

# Amazon's Holiday Catalog Is Its Latest Multichannel Move

## Article



**A**mazon appears to be covering all bases. The retailer known for transforming online shopping is now taking a page from the traditional playbook: catalogs.

The once online-only merchant is planning to launch a holiday toy catalog this year, [according to Bloomberg](#). Catalogs will be mailed to US households and be available at [Whole Foods Market](#) stores.

What may seem like an off-brand move isn't that unusual. In fact, catalogs never really died despite the rise of ecommerce. Online furniture and home goods merchant **Wayfair** debuted a print catalog in 2016. **Urban Outfitters**, **Williams-Sonoma** and their associated brands still mail them. However, Williams-Sonoma's chief financial officer Julie Whalen said in a Q1 2018 earnings call that the retailer was now spending more than 50% of its ad budget on digital and is "continuing to optimize [its] catalog spend."

They make sense for some lifestyle brands, though. Print catalogs can convey luxury, as evidenced by **Restoration Hardware's** famously glossy tomes that clock in at more than 2,000 pages.

Catalogs are also a way to cut through the digital noise. According to an annual survey by the **United States Postal Service (USPS)**, 46% of US consumers said they read catalogs in 2017, more than double the amount who threw them away (21%). Some 11% set them aside to read later. While shoppers can browse endless product pages online, it can be nice to thumb through a selection of items that are often more contextualized.

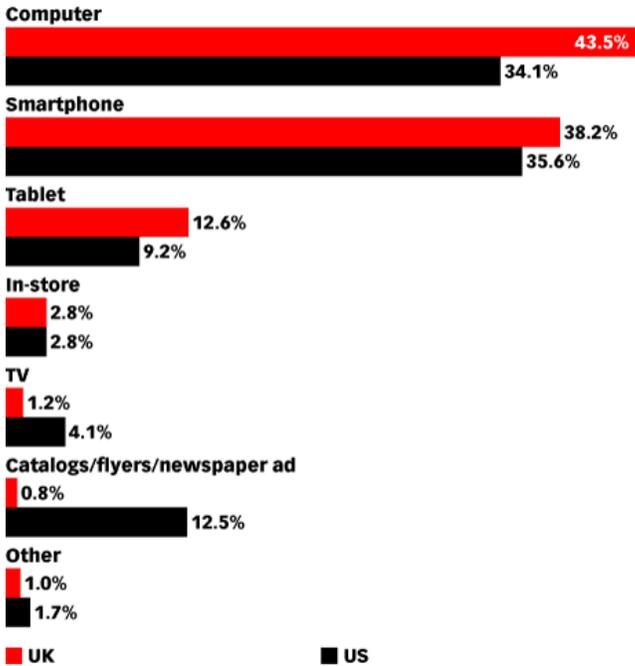
Catalogs also appeal to a sense of nostalgia. Last year **Sears** revived its "Wish Book" for the holiday season, the first time since 2011. And **Amazon** is stepping in to fill the role that used to belong to **Toys "R" Us**, which produced its "Big Book" catalog every year.

Based on consumer shopping surveys, though, catalogs function more like branding tools than sales vehicles. In **National Retail Federation (NRF)** surveys throughout 2018, catalogs ranked last among US consumers when buying gifts for holidays like Father's Day, St. Patrick's Day and Easter.

In a **Periscope** survey of US internet users last October about Black Friday shopping behavior, only 4.1% said they were primarily going to buy through catalogs. However, 12.5% were going to research Black Friday deals via catalogs (and newspaper ads), which was higher than using in-store methods, TV or tablets.

## Primary Channel/Location Where UK vs. US Internet Users Research Black Friday Promotions, Oct 2017

% of respondents



Note: UK n=510; US n=1,042; ages 18+ who plan to shop for Black Friday deals; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding  
Source: Periscope, "Black Friday 2017 Shopping Report: Consumer sentiment is riding high," Oct 12, 2017

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The popularity of catalogs during the holidays was also apparent in a September 2017 **IFTTT** survey about channel preferences for holiday deals. US internet users ranked email highest (37.9%), but catalogs and direct mail (23.0%) beat out social media (12.4%), in-store ads (11.6%), text messages (7.8%) and app notifications (7.4%).

According to **Multichannel Merchant**, 84.2% of retailers said they would be using catalogs as a marketing tool in 2018. Branding was cited as the No. 1 goal, rating 8.86 on a scale of one to 10. Next on the list was driving digital traffic and helping customer retention (tied with a score of 8.14).