

# Why Mariah Carey could be your best (or worst) friend in the countdown to Christmas

Tomorrow marks the final week before Christmas and the busiest weekend of the retail calendar. The unrelenting onslaught of carols sends most shoppers mad, yet studies show the right Christmas retail music can make shoppers spend more. It's simple, if you want customers to buy up big this Christmas, you must play the right music. But how do you know if what you're playing appeals to your kind of customer? Harley Sedman, a specialist in brand sound and CEO of POSMusic, gives his expert insights to help retailers and venue owners use music to their advantage in the countdown to Christmas.

1) Be sure to mix it up Christmas music is a special kind of music which, after a period of absence from the airwaves, hits high rotation again with a new lease of life. Often nostalgic, it invokes pleasurable memories and, as Martin Lindstrom, author of *Brandwashed* puts it, a state of "rosy remembering". We're happy to hear these well-known songs again and interestingly they make us more inclined to spend, but the risk and a confirmed phenomenon for retailers is overplay and burnout for listeners. An ongoing rotation of Christmas music is only appropriate for the days directly preceding Christmas itself. A 50/50 mix of festive tunes and general tracks that best represent your brand are often the best ratio through December.

2) Match the right music to your demographic All businesses should find and play Christmas music that is congruent with their brand message and relevant to their demographic. With thousands of Santa-happy songs running the gamut from punk and rock to classical and jazz, make sure you are standing out from the crowd and never resort to the Bing Crosby cassettes hiding in the store cupboard since last December's stocktake. Remember, it's ok not to play carols. In fact, if you have spent the year refining your sound to represent your brand and engage customers, a change of playlist without precaution could be detrimental. POSMusic's recommendations for key retail categories are as follows:

- Tween Outlets for pre- and early teens can rely on the pop stars that adorn their customer's bedroom walls: Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande, Fifth Harmony, Meghan Trainor, and Little Mix have all recently released their take on the traditional Christmas carol, which will do the trick to keep young customers in-store.
- Lifestyle Lifestyle brands must ensure they don't abandon their brand-orientated sound for the sake of playing Christmas tunes. Left-field selections like Emmy The Great's *Zombie Christmas*, alongside festive releases from indie/alternative artists like the Shins, The Knife, Smashing Pumpkins, and Radiohead are best served here.
- Electronics Tech-savvy audiences rarely pay close attention to music charts, so artists like Britney Spears aren't going to help. Starting with indie/alternative stars like The XX, The Killers and Sufjan Stevens is a smart choice, with rock'n'roll adaptations from Blink-182 and Green Day (whose punk-inspired carols match the frenetic pace of the video games retailers are running out the door) are also highly recommended.
- Mid-range fashion Stores for women looking to avoid the cost of designer brands should seek Christmas tunes from Kylie Minogue, Destiny's Child, Britney Spears, Kelly Clarkson or Coldplay, mixed with more contemporary releases such as Pentatonix' *A Pentatonix Christmas*. For an older demographic, festive releases from pop icons like Madonna, Sting, U2, The Pretenders and Bruce Springsteen will mean they won't want to walk out the door.
- Hospitality Without question, many people turn to bars, clubs, and pubs for a moment of respite amongst the Christmas madness. It's best to refrain from playing festive season songs until the very last days of Christmas, and keep it up-tempo, funky, and fun. Our suggestions are Jackson 5, Sharon Jones, and the Dap Kings (RIP), James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Hot Chocolate, and Rufus Thomas, who have all recently got into the Christmas spirit. Oddly enough, so too have rap luminaries Snoop Dogg, Kurtis Blow, and Run DMC, so if revellers feel like a hip hop breakdance after a few too many mulled wines, the option is there.
- Supermarkets Carols and supermarkets go together like candy and canes. With a broad demographic, you can play just about anything with a traditional Christmas theme, but keep in mind your staff might find it a little maddening to hear 100 variations of *Silent Night* in a day. Your best bet here is a mix of old and new. Mariah Carey's *All I Want for Christmas is You*, Michael Bublé, Justin Bieber, Kylie Minogue and Wyclef Jean will help, but no one will begrudge a store for reaching just a little further back with the occasional Ray Charles or Tony Bennett classic.
- Toys and games Toy stores are a magical place all year round, and especially during December. There's no shortage of artists to bring the Christmas cheer, with The Wiggles (naturally) and Bananas in Pyjamas looking after the little ones, and Ellie Goulding, Justin Bieber and Taylor Swift ringing the sleigh bells for the primary schoolers. And don't forget a little something for the adults. Once again, keep it broad, and most importantly fun, with Christmas interpretations by Mariah Carey, Kylie Minogue, Lady Gaga and The Glee cast your best bet for keeping mum and dad sane.
- Homewares No one wants out-of-date homewares, so once again we've gone for a modern tip: Pentatonix' *A Pentatonix Christmas* is this year's stand-out Christmas release, alongside R. Kelly's *12 Nights of Christmas*. Both releases should fit right in with classic but contemporary releases by Michael Bublé, Sheryl Crow, Christina Aguilera, and Dido.
- Luxury Once again, we must re-iterate that you must never divert from your brand message. Fashion labels should exercise extreme caution using Christmas music, as many are considered "tacky", particularly in Australia. If carols are necessary, keep it subtle, sophisticated, and stylish, and avoid anything with lyrics. Instead stick with jazz interpretations that keep the Christmas cheer under control: Duke Ellington, Vincent Guaraldi, Kenny Burrell, the Ramsey Lewis Trio, and the Atlantic Five Jazz Band will keep things simple and smart.

3) Respect your staff With high staff turnover a significant issue during the holiday season, it's wise to consider staff needs when you are selecting

which music to play this Christmas. Without fail we have store staff contact POSMusic in early December every year asking if we can increase the percentage of 'normal' songs in their venue, as well as thank us for the variety of Christmas songs we do play. Happy staff mean happy customers therefore it's important the right songs are selected, staff opinion is monitored and acted on, and that there are enough songs on rotation to ensure staff morale stays positive during this busy period.

The good thing is Christmas music can be great when targeted to the right audience. Check out what good Christmas music can sound like at POSMusic.com, where we've expertly curated five cool Christmas playlists for your customer's listening pleasure: <https://christmas.posmusic.com> (be sure to add your e-mail for access).

About POSMusic POSMusic is a music platform built for business, a specialised music consultancy service and content marketing platform that connects brands with their target market. POSMusic creates expertly curated playlists and brandspecific content for clients in stores, venues and online. Using big data, the company is fast becoming an industry-leader in music curation for business, helping businesses grow customer loyalty and their bottom line.

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