storyblok

What's Breaking Your Black Friday?

A data-backed breakdown of the five areas that fail e-commerce teams during peak sales season and how to fix them before your next one.



The sales season between Black Friday and early January is one of the biggest revenue opportunities of the year for retailers. It's also when every unresolved problem in your tech stack comes back to bite.

The same issues tend to resurface year after year: sites buckle under untested traffic, cyberattackers get a head start while teams are still finalizing sales plans, a promo page breaks and nobody can fix it fast enough on go-live day—you know the score. Chances are, at least one of these impacted your team during your last sales launch, and without making some changes, it'll probably impact the next one too. But we can change that.

These are the five sales killers that impacted the e-commerce industry last season, backed by data, and what you can fix to have a better sale next time around.

Your sales season pressure reading

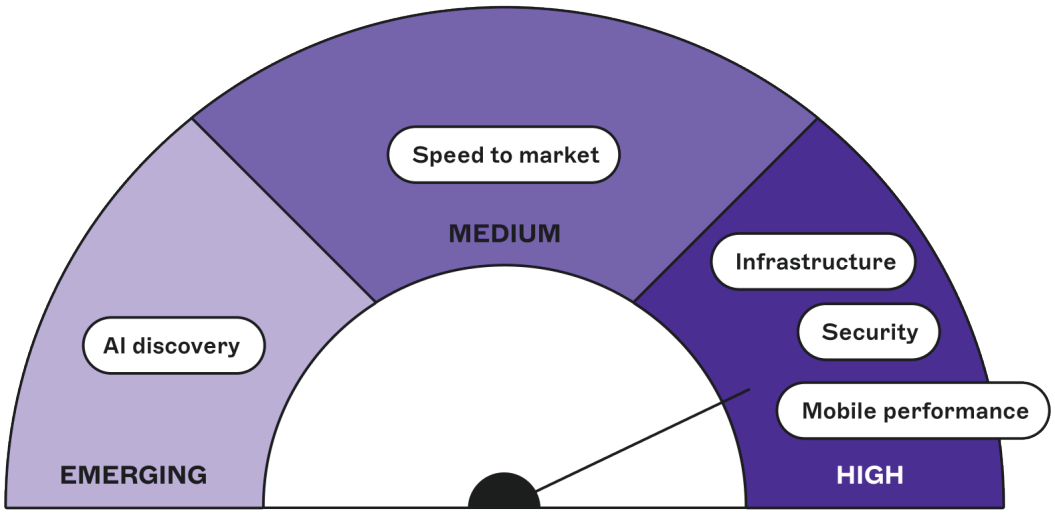


Table of Contents



4 **THE FIVE CRITICAL E-COMMERCE BREAKING POINTS**

1: Infrastructure

2: Mobile performance

3: Security

4: AI discovery

5: Speed to market

9 **FIVE SYMPTOMS, ONE UNDERLYING PROBLEM**

Global retailers who've already released the pressure

The five critical e-commerce breaking points

1. Infrastructure



Risk level: HIGH

NUMBERS

A Cloudflare configuration error caused an hours-long global outage 10 days before Black Friday, taking down multiple major platforms.

Best Buy's site went down on Black Friday itself, prompting over 1,800 complaints.

Shopify Cyber Monday outage created merchant admin and POS login issues, with 4,000 cases reported.

THE IMPACT

Peak sales-day traffic can catch out even the most well-resourced retailers when demand exceeds what your e-commerce infrastructure was tested with. The biggest risk for most retailers is if your infrastructure can't hold up under the enormous pressure of the Black Friday or the seasonal rush. If you find yourself in this position, the cost is immediate and long-standing. Sales are lost that you can't get back during one of the year's biggest revenue-generating opportunities, and customer trust is broken that isn't easily repaired even after the sales end.

THE SOLUTION

Start with what's actually in your control: load test using real peak-traffic patterns, not average-day traffic multiplied by two, so you know how your own architecture holds up before the sales begin.

From there, map every third-party dependency in your checkout and payment path, put real-time uptime monitoring in place with alert thresholds tuned for peak, and write a documented fallback plan for when a dependency does fail.

BONUS TIP: A multi-cloud setup can add resilience against vendor-level outages, but it's a cost worth justifying against the actual risk to your business.



DIVE DEEPER INTO THIS TOPIC:

Users won't wait for a lagging site, and neither will AI. See what's actually causing slow performance, and how to fix it. Read *The Cost of Slow Websites: Why Modern Users and AI Algorithms Won't Wait*.

2. Mobile performance



Risk level: HIGH

NUMBERS

70% of global Black Friday and Cyber Monday online orders were done on mobile devices last year.

A mobile site speed improvement of just 0.1 seconds increases retail conversions by 8.4% and average order value by 9.2%.

Average online cart abandonment rate is 76.8%, with mobile abandons significantly higher than desktop.

THE IMPACT

Mobile now accounts for most of your peak sales-season revenue, whether that's your mobile site or a dedicated app, so that experience has never mattered more. Even a fraction-of-a-second lag can have a direct, negative impact on your conversion rate. Considering that most mobile shoppers who fill their carts don't complete the purchase, there is truly no room for error in discouraging those who are ready for payment details. Every point of purchase friction, large or small, on your website or in your mobile app, is a cause for concern if you want to capture most of your buyers

THE SOLUTION

Treat mobile QA as a non-negotiable: test checkout, search, and page load, specifically on mobile devices under simulated peak traffic, since issues that only show up at scale won't surface in everyday testing.

Push image-heavy and static assets through a CDN with edge caching so load times hold steady even as traffic spikes, and if you run a native app, make sure content and promotions can update there without a separate app-store release cycle slowing you down. Prioritize mobile checkout performance above every other page in your optimization queue, since that's where the revenue and the friction both live. Optimizing your mobile experience is vital to securing sales on your next sales day.

3. Security



Risk level: HIGH

NUMBERS

Malicious bot configurations targeting retail rose 92% last year, typically deployed 10–14 days ahead of peak sales.

Account takeover attempts and bot testing for checkout page weaknesses rose sharply, with malicious traffic concentrated in the US (46%), Australia (12%), and the UK (11%).

Retail accounted for 84% of all Layer 7 DDoS attacks this year, making commerce the most targeted industry by cybercriminals.

THE IMPACT

Cyberattackers prepare for your peak sales season weeks ahead of you and your competitors, staging and testing tools before most teams have finalized their holiday sales plans. E-commerce absorbs the largest share of cyberattacks, and teams that only ramp up monitoring shortly before the sales season begins are already at risk. Any gaps in your e-commerce infrastructure can be exploited, particularly in your checkout and login pages. Any successful attacks can lead to untold reputational, financial, and operational damage that no brand can afford to take on.

THE SOLUTION

Turn on bot and fraud monitoring weeks before peak, not during, since attacks are staged well in advance. Add real-time transaction scoring to catch account takeover attempts at checkout, and route traffic through a web application firewall built to absorb Layer 7 DDoS spikes, the attack type retail sees most.

4. AI discovery



Risk level: EMERGING

NUMBERS

$14.2 billion generated in global Black Friday online sales was driven by AI agents.

There has been an 805% increase in AI-driven traffic to US retail sites compared to last year.

50% of shoppers use AI to compare prices, 37% to make a final purchase decision, and 26% to complete the purchase.

THE IMPACT

AI-driven shopping now represents a multi-billion-dollar share of sales season traffic (and that's from just one single shopping event on Black Friday), and it's growing faster than any other retail traffic source. Shoppers now use AI to compare prices, decide on products, and complete purchases, so any retailer whose product data isn't structured for AI agents to read is effectively invisible at every one of those stages, and with invisibility comes missing out on an enormous share of revenue potential.

THE SOLUTION

AI agents can only recommend what they can actually parse, so give them structured data to work with: JSON-LD Product schema tagging price, stock status, SKU, and ratings on every page. Map products to a standard taxonomy too, since agents trained outside your systems won't recognize an internal one. Then track AI referrals as their own channel, not folded into "other," so you can see what it's actually driving.



HOW READY IS YOUR CONTENT FOR AI SEARCH PERFORMANCE THIS SALES SEASON?

Unstructured, outdated content is a growing liability, one that's already costing the global economy $4.63 trillion a year. Find out what content debt is really costing you. Get the report with FT Longitude.

5. Speed-to-market



Risk level: MED-HIGH

NUMBERS

38% of marketing teams need developer support for most or every campaign. A costly dependency when speed matters most during peak season.

Nearly a third of teams cite tech limitations as a major cause of slow delivery, driven by complex deployment processes (39%), tool integration problems (25%), and fragmented/outdated systems (14%).

Post-launch fixes affect 79% of teams at least some of the time. If those fixes are required when a sale goes live, revenue is at risk from the start.

THE IMPACT

When every content or offer change requires a developer ticket to implement or a fix post-launch, you're not working with the type of agile, fast workflows and tooling that e-commerce teams need to compete in the market today. No amount of hustle can fix a platform that wasn't built to support speed-to-market, especially at crunch time during peak sales season, when moves need to be made fast, especially if something is broken, as every second down or with inaccurate content is revenue down the drain.

THE SOLUTION

Move to a composable, headless content management system (CMS), where content is decoupled from the presentation layer and delivered via API rather than baked into templates a developer has to edit for every change. Instead, developers build reusable components once, and content and website-managing teams can assemble and publish directly, ideally using production-accurate previews to see what changes will look like live to ensure they're fully sales-ready.



CAN YOUR TEAM MOVE FAST ENOUGH THIS SEASON?

Slow delivery isn't unique to peak season, it's a year-round drag on growth. Access the full data behind what's holding teams back and how to fix it in The Global Speed-to-Market Benchmark Report.

Five symptoms, one underlying problem

Looking back at the five breaking points above, there is one tool running underneath them all: **your CMS**. It's what delivers your content, what your team uses to publish it, and what can shape how fast, how reliably, and how well everything else performs.

The difference between a team that can move confidently into the next sales season, or not, is in the architecture and capabilities of your chosen CMS.

Getting this one tool right is one of the most consequential decisions you'll make for next season's performance. Here's how, in the context of the five breaking points:

SPEED TO MARKET: For many retailers, if marketing wants to update a page or launch a promo, they often have to go through a developer, because the content and the code are built together. A headless CMS separates the two, so content can be edited and published through a simple interface, without anyone touching code. That's what lets a team ship a change in minutes instead of waiting on a developer ticket.

> **With Storyblok:**
> The Visual Editor lets marketers click directly on a page and edit it live, using reusable components that developers build once and marketing reuses to build whatever content they need independently. You can also see exactly what the final result will look like in real-time before you push live, so there are no surprises.

AI DISCOVERY: AI shopping agents don't browse a page the way a person does. They need your product information broken down into clear, labeled pieces, like price, stock status, and ratings, that are readable on the live page itself, usually through structured data markup like schema.org. That's what lets an agent find your products and recommend them accurately.

> **With Storyblok:**
> Your product data is stored in a clean, structured format from the start. That makes it far easier for your own team to reuse accurately, whether that's powering a recommendation engine, feeding a search tool, or any other system that needs reliable product data to work from.

MOBILE PERFORMANCE: A website built the traditional way is usually designed for a browser alone. If you also have a mobile app, that often means rebuilding the same content again from scratch for it. A headless CMS stores content once and delivers it to whatever needs it, whether that's a website, an app, or another channel, so it reaches every device properly without a second build.

With Storyblok:
Native iOS and Android SDKs mean no separate content system for your app. Chronext used them to build a new mobile app in seven weeks and tripled their app session times.

INFRASTRUCTURE: The CMS is responsible for storing and delivering your content, like text, images, and page layouts, reliably even when a lot of people are visiting at once. A good one can handle that load well. It doesn't, however, cover the rest of your site's infrastructure, like the systems that process payments or manage checkout, which need their own testing and safeguards.

With Storyblok:
Content runs through Amazon CloudFront's CDN, data is backed up daily with automatic failover and monthly recovery tests, and enterprise plans carry an uptime SLA of up to 99.99%.

FRAUD & SECURITY: A headless CMS is built to protect its own API and content layer from attacks like SQL injection, bot traffic, and attempts to overwhelm it with volume. What it can't do is stop a stolen credit card from being used at your checkout, or flag a bot trying to brute-force its way into a customer account, so your security optimization extends far beyond just your choice of CMS.

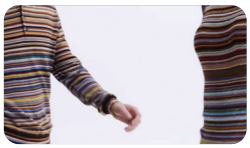
With Storyblok:
The platform is ISO 27001 certified, runs a web application firewall against attacks like SQL injection and brute force on its APIs, and undergoes continuous automated security testing plus periodic manual DDoS testing.

Global retailers who've already released the pressure

CASE STUDY

Paul Smith

50% faster page speed, built in eight months, with higher conversion and revenue to show for it.

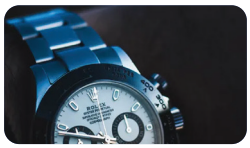


READ THE FULL CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

Chronext

A mobile app built in seven weeks that tripled how long customers stuck around.



READ THE FULL CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

Primo Brands

15 brands consolidated into one platform, with content updates now 35% faster.



READ THE FULL CASE STUDY

Find out where your stack stands before your next sale does

Talk to our team about what your sales season could look like this year, and what it would take to fix the breaking points impacting your team the most.

Chat to Our Team

About Storyblok

Storyblok is a headless CMS that enables marketers and developers to create with joy and publish with confidence. It empowers you to deliver structured and consistent content everywhere: websites, apps, AI search, and beyond.

Legendary brands like Virgin Media O2, Oatly, and TomTom use Storyblok to make a bigger, faster market impact.

Create with joy.
Publish with confidence.

storyblok.com.

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