week of June, essentially as soon as school gets out. By the time we hit July, one in four back-to-school shoppers has already begun researching products and 15% will have made purchases for the coming school year.

Traditionalist shoppers start in August

Traditionally August has been the peak month for back-to-school shopping and our data shows this trend remains firmly entrenched. Last year, August had eight of the top ten heaviest searched days for back-to-school related queries (the remaining two are found during the first few days of September), with searches typically spiking on Mondays. Half of all Canadians surveyed this year told us that they will start their research in August and two-thirds will do the majority of their shopping in this same month (33% in early August and 42% later in the month.)

Wait-and-see shoppers bide their time

While back-to-school shopping starts early for many, there is a faithful group that adopts a wait-and-see approach. We find strong online interest in back-to-school spilling into the first few weeks of September, suggesting that many parents and students will wait to see what products emerge as the latest and greatest trends. Which tablet will most meet their needs? Do they have everything they need to set up their new dorm room? Are booties still popular this year? In fact, our latest research tells us that one in ten back-to-school shoppers will only start their shopping once school has resumed, something we also saw during the 2013 back-to-school season.

What does this mean for marketers

A wider window:

The shopping behavior of back-to-school consumers requires marketers to approach this extended retail season in a new way. Canadians are now looking for products, services, trends and deals from June right through September. Brands and retailers that start earlier and continue longer will be positioned to have a stronger presence throughout their customers' back-to-school shopping experiences..

Different mediums:

Understanding the nuances of these different shopping behaviors will also help guide marketing strategies when connecting with consumers. For example, a marketer aiming to influence the “wait and see” set who seeks what’s popular, should consider online video—it’s social, trend driven and reaches approximately 72% of 12-24 year olds.

Show up:

Meeting any customer with the right message, in the right medium, at the right time, regardless which type of shopper they are, will ensure that when back-to-school purchases are made, you’ll be first in class.



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