

How brands can **bounce back** in the 2022 retail peak



How retailers are getting back to normal(ish)

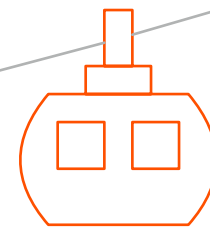


A peak season like no other

Every single retail brand ever knows the importance of the retail peak.

These days, it starts long before Black Friday, and in 2022, cost-conscious consumers will be looking to spread the expense of the holiday season.

If you're looking to get ahead of the game and ensure your brand messaging is on point for the upcoming spending frenzy, look no further – we've got you covered with our exclusive insight into what's working, what's not, and how to boost sales in the 2022 retail peak...





Thrifty and thriving

It's crystal clear that consumers are concerned about saving money on the cusp of the 2022 retail peak. Our research finds that savings-related words like "deal," "sale," "offer," and "saving" are attracting opens and clicks in inboxes (though it's worth bearing in mind that if you're not following email best practice, some email providers may flag "deal" emails as spammy, so make sure your general email health is up to scratch.)

The global cost-of-living crisis is at the forefront of consumers' minds on the cusp of the retail peak, so emphasizing how your customers can bag a bargain and save some money will inevitably continue to capture their attention into this year's retail peak.

Fig. 1: Top 20 words in high-performing retail subject lines

- | | | |
|----------|------------|----------|
| 1. Deal | 8. Today | 15. Miss |
| 2. New | 9. Style | 16. End |
| 3. Sale | 10. Saving | 17. Time |
| 4. Day | 11. Save | 18. Get |
| 5. Tech | 12. Great | 19. Love |
| 6. Offer | 13. TV | 20. Shop |
| 7. Look | 14. Big | |

2 Fun is back (and it's on a budget) 🎈

The 2020 and 2021 retail peaks were both spent under ever-changing pandemic restrictions, and the appetite for whimsy and frivolity wasn't necessarily there for many consumers. However, in 2022, fun is back, baby! 😎

We're seeing this starry-eyed little guy 🤩, this cheery character 😄, and even these little sparkles ✨ landing back in our inboxes, and we're loving it.

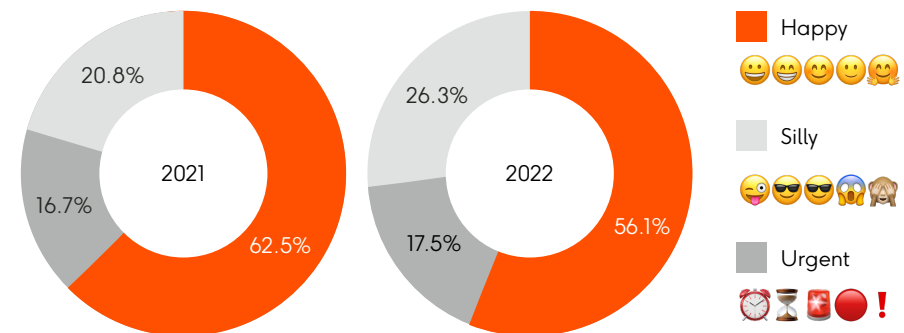
And money-related emojis are grabbing attention too. From the moneybag (yes please) 💰 to the dollar \$ to the flying stack of cash 🪂 (whimsical AND monetary!), it's a good way to reinforce that there are savings to be had within your email.

Fig. 2: Top 20 emojis in high-performing subject lines

- | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. 🤩 | 8. 🤙 | 15. 😄 |
| 2. 💰 | 9. 😎 | 16. ✓ |
| 3. 😍 | 10. ✨ | 17. 🙌 |
| 4. \$ | 11. 📺 | 18. 🩵 |
| 5. 🟦 | 12. 🤖 | 19. 😊 |
| 6. ☀️ | 13. 📺 | 20. ❤️ |
| 7. 🪂 | 14. 📺 | |

And, sticking with emojis for a moment, the use of “silly” emojis in high-performing marketing messages is up from 20.8% in 2021 to 26.3% in 2022. Let's get wacky, phriends! 🤪

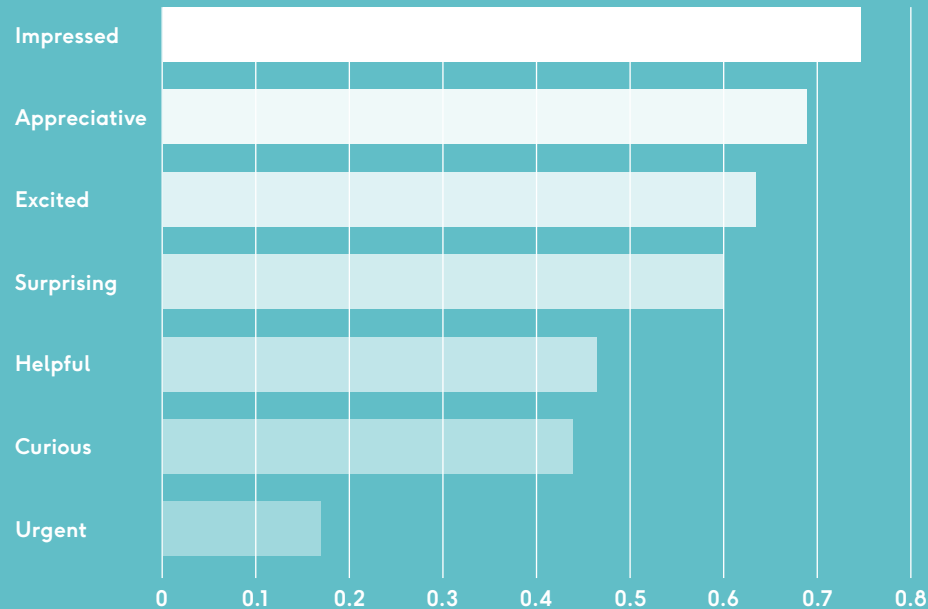
Fig. 3: Emoji usage change (2021-2022)





It's nice to be nice

Fig. 4: Emotions of high-performing subject lines in 2022



Across all sectors, there are three clear frontrunners when it comes to winning sentiments right now:



1 **Impressed** – making your customers feel good about engaging with your content (e.g. “WOW! Here’s 20% off because you’re awesome!”)



2 **Appreciative** – showing your gratitude for your customers (e.g. “You deserve a treat”)



3 **Excited** – building enthusiasm and anticipation around what you’ve got to say (e.g. “You won’t BELIEVE what we’ve found for you!”)

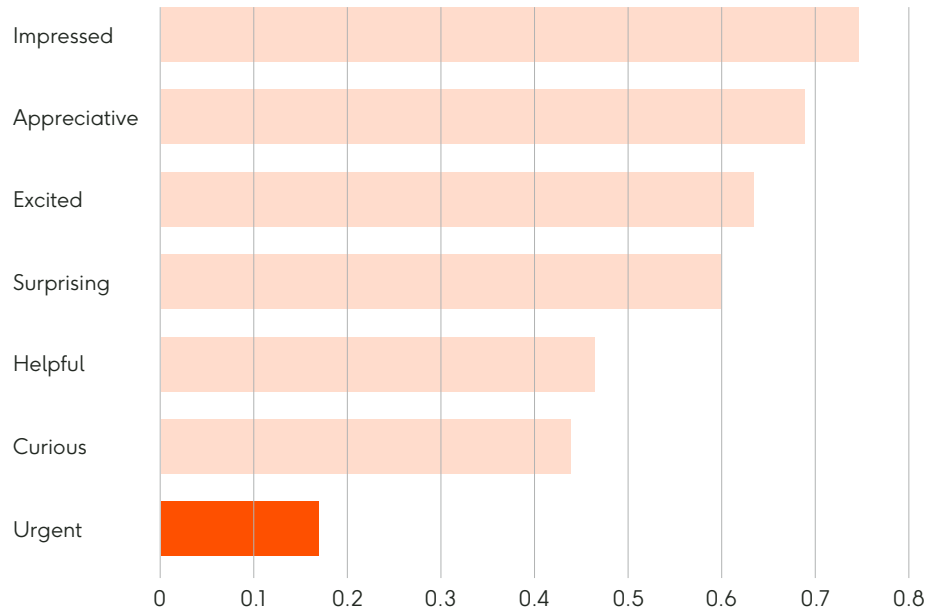
This year, consumers are embracing good vibes. They’re interested in treating themselves, they want to know you appreciate them, and they’re up for a little bit of fun.



4 Under pressure

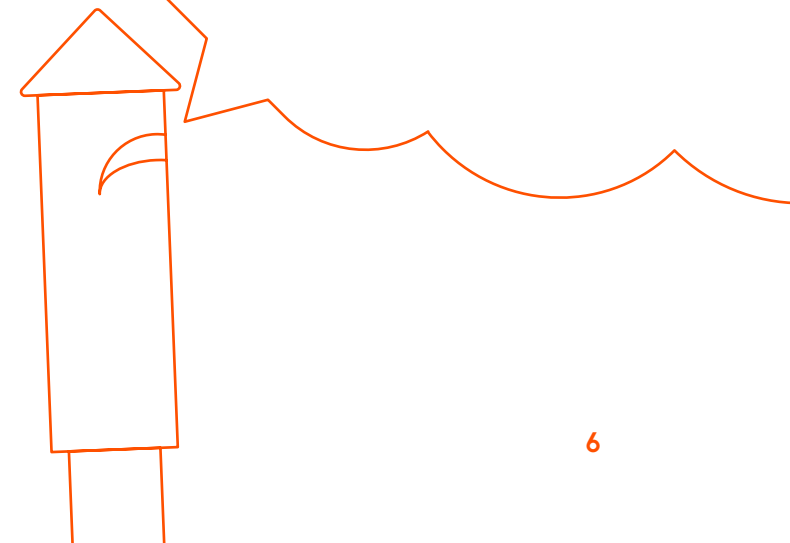


Fig. 4: Emotions of high-performing subject lines in 2022

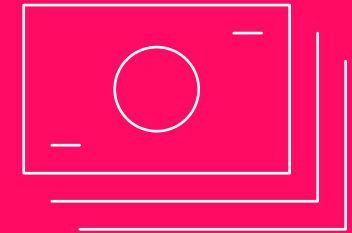


One thing that isn't resonating so well this year is urgency. High-pressure messages like "BUY NOW," "Ends tonight," and "Time's running out!" are less likely to grab customers' attention. Many people report that they're experiencing "content fatigue," with an overwhelming number of messages flying at them from every channel, so now isn't the time to pile pressure on your customers.

Our research found that urgent messaging was the least successful in every sector, and there are no signs of that changing anytime soon. Try turning down the pressure, and turning up the warm and fuzzies as we ascend this year's peak.



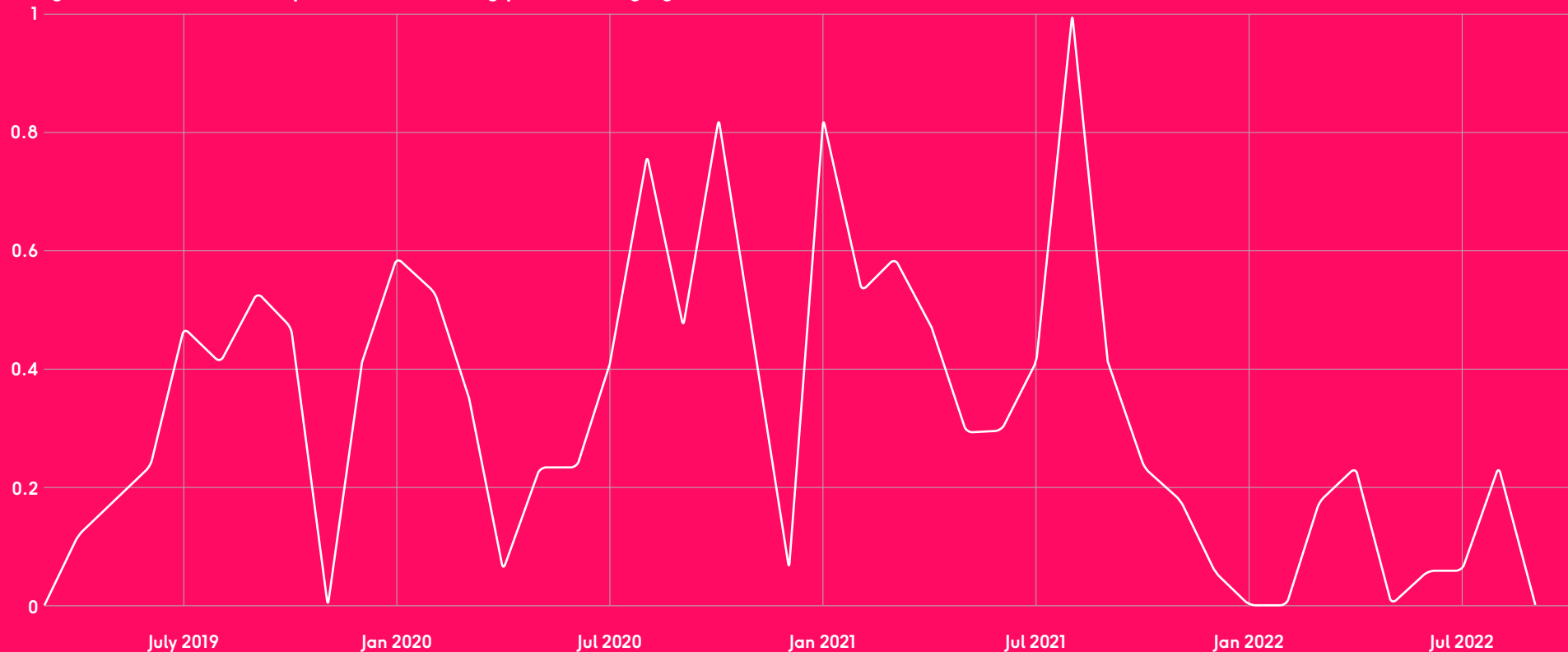
5 MON£¥ TALK\$ (but it shouldn't)



Even though consumers are looking to save money in 2022, they don't want prices shoved in their faces. Think of the holiday magic, won't you?!

In fact, our data surfaced an interesting trend – the success of subject lines containing price information plummets in the retail peak. As the holidays approach, consumers want to be inspired and delighted, not overtly sold to. In 2022, subject lines containing a price have been especially unpopular, so consider trying some of those top 20 high-performing words if you want to emphasize your offers.

Fig. 5: The success of subject lines containing price messaging





Trends by retail sector

All retail subsectors are not made equal, and the pandemic made things especially tricky for marketers. You may not have heard, but we were in “unprecedented times” for two years, which had a major impact on the way customers engaged with communications and spend money.

Let’s take a look at what that meant for three major retail subsectors (technology, fashion, and beauty), and what we can predict for the 2022 retail peak.

Naturally, everyone wants a deal on their technology. Whether it’s new wireless earbuds or a \$2,000 gaming laptop, consumers are generally happy to shop around to get the best price on their tech.

The good news is that the 2022 data appears to be aligning with the pre-pandemic retail peak. Once again, consumers are interested in deals, offers, and sales, as they were in 2019, back when medics were the only people wearing surgical masks. That’s a positive sign for the likes of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, when tech brands typically discount big-ticket electrical items. After the pandemic, where brands were advertising curbside pickup and home delivery, consumer engagement data suggests that they’re in a better position to think about buying TVs, phones, and computers once again.

Technology

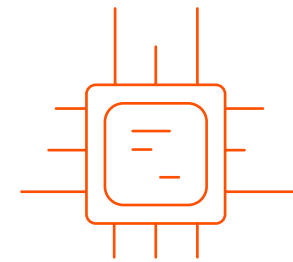


Fig. 6: Top 10 words in high-performing retail subject lines (technology brands)

2019	Pandemic	2022
Deal	Deal	Deal
Saving	Black	Price
Price	Go	Offer
Best	Curbside	Update
Email	Home	Holiday
Shop	Check	Sale
Come	Start	Need
Week	Smart	Shop
Great	Select	Clearance
Gift	Labor	Treat

Fashion brands



In the words of Yves Saint Laurent: “Fashions fade, style is forever.” The man clearly had a point, with “style” being a clear click-attractor for marketers before, during, and after the pandemic.

In 2022, “want” is back on the click-list, replacing “need” in the 2020 retail peak. Consumers are also swapping lockdown-friendly “cosy” clicks for more fashion-related words, such as “dress,” “trend,” and “menswear,” which could indicate that fashionistas are ready to update their wardrobes in the upcoming retail peak.

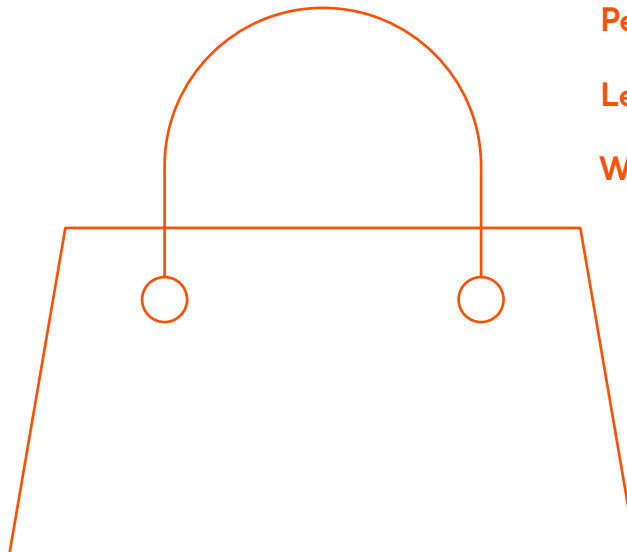
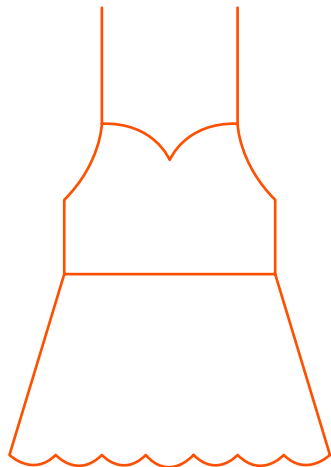
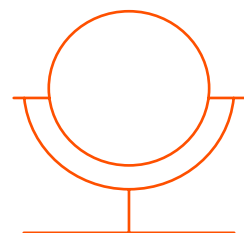


Fig. 7: Top 10 words in high-performing retail subject lines (fashion brands)

2019	Pandemic	2022
Style	Style	Style
Love	Season	Trend
Item	Need	Dress
Arrive	Find	Want
Autumn	Time	Season
Great	Cosy	Extra
Holiday	Land	Open
Perfect	Come	Top
Level	Jean	Menswear
Want	Hello	Stylish

Beauty brands



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder – but maybe not in 2022! Despite topping the list of high-performing words in the 2019 and 2020 retail peaks, it’s dropped out of the top 10 this year. Instead, it’s clear where beauty fans’ priorities lie – they’re looking for freebies, trial items, and rewards.

We may not quite be back to the “luxe” pre-pandemic days, but all the purchase indicators are there – including, literally, the word “purchase!” Based on the current high-performing words, we might see an interest in beauty bargains – so get those cut-price creams, cleansers, and contour palettes at the ready.

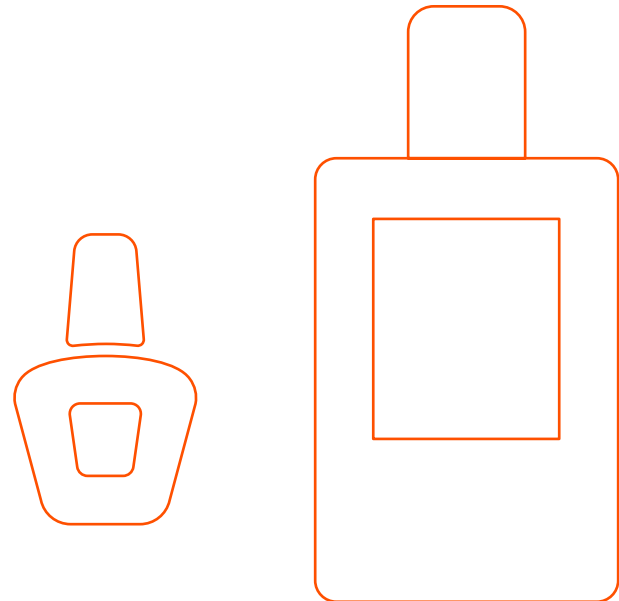


Fig. 8: Top 10 words in high-performing retail subject lines (beauty brands)

2019	Pandemic	2022
Beauty	Beauty	Free
Wait	Body	Trial
Purchase	Time	Size
Size	Good	Reward
Clean	Saving	Product
Care	Deal	Purchase
Fave	Shop	Point
Luxe	Skin	Drop
Think	Brand	Spend
Makeup	Butter	Good

The bottom line

The 2022 retail peak is looking quietly promising. Understandably, consumers are price conscious right now, and this will likely continue into the peak holiday shopping period.

According to our data, the key considerations for your content marketing for the remainder of 2022 are:

- 1 Mention offers, but not specific prices** – customers want to get the most bang for their buck, but they don't necessarily need to be confronted with specific prices right off the bat
- 2 Embrace the holiday feels** – this will be the most “normal” holiday season since 2019, and customers are looking forward to celebrating. Keep your messaging light and bright – remember impressed, appreciative, excited
- 3 Avoid pressure and scare tactics** – across the board, “urgent” marketing messaging isn't really resonating in 2022. Entice customers back with a sprinkling of fun and festive whimsy

Of course, there is no one size fits all when it comes to marketing messaging. Your brand is unique, and it's vital that retailers stand out in cluttered inboxes in the peak season.

Our data is based on what's working for other brands, but who knows – maybe your customers go gaga for urgent messages, or want nothing more than a price in their subject lines.

That's where Phrasee comes in. Using AI-powered content, Phrasee constantly tests, optimizes, and deploys marketing messaging that aligns with your brand voice, helping you maximize clicks, opens, and engagement with your messaging.

Retailers like Walgreens, Party City, and Currys trust Phrasee to create on-brand, engaging content to keep customers clicking, browsing, and spending.



Ready to bounce back?

The 2022 retail peak is like no either - kinda. We're not quite back to normal yet, but with the right messages, we'll get there a whole lot faster.

Let's get those carts filled with more than just holiday cheer!

Schedule your demo today to find out how we can make this your best holiday season yet.



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