

Guide

# Peak Performers

Lessons from the brands that get peak season right. Gain first-hand insights from AMARA, Fat Face, Hamleys, Molton Brown, and The Conran Shop



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# Peak: an evolution

The festivities between October and January have been a constant for decades - as have the epic sales that come with them. Over the years, these holidays have become a staple in the retail calendar for businesses and customers alike.

But since early 2020, life has been somewhat of a whirlwind. The arrival of the pandemic meant Christmas 2020 and 2021 were essentially cancelled. And terms like 'new normal' started being thrown around as we struggled to adjust to ongoing uncertainty. Fast-forward a few years, and we now have a fresh set of challenges: Soaring energy bills, rising interest rates, and a looming recession. Stores might be open this year but will people be shopping?

It's not necessarily all doom and gloom. Learnings of the past few years have shown us that adversity can make us stronger. Many businesses made their first big move into digital when their brick-and-mortar stores were forced shut, and have since established new revenue streams while benefiting from a new treasure trove of customer insights.

One thing is certain; this year agility and adaptability are more crucial than ever and businesses should be going into peak with new, flexible gameplans. To understand more about how retailers should prepare for peak 2022, we spoke to some of our top performing customers: AMARA, Fat Face, Hamleys, Molton Brown, and The Conran Shop. This guide is a summary of their top tips.



## Why peak still matters

According to our research last year, 53% of UK businesses believe that peak sales periods are 'make or break' for them. They play a vital role in a business' annual performance both in terms of more transactions and gaining new customers. Clothing brand FatFace calls peak the "golden quarter," and a critical source of customer acquisition. For toy giant Hamleys, peak alone makes up a significant portion of its annual turnover. And The Conran Shop hails it as its "biggest trading period of the year".



*"It is about acquiring customers over that peak period. So it's key to get that customer proposition right. For example: Trustpilot is something we talk about every day, we've got a 4.6 star rating, which is really important particularly for new customers. We've done a lot of work this year to collect reviews, giving customers a truly balanced view of what service they should expect over the peak period this year."*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

THE **CONRAN** SHOP

*"It's the biggest trading period of the year for us. Pre-Christmas tends to be about gifting. Then we move into the sale period after Christmas when we sell big-ticket items like furniture. We find English shoppers tend to hold off on buying those pieces until the sales, so that causes another seasonal peak for us."*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

# Preparing for Peak

Of course, planning for peak begins long before the season starts, but what does it actually involve? How do you get, as Richard from The Conran Shop describes it, “match ready”?



## Product: Getting your supply chain in order

Getting the right products on the shelves or ready to ship from warehouses is peak 101. In normal circumstances, not being able to buy the product you want is frustrating. Imagine how that frustration is heightened when the price drops but it's impossible to find. Luckily there's a solution and your customers have come to expect it; 60% of consumers say they'll be more loyal to a retailer if they can purchase an item that was out of stock in store and have it shipped to their home.

Distribution chains have also fallen foul to the chaos of the past few years. Just think back to those queues of lorry drivers stuck in Kent when the borders closed in December 2020. That's why The Conran Shop ensures product is in place first and foremost...

THE **CONRAN** SHOP

*"For us, it starts with product. This is led by the buying and merchandising teams who ensure we've got sufficient coverage and enough stock. We want to be sure we've got the right kind of products along the right trends."*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

## Adyen's outlook

Taking your omnichannel up a level by connecting all your payments in the back-end results. This makes it easier for your customers to get their hands on the products they want by making them available in different ways such as:

**Endless aisles:** Ordering out of stock items in store via tablets or kiosks and having them shipped home

**Click and collect:** Order online and pick up from a store

**Buy online, return in store:** Return unwanted gifts at local stores

[Learn more about unified commerce >](#)

## Stop, in the name of code

There are many decisions to be made during the build-up to peak season. But one that rang true with all the retailers we spoke to was a freeze on development. Also known as a code freeze, this is when developers hold back from implementing any changes to their operating systems. This is because volumes surge during peak and retailers don't want to risk disrupting systems when they're running at full capacity.



*“From a digital point of view, it's very much focused on the delivery of the roadmap, and new initiatives. There'll be customer-facing functionality that we'll need to get across the line before the code freeze. The period is so important for us; we lock down any new code going live.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital



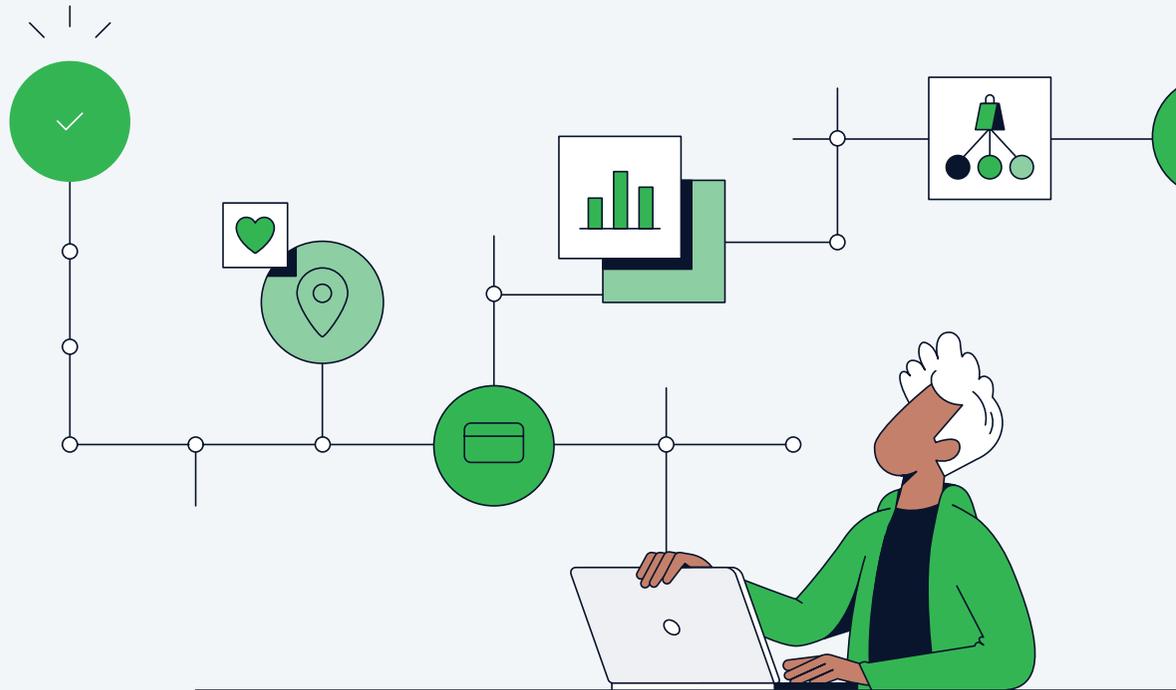
*“Any changes to production systems are all locked down. Nothing changes in any system. From ecommerce to POS; it remains as it is.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown

## Adyen's outlook

If your systems are going to be put on freeze, you'll want to be sure you're set up right. Working with expert technology partners with a good understanding of your specific market is essential. That way, you'll have all your integrations and settings ready to roll, so you can put your best foot forward.

[Discover our latest innovations on our tech blog >](#)



## Better together: Collaborating with stakeholders

Another common thread running between the companies we spoke with is collaboration between both internal and external stakeholders.

**MOLTON  
BROWN**  
LONDON

*“We always hire a dedicated lead to manage the peak periods. That person is on call almost 24/7 and ensures there’s a war room open at all times. It’s a costly resource but it’s proven to be very effective. We ask vendors to give escalation procedures. Some also provide us with dashboards or other tracking capabilities. We then share that information with the wider business to say: This is what we are doing to prepare the infrastructure for a peak period based on the estimated sales.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown



## THE CONRAN SHOP

*“The most important thing about our peak teams is that they’re cross functional. We have work streams that combine people from customer services, IT distribution, traders, buying and merchandising.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

*“We need to ensure that, across the business, different departments know how to use the new systems properly and the customer-facing teams have understood the processes. We’ll give them initial training, we’ll then go back and retrain, and eventually we’ll run retrospective workshops. We want to know the good, the bad, and what they learned. How did the solution turn out versus how we thought it would.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

## Adyen’s outlook

Nothing works at 100% without full transparency, which can be harder when it comes to external suppliers. If you’re looking to form new relationships with tech vendors and partners, ensure you’re very clear where ownership and accountability lies. It’s also

important to understand who your allocated team and points of contact will be. Ideally these new vendors will also have existing integrations and relationships with your other partners so everything slots together seamlessly.

It’s also beneficial - as Molton Brown does - to keep your

partners in the loop way ahead of peak season. Take the time to hear their plans as well so there are no surprises and everyone benefits from any updates and improvements with plenty of time for testing.

[Meet our partners >](#)

# Boost performance with payments

You've invested a lot to get your customers to the point of payment, so it's vital you don't fall at the final hurdle with a poor experience. When set up right, payments can actively improve your performance by increasing conversion rates and ensuring your sales go through without a hitch.

Here's how our peak performers use payments to drive success during busy times:





## The freedom of choice

Just like people have different tastes in food, fashion and music, their payment preferences differ too. Some may love Buy Now, Pay Later, while others want to use digital wallets. Critically, many now expect the same options in-store as they have online.



*“Online, we bring forward the prominence of payment in the site journey. It's always on the footer of the checkout, but we also use tactical payment method banners to let customers know they can pay with methods like Apple Pay. Customers are super busy during peak; they want to make informed decisions and we've seen some interesting results when you bring that information forward. People are less likely to forget to check out.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital



*“Online purely is about making that sale, isn't it? That was the biggest room for extension for us from a pretty basic shop, with a limited amount of products to one that's expanding massively. A big part of that, obviously, is product availability. But things like enabling Klarna, Apple Pay, Google Pay... That has been absolutely key. So that is going to continue.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London

## THE CONRAN SHOP

*“We use [Pay by Link](#) for remote transactions. We have customers across the UK who don't always come into the store so we serve them via a telephone consultation or online chat. An essential part of the user journey is making sure the payment is simple and that it goes through. You don't want the frustration of customers trying to buy something and they can't, particularly when the cost of acquiring customers is so high.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

## Adyen's outlook

With new payment methods emerging all the time, you need to be ready to accept all your customers' preferences.

Our latest research found that 54% of consumers expect to be able to pay with [digital wallets](#); in fact, in 2021 25% of

UK ecommerce payments were carried out via digital wallets.

Having a variety of relevant options available will make a big difference to their overall experience, and your sales.

This is why we support all major payment methods in the same integration.

[Explore our payment methods >](#)

## Queue-busting initiatives

Queues before the doors open, doors open and queues spanning out the doors all make for stressful shopping. Customers can lose patience, till receipts run out faster. Ultimately, you can't serve everyone and you miss out on valuable sales. But Hamleys and Molton Brown have found a solution with mobile point of sale (mPOS) terminals.



*“Mobile point of sale devices are going to help us with queue busting. What I'm pushing for is our demonstrators to have the ability to make a sale straight after a demo rather than having to say: ‘Please join that 200-person queue over there.’”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London



*“I believe mobile point of sale will do far better than the standalone units, mainly because of the feedback I've received from cashiers in the store. The ability for us to integrate this into one single solution while keeping it simple for the store staff is really going to drive this initiative. It gives that luxury feel and ease of use, which is important because Molton Brown is very much about luxury.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown

## Adyen's outlook

The freedom and flexibility of mobile terminals has a big impact on businesses, especially during busy periods. And there's more to these devices than just processing payments.

Take the [Android terminal](#) for example. These all-in-one,

smartphone sized tools can completely transform your daily operations by letting staff check orders, manage inventory and process payments from the palm of their hand.

Adyen has also collaborated with our customers around the world to create [our own terminals](#):

The AMS1 and NYC1, which are designed to support mobile customer journeys at an affordable cost and with a powerful battery. All our terminals are PTS POI compliant as per PCI security standards.

[Discover our new terminals >](#)

## Utilise payments data

With the right payments setup you can unlock a wealth of insights all year round - but especially during peak. By understanding customers' purchasing behaviour, you can cater to their specific needs across all areas.

FatFace, for example, uses payments data and trends that arise from these insights to inform its marketing calendar over peak, giving campaigns and ads more validity and depth.

And with unified commerce connecting your in-person and online payments, you can start to build a 360-degree view of your shoppers across any channel or region. This approach won't go unnoticed, since our research found that 29% of UK consumers prefer retailers who remember their preferences and previous shopping behaviours to create a more tailored experience. But only 19% of UK businesses are using data to drive their marketing materials, so it's a real chance to make yourself stand out.

## Adyen's outlook

We know the importance of data, especially when it's real time. That's why we created our [Customer Area tool](#), giving the businesses we work with access to insights across all their offline and online channels. This lets you deliver truly personalised

experiences, from targeted marketing to loyalty initiatives, while remaining agile amid busy periods.

It can also inform big business decisions for example if you see a rise in online orders from an area where you don't yet have a store.

[Discover how we deliver data insights >](#)

# Up your fraud prevention ahead of time

26% of the retailers we surveyed recently admitted they had fallen victim to fraud or data leaks during peak season. And with the pandemic increasing overall levels of fraud, the risk only grows as sales volume peaks. Having the right systems in place, and ensuring your chosen payments provider prioritises this all year round, is critical to staying secure.



*"We monitor and adjust our fraud rules throughout the year. We're always optimising and we're always testing so it's not a peak-specific problem for us. On top of that, a diversified payment mix, with the likes of Klarna growing in popularity, means we can mitigate some risk still further. But we continue to monitor with daily manual checks."*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital



THE **CONRAN** SHOP

*“We recently had a very good and detailed review with our account manager where we went line by line through all our fraud rules, really critically evaluating them. Then we made a plan where we reviewed and adjusted some of them. The takeaway from that is: Don't leave it too late. Use your historical data to help inform good choices around setting fraud rules and test them before sales ramp up to check how they're performing.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology


 The logo for Hamleys, featuring the word "Hamleys" in a stylized, handwritten font with three stars above the 'a'.

*“Because of the way everything's integrated, I don't see fraud being an issue. We have the ability to refine settings if we wish. Plus we're getting constant feedback from Adyen with analysis and suggestions on what we should or shouldn't do. We previously did a big piece on our fraud set up and we leveraged Adyen's knowledge of ecommerce and other comparable retailers. They said: 'Look, we think these configurations will be best for you.' And so far it's proved to be true.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London

## Adyen's outlook

There are ways to build the optimum fraud prevention set-up, which goes beyond simply blocking transactions at the slightest whiff of uncertainty.

After all, you want to welcome [genuine shoppers](#) who come to you during peak, as well as protect

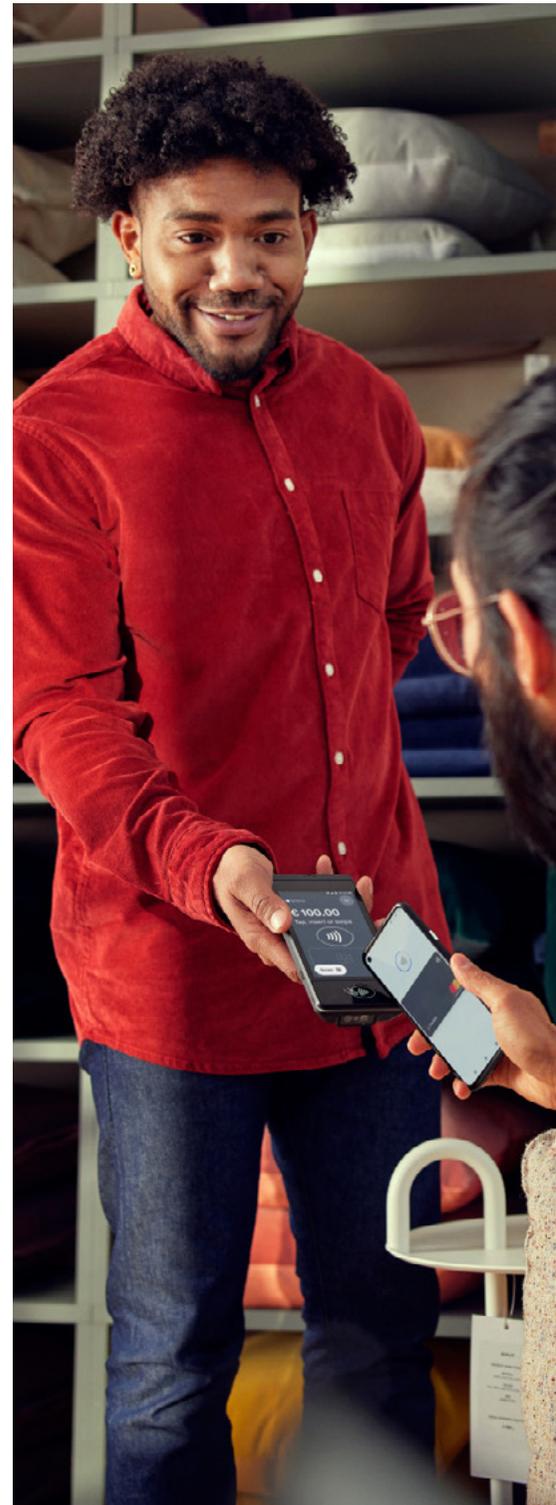
your own business. We combine different techniques for our solution [RevenueProtect](#), bringing together machine learning, biometrics, and regulations (like PSD2) to create robust security. Machines are only as reliable and effective as the data you feed into them. Once you have a good overview of your businesses'

weaknesses you can set personalised rules to keep these in check.

[Discover our risk management solution >](#)

# Always bring it back to the customer

Last year, [58% of UK consumers](#) shopped during Black Friday to buy Christmas gifts for loved ones, making it the main reason for spending followed by self-gifting. Customers should always be at the forefront of what you do all year round, whether it's giving them the best end-to-end experience or adjusting your priorities based on their criteria. With that in mind, we asked our brands how they ensure they always bring it back to the customer. For this chapter, we also spoke to Harriet Gribble, Head of Digital Product, at luxury homeware retailer AMARA.



## Striking the perfect channel balance

Though “different animals”, as Hamleys described them, both online and offline channels need to be ready for an influx of visitors during this time. Moreover, they need to complement one another focusing on their specific strengths rather than competing.


 The Hamleys logo is written in a black, cursive, handwritten-style font. The word "Hamleys" is written with three small stars above the 'a' and 'm'.

THE **CONRAN** SHOP


 The Molton Brown logo features the words "MOLTON BROWN" in a bold, black, serif font, stacked vertically. Below "BROWN" is the word "LONDON" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

*“Our flagships are destinations; a fun place you go when you’re visiting London. To increase our appeal still further, we’ve recently introduced a new gaming zone in the basement. We now have people coming in just to play Fortnite. It’s a little bit of that craziness for which Hamleys is renowned.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London

*“It should just be a great experience from start to finish, it shouldn’t just be a great experience in store and then you’re just left in the dark wondering what’s going to happen. Our focus now is ensuring the digital follow-up experience is as strong as the in-store one.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

*“Ecommerce is certainly going to be the main revenue driver because it always does well. But it’s forecasted that stores are going to bring in a lot more than previous years, mainly because of COVID and various lockdowns.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown



*“Our store teams have endured the volatility of working through COVID, they've also seen changes in trade patterns. We don't really know what 'normal' is anymore but we can always double-down on customer service.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

## A M A R A

*“Our buying team seeks out beautiful products for our customers' homes, and brings these into the business in order to be stocked for fast delivery to customers worldwide. Our marketing helps the customer to prepare for the changing seasons and festive period. We invest in great customer care and expand our opening hours to support customers. From a technology perspective, we ensure we have a stable platform with scaling servers to handle increased demand.”*

**Harriet Gribble** - Head of Digital Product

### Adyen's outlook

They may be separate when it comes to the overall experiences, with online more about ease and speed while in-store offers more in the way of interaction and support. But unified commerce brings their strengths together for a better end-to-end experience.

A good way to think about unified commerce is the building blocks that make up a customer journey: Where do they first see a product? Where do they buy? How do they receive it? How can they return it? All of these elements should be interchangeable. For example: They might see a product on Instagram, check your website

for availability in a local store, buy in-store but have it shipped home, and then potentially process a return online.

[Learn more about the building blocks of unified commerce in this practical guide >](#)

## Adapting to change

It isn't just people changing; circumstances, environments, and costs are also in a constant state of flux right now. So it's important you adapt your peak planning to the current needs of your customers. This doesn't mean overhauling your entire strategy; just ensure you have mechanisms in place to pivot if necessary.



*“Costs have risen across the board and a lot of retailers are trying hard to maintain prices and not pass on costs to customers. But what's not yet layered on is all those extra cost pressures facing customers this year. So how is your pricing architecture going to change? How can it adapt? You need to be more flexible with your promotion calendar. Where you might have historically done blanket discounts, you should retain the flexibility to target discounts based on different customer segments. While it's going to be tough for everyone, it's going to be even tougher for some.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

## Adyen's outlook

To target specific customers with specific offers requires data. Our research found that 28% of consumers are willing to give their data to a business if there's something in it for them, such as a discount or special offer.

Using your aggregated payments data you can base your targeting on factors like:

- Where they are
- How often they buy from you
- The channels they prefer

## Create confidence amongst staff

The time and effort you put into planning for peak will be wasted if your employees aren't kept in the loop. For in-store staff to truly deliver the best customer service, training across relevant areas is absolutely necessary.

THE **CONRAN** SHOP

*"It's important to work on training and make sure different departments know how to use new systems properly. We're going to go back and retrain, as well run retrospective workshops. It's about checking in with our teams and seeing what they have learned. Are there improvements to make? What was the customer reaction? How can we make it quicker? Faster? A bit more seamless?"*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology



**MOLTON  
BROWN**  
LONDON

*“New tech innovations are empowering store staff by giving them more visibility into their customers and enabling them to build stronger relationships. The point of sale will give the cashier insight into a customer’s preference, such as their favourite products. On the other hand, cashiers already know the product very well and can uncover a good product fit simply by asking questions. But our data-driven approach adds a new dimension to this.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown

## Adyen’s outlook

You’ll never be able to fully connect with your customers if you don’t understand their behaviour and habits. Shop staff especially need to be in their element and fully bought into any new technology you decide to roll out for peak. Giving them POS

terminals that empower them to provide a better service is a great way to do this. For example, mobile options make it easier to serve customers during busy periods. As Richard at The Conran Shop explained: “Training and refresher sessions will ensure staff are up to scratch all year round. Meanwhile, keeping them in the

loop about any emerging trends will ensure they offer a customer experience that feels relevant.”

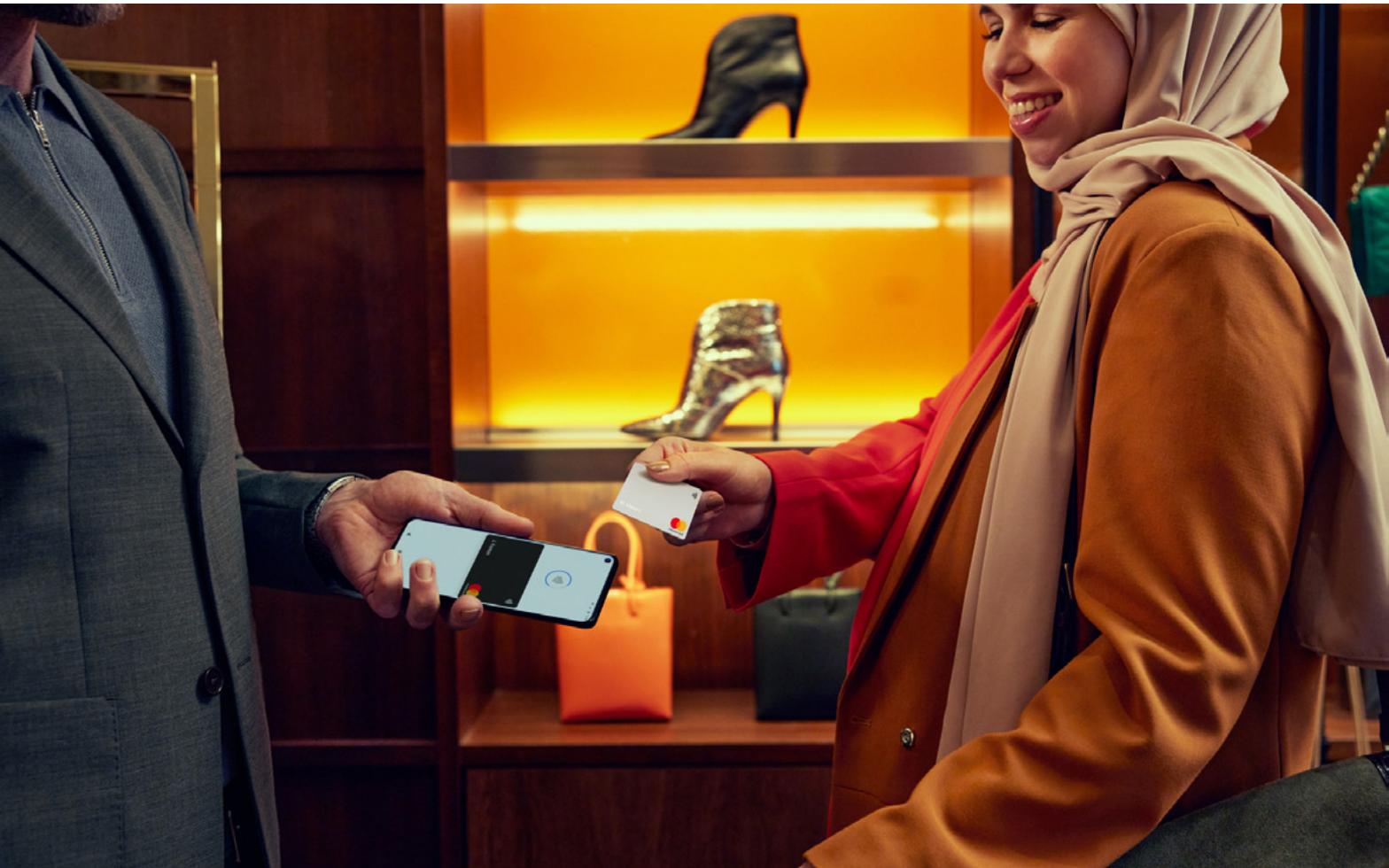
## It pays to give back

Despite the cost of living crisis taking a toll on household budgets, customers are still keen to give back. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a big role in customer decision-making. 63% of consumers believe brands have a responsibility to ensure their stock is ethically sourced and produced while 43% prefer brands that stand up for causes they believe in. And 26% want to donate to good causes while they're paying.



*"We have the FatFace Foundation all year round. We also work closely on product collaboration with Shelter, to whom we also make donations."*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital





*“Giving back has been a very strong focus for Hamleys. Great Ormond Street has been a long-standing partnership. The team here did a huge amount of work and they continue to think of new ideas on how to give back. That's something that is definitely going to continue and probably increase as well.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London

## THE CONRAN SHOP

*“We're really proud of our partnership with The British Heart Foundation with whom we collaborate to recycle furniture, which fits in with our ethics around sustainability. Our products are designed for life; they're designed to be handed over to the next generation. We teamed up with the British Heart Foundation who will take away items that you may be looking to replace. They can then resell these items and put the funds towards the charity. And, since furniture sales tend to happen during peak periods, it's a really good time to give something back.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

## Adyen's outlook

We wanted to remove the complexities that come with donating to causes, making it easy and fast for our customers - and theirs - to make an impact on the world around them. This includes allowing consumers to donate as part of the payment process

rather than being redirected to a different page and having to enter their details again. This is why we launched our Impact features. We enable seamless charity donations, with 100% of the amount going to the chosen cause. It's a truly localised process too, with language and payment method options available to adapt

to your audience. Meanwhile our Restore feature allows customers to offset the carbon emissions of their purchase.

[See how you can make an impact with Adyen >](#)

# Final advice

While each business has its own strategy and objectives around peak, there are many overlaps when it comes to planning. So we rounded off by asking our peak performers to share a key recommendation to fellow retailers.

**MOLTON  
BROWN**  
LONDON

## Communication ensures consistency

*“Improve visibility and communication with your vendors. Be aware of who they are, and make sure they’re aware of your peak plans. Make clear what your key dates are the actions you need to ensure everything goes smoothly. Have regular meetings and catch ups. Additionally, ensure good communication not just with the vendors but internally as well. Acknowledge the vendors and providers that are working behind the scenes to really make this a good experience for everyone. That’s something that we certainly do.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown

## Always plan ahead

*“The further ahead you plan, the better. The later you leave it the more chance there is of it going horribly wrong. That sounds obvious but you want to get going as quickly as you can so you have time to get everything set up right.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

THE **CONRAN** SHOP



## Flexibility enables agility

*“Ensure you have flexibility in your trading calendar and the agility to react based on stock availability. Offering a variety of payment types and using them as levers. And customer insight should be at the heart of everything you do. Go into peak with a robust set of KPIs so you can respond in real time to what's going on. So many retailers look back at peak and say: ‘We saw this trend or that.’ But you really need this information in real time to make the most of peak. It's going to be hard this year, it's going to be hard to capitalise on every single sale. The winners will be those that are reacting to the data they're getting on a daily basis.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

## Secure your infrastructure

*“Make sure your infrastructure is locked down and that you've got the whole support structure secure. Don't introduce a major change just before peak. From an IT perspective, there's no difference during peak. I look at it all the same because, whether this is going to be over six weeks or six years, I need a robust backbone in place.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London



# Reach your peak with Adyen

Peak is an exciting yet challenging time for retailers. And while nothing can be done to ensure success during these uncertain times, having the right technology partners by your side can help stack the odds in your favour. Below, our brands share how Adyen supports them during peak and beyond.

[Could we help you too? Get in touch and find out >](#)

**MOLTON  
BROWN**  
LONDON

*“With previous providers, we had different devices to accept different methods (like Amex or Alipay and WeChat Pay). Now, we have a global solution that allows us to manage everything through one ecosystem and keep things simple. It all feels very up to date. It's easy to find the information you're looking for and it's very forward-thinking in terms of the integration. To date, I've had no issues either in uptime or performance.”*

**Simon Binney** — Retail Analyst, Molton Brown

**FATFACE**  
UNITED KINGDOM

*“We don't worry about Adyen because it just works. Having a reliable payments platform is super important for us. I also value the flexibility to be able to run reports on the fly. This is really useful for ad hoc queries and lets us respond to trading and operational issues in real time. So, it's good - we're not all concerned about going into peak.”*

**Liam Price** — Head of Digital

THE **CONRAN** SHOP

*“Adyen feels like a modern system rather than something that's bolted together from lots of different archaic systems that don't fit. From a back-end and reporting perspective, it's easy to get to what you need. It also integrates really nicely with our Magento platform. Another thing I value is access to a good account manager; someone who's easy to reach, easy to set up meetings with, and can support with challenges and questions along the way. Ultimately, it's one less thing for me to worry about. Because I've got plenty of others.”*

**Richard Voyce** — Director of Technology

The logo for Hamleys, featuring the word "Hamleys" in a stylized, handwritten font. The letter "H" is large and prominent, with three small stars above the "a".

*“Before Adyen, it felt like we were constantly fighting against the tide. It was a real struggle and I believe that impacted us commercially as well. It prevented us from doing ambitious things with ecommerce, it prevented us from introducing new technologies and payment methods in store. Adyen has been a breath of fresh air. They feel like a true partner and the change has been really positive.”*

**Shahid Mohamed** — Programme Manager, Hamleys London

Get in touch with us today to begin your journey into success during peak season and beyond.

[Let's talk >](#)

**adyen**