

Everything you missed while you were on holiday break

Article

With many marketers and business professionals taking time off at the end of the year, the news cycle might have slowed down, but it didn't stop entirely.

Our team reviewed the most consequential stories of the last few weeks and selected what we think will be most useful for you.

Omicron didn't stop holiday shoppers: Despite a surge in cases tied to the latest COVID-19 variant, US shop and restaurant visits **increased as much as 4.8%** in the week leading up to Christmas, **per** SafeGraph data.

- Both in-store and online sales picked up with overall sales **rising 8.5%** from 2020, **according to** Mastercard SpendingPulse. However, with more stores closing due to omicron, even the most enthusiastic shoppers may find it more difficult to shop in-store for a while.

Apple faces more worker unrest: **Apple shut down more stores** and reinstated a mask mandate as it attempts to mitigate the effects of omicron on its staff (and presumably its profits), Bloomberg **reported**, although some stores remain open for limited walk-in services.

- These measures come after **over 50 employees staged a walkout** and urged a consumer boycott of the company on Christmas Eve to advocate for better working conditions, **per** Insider.

Oculus' app topped the charts after Christmas: The app that supports **Meta's** VR headset product became **the No. 1 app** on both the iOS App Store and Google Play store.

- This strongly suggests the headsets soared in popularity this year.
- Before Christmas 2021, the Oculus app only cracked the iOS top 10 in the US. By December 26, it had reached the top five in 14 different markets.

The sales growth can likely be attributed to two things: Facebook's much-discussed rebrand to Meta in Q4 and shortages of popular video game consoles, including Nintendo OLED Switch and Sony's Playstation 5.

Baidu sees full launch of its metaverse in six years: Ahead of Baidu Create 2021, the company's developer conference held on December 27, Baidu vice president Ma Jie **told reporters XiRang**, the company's metaverse app, is still six years away from a full launch. The company appears to be walking a fine line between moving ahead quickly to compete with **Microsoft** and Meta and adhering to China's new anti-monopolistic regulations.

TikTok is 2021's most popular domain: **According to** a recent report by the security firm **Cloudflare**, the company's public DNS resolver saw **tiktok.com** requested more than any other domain—surpassing stalwarts such as **google.com** and **facebook.com**. The top 10 was rounded out by the domains for Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

While the report emphasized rankings don't reflect the number of users on each platform, it does represent TikTok's meteoric rise since the pandemic began.

TikTok to get into the food business: TikTok Kitchens is a partnership with Virtual Dining Concepts (VDC) that will deliver tasty dishes from the popular app.

- The plan is to launch with 300 US locations and expand to 1,000 by the end of this year.
- The concept will be based out of existing kitchens and use restaurant employees, but TikTok Kitchens will be responsible for recipes sourced from the social platform as well as food packaging.
- Menus are to be rotated quarterly, though it remains to be seen if that's fast enough to take advantage of viral food trends.

While the service isn't intended to seriously compete with the likes of **Doordash** and **Uber Eats**, it does suggest TikTok is confident it can own the end-to-end experience for its users—rather than cede those transactions to food delivery companies. VDC has had success with **MrBeast Burger**, launched near 2020's end, which sold **1 million burgers** in its first three months, [per](#) Fortune.

California sues Walmart over environmental laws: In late December, California's attorney general filed a lawsuit against **Walmart**, alleging the company **illegally disposed of hazardous waste**.

- **According to** the suit, Walmart “unlawfully disposes of approximately 159,600 pounds—or more than one million items—of hazardous waste in California each year.”
- While the company disputes the charges, this is **not the first time** Walmart has come under fire over environmental issues. As sustainability becomes a must-have quality for retailers, any negative publicity can harm their consumer appeal.

Amazon employees continue to protest working conditions: Amazon workers in the Chicago area walked off their jobs several days before Christmas to **demand higher wages and longer break times**, Insider [reported](#).

- In a video, one worker complained the company was acting as if the pandemic had ended, despite several employees having tested positive.
- Since the pandemic began, Amazon has drawn significant criticism over its safety and workplace measures, especially after six employees died in an Illinois warehouse **due to a**

tornado in the area a few weeks ago.