

# Discount Extensions 101

## The BFCM Playbook

How coupon extensions work, what they cost an online store in peak season, and what you can do about it.



## — FOREWORD

# Why I wrote this

I started my career in affiliate marketing, on the paid search team at vouchercloud, one of the UK's biggest voucher publishers. From that seat you could watch commission move. A shopper would find a brand through a review, a comparison site or a creator. Then, at the very last step, a pop-up would appear, claim the last click and collect the commission meant for the partners who'd done the work. Internally we called it the Honey Hoover.

The merchant paid twice: once in commission on a sale it already had, and again in the discount the pop-up handed out. Nobody upstream had much reason to complain. Every one of those orders still paid the networks.

In 2022 I built Benson so merchants could see that happening and stop it. Then Shopify closed its checkout to scripts, and the original Benson stalled.

I came back because the problem never left. A YouTube investigation made millions of people ask how coupon extensions get paid, and in January 2026 three of the biggest affiliate networks acted against the best-known one. Meanwhile a new kind of shopper is arriving at the same spot in your checkout: AI agents that read your pages, fill carts and try codes for someone else.

This playbook explains how coupon extensions work, who pays for them, what changed after the controversy, and what you can do before peak season. It isn't against extensions. Some bring you customers you wouldn't otherwise reach, and chapter 5 shows how to tell which ones. The problem is paying for the same order twice, in the weeks when you have the least time to check.

We've sourced every claim, marked what's still disputed and kept the plays practical: each one has an owner and a deadline. With twelve weeks to go, the calendar in chapter 7 uses all of them. With less, start with the first two plays.

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**Doug Silkstone**

FOUNDER, BENSON

# Contents

Nine chapters, in the order the explanation runs, then a checklist, a glossary and the sources. Every line on this page links to its page.

BEFORE YOU START

|          |    |                   |    |
|----------|----|-------------------|----|
| Foreword | 02 | The short version | 04 |
|----------|----|-------------------|----|

CHAPTERS

|        |                                                      |    |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 01     | What happens at checkout                             | 05 |
| 02     | Who's involved                                       | 08 |
| 03     | How coupon extensions work                           | 11 |
| 04     | What went wrong, and where it stands                 | 15 |
| 05     | When extensions are worth it                         | 19 |
| 06     | The plays                                            | 22 |
| PLAY 1 | Measure before you change anything                   | 24 |
| PLAY 2 | Run a holdout in ordinary weeks                      | 25 |
| PLAY 3 | Restrict your discount codes                         | 26 |
| PLAY 4 | Write your extension rules into your affiliate terms | 27 |
| PLAY 5 | Keep the partners that add sales                     | 28 |
| PLAY 6 | Remove the reason to hunt for a code                 | 29 |
| PLAY 7 | Control the storefront, set rules for checkout       | 30 |
| PLAY 8 | Decide how you handle AI agents                      | 31 |
| 07     | The calendar                                         | 32 |
| 08     | AI shopping agents                                   | 36 |
| 09     | How Benson helps                                     | 39 |

AT THE BACK

|           |    |          |    |         |    |
|-----------|----|----------|----|---------|----|
| Checklist | 41 | Glossary | 42 | Sources | 43 |
|-----------|----|----------|----|---------|----|

## How to use this playbook

The chapters build on each other. They follow one order through a checkout, then explain who is involved, how the money moves, what went wrong and when an extension is worth paying for. Chapters 6 and 7 turn that into eight plays and a calendar counted back from Black Friday.

Each figure has a small number that links to its source at the back. Where the arithmetic is ours, we mark it illustrative. Anything likely to change, such as a court case or a platform feature, sits in a status box dated 6 October 2026. Nothing here is legal advice.

READING ROUTES

### Founder

The [short version](#), chapters [1](#) and [5](#), then Plays [1](#) and [2](#): what is happening, whether it costs you, and how to find out.

### Head of e-commerce

Everything, in order. The calendar in chapter [7](#) is the plan, and the [checklist](#) is a printable version for the team.

### Affiliate or partnerships manager

Chapters [3](#) and [4](#), the break-even section of chapter [5](#), then Plays [2](#), [4](#) and [5](#): the holdout, your programme terms and which extensions to keep.

### Developer

Chapter [3](#) for how a checkout session works, Plays [3](#), [7](#) and [8](#) for codes, storefront controls and agents, then chapter [8](#).

### Finance

The [short version](#), the break-even arithmetic in chapter [5](#), and Play [2](#) for how a holdout result is read.

# The short version

The whole playbook on one page, for anyone who reads nothing else.  
Each point links to the chapter or play that explains it in full.

## 01 How extensions get paid

P. 08

Coupon and cashback extensions are affiliate partners: they earn commission from your programme on the orders they touch, as the best-known one's store listing says.<sup>1</sup> Most programmes credit the last tracked click before an order, so an extension that activates at checkout can be credited for a sale another partner drove.<sup>2,3</sup>

## 02 The two costs of an extension order

P. 05

If the shopper was already at checkout, you give away a discount they didn't need and pay commission on a sale you already had. On a £100 order with a 10% code and 5% commission, that's £14.50 (illustrative). Each cost has its own fix: code design for the discount, programme terms for the commission.

## 03 The rules, and where they stand

P. 15

Stand-down means an extension must not activate or overwrite tracking when another affiliate referred the shopper; seven of eight surveyed networks require it.<sup>4</sup> In January 2026 three major networks acted against the best-known coupon extension over stand-down.<sup>6,7,8</sup> The US lawsuits are still running: as of 6 October 2026, no court has found any extension liable.<sup>72</sup>

## 04 Whether an extension adds sales

P. 19

Published studies conflict and come from interested parties; we found no independent randomised holdout.<sup>9,10</sup> At a 10% code, 5% commission and 50% margin, an extension breaks even when about 29% of its orders are extra sales (illustrative). A holdout on your traffic shows which side it's on.

## 05 Discount code limits

P. 26

Extensions can collect the codes their users find and submit, which is a likely route for a staff or creator code to reach strangers.<sup>11,12</sup> A code that is unique, single-use, tied to one customer or past its end date fails when someone else tries it.<sup>13,14</sup> A prefix for each channel shows where a stray code came from.

## 06 What you control on Shopify

P. 30

Shopify runs checkout code in a sandbox, separate from the page, so we know of no supported way for an app to detect or remove an extension's overlay inside checkout.<sup>15,16</sup> You control what shows on your storefront, and you govern which codes are valid at checkout, for whom and until when.<sup>14,17</sup>

## 07 Timing around Black Friday

P. 32

In our analysis of Google Trends, Black Friday was the top fourth-quarter day for code searches in every series-year we pulled, in the US and the UK.<sup>18</sup> IMRG's affiliate measure for 160 UK retailers doubled that day, from 4% in a typical quarter to 8%.<sup>19</sup> Make changes before your code freeze, and use peak week to watch.

## 08 AI shopping agents

P. 36

Two agent-checkout protocols, ACP and UCP, each define a way for an agent to submit a discount code, and ACP has a proposal for crediting affiliate publishers.<sup>20,21</sup> Shopify said in March 2026 that its merchants' products become discoverable in ChatGPT by default.<sup>22</sup> The same questions apply: which code, who gets the credit, what margin you keep.

## 01

## THE PROBLEM

# What happens at checkout

Coupon and cashback extensions act at the last step of an order. This chapter follows one order through a checkout, explains why shoppers look for codes, and sets out the two costs an extension can add.



- 01 Follow one order through your checkout
- 02 Why an empty code field starts a hunt
- 03 The two costs of an extension order

# One order, start to finish

A worked example: one shopper, one sale weekend, and what happens in the last few seconds before she pays.

**S**am found you on a Tuesday, in a creator's video about winter boots. She clicked the creator's link, browsed for ten minutes and left. On Friday she comes back to buy. Your sale is on, the boots are in her basket and she's one click from paying.

Then a small window slides in from the corner of her browser: we found codes for this store. Sam runs a coupon extension, like millions of shoppers. It tries a few codes, finds one that works and applies it. Somewhere in that sequence it also routes her through its own affiliate link.

From your side, nothing looks wrong. The order converts and your analytics records a sale. A month later your network bills you commission, and it goes not to the creator who introduced you, but to the extension that turned up at the end.

That isn't a glitch. Most affiliate programmes pay the last tracked referral before a purchase, a rule known as last click.<sup>3</sup> A tracking link that fires at checkout, the moment of highest intent, can be credited with a sale another channel started.<sup>47</sup> Stand-down rules, covered in chapter 3, exist to prevent this when another affiliate referred the shopper.

## Why shoppers look for codes

It starts with the code field. Seven in ten e-commerce sites show a promo-code field at checkout, and about a third of those show it open by default.<sup>24</sup> In Baymard's usability testing, shoppers paused at the field and some left to hunt for a code; once they leave, the chance they don't come back "increases significantly".<sup>24</sup>

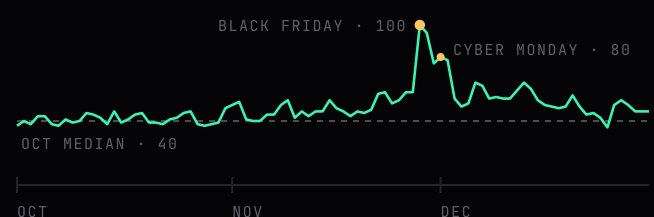
Hunting is normal. In Capterra's 2022 survey of US coupon users, 91% look for a code before buying at least some of the time, and 78% have decided against a purchase because they had no coupon.<sup>25</sup> In the UK, almost six in ten shoppers search for a code first, and 53% have delayed a purchase hoping for a better deal, says the voucher publisher VoucherCodes.<sup>26</sup>

Read those figures as direction, not size: they describe deal-aware shoppers, and none measures what share of all orders is affected. Baymard's list of reasons for abandoning a checkout has no coupon-hunting item.<sup>27</sup> Still, an extension saves the shopper a trip, which is genuinely convenient and why extensions are popular.

## Why peak week matters most

Code searches peak with your sales. In our analysis of Google Trends, Black Friday was the top day of the fourth quarter in all seven series-years we pulled, in the US and the UK, at 1.8 to 2.6 times a typical October day. Black Friday week was the top week of the year in 23 of 24 series-years from 2022 to 2025.<sup>18</sup>

Affiliate traffic peaks too. IMRG's measure of affiliate performance, from GA4 data-driven attribution across 160 UK retailers, doubled from 4% in a typical quarter to 8% on Black Friday 2025.<sup>19</sup>



**FIGURE 1.1** US searches for "coupon code", October to December 2025. Google Trends index (0–100); our analysis.<sup>18</sup>

# The two costs of an extension order

An extension can add a discount, a commission or both. Each has its own cause and its own fix, so it helps to price them separately.

| ORDER 4417 · CHECKOUT  |         | THE SAME ORDER AT OTHER SETTINGS                                                       |            |        |            |
|------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------|------------|
|                        |         | CODE                                                                                   | COMMISSION | MARGIN | GIVEN AWAY |
| Basket                 | £100.00 | 10%                                                                                    | 5%         | 50%    | 29%        |
| Gross profit at 50%    | £50.00  | 20%                                                                                    | 5%         | 50%    | 48%        |
| Code applied (10%)     | -£10.00 | 20%                                                                                    | 8%         | 40%    | 66%        |
| Commission (5% of £90) | -£4.50  | 30%                                                                                    | 5%         | 30%    | 112%       |
| Given away             | £14.50  | $\text{Given away} = [d + c(1 - d)] \div m$ d discount · c commission · m gross margin |            |        |            |
| Share of gross profit  | 29%     |                                                                                        |            |        |            |

**FIGURE 1.2** The double cost on one £100 order, and the share of gross profit given away at other settings. Illustrative: it assumes the shopper was already at checkout and would otherwise have paid full price.

The business model isn't hidden. The best-known coupon extension's own store listing says it plainly: "When you use PayPal Honey, merchants may pay us affiliate commissions. We share those commissions with our users in the form of rewards."<sup>1</sup> That commission comes out of your affiliate programme.

So an extension can cost you in two separate ways. **Margin leakage** is a discount the shopper wouldn't otherwise have used: a staff code, a creator's code, last spring's code. You fix it with code design and an offer of your own. **Attribution leakage** is commission paid on a sale another partner, or your own email, already drove. You fix it with your programme terms and a holdout.

## Why the total is easy to miss

The two costs arrive in different places. The discount shows in your discount report on the day of the order. The commission arrives weeks later on your network's invoice, after a validation period in which you can decline it. Awin, for example, lists "unauthorized voucher code use" as a

valid reason, and approves commissions left unreviewed automatically.<sup>92</sup>

When the discount plus the commission exceeds your margin, as in the table's last row, even a genuinely new order loses money. Chapter 5 shows that the "given away" figure is also your break-even: the share of orders that must be genuinely new.

Neither cost is a problem when the extension brought you the customer. Both are a problem when it didn't, and from the order alone you can't tell which. That's why measurement comes first.

### WHAT WE'D DO THIS WEEK

Pull last year's peak-week orders and list every discount code used, with its count. Mark the ones you never published: that's your first leak map, and it takes an hour.

Chapter 2 sets out who these tools are, how each kind earns and how the money reaches them.

## 02

## THE LANDSCAPE

# Who's involved

The tool in your shopper's browser might be a coupon finder, a cashback app, a browser feature or a plugin you've never heard of. This chapter sorts them into six kinds and follows the money back to your programme.



- 01 Six kinds of player, and how each one earns
- 02 How the money flows through your programme
- 03 Where affiliate spend concentrates

# A field guide to the six kinds of player

They earn in different ways and act at different moments, so each raises a different question for you. Here is how to tell them apart.

**E**xension publishers are a normal part of affiliate marketing. In the PMA's 2024 survey of more than 300 US brands, 88% said they allow toolbars, extensions and plug-ins in their programmes.<sup>28</sup> Shopper numbers are less clear: in the newest survey we could trace, run in 2019 by the coupon publisher CouponFollow, about 27% of US coupon users, and about half of Gen Z, used an extension to find codes.<sup>94</sup>

## 01 Coupon finders

The classic coupon extension. It recognises your store, tests the codes they hold for it in your code field and keeps the one that saves most. It earns commission and shares part of it as rewards.<sup>1</sup> Chrome's rules, enforced since June 2025, say a coupon finder must not insert an affiliate link if no discount is found.<sup>5</sup> The possible win is a shopper who would have left to hunt and not come back.

## 02 Cashback and loyalty extensions

These return part of the commission to the shopper as cashback, usually after a prompt to activate. Awin's terms say reminders must follow "clear, explicit user action".<sup>46</sup> The question for you is whether the cashback changes the order or rewards someone already buying; chapter 5 weighs the evidence.

## 03 Features built into browsers and search

Some deal-finding is part of the browser or the search page and reaches the shopper before you do. Microsoft retired Edge's coupons feature in 2025 but kept cashback and price comparison.<sup>31, 32</sup> Google shows merchants' own promotions across Search, the Shopping tab and Chrome in 13 coun-

tries, including the UK and the US.<sup>33</sup> It's the one surface where you choose the code.

## 04 Voucher-code sites

The oldest player lists codes and earns commission when a shopper clicks through. The model rests on last click: RetailMeNot told the SEC in 2014 that it earned "the vast majority" of its net revenues on transactions where it received last-click attribution.<sup>2</sup> Voucher sites' share of US affiliate spend fell from 16% in 2021 to 10% in 2024.<sup>34</sup> In a 2024 UK study of 60 retailers, 42% of voucher-site page titles that implied a code had none.<sup>35</sup>

## 05 White-label and newer plugins

Providers such as Wildfire build extensions for other brands,<sup>36</sup> so a tool can sit in your programme under an unfamiliar name, with no terms set for it. Wildfire tells builders "a one-hour window is a reasonable approximation" for stand-down: vendor guidance, not a network rule.<sup>36</sup> Awin requires publishers to declare an extension in advance;<sup>46</sup> ask your network for the list.

## 06 AI shopping agents

Agents read your pages and fill carts for someone else; their protocols already carry discount codes as fields. OpenAI and Stripe's Agentic Commerce Protocol added a discount extension in January 2026; Google's Universal Commerce Protocol has an equivalent.<sup>20, 21</sup> Chapter 8 covers the rest.

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SCALE AT TIME OF WRITING

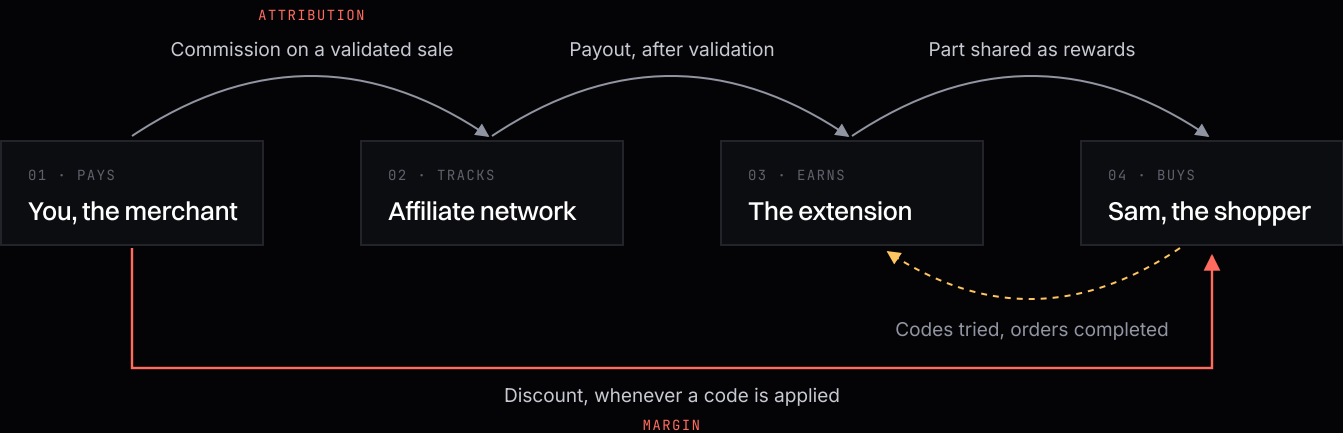
6 OCTOBER 2026

Chrome Web Store users, rounded: PayPal Honey 13m, Coupert 3m, Karma 500,000, TopCashback USA 100,000. Installs don't measure activity.<sup>1, 37</sup>

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# How the money flows

Almost every player in the field guide is paid through the affiliate programme you already run. Here we follow that money.



**FIGURE 2.1** How an extension order is paid for. The commission path runs through your own programme; the discount comes straight out of your margin; each order feeds the extension's code inventory.

The commission path is the one you built for partners: you pay the network on a validated sale, it pays the publisher, and a coupon or cashback publisher passes part on to the shopper. Honey's terms pay rewards only once a purchase is "successfully completed and tracked", which is why cashback shows as pending.<sup>29</sup>

## Where the spend concentrates

| PARTNER TYPE        | CLICKS | TRANSACTIONS | BRAND SPEND |
|---------------------|--------|--------------|-------------|
| Loyalty and rewards | 15%    | 50%          | 33%         |
| Voucher and coupon  | 6%     | 9%           | 6%          |

**FIGURE 2.2** Share of activity by partner type. North America, vendor data.<sup>38</sup>

In impact.com's 2025 benchmark of 2,368 North American retail brands, loyalty and rewards partners drove 15% of clicks but half of all transactions.<sup>38</sup> Partners that convert like that sit very close to the purchase, where "would this have happened anyway?" matters most. impact.com

itself advises keeping strong relationships with them.<sup>38</sup>

In the US, cashback, loyalty and rewards publishers took 35% of the \$13.63bn spent on affiliate in 2024,<sup>34</sup> in the UK, about a third of £1.8bn in 2025.<sup>40, 41</sup> Against the sales tracked, \$113bn and £20.7bn, that's a cost of sale of about 12% and 8.7% by our arithmetic. The two are measured differently, so we never add them up.

### THE SKEPTIC'S QUESTION

**If they convert so well, aren't they our best partners?** They may be. A high conversion rate fits a partner that brings buyers, and one that arrives just before buyers pay; only a holdout on your own traffic tells them apart. In April 2026 Rakuten Rewards, a cashback operator, was reported to be contributing consumer signals on incremental-ity to an alliance with impact.com.<sup>43</sup>

Chapter 3 follows Sam's last seconds at checkout, step by step.

## 03

## THE MECHANICS

# How coupon extensions work

This chapter replays Sam's order one step at a time and names the rule that governs each step. It then explains how private discount codes reach the public, and what the stand-down rules require.



- 
- 01 Sam's order, step by step
  - 02 Why discount codes leak
  - 03 Stand-down rules, and what they leave out

# Sam's order, step by step

Sam's Friday order from chapter 1 as the eight steps a coupon extension goes through, each with the rule that governs it: documented policy or allegation.

| STEP | IN SAM'S SESSION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | THE RULE THAT GOVERNS IT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|      | <b>Before Friday.</b> Sam clicks a creator's link to your store. The network sets a cookie that credits the creator for a purchase within the programme's cookie window. She leaves without buying.                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1    | <b>Install</b><br>Sam installed a coupon extension some time ago and granted the permissions it asked for.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Chrome Web Store, from 10 June 2025: the affiliate programme is disclosed on the listing, in the extension and before install, and the user gets a direct benefit. <sup>5, 44</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2    | <b>Page detection</b><br>On Friday Sam types your address. The extension matches it against its merchant list.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Stand-down signals are read on arrival: afsrc=1 in the URL, or Awin's awc and awin parameters. <sup>45, 49</sup> No affiliate referred this visit, so it carries none.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 3    | <b>Code lookup</b><br>It pulls its codes for your store: codes shoppers found and submitted, tested first.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Honey's EU privacy statement describes "an inventory of functioning coupons"; its help centre invites users to submit codes. <sup>11, 12</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 4    | <b>Auto-apply and test</b> <span>MARGIN LEAK</span><br>Sam lets it try codes in your discount field. One takes 10% off her £100 basket.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Your discount settings decide which codes work: eligibility, minimum spend, total uses, one per customer, active dates. <sup>14</sup> A code with no limits works for anyone who has it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 5    | <b>THE STEP THAT EARNS THE COMMISSION</b><br><b>Affiliate activation</b> <span>ATTRIBUTION LEAK</span><br>Sam is routed through its tracking link. The new network cookie replaces the creator's as the latest click.<br><br>Her click on the panel in step 4 is the user action the Chrome policy asks for. The policy doesn't require stand-down (our reading). <sup>5</sup> | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Chrome: "Related user action is required before the inclusion of each affiliate code, link, or cookie", and no affiliate link if no code is found. <sup>5, 44</sup> Stand-down would forbid this step after a referral in the same session. Tuesday's was days ago. <sup>45</sup><br><br><b>ALLEGATION</b> Of Honey: that it replaced creators' tracking when it found no working code (MegaLag, Dec 2024, via Fortune) <sup>58</sup> and stood down only for suspected testers (Ben Edelman, Dec 2025). <sup>60</sup> PayPal said Honey follows industry rules. <sup>58</sup> No court has found any extension liable, as of 6 October 2026. |
| 6    | <b>Attribution</b><br>At payment the network credits the latest click in the cookie window: the extension's.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Most programmes credit the last click. <sup>2, 3</sup> On Awin, an extension on soft-click status wins only if no other valid last click exists, <sup>3, 47</sup> so there the creator would keep this sale.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 7    | <b>Commission and rewards</b><br>Sam pays £90. You pay 5% commission, £4.50, and part goes back to Sam as rewards.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> Rewards are paid once a purchase is "successfully completed and tracked". <sup>29</sup> On Awin you can decline "unauthorized voucher code use" before commissions auto-approve. <sup>92</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 8    | <b>Data loop</b><br>The working code and the completed order are recorded for the next shopper.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>DOCUMENTED</b> The same privacy statement lists transaction value and whether an order was completed or returned, used for "internal analytics, commission collection, and managing Rewards". <sup>11</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

**FIGURE 3.1** Sam's Friday order in eight steps. The steps describe how the category is built to work, not a finding about any one extension. Chapter 4 sets out where the allegations stand.

# Why discount codes leak

An extension can learn your codes from shoppers and offer them to everyone. The fix is to make each code fail when the wrong person tries it.



**FIGURE 3.2** How a code meant for one audience can reach everyone with an extension. Red traces one staff code. Illustrative: a possible route, not the documented behaviour of any named extension.

**A**n extension doesn't need you to hand over your codes; it can learn them from shoppers. Honey's EU privacy statement (May 2024) says it may collect "coupons, promo codes, and deals you found" and builds "an inventory of functioning coupons".<sup>11</sup> Its help centre invites users to submit codes, which are tested before they go live.<sup>12</sup>

That's a likely route by which a code meant for a narrow audience reaches everyone: a staff code, a VIP code, one creator's followers. Honey doesn't say it redistributes private codes, and we aren't saying it does. Any system that collects working codes from shoppers is likely to collect some of yours.

## What makes a code reusable

A code leaks when it works for someone it wasn't meant for. Shopify lets you limit each code by eligibility, minimum spend, total uses, one use per customer and active dates.<sup>14</sup> A code with none of these set works for anyone who types it.

## What network settings change

Awin's voucher attribution gives a sale on an exclusive code to its assigned publisher, even if another publisher picks the code up.<sup>105</sup> impact.com's tracking promo codes flag other partners' conversions on the code as invalid.<sup>107</sup> Both decide who earns the commission. Neither stops the code working, so a leaked code still costs you the discount.<sup>106</sup>

The IAB UK voucher code of conduct (2010) defines a valid code as one "legitimately issued by a merchant for affiliate use online".<sup>48</sup> A staff code fails that test, and Awin lists "unauthorized voucher code use" as a reason to decline a commission.<sup>92</sup>

### WHAT WE'D DO THIS WEEK

Export last peak's orders with their codes. Mark each code that wasn't meant to be public, and the limit that would have stopped it. That list is the brief for Play 3.

# Stand-down rules

Stand-down means an extension stays quiet when another affiliate has just referred the shopper. Most networks require it, in similar but not identical forms.

| RULE                                                        | TRIGGERED BY                                                                           | WHAT IT REQUIRES                                                                                                                                                   | HOW LONG                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>impact.com</b><br>STAND-DOWN POLICY<br>V1.0.0 · AUG 2025 | afsrc=1 on the landing page, on by default; brands can switch it off <sup>45, 51</sup> | No pop-ups, banners or cookie overwrites; a click to activate; no automatic redirects <sup>45</sup>                                                                | "Should last" the session or 30 minutes after the referral, whichever is longer <sup>45</sup> |
| <b>Awin</b><br>PUBLISHER TERMS AND CODE · 28 AUG 2025       | afsrc=1, "Awin1" in the redirect, or awc and awin parameters <sup>49</sup>             | Soft-click status unless exempt; no overlays or overwrites after another Awin publisher's referral; explicit user action; stand-down logic published <sup>46</sup> | Not set in the terms                                                                          |
| <b>Rakuten and CJ</b><br>QUOTED BY EDELMAN                  | Another publisher's referral                                                           | Rakuten: no "sliders or pop-ups". CJ: no "usurpation" of another publisher's payout <sup>50</sup>                                                                  | Rakuten: the browser session <sup>50</sup>                                                    |
| <b>Chrome Web Store</b><br>POLICY · 10 JUN 2025             | Any affiliate code, link or cookie                                                     | Disclosure, a related user action each time, and a direct benefit to the user <sup>5, 44</sup>                                                                     | Each action. It doesn't mention stand-down                                                    |
| <b>Draft software code</b><br>V0.1 · NO SIGNATORIES         | Another affiliate's referral in the session                                            | Stand down for the session <sup>52</sup>                                                                                                                           | 60 idle minutes; 90 if idling can't be detected <sup>52</sup>                                 |

**FIGURE 3.3** The main stand-down rules. Seven of eight networks in the PMA's self-reported survey require stand-down.<sup>4</sup> Disclosures: Ben Edelman works with VPT, which sells plugin monitoring; the draft's co-author, James Little, works for TopCashback.

## Sam's order under these rules

No rule in the table applies to Sam's Friday. Each is triggered by a referral in the current session; the creator's click was on Tuesday, and on Friday she typed your address. That's our reading of the policy texts, and it describes an ordinary journey, not a loophole.<sup>45, 46</sup> Had Sam come back through the creator's link, the extension should have stood down. On Awin, where extensions sit on soft-click status unless exempt, the creator's click would have won anyway.<sup>47</sup>

## What the rules don't cover

Every rule here protects other publishers. None requires an extension to stand down when the shopper came from your own email, SMS, paid social or organic search.<sup>45, 49, 50</sup> For those channels there's de-duplication, which declines commission on a sale your own channel drove. Awin advises

using it against email but not brand search, organic or direct traffic.<sup>56</sup> Those shoppers are left to a hold-out (chapter 5).

## How well the rules work

Stand-down runs in the shopper's browser, so networks test it by shopping through affiliate links. They are moving to soft click, shared stand-down code and source-code access.<sup>54, 53, 8</sup> Rakuten Rewards' open-source SDK (May 2026), for example, sets a session length per network: 30 minutes in its CJ example.<sup>53</sup> In a UK test programme across ten networks (2025), referrer protections fired in 80% of journeys; discount extensions were "mixed".<sup>55</sup>

Chapter 4 tells how questions about one extension's stand-down became public, and where they stand.

## 04

## THE CONTROVERSY

# What went wrong, and where it stands

Between December 2024 and January 2026, a video investigation and a researcher's allegations turned stand-down, a little-known affiliate rule, into a public dispute. This chapter sets out what happened, what the companies say and where the cases stand.



- 01 What happened, in order
- 02 What the networks did, and the companies' side
- 03 Where the court cases stand, and what it means for you

# What happened, in order

From a YouTube video in December 2024 to action by three affiliate networks in January 2026: the events in date order, each tagged with the kind of claim it is.

Chapter 3 described stand-down, the rule that software publishers must not activate, prompt or overwrite tracking when another affiliate has just referred the shopper.<sup>45, 49</sup> For most of its life it was a clause in network terms, checked

by networks shopping through their own affiliate links. Over thirteen months it became the centre of a public dispute about PayPal Honey, the best-known coupon extension.

## 2024

- 21 DEC

ALLEGATION

MegaLag, a YouTuber, publishes a video investigation into Honey: about 19.5 million views by October 2026.<sup>57</sup> Fortune’s summary of its allegations: Honey replaced creators’ affiliate tracking at checkout, even when it found no working code, and partner merchants could influence which codes it showed.<sup>58</sup>
- DEC

COMPANY RESPONSE

PayPal: “Honey follows industry rules and practices, including last-click attribution.”<sup>58</sup>
- 29 DEC

ALLEGATION

Creators sue PayPal in California, in what becomes *In re PayPal Honey Browser Extension Litigation*, a putative class action.<sup>79</sup>

- 30 DEC

ALLEGATION

Researcher Ben Edelman, in a video with MegaLag, alleges Honey honoured stand-down only when it suspected a tester, such as a new account or a browser with affiliate-dashboard cookies. He discloses his role at VPT, which sells monitoring of shopping plugins.<sup>59, 60</sup>

## 2026

## 2025

- 11 MAR

DOCUMENTED

Google announces a Chrome Web Store affiliate policy, enforced from 10 June: a related user action before each affiliate code, link or cookie. It doesn’t mention stand-down.<sup>5, 44</sup>
- MAY

DOCUMENTED

Microsoft retires the coupons feature in Edge and keeps cashback; trade press dates it to 31 May.<sup>31, 32</sup>
- 26–28 AUG

DOCUMENTED

impact.com publishes its Stand-Down Policy. Awin’s new terms put extensions on soft-click status unless exempt.<sup>45, 46</sup>

- 12 JAN

NETWORK ACTION

Rakuten Advertising tells advertisers Honey “has been terminated from the Rakuten Advertising network... effective immediately”. Trade press reports about 2,000 merchants affected.<sup>6, 61</sup>
- 15 JAN

COMPANY RESPONSE

PayPal says the code “was implemented prior to PayPal’s acquisition, and appears to affect less than 0.1% of Honey’s traffic”, and “no longer has an impact”.<sup>62</sup>
- 16–17 JAN

NETWORK ACTION

impact.com tells partners Honey “is out of compliance with our platform policies”. The account is “temporarily suspended”.<sup>7, 63</sup>
- 21 JAN

NETWORK ACTION

Awin says its investigation “confirmed breaches of our publisher policies”, and suspends Honey’s payments and access to new advertiser programmes.<sup>8</sup>
- MAY

REPORTED

Honey is reported back on Rakuten Advertising after adopting Rakuten Rewards’ open-source stand-down SDK, in a LinkedIn post by James Little of TopCashback, a competitor. We found no Rakuten statement.<sup>64</sup>

|                                                                                              |                                                                                |                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>ALLEGATION</div> Made by a researcher, a video or a complaint. No court has decided it. | <div>COMPANY RESPONSE</div> The accused company’s side, in its own words.      | <div>NETWORK ACTION</div> A network’s decision under its own terms. Not a court ruling. |
| <div>DOCUMENTED</div> A published policy, filing or product change.                          | <div>REPORTED</div> A single trade-press source we couldn’t confirm elsewhere. |                                                                                         |

# What the networks did, and what the companies say

Three networks acted within ten days, in three different ways. What each did, the companies' side in their own words, and what has happened since.

## Three networks, three different actions

The January 2026 actions are often summarised as Honey being removed from affiliate marketing. The networks' own words are narrower, and the differences matter if you run a programme on any of them. Rakuten Advertising terminated Honey "effective immediately".<sup>6</sup> impact.com took it off its Discovery Marketplace and "temporarily suspended" the account "while we confirm they've made the necessary changes".<sup>7, 63</sup> Awin suspended Honey's payments and its access to new advertiser programmes.<sup>8</sup>

None of these was a court decision, and none stopped the extension working for shoppers. Leaving impact.com's marketplace stops new merchant relationships without unwinding existing ones, and as of August 2026 trade press had reported no reinstatement by impact.com or Awin.<sup>65</sup> Awin says its soft-click technology was active throughout and "materially reduces the risk of misattribution".<sup>8</sup>

## The companies' side

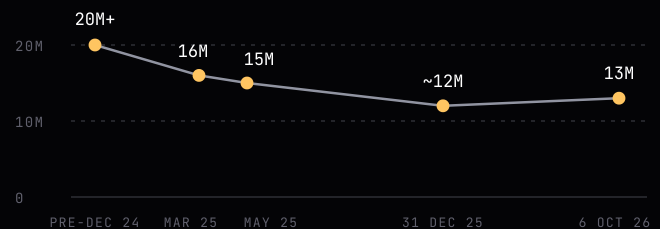
PayPal's position changed between December 2024, when it said Honey follows industry rules, and January 2026.<sup>58</sup> It then said the code behind the stand-down behaviour had been "only recently discovered", predated its acquisition of Honey, affected under 0.1% of a traffic base of "billions" of shopping trips, and had been switched off. Mark Grether, SVP of PayPal Ads, said: "We regret the impact this situation has had on our partners."<sup>62</sup>

Ryan Hudson, Honey's co-founder, called the first video "deceptive" and said parts were "fabricated in pursuit of a viral narrative".<sup>76</sup> In court, PayPal denies

the creators' allegations and pleads 13 defences, including that it "did not intentionally or wrongfully divert any commissions".<sup>77</sup>

According to Awin, Honey "offered to fund and support" access to its source code for verification, ways for advertisers to remove unauthorised or invalid codes, and advance notice of changes to its stand-down logic, and has "implemented initial updates".<sup>8</sup>

The critics have interests to declare too. Edelman works with VPT, which sells monitoring of shopping plugins,<sup>60</sup> and James Little, whose post reported the Rakuten return, works for the cashback site TopCashback.<sup>64</sup>



**FIGURE 4.1** Honey's Chrome Web Store users, rounded, as reported by 9to5Google and shown on the listing. Chrome only; installs don't measure activity.<sup>66, 67, 68, 69, 1</sup>

### THE SKEPTIC'S QUESTION

**PayPal says under 0.1% of traffic was affected.**

**Why should a merchant care?** The figure is PayPal's own; nobody outside has checked it. The wider point applies to every extension: stand-down runs in the shopper's browser, so you can't easily see whether it fired on a given order. Hence the networks' move to soft click, SDKs and source-code access.<sup>54, 53, 8</sup>

# Where the court cases stand

Five US lawsuits concern coupon extensions. Some claims were dismissed, others go on, one company settled, and no court has found any extension liable.

Nearly everything decided so far was decided at the pleading stage, where a judge asks whether a complaint would state a legal claim if everything in it were true. A ruling for the plaintiffs assumes the allegations are true for the sake of argument; it is not a finding that they are.<sup>72</sup> A dismissal can turn on the remedy rather than on what happened: the UK residents’ suit was dismissed without the court deciding whether better codes were withheld.<sup>73</sup> The one settlement so far is set out in Figure 4.2.

|           |                                                                                                                       |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| \$3.95m   | Cap on class counsel’s fees and expenses.                                                                             |
| 18 of 810 | Claims approved for “proof payments” (the commission received on a claimant’s orders, or \$20): about \$3,357 in all. |
| 2 years   | At least, of best efforts to follow stand-down rules, compliance reviews and an ombudsman.                            |

**FIGURE 4.2** The Capital One Shopping settlement, approved June 2026. Capital One denied the allegations and admitted no liability. In our reading, the stand-down commitment matters more than the payout.<sup>75, 78</sup>

STATUS AT TIME OF WRITING

6 OCTOBER 2026

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Creators v. PayPal      | N.D. Cal. Putative class action; no class certified. All seven counts survived a motion to dismiss, 22 June 2026. Class-certification motion due 26 October 2026 under the signed order (the docket text says 7 October); jury trial set for 18 October 2027. No settlement publicly reported as of 11 August 2026. <sup>72, 79, 80, 81</sup> |
| UK residents v. Honey   | N.D. Cal. Dismissed with prejudice, 15 June 2026; appeal reported 20 July 2026. <sup>73, 82</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Creators v. RetailMeNot | S.D.N.Y. One of nine counts went forward, March 2026. Voluntary dismissals filed in June; scope unclear from the public docket. <sup>74, 83</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Creators v. Microsoft   | W.D. Wash. Motion to dismiss pending as of the last public filing seen, 23 June 2026. <sup>84</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Creators v. Capital One | E.D. Va. Settled, approved June 2026; no liability admitted. <sup>75</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Network actions         | Rakuten Advertising: terminated; return reported May 2026 (single source). impact.com: temporarily suspended. Awin: payments and new programmes suspended. No impact.com or Awin reinstatement reported by August 2026. <sup>6, 64, 7, 8, 65</sup>                                                                                            |

## What it means for you

Courts work in years; none of these cases will be resolved before your next peak season.

- **Stand-down protects affiliates, not your own channels.** Every rule in chapter 3 is triggered by another publisher’s referral, so a shopper from your email or a brand search isn’t covered.<sup>45, 49, 50</sup>
- **Compliance is hard to see from outside.** Your own holdout is the check you control (Play 2).

WHAT WE’D DO THIS WEEK

Ask your network account manager, in writing: is stand-down on for our programme, which of our publishers run browser software, and what has changed in the network’s extension policy since January 2026?

Chapter 5 weighs when extensions bring new sales, and how to find your own break-even.

## 05

THE WINS

# When extensions are worth it

Some extensions bring you customers you wouldn't otherwise reach. This chapter sets out the case for them, weighs the evidence by who produced it, and shows how to work out your own break-even.

- 01 Where extensions can add sales
- 02 The evidence, weighed by who produced it
- 03 Working out your break-even



# When an extension is worth paying

Some extensions bring you customers you'd never have reached. Here's the case for them, and what the research can show.

Switching every extension off is the obvious reaction to the last chapter, and we don't think it's the right one. Extensions do something shoppers value, and most brands already allow them in their programmes, as chapter 2 showed. The useful question is which of yours earn their commission.

## Where extensions can add sales

Three cases stand out. New customers: 86% of US coupon users in Capterra's 2022 survey said a coupon makes them more likely to try a new business, though that's stated intent.<sup>25</sup> Convenience: in Baymard's testing, shoppers saw sites that apply discounts automatically as "customer-focused and trustworthy".<sup>98</sup> Timing: network data ties extra sales to activity before checkout, such as a cashback reminder on a product page, more than to a code applied in the cart.<sup>9</sup>

## What the research shows

Across 70 randomised experiments, emailed discount offers lifted spend, and most of the gain

came without the code being used: the offer worked as advertising.<sup>85</sup> Mobile coupons work the same way, mainly by bringing extra visits.<sup>86</sup> Cashback differs: an extra \$1 lifted future spending through the cashback company by \$0.32 but barely changed whether people bought, so the loyalty may go to the platform, not to you.<sup>30</sup>

Our reading: a code advertises only before the shopper has decided. Applied for someone already paying, redemption is its only effect. Paying a last-touch channel to reach people who were coming anyway produces attributed revenue, not incremental revenue, as eBay found with brand-keyword search ads: "no measurable short-term benefits".<sup>88</sup>

Studies of extensions themselves come from interested parties and point both ways (Figure 5.1). CJ's study compares extension users, whom it calls "more prolific shoppers", so those shown a pop-up may differ from those who weren't.<sup>9</sup> With no independent randomised holdout published,<sup>89</sup> only a test on your own traffic can show which of yours add sales.

| STUDY                                                | METHOD           | RUN BY            | WHAT IT FOUND                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Discount emails (Sahni, Zou & Chintagunta, 2017)     | RANDOMISED       | Academic          | Spend up 37.2% in the promotion; "90% of these gains are not through redemption" <sup>85</sup>        |
| Promo codes at a US apparel retailer (Neslin & Jiao) | FIELD EXPERIMENT | Academic          | ROI of 134–315% in the promotion, 43–214% once later weeks were counted <sup>87</sup>                 |
| 35 extensions (CJ with Namogoo, cited by Jan 2024)   | COMPARISON       | Affiliate network | Pop-up seen before checkout: 64% higher conversion, 0.5 points more discount <sup>9</sup>             |
| A/B tests in 12 retail verticals (clean.io, 2021)    | VENDOR A/B       | Blocking vendor   | Lower order value, no measurable gain in conversion; no effect sizes published <sup>10</sup>          |
| Independent randomised holdout of extensions         | NONE FOUND       | –                 | No peer-reviewed or independent study found in a scholarly-index search, 6 October 2026 <sup>89</sup> |

FIGURE 5.1 The published evidence, by method and by who ran it. Only the work on discounts in general is randomised.

# Working out your break-even

A partner pays for itself only if enough of its orders are extra. Three numbers you already know give you that share.

Every partner order you'd have had anyway costs you the discount and the commission. Every order you wouldn't have had earns its margin, less the same two costs. The partner breaks even when the margin on its extra orders covers what you give away on all of them, which sets the share that must be extra:

BREAK-EVEN INCREMENTALITY

[d + c(1 - d)] ÷ m

d

the discount

c

the commission, paid on the discounted price

m

your gross margin before the discount

At a 20% code, 5% commission and a 50% margin, the bar is 48%. For a cashback partner that applies no code, *d* is zero and the bar falls to 10%: the code, not the cashback, raises it. Sam's order from chapter 1 sits in the 29% cell, and hers almost certainly wasn't extra.

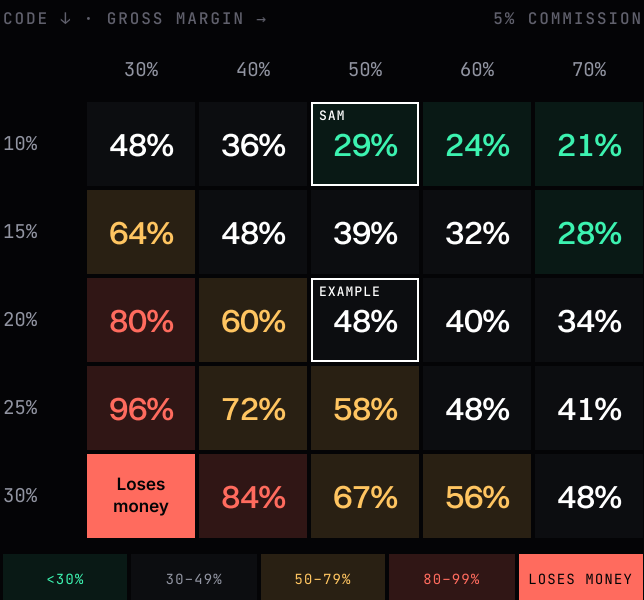


FIGURE 5.2 Break-even incrementality at 5% commission: the share of a partner's orders that must be extra. Where the code plus the commission exceeds your margin, even extra orders lose money. Illustrative: it assumes shoppers would otherwise pay full price, and ignores lifetime value.

| PARTNER TYPE       | GOAL: NEW CUSTOMERS                                             | GOAL: MARGIN                                                | GOAL: ORDER VALUE                              | GOAL: LOYALTY                                 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Coupon extension   | <b>Cap:</b> pay a new-customer rate only                        | <b>Replace:</b> your own offer; hide its pop-ups            | <b>Replace:</b> a spend-more offer of your own | <b>Replace:</b> member pricing                |
| Cashback extension | <b>Keep:</b> activation before checkout only                    | <b>Cap:</b> a lower rate when a code is used <sup>108</sup> | <b>Keep</b> if a holdout shows lift            | <b>Replace:</b> your own loyalty scheme       |
| Voucher site       | <b>Keep:</b> exclusive code, voucher attribution <sup>105</sup> | <b>Cap:</b> a lower rate when a code is used                | <b>Cap:</b> minimum-spend codes only           | <b>Replace:</b> member pricing                |
| AI shopping agent  | <b>Keep:</b> tag it, and publish the offer you want used        | <b>Cap:</b> codes that fail on reuse                        | <b>Measure</b> separately first                | <b>Publish</b> member perks, not public codes |

FIGURE 5.3 Where to start, by partner type and goal. Each cell is a hypothesis to test, not a verdict: test extensions with a holdout (Play 2), and judge off-site partners against your network reports, before you change terms.

Chapter 6 turns this into eight plays, starting with measuring who is at your checkout.

## 06

EIGHT PLAYS, IN ORDER

# The plays

Eight things to do before peak season. Each has an owner, a window counted back from Black Friday, a measure and a red flag. Start with the first two: see who's at your checkout, then test before changing anything.



---

01 The plays at a glance, by owner and by week

---

02 Where to start if you're short of time

---

03 Plays 1 to 8, one per page

# The plays at a glance

An index to share with your team: what each play is, who owns it, when it happens and how much work it takes.

The plays follow the order of the book. Play 1 measures who is at your checkout and Play 2 sets up a holdout, so every change after them can be tested rather than assumed. Code

limits (Play 3) and the standard terms in Play 4 don't depend on a test, so you can start them now. The last line of each play, With Benson, says how our product fits; every play works without it.

| NO. | PLAY                                                 | OWNER                                     | EFFORT | WHEN, IN WEEKS BEFORE BLACK FRIDAY     |     |     |    |     | PAGE |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----|------|
|     |                                                      |                                           |        | T-12                                   | T-8 | T-4 | BF | JAN |      |
| 01  | Measure before you change anything                   | Head of e-commerce                        | Small  | T-12 to T-8                            |     |     |    |     | 24   |
| 02  | Run a holdout in ordinary weeks                      | E-commerce lead, with an analyst          | Medium | T-8 to T-4; never during the sale      |     |     |    |     | 25   |
| 03  | Restrict your discount codes                         | CRM lead, with e-commerce                 | Medium | T-8 to T-6, then daily at peak         |     |     |    |     | 26   |
| 04  | Write your extension rules into your affiliate terms | Affiliate manager                         | Medium | T-10 to T-6, with notice               |     |     |    |     | 27   |
| 05  | Keep the partners that add sales                     | Affiliate manager                         | Medium | T-12 to T-8; review in January         |     |     |    |     | 28   |
| 06  | Remove the reason to hunt for a code                 | E-commerce lead, with design              | Small  | T-6 to T-4, before the freeze          |     |     |    |     | 29   |
| 07  | Control the storefront, set rules for checkout       | Developer, with e-commerce                | Medium | Set up T-8 to T-4; runs itself at peak |     |     |    |     | 30   |
| 08  | Decide how you handle AI agents                      | E-commerce lead, with developer and legal | Medium | T-10 to T-6                            |     |     |    |     | 31   |

KEY  Work window  Checks at peak  January review  Black Friday (BF), the day after the fourth Thursday in November: 23 to 29 November.<sup>91</sup> Effort is our estimate: small is hours, medium is days.

STARTING LATE

Four to six weeks out

Measure two ordinary weeks (Play 1). Put limits and end dates on live codes (Play 3). Keep stand-down on and put your decline policy in your terms (Play 4). Make the headline offer an automatic discount (Play 6). Start a holdout only if you can read it before your freeze.

Inside your code freeze

Change settings, not code. Restrict or replace codes, brief partners, and find out when Black Friday commissions will approve automatically. Install nothing new and start no tests: a test started now would measure the sale, not the change.

After peak

Decline what your terms allow before it approves: on Awin, commissions left unreviewed are approved automatically.<sup>92</sup> Run your first holdout in January's ordinary weeks, and take the result into your partner reviews.

# 01

— PLAY 01 • BASELINE

## Measure before you change anything

Find out how often extensions appear in your sessions and which of your codes are circulating, before you change anything.

| OWNER              | WHEN              | EFFORT | MEASURE                     |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------|-----------------------------|
| Head of e-commerce | T-12 to T-8 weeks | Small  | Extension share of sessions |

Chapter 2 showed how widely affiliate programmes admit extensions. Your analytics can’t show how much they matter on your store: an extension session looks like any other, and its part shows up later, as a commission line and a code on the order.

So start with a baseline: a dated, one-page note of four numbers from two to four ordinary weeks. Extension share of sessions; the share of last season’s commission paid to software publishers; codes in use you never published; and the gap in discount depth. Later changes and peak results are read against it.

### How

- 1

Pull last season’s network report by publisher type, with the codes on those orders.
- 2

In your order export, flag codes used outside their channel and codes you never published.

- 3

Test as networks do.<sup>54</sup> In a clean browser profile, install the main coupon and cashback extensions, click a partner’s link and shop to checkout. Send dated screenshots of any breach to your network.
- 4

Add detection to your site and observe. Compare discount depth, the discount as a share of order value, in extension sessions against the rest.
- 5

Have your privacy notice and consent reviewed: rules on reading a visitor’s device differ in the US, UK and EU. Not legal advice.

### Red flag

Changing anything before you have a baseline, or reading a commission report as proof of harm: it shows who was credited, not who caused the sale.

| SOURCE                 | WHAT IT SHOWS                                    | WHAT IT CAN’T SHOW              |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Network report         | Commission and codes by publisher type           | Whether those orders were extra |
| Order export           | Codes used off-channel or never published        | Who leaked a code               |
| Clean-browser test     | Codes an extension tries; whether it stands down | How often that happens          |
| Detection on your site | Extension share of sessions; discount-depth gap  | Incrementality: see Play 2      |

FIGURE 6.1 Four places to look, and the limit of each. Together they make your baseline.

WITH BENSON Detection and observe mode are free on every plan. Detection labels each session as a person, a coupon extension, an AI agent or automation; observe mode records what a rule would hide, without hiding it.<sup>95</sup>

02

— PLAY 02 • TESTING

Run a holdout in ordinary weeks

Put a random control group behind each change you make on your own site, and read the result before the sale begins.

| OWNER                            | WHEN             | EFFORT | MEASURE                        |
|----------------------------------|------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| E-commerce lead, with an analyst | T-8 to T-4 weeks | Medium | Revenue per session vs control |

Chapter 5 weighs the published studies; none is an independent randomised holdout.<sup>89</sup> The evidence that counts is your own: a control group, a random slice of sessions that doesn't get the change, compared with the sessions that do.

Split by session. Extension use belongs to each shopper's browser, so a random split by session is usually cleaner than one by region, and a before-and-after comparison picks up everything else that changed that month. Commission can't be split this way, since it applies to a whole partner: judge partners with Play 5.



FIGURE 6.2 A 10% holdout, picked at random by session. Read the ranges, not the midpoints. Schematic, no data.

How

- 1 Pick one change you can apply per session on your own site, such as hiding pop-ups or limiting which codes work.

- 2 Hold back a control that sees no change. 10% leaves most sessions treated; 20% or more fills faster when time is short.
- 3 Run whole weeks. As a working floor we use 7 days and 500 sessions per arm;<sup>97</sup> your analyst may want more.
- 4 Agree the smallest change worth acting on before you start, then read revenue per session and conversion as ranges.
- 5 Decide before the sale. The season now opens in early October,<sup>98</sup> so keep its big sale events out of your window. Re-test in January: an October result describes October shoppers.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Say 1,500 sessions a week carry a coupon extension. A 10% control gets about 150 a week, so it needs four whole weeks to pass 500; a 20% control needs two. Illustrative, and why this play starts eight weeks out.

Red flag

Reading attributed revenue as incremental, or starting a holdout during the sale, which would measure the sale rather than the change.

WITH BENSON Holdouts come with the Stop plan, with a 5, 10, 20 or 50% control. The readout shows "Not enough data yet" until it has 7 days and 500 sessions per arm, then gives revenue per session and conversion as ranges. A holdout is a measurement, not a promise of a significant result.

03

— PLAY 03 • CODES

# Restrict your discount codes

Coupon extensions can collect the codes shoppers find. Limits on each code mean a leaked code fails when someone else tries it.

| OWNER                     | WHEN                                 | EFFORT | MEASURE                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| CRM lead, with e-commerce | T-8 to T-6 weeks, then daily at peak | Medium | Codes used outside their channel |

Coupon extensions can build their inventories from the codes shoppers find and submit.<sup>11, 12</sup> That is a likely route by which a staff discount from March ends up in a stranger’s basket in November. A code that works once for anyone works for everyone; one that’s single-use, tied to one customer or expired simply fails when it’s tried again.

So give every code a job, and the limits that match it. Codes for customers you already know, from email, SMS, service or staff, should be unique, single-use and short-lived. Codes for partners and creators have to be shareable, so give each one its own prefix, an expiry, a minimum spend and a cap on total uses. Your public sale shouldn’t need a code at all (Play 6).

EM 7Q4K 20

Channel Unique Value

FIGURE 6.3 A code that tells you where it came from when it turns up somewhere it shouldn’t.

Codes printed on your own site travel too. Search Engine Roundtable reported that Google Ads told some advertisers it would pull promotions from their websites into some Search and Performance Max campaigns from 12 October 2026, unless switched off.<sup>102</sup>

WITH BENSON The strict code policy (Stop plan) lets only the codes on your allowlist through in sessions with a coupon extension, where your platform supports it. On Shopify it comes with the Benson Shopify app; chapter 9 has the current status. Keep private codes off the list.

## How

- 1 In Shopify, set eligibility, minimum spend, total uses, one per customer and active dates on every code.<sup>14</sup>
- 2 Leave combinations off. Shopify discounts don’t combine unless you let them.<sup>101</sup>
- 3 Send unique codes, not one shared code. A store can hold up to 20 million.<sup>13</sup>
- 4 Give each channel and partner its own prefix, so a stray code tells you its source.
- 5 Check your Merchant Center promotions and the Google Ads account-level “Automated Promotions” setting.<sup>33, 102</sup>
- 6 Check orders weekly, then daily at peak, for codes used outside their channel.
- 7 Before you retire a partner’s code, tell them and give them a replacement. Brief customer service on retired customer codes.

## Red flag

Generic evergreen codes, staff or apology codes in extension sessions, or a creator’s code switched off mid-peak with no warning.

## 04

## — PLAY 04 • AFFILIATE TERMS

# Write your extension rules into your affiliate terms

Your network already has most of the controls you need. Write your policy into your programme terms, then switch them on.

| OWNER             | WHEN                           | EFFORT | MEASURE                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------|
| Affiliate manager | T-10 to T-6 weeks, with notice | Medium | Commission paid to software publishers |

Your programme terms decide who can join, what they may promote and when you can decline a commission. Networks enforce them: in January 2026 three major networks acted against the best-known coupon extension over stand-down. None of these was a court ruling.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>

Code attribution is often misread. Awin's voucher attribution and impact.com's tracking promo codes decide who earns on an exclusive code,<sup>105, 107</sup> but a leaked code still works, so you can pay the discount and a commission (Play 3).

## How

- 1 Assign each exclusive code to one partner: voucher attribution on Awin, a tracking promo code on impact.com.<sup>105, 107</sup>
- 2 Pay less when a code is used and more for new customers, where your plan allows.<sup>108</sup>

- 3 De-duplicate against email and generic PPC, with notice, so an extension that takes the last click from your email isn't paid.<sup>56</sup>
- 4 Leave stand-down on, as impact.com does by default,<sup>51</sup> and ask software publishers to publish their stand-down logic, as Awin requires.<sup>46</sup>
- 5 Keep extensions on soft click, Awin's default for certain software partners.<sup>3</sup>
- 6 Make sure your conversion tag sends the code.
- 7 Decline unauthorised-code commissions before they approve automatically.<sup>92</sup>

## Red flag

Extensions admitted with no terms, stand-down off, or commissions approving without review.

### CLAUSE STARTERS • NOT LEGAL ADVICE; CHECK YOUR NETWORK'S TERMS

"Software publishers must stand down when another publisher has referred the visitor." IMPACT • AWIN<sup>45</sup>

"Software may activate only after a clear user action, never automatically." AWIN TERMS<sup>46</sup>

"Codes may be promoted only if issued to you through this programme." IAB UK 2010<sup>48</sup>

"On request, software publishers will stop using software to send traffic to us." IAB UK 2015<sup>109</sup>

**WITH BENSON** Attribution integrity (Stop plan) records the affiliate and click ids each shopper arrived with and flags late changes in extension sessions. Commission moved is shown as an estimate.

05

— PLAY 05 • PARTNERS

# Keep the partners that add sales

Some extensions bring you customers you wouldn't otherwise reach. Test the ones you're unsure of, then pay for what they add.

| OWNER             | WHEN                                       | EFFORT | MEASURE                         |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| Affiliate manager | Terms T-12 to T-8 weeks, review in January | Medium | Incremental revenue per partner |

Chapter 5 weighs the published studies on what extensions add; none is an independent randomised holdout, so the answer for your store comes from your own traffic.

To test one extension, hide its pop-up for a random share of sessions and keep a control group that still sees it. Read revenue per session net of discount and commission: an extension can lift conversion and still cost more than it adds. Cashback portals and voucher sites send shoppers from their own sites, so a storefront holdout can't isolate them. Compare their new-customer share, code use and net revenue per order in your network reports, changing one term at a time; chapter 5 explains why cashback loyalty may go to the platform rather than to you.

| TERM       | DEFAULT                        | AFTER A TEST                                  |
|------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| COMMISSION | Last-click rate on every order | ✓ Lower with a code, higher for new customers |
| ACTIVATION | Any page                       | ✓ Before checkout only                        |
| CODES      | Whatever it finds              | ✓ One exclusive code                          |
| REVIEW     | None                           | ✓ Each January                                |

**FIGURE 6.5** One partner, two sets of terms. Awin can vary the rate for code use (some plans) and for new customers.<sup>108</sup>

Your network may already limit what an extension can claim. Under Awin's soft click, an extension is credited only when no regular publisher was in the journey,<sup>47, 54</sup> though Awin's Attribution Manager says cashback and loyalty partners are "always attributed on a last-click basis".<sup>110</sup>

THE SKEPTIC'S QUESTION

"Our extension partners drive a lot of revenue." That's attributed revenue; a holdout shows how much of it is incremental.

## How

- 1 Test each extension you're unsure of with an on-site holdout (Play 2); judge cashback portals and voucher sites in your network reports.
- 2 Agree now what needs no test: stand-down on, activation before checkout only, an exclusive code and the right to decline unauthorised codes. Settle terms before peak rates lock.
- 3 Treat a peak placement fee or boosted cash-back rate as a media buy: cap it, tie it to your own code, judge it on new customers.

## Red flag

Full last-click commission on returning customers.

**WITH BENSON** Rules can target individual extensions (Stop plan), so you can hide the pop-ups you don't want and leave the ones you've agreed to. Each rule can run against a holdout.

## 06

## — PLAY 06 • OFFER

# Remove the reason to hunt for a code

An open code field prompts a search. Apply your sale price automatically, say so, and fewer shoppers go looking for a code.

## OWNER

E-commerce lead, with design

## WHEN

T-6 to T-4 weeks, before the freeze

## EFFORT

Small

## MEASURE

Code-field use, checkout exits

In Sam's order in chapter 1, the sale was on but the checkout still showed a code field, and her extension filled it. An open field alone sends some shoppers off to look for a code. Baymard found 83% of sites still don't apply discounts automatically,<sup>98</sup> although its participants viewed those that did favourably (chapter 5).

## CART DRAWER • ILLUSTRATIVE

|                          |               |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Wool boots, size 6       | £120.00       |
| Sale price applied (20%) | -£24.00       |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>£96.00</b> |

Sale price applied. No code needed.

[Have a code?](#)

**FIGURE 6.6** The offer applied automatically, a line that says so, and the code field behind a link.

Shoppers also arrive doubtful: in a Barclays and Opinium survey of 2,000 UK adults in October 2025, 68% doubted the real value of Black Friday deals.<sup>111</sup> A line saying the sale price is already applied answers the question the field raises.

On Shopify, the checkout branding API has no setting to hide the discount field,<sup>112</sup> and merchants below Plus report no supported way to do it.<sup>113</sup> On

mobile, merchants report the field already sits inside the collapsed order summary.<sup>114</sup> Your cart and drawer are different: your theme runs them.

## YOUR SALE HAS RULES TOO • NOT LEGAL ADVICE

UK: CMA guidance gives a countdown that restarts after the offer was said to end as a banned practice; a true deadline "is unlikely to be problematic".<sup>116</sup> The CMA can now fine up to 10% of global turnover.<sup>117, 118</sup> EU: a percentage off is measured against the lowest price of the previous 30 days or more.<sup>119</sup>

## How

- 1 Move the headline offer into an automatic discount and say in the cart that it's applied. Shopify allows up to 25 at once.<sup>115</sup>
- 2 In the cart and drawer, put any code field behind a link.<sup>24</sup> Theme changes are deploys, so land them before your freeze.
- 3 Tell partners the offer needs no code, and keep exclusive codes for partner-only extras.

## Red flag

A sitewide sale with an open, empty code field.

**WITH BENSON** With a checkout code policy (Stop plan), codes turned away in extension sessions show "Your best available price is already applied.", where your platform supports it (on Shopify, with the Benson Shopify app). On Own, your sale code sits in your own widget.

07

PLAY 07 • STOREFRONT AND CHECKOUT

# Control the storefront, set rules for checkout

On the storefront you control what shoppers see. Shopify checkout is sandboxed, so there you decide which codes are valid.

| OWNER                      | WHEN                                         | EFFORT | MEASURE                     |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|
| Developer, with e-commerce | Set up T-8 to T-4 weeks, runs itself at peak | Medium | The holdout result (Play 2) |

Your storefront and your checkout are technically different places. Home, product, collection, search and cart pages are your theme, and scripts you add can change what appears on them. Shopify checkout is sandboxed: checkout UI extensions run “in an isolated sandbox, separate from the checkout page”,<sup>15</sup> and web pixels can’t read or write the page either.<sup>16</sup> We know of no supported way for a merchant or an app to detect or remove an extension’s overlay there.

STOREFRONT • YOUR THEME

HOME

PRODUCT

COLLECTION

SEARCH

CART

CART DRAWER

You control what’s visible

----- THE BOUNDARY -----

SHOPIFY CHECKOUT • SANDBOXED

Overlays: no supported access

Codes: checked by a Discount Function

You govern which codes are valid

FIGURE 6.7 Where the line falls on Shopify. Storefront rules reach the cart drawer; at checkout, the lever is the code.

What you can still govern there is the code. Discount Functions receive the cart lines, the buy-

er’s identity, cart attributes and the code that triggered them,<sup>17</sup> so a function can decide whether a given code applies to a given cart. Functions are now the only route: Shopify Scripts stopped running on 30 June 2026.<sup>120</sup>

## How

- 1 Schedule your sale rules before the freeze, so nothing needs deploying during it.
- 2 Cover every storefront page; on other platforms, checkout pages too.
- 3 On Shopify, govern codes at checkout with a policy built on Discount Functions.
- 4 Run every new rule in observe mode first. Pop-ups hidden is a count, not a result: read the rule against the holdout.

## Red flag

Anyone promising to hide extensions inside Shopify checkout.

STATUS

6 OCTOBER 2026

The Benson Shopify app is coming soon. Until it’s listed, Shopify stores install Benson with one snippet, and the checkout code policy arrives with the app.

WITH BENSON Scheduled rules and the “Block during a sale” preset (Stop plan) hide extension pop-ups on your storefront only while the sale runs. On Shopify, the checkout code policy comes with the Benson Shopify app.

08

— PLAY 08 • AGENTS

# Decide how you handle AI agents

Several agent channels arrive switched on. Go through them one by one before the freeze: what you allow, who owns it and how you'll measure it.

| OWNER                                     | WHEN              | EFFORT | MEASURE                          |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| E-commerce lead, with developer and legal | T-10 to T-6 weeks | Medium | AI-referred share, code attempts |

Chapter 8 explains how agent checkouts carry codes as data and which channels are already on. This play is the decision for each one.

Decide too which offer you want agents to find. Google's Direct Offers, "a new Google Ads pilot", puts exclusive offers in AI Mode.<sup>140</sup> In our reading, an automatic sale price (Play 6) or member pricing for known customers<sup>141</sup> suits agents best: neither creates a public code that can leak.

### How

- 1
- Go through Figure 6.8: leave each channel on or switch it off, and name its owner.

- 2
- Read what your `/.well-known/ucp` file lists (chapter 8).<sup>122</sup>
- 3
- Make codes fail on reuse (Play 3). On your own checkout API, rate-limit code attempts.<sup>20</sup>
- 4
- Tag AI-referred sessions and report them separately.
- 5
- Check your terms of service cover agents.<sup>126</sup> Not legal advice.

### Red flag

Agent traffic you can't see, or a channel nobody owns.

| CHANNEL                     | ON BY DEFAULT?                                                   | WHERE YOU SWITCH IT                                      | OWNER                       | WHAT YOU MEASURE                                         |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Shopify Agentic Storefronts | Yes, in ChatGPT <sup>22</sup>                                    | In Shopify, direct checkout per channel <sup>123</sup>   | E-commerce lead             | ChatGPT-referred orders <sup>22</sup> and their codes    |
| Microsoft Copilot Checkout  | Yes, after an opt-out window <sup>124</sup>                      | Opt out within that window                               | E-commerce lead             | Copilot sessions, orders and code attempts               |
| Amazon Buy for Me           | Merchants said they were opted in without consent <sup>125</sup> | Email <code>branddirect@amazon.com</code> <sup>125</sup> | E-commerce lead, with legal | Agent orders, including out-of-stock ones <sup>125</sup> |
| Google UCP checkout         | Rolling out gradually <sup>141</sup>                             | Not stated; read your <code>/.well-known/ucp</code> file | Developer                   | Code attempts in agent sessions                          |

FIGURE 6.8 One decision per channel. All four are US channels; chapter 8 has the detail and the dates.

**WITH BENSON** Agent detection and analytics are free on every plan; identities are provisional. With agent policy on (Stop plan, off by default), Benson limits the codes agents and automation apply per visit through your widget (Own), and with the Benson Shopify app can reject codes from automation at Shopify checkout. It sees agents that run JavaScript.

## 07

## TIMING

# The calendar

Every play has a window, counted back from Black Friday, the day after the fourth Thursday in November. This chapter sets out who does what in each week, from twelve weeks out to January, and what peak week looks like.



- 01 How to count back from Black Friday
- 02 Week by week, by owner, to January
- 03 Sam's order in peak week, with the plays in place

# From twelve weeks out to your freeze

What each owner does from twelve weeks out until the freeze.

**T**hanksgiving in the US is set by law as the fourth Thursday in November, so Black Friday always falls between 23 and 29 November.<sup>91</sup> Count every deadline back from it: T-8

weeks means eight weeks before Black Friday. Changes to your site, your codes and your partner terms belong in these weeks, while traffic is ordinary and before peak rates lock.

| OWNER             | T-12 TO T-9 WEEKS                                                                                                                             | T-8 WEEKS                                                                                                            | T-8 TO T-4 WEEKS                                                                                       | T-4 TO T-3 WEEKS                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                   | <b>See</b><br>Early to late September                                                                                                         | <b>Build</b><br>Around the start of October                                                                          | <b>Test</b><br>October's ordinary weeks                                                                | <b>Decide</b><br>The first working day of November is 22-28 days out <sup>91</sup>                       |
|                   |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                        | <b>FREEZE STARTS</b>  |
| E-COMMERCE LEAD   | Lock the offer plan: sale dates, a headline offer with no code, and which channel gets which code. Baseline your extension sessions.<br>P1 P8 | Clear every change you will need at peak with whoever owns the freeze. <sup>128</sup>                                | Holdouts running. P2<br>Headline offer set as an automatic discount, cart message live. P6             | Conclude the holdouts and choose what goes into peak.                                                    |
| AFFILIATE MANAGER | Pull last season's report by publisher type. Review voucher, stand-down and de-duplication terms. Ask when peak rates lock.<br>P1 P4 P5       | Give partners notice of new terms and de-duplication rules. <sup>56</sup> P4                                         | Voucher attribution and code-rate rules switched on. Judge off-site partners on network reports. P4 P5 | Partner codes, rates and placements confirmed. No new terms until January.                               |
| CRM / EMAIL       | List every live code, where it was issued and who owns it. P3                                                                                 | Rebuild codes: customer codes unique and single-use, partner codes capped, prefixed and dated. P3                    | Weekly check for codes used outside their channel. P3                                                  | Every partner and CRM code listed with its owner, limits and expiry.                                     |
| DEVELOPER         | Install session detection. Check what your store's /.well-known/ucp file advertises. P1 P8                                                    | Every tag, app and discount function needed at peak goes in now, including a conversion tag that passes the code. P4 | Schedule the sale rules and run each new rule in observe mode first. P7                                | Test every code, automatic discount and combination at checkout. <sup>101</sup>                          |
| FINANCE / ANALYST | Agree the margin and commission inputs for your break-even number (chapter 5).                                                                | Agree the holdout readout, the peak discount and commission budget, and the decline policy.                          | Mark any early-October sale event as noise in the data. <sup>98, 99</sup>                              | Read the holdout as ranges, then sign off the peak plan.                                                 |

**FIGURE 7.1** Twelve weeks out to the freeze, by owner. P1 to P8 are the plays in chapter 6.

|               |                                                                                                                                                                     |                  |                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FREEZE</b> | No published standard sets the date. A common pattern runs from a few weeks before Black Friday into the new year. <sup>128</sup> Agree yours with whoever owns it. | <b>T-4 WEEKS</b> | In the UK, 58 of 278 tracked retailers had a Black Friday campaign live on the first working day of November 2025, up from 12 in 2021. <sup>19</sup> |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

# From your freeze to January

Once the freeze is in force, the work changes from building to watching. Every change during peak week should be one you agreed in advance.

| OWNER             | T-21 TO T-12 DAYS                                                                                 | T-7 DAYS                                                      | BLACK FRIDAY                                                       | TO CHRISTMAS                                                                                                | JANUARY                                                                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                   | <b>Ready</b><br>Early November, with Singles' Day <sup>91</sup>                                   | <b>Final checks</b><br>The week before Thanksgiving           | <b>Peak</b><br>Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday                        | <b>Taper</b><br>Christmas is 26–32 days later <sup>91</sup>                                                 | <b>Review</b><br>After any January sale ends                                      |
|                   | FREEZE IN FORCE                                                                                   |                                                               |                                                                    |                                                                                                             | FREEZE LIFTS                                                                      |
| E-COMMERCE LEAD   | Agree who may change what at peak, and name one owner per lane.                                   | Sale codes listed and tested. Scheduled rules confirmed.      | Watch. Make only the changes agreed in advance.                    | End each sale when you said it would end. <sup>116, 117</sup> P6                                            | Re-test in ordinary weeks, then lift the freeze.                                  |
| AFFILIATE MANAGER | Partner codes and rates live. Find out when peak commissions approve automatically. <sup>92</sup> | Final check of partner codes and placements.                  | Watch for codes used outside their channel.                        | Review peak commissions as they come due. Decline unauthorised-code ones before they approve. <sup>92</sup> | Review partner terms with the holdout result in hand. P5                          |
| CRM / EMAIL       | Early-access codes single-use and tied to the customer.                                           | Last test of every code you will send.                        | Replace a leaked code the same day, and tell whoever issued it. P3 | Keep codes restricted through any Boxing Day or January sale.                                               | Retire the seasonal codes.                                                        |
| DEVELOPER         | NO DEPLOYS                                                                                        | Confirm scheduled rules and their dates.                      | NO DEPLOYS                                                         | NO DEPLOYS                                                                                                  | Ship what the freeze held back.                                                   |
| FINANCE / ANALYST | Baseline locked. A daily read of discount depth from here.                                        | Check every app's plan and usage limits against peak traffic. | No new holdouts. A test started now measures the sale.             | Track returns against coded orders.                                                                         | Report peak as net revenue after discount and commission, by channel and partner. |

**FIGURE 7.2** The freeze to January, by owner. The accent line marks Black Friday, the fixed anchor. “Cyber Week” has no single definition: Adobe means the five days from Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday, while IMRG’s UK Black Friday week runs eight days, Monday to Monday.<sup>23, 19</sup>

DISCOUNT DEPTH • ADOBE FORECAST, US, ONE SEASON<sup>130</sup>

|           |                                         |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------|
| EARLY NOV | Up to 14% off                           |
| LATE NOV  | Up to 21% off, just before Thanksgiving |
| DECEMBER  | Up to 10–15% off throughout the month   |

### WORKED EXAMPLE

If Thanksgiving falls on 26 November, Black Friday is 27 November. T–8 weeks is then 2 October, the freeze window runs from 30 October (T–4 weeks) to 6 November (T–3 weeks), and Christmas Day is 28 days after Black Friday. Illustrative.

# Peak week with the plays in place

We replay Sam's order from chapter 1 on a store that worked through the calendar, then set out what each owner watches during the week.

Sam found you through a creator's video on a Tuesday and comes back on Friday to buy the boots. This time the store has worked through the calendar. It's an illustration: what actually happens depends on your platform, your network and the extension.

- 1 The price is already on the page. The sale runs as an automatic discount, which Shopify applies in the cart and at checkout, and the cart says so (Play 6).<sup>115</sup> Sam has less reason to go looking.
- 2 On product and cart pages, a storefront rule scheduled for the sale is running (Play 7). Shopify checkout is sandboxed, and we know of no supported way to remove an extension's overlay there, so the pop-up may still appear.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- 3 The extension tries its codes. Last spring's staff code has expired, and email codes are single-use and tied to one customer. The creator's code works, but it's capped and carries the creator's prefix (Play 3).<sup>14</sup>
- 4 If the extension takes the last click, your terms decide what it earns: stand-down, de-duplication against email, and the right to decline commission on a code you never issued to it (Play 4).<sup>56, 92</sup> If the code it applied was the creator's exclusive code, voucher attribution credits the creator.<sup>105</sup>
- 5 If this extension tested as incremental in October, it's on terms you agreed (Plays 2 and 5).

Sam pays the sale price. Nobody on your team changed anything during the week to get there: every step was set before the freeze.

## What each owner does during the week

- **E-commerce lead:** watch, and make only the changes agreed in advance.
- **Affiliate manager:** note codes used outside their channel, and list the commissions to decline before they approve automatically.<sup>92</sup>
- **CRM:** replace a leaked code the same day and tell whoever issued it.
- **Developer:** no deploys.
- **Analyst:** a daily read of discount depth, and no new holdouts.

## Reading the peak numbers

Code searches peak on Black Friday itself. In our analysis of Google Trends it was the top day of the fourth quarter in every series-year we pulled, in the US and the UK.<sup>18</sup> Traffic is at its highest and least typical, so treat any comparison with your baseline as an estimate.

An October holdout tells you about October shoppers. Re-test in January before you change a partner's terms for good.

### THE SKEPTIC'S QUESTION

**"Why not test during peak, when we have the most traffic?"** Because the sale changes prices, traffic mix and urgency all at once. A holdout started during the sale measures the sale, not your change. Use ordinary weeks before and after.

Chapter 8 looks at a newer visitor at the same checkout: AI shopping agents.

## 08

## WHAT'S CHANGING

# AI shopping agents

AI agents now read product pages, fill carts and submit discount codes for shoppers. This chapter explains what agent checkouts change, which agent channels are switched on by default, and what to decide before peak.



- 01 Extension and agent sessions, side by side
- 02 What's on by default, and your controls
- 03 What to decide, and where the law stands

# What agent checkouts change

Agent protocols carry discount codes as data fields, and a proposal would add affiliate credit. The same questions apply.

An AI shopping agent is software that browses, compares and sometimes buys for a shopper, inside a chat app, a browser or a voice assistant. OpenAI and Stripe launched Instant Checkout in ChatGPT in September 2025, with the open Agentic Commerce Protocol (ACP).<sup>134</sup> By March 2026 OpenAI was “allowing merchants to use their own checkout experiences” while it focused on product discovery.<sup>135</sup> Walmart told WIRED its products converted about three times worse inside ChatGPT than when shoppers clicked through to its site: one retailer’s experience.<sup>136</sup>

Discovery is growing from a small base. AI referrals to US retail sites rose 1,300% over the 2024 holiday season and 693.4% over 2025, and Adobe noted that “the base of users remains modest”.<sup>137, 23</sup>

## The code field becomes a protocol field

ACP’s discount extension lets an agent submit codes in the checkout request.<sup>20</sup> The spec says rate limiting “SHOULD be applied to prevent discount code enumeration attacks”, a risk it anticipates rather than behaviour anyone has reported. Google’s Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) has an equivalent extension.<sup>21, 138</sup>

## Credit moves from cookies to declarations

A proposed ACP extension lets agents “credit third-party publishers without relying on cookies or client-side tracking”; commission is out of its scope.<sup>20</sup> UCP “does NOT prescribe attribution models”.<sup>21</sup> In our reading, credit is moving from a cookie an extension could overwrite to a claim an agent declares.

|             | Extension session                                                                        | Agent session                                                                       |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| THE CODE    | Typed into your code field, from an inventory of codes the extension has collected.      | Sent as a field in the checkout request, through the ACP or UCP discount extension. |
| THE CREDIT  | A cookie set by the extension’s affiliate link. Under last click, the latest click wins. | Declared by the agent, with first-touch or last-touch markers. Still a proposal.    |
| THE PAYMENT | On your own checkout page.                                                               | In the agent, in the platform, or on your own checkout.                             |
| WHICH CODE? | WHO GETS THE CREDIT?                                                                     | WHAT MARGIN DO YOU KEEP?                                                            |

FIGURE 8.1 The same three questions in two kinds of session. Agent attribution fields are proposals, not settled standards.

SPOTTED ON 6 OCTOBER 2026

We checked eight Shopify stores. Seven served a UCP file at /.well-known/ucp listing the discount capability. Several of their Shopify-generated robots.txt files tell agents “Checkouts are for humans”, while agents.md points them to a Shopify skill for “price/discount discovery”. A sign of where the platform is heading, not advice.<sup>122</sup>

# What’s on by default, and what to decide

Several US agent channels enrol merchants by default, with an opt-out. Here’s what is on, the control you have, and what to decide.

| CHANNEL                     | WHAT IT DOES                                                                                                                                              | YOUR CONTROL, OR ITS STATUS                                                                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shopify Agentic Storefronts | Products “become discoverable in ChatGPT by default”, and orders carry ChatGPT referral attribution. <sup>122</sup>                                       | Direct checkout on or off per channel; choose which AI partners get your data. <sup>123</sup> |
| Microsoft Copilot Checkout  | Checkout inside Copilot from January 2026, with PayPal, Shopify and Stripe. Merchants remain merchant of record. <sup>124</sup>                           | Shopify merchants are enrolled after an opt-out window. <sup>124</sup>                        |
| Amazon Buy for Me           | Amazon’s agent buys from other sites for some customers, in beta since April 2025. Merchants said they were opted in without consent. <sup>125, 139</sup> | Amazon says you can opt out by emailing branddirect@amazon.com. <sup>125</sup>                |
| Google UCP checkout         | Built with Shopify, Etsy, Wayfair, Target and Walmart; it “will soon power” checkout in AI Mode and Gemini. <sup>140</sup>                                | Rolling out gradually in the US. “Retailers remain the seller of record”. <sup>141, 140</sup> |
| Shop Pay in Meta’s Muse     | Shopify is “partnering deeply with Muse to enable agentic checkout with Shop Pay on all Shopify stores”. <sup>142</sup>                                   | Announced on 21 September 2026; not confirmed as switched on. <sup>142</sup>                  |

## Deal-finding moves into the platform

Google’s Universal Cart, announced in May 2026, “gets to work in the background — finding deals and price drops”.<sup>143</sup> Amazon says Alexa for Shopping can find deals and buy at a set price.<sup>144</sup> In our reading, the hunt that extensions automate is moving into the agents.

## Law and identity

Amazon sued Perplexity, alleging its Comet agent disguised itself as Chrome while shopping in users’ accounts.<sup>145</sup> In August 2026 the Ninth Circuit vacated a preliminary injunction, holding that the user, not Perplexity, “accessed” Amazon’s computers under US anti-hacking law.<sup>145, 126</sup> Cooley advises sites to enforce their terms of service instead.<sup>126</sup> Visa and Cloudflare’s Trusted Agent

Protocol, built on Web Bot Auth, is one attempt to tell trusted agents from other bots.<sup>146</sup>

## What to decide before your freeze

- 1 Per channel: direct checkout on or off, and which AI partners get your data.<sup>123</sup>
- 2 What your /.well-known/ucp file advertises.<sup>122</sup>
- 3 Whether your codes fail on reuse (Play 3), which works for agents too. On your own checkout API, rate-limit code attempts.<sup>20</sup>
- 4 How you report agents: tag AI-referred sessions and read them separately.
- 5 What your terms of service say about agents.<sup>126</sup>

Chapter 9 sets out how Benson fits each play.

| STATUS AT TIME OF WRITING                                                                                          |                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                     | 6 OCTOBER 2026 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| – Amazon v. Perplexity: injunction vacated 4 August 2026; amended complaint 21 September 2026. <sup>145, 148</sup> | – Universal Cart: a US rollout was planned for summer 2026; not verified as live. <sup>143</sup> | – Cloudflare: since 15 September 2026, blocks agent bots by default on pages with ads (new domains). <sup>149</sup> |                |

# How Benson fits each play

Each play’s Benson feature, the plan it needs and its status on 6 October 2026.

| Free                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Stop                                                 | Own <small>RECOMMENDED</small>                                                                                                | Scale                  |                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| £0                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | £49 · \$59 · €55                                     | £149 · \$179 · €169                                                                                                           | £399 · \$479 · €449    |                                                                 |
| 10k sessions · 1 site                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 50k sessions · 3 sites                               | 250k sessions · 5 sites                                                                                                       | 1M sessions · 25 sites |                                                                 |
| Prices are monthly, excluding VAT where it applies; a year costs ten times the monthly price. <sup>95</sup> Every new workspace starts with 14 days of Own, no card, then moves to Free unless you pick a plan. <sup>129</sup> |                                                      |                                                                                                                               |                        |                                                                 |
| PLAY                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | WHAT BENSON DOES                                     |                                                                                                                               | PLAN                   | AVAILABILITY                                                    |
| 01                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Measure before you change anything                   | Labels each session as a person, extension, AI agent or automation. Observe mode previews any rule. <sup>95</sup>             | Free                   | Live                                                            |
| 02                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Run a holdout in ordinary weeks                      | Leaves 5, 10, 20 or 50% of extension sessions alone, and reports a range after 7 days and 500 sessions per arm. <sup>97</sup> | Stop                   | Live                                                            |
| 03                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Restrict your discount codes                         | Strict code policy: in extension sessions, only allowlisted codes go through at checkout. <sup>103</sup>                      | Stop                   | Shopify: with the app. Others: plugin or script. <sup>104</sup> |
| 04                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Write your extension rules into your affiliate terms | Attribution integrity records the affiliate and click ids a shopper arrived with and flags late changes. <sup>95</sup>        | Stop                   | Live; commission moved is estimated                             |
| 05                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Keep the partners that add sales                     | Rules by extension, page type, country, source, device and date, so partners you pay keep their pop-ups. <sup>97</sup>        | Stop                   | Live                                                            |
| 06                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Remove the reason to hunt for a code                 | Your own widget shows your sale code first, and only codes Benson can verify. Drafts and previews are free. <sup>95</sup>     | Own                    | Live                                                            |
| 07                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Control the storefront, set rules for checkout       | Scheduled rules hide pop-ups on storefront pages only while the sale runs. On Shopify, never at checkout. <sup>93, 96</sup>   | Stop                   | Live                                                            |
| 08                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Decide how you handle AI agents                      | Agent analytics on every plan. Agent policy, off by default, limits codes agents apply via your widget. <sup>127</sup>        | Free · Stop            | Beta                                                            |
| Ch7                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | The calendar                                         | Sale periods, a readiness report 21 days before your sale, and a recap 3 days after a marked sale period ends. <sup>131</sup> | In the app             | Beta                                                            |

## What Benson can't do

- Change what an extension shows inside Shopify check-out. We know of no supported way for any app to do that. On Shopify, Benson works on storefront pages, and on codes with the Benson Shopify app.<sup>96</sup>
- See agents that don't run JavaScript on your storefront, or limit the codes an agent types into your own discount box.<sup>127</sup>
- Promise a significant result. At a 10% control, a holdout needs about 5,000 eligible sessions.<sup>97</sup>
- Cover your sale on a late trial. One started in the last three weeks ends before or during it, and on Free your rules fall back to observe.<sup>129</sup>

STATUS AT TIME OF WRITING

6 OCTOBER 2026

The Benson Shopify app was submitted to the Shopify App Store on 3 October 2026 and is awaiting review.<sup>151</sup> Until it's listed, Shopify stores install Benson with a snippet or Google Tag Manager, as on any platform;<sup>100</sup> the Shopify checkout code policy and Shopify billing arrive with the app.

trybenson.com/pricing marks checkout code policies “Coming soon” on every platform. On WooCommerce, Magento and BigCommerce they run through the Benson plugin or the script on the coupon field.<sup>100, 104</sup> Money figures need your order data connected: ask us what that means for your platform.<sup>150</sup>

CLOSING NOTE

# Before you start

I built the first Benson in 2022, after years on the affiliate side, and it stalled when Shopify closed its checkout to scripts. I relaunched it in October 2026 because the problem was still there, and because AI agents are now arriving at the same step of the checkout.

I still run an affiliate publisher, so I want commission to reach the partners who earned it. That’s also why this book isn’t against extensions. Some bring you customers you’d never reach otherwise, and they deserve to be paid well for it.

If you only do part of this playbook, do it in order. Measure before you change anything. Fix your codes and your terms, which cost nothing. Keep the partners that bring you new customers. Set everything up before your freeze, and use peak week to watch, not to change things.

None of it needs Benson. Every play works with your platform’s settings, your network’s terms and a spreadsheet. We built Benson to make the measuring and the switching quicker, and the previous page sets out what it does and what it can’t do.

I said it when we relaunched, and I still think it: “Discount extensions will always exist, but they’ll start to play by the rules.” Until the rules settle, these plays are how you check that you pay once, for sales a partner actually brought you.

Doug Silkstone

FOUNDER, BENSON



Start free trial  
14 days of Own, no card  
[trybenson.com](https://trybenson.com)

Start it in ordinary weeks, and pick a plan before your sale.

# Peak-season checklist

Every play in order, counted back from Black Friday. Add an owner and a date.

## T-12 TO T-9 WEEKS

### See

|                                                                                                                                                          | OWNER | DATE  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Offer plan locked: sale dates, headline offer, and which channel and partner gets which code <small>PLAY 6</small>              | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baseline: last season's network report by publisher type, plus two to four ordinary weeks of session data <small>PLAY 1</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every live code listed, and any public codes you never issued <small>PLAY 3</small>                                             | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Affiliate terms reviewed, and the date peak rates and placements lock <small>PLAY 4</small>                                     | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agent-channel settings and your /.well-known/ucp file reviewed <small>PLAY 8</small>                                            | ..... | ..... |

## T-8 WEEKS

### Build

|                                                                                                                                        | OWNER | DATE  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every tag, app and piece of checkout code you need at peak installed <small>CH. 7</small>                     | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conversion tag sends the code used and the channel your network needs <small>PLAY 4</small>                   | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planned changes cleared with whoever owns the freeze <small>CH. 7</small>                                     | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Codes rebuilt: customer codes unique and single-use, partner codes capped and pre-fixed <small>PLAY 3</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partners given notice of changes to terms and de-duplication <small>PLAY 4</small>                            | ..... | ..... |

## T-8 TO T-4 WEEKS

### Test

|                                                                                                                                  | OWNER | DATE  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holdout running: at least 7 days and 500 sessions per arm <small>PLAY 2</small>                         | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voucher attribution, code-rate rules and de-duplication against email switched on <small>PLAY 4</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headline offer in automatic discounts; cart message deployed <small>PLAY 6</small>                      | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sale rules scheduled, with new rules in observe mode first <small>PLAY 7</small>                        | ..... | ..... |

## T-4 TO T-3 WEEKS

### Decide

|                                                                                                                                                | OWNER | DATE  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holdouts concluded and the peak plan chosen <small>PLAY 2</small>                                                     | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every code, automatic discount and combination tested at checkout <small>PLAY 3</small>                               | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Who may change what in the freeze agreed; one owner per lane <small>CH. 7</small>                                     | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peak discount and commission budget agreed, and the date Black Friday commissions approve known <small>PLAY 4</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every app's plan and usage limits checked against peak traffic <small>CH. 7</small>                                   | ..... | ..... |

## BLACK FRIDAY WEEK

### Peak

|                                                                                                                                                             | OWNER | DATE  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduled rules live <small>PLAY 7</small>                                                                                         | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily check for codes used outside their channel; leaked codes replaced the same day, with their owners told <small>PLAY 3</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Only the changes agreed for peak, and no new holdouts <small>PLAY 2</small>                                                        | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No deploys <small>CH. 7</small>                                                                                                    | ..... | ..... |

## DECEMBER TO JANUARY

### After peak

|                                                                                                                                                      | OWNER | DATE  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unauthorised-code commissions declined before they approve <small>PLAY 4</small>                                            | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> UK: code rules and the freeze kept through any Boxing Day or January sale <small>CH. 7</small>                              | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Results read against your baseline, as estimates, and partner terms reviewed with the holdout in hand <small>PLAY 5</small> | ..... | ..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Next test booked for ordinary weeks <small>PLAY 2</small>                                                                   | ..... | ..... |

T-8 means eight weeks before Black Friday, the day after the fourth Thursday in November.<sup>91</sup> Not legal advice: check your network's terms.

# Glossary

The terms this book uses, in plain English and grouped by topic.

## The players

**Coupon extension.** Browser software that finds discount codes and tries them at checkout. Most are paid through affiliate commission on the orders they touch.<sup>1</sup>

**Cashback extension.** Browser software that passes part of the commission it earns back to the shopper as a reward.<sup>1</sup>

**Affiliate network.** The platform that tracks referrals and pays partners for you, such as Awin, CJ, impact.com and Rakuten Advertising.

**Publisher.** Any partner paid through your affiliate programme: content sites, creators, voucher sites, cashback apps and extensions.

**Downloadable software publisher.** A publisher whose product is software on the shopper's device, such as a toolbar, an extension or a plug-in.<sup>189</sup>

## Money and attribution

**Last click.** The rule most programmes use: the last tracked referral before the purchase earns the commission.

**Cookie window.** How long after a referral a sale still counts for that partner.

**Validation period.** The window in which you approve or decline a commission. On Awin, commissions you don't review approve automatically.<sup>92</sup>

**Stand-down.** The rule that software must not activate, prompt or overwrite tracking when another affiliate has just referred the shopper.<sup>45</sup>

**afsrc=1.** A URL parameter that tells software a partner referred the visitor. impact.com adds it by default.<sup>51</sup>

**Soft click and hard click.** On Awin, a soft-click partner is credited only if no regular, hard-click partner was in the journey.<sup>47</sup>

**De-duplication.** Not paying a partner for a sale another channel, such as your email, is already credited with.<sup>56</sup>

**Voucher attribution.** Crediting sales on an exclusive code to the partner it was issued to. It decides who's paid; the code still works.<sup>105</sup>

**Tenancy fee.** A fixed fee paid to a partner for a placement, instead of or as well as commission.

**Margin leakage and attribution leakage.** The two costs of an extension order: a discount the shopper wouldn't otherwise have used, and commission on a sale that another partner, or your own marketing, already drove.

## Measurement

**Incrementality.** The share of sales that wouldn't have happened without a partner or a change.

**Holdout.** A random slice of sessions left unchanged, so you can compare like with like.

**Break-even incrementality.** The incrementality a partner needs to pay for itself:  $[d + c(1 - d)] \div m$ , where  $d$  is the discount,  $c$  the commission on the discounted price and  $m$  your gross margin.

## Peak season

**BFCM.** Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Black Friday is the day after the fourth Thursday in November. This book counts its deadlines back from it: T-8 means eight weeks before.<sup>91</sup>

**Cyber Week.** No single definition. Adobe means Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday in the US; IMRG's UK week runs Monday to Monday.<sup>23, 19</sup>

**Code freeze.** A period when nothing on the site, its tags or its apps changes. Its timing is yours to agree.

## Shopify

**Automatic discount.** A discount applied in the cart and at checkout when its conditions are met, with no code to type. A store can have up to 25 active.<sup>115</sup>

**Discount Function.** Shopify's server-side logic for a discount. It can read the code that triggered it and the cart's attributes.<sup>17</sup>

**Checkout extensibility.** Shopify's sandboxed way to customise checkout, which replaced checkout.liquid. Shopify Functions replaced Scripts.<sup>152, 120</sup>

**Accelerated checkout.** One-tap wallets such as Apple Pay and Google Pay. Checkout UI extensions can't add or remove codes there.<sup>121</sup>

## AI shopping agents

**Agentic storefront.** Shopify's way of making your products available inside AI chats.<sup>22</sup>

**ACP.** The Agentic Commerce Protocol, an open standard for agent checkout from OpenAI and Stripe.<sup>134</sup>

**UCP.** The Universal Commerce Protocol, co-developed by Google with Shopify, Etsy, Wayfair, Target and Walmart.<sup>140</sup>

**Web Bot Auth.** A way for agents to prove who they are cryptographically, used by the Trusted Agent Protocol.<sup>146</sup>

# How we checked

Where the facts in this book come from, how we labelled them and whose interests sit behind them, followed by every source we used.

**E**ach number, date and legal statement in this book comes from a source listed below, numbered as in our research ledger. We finished the research and the fact-checking on 6 October 2026, the date on every status box. Web pages were read that day unless the entry gives another date.

**Labels.** Our own arithmetic is marked illustrative. Our own analysis, such as the Google Trends pull (source 18), is described as ours. Allegations are attributed to whoever made them, and a network's action is never described as a court ruling. Sources we consulted but didn't cite say so.

**Interests.** Ben Edelman works with VPT, which sells monitoring of shopping plugins. James Little works for TopCashback, a cashback site. CJ is an affiliate network that earns from extension partners. clean.io later marketed a blocking product. Wildfire builds white-label extensions. Rakuten Rewards is a cashback operator. Adobe, Salesforce

and impact.com publish data from their own platforms. CouponFollow, Savings.com and VoucherCodes, which ran shopper surveys, publish coupons. And Benson sells software that detects and manages extension sessions.

**Geography.** US, UK and global figures are never combined. Shopify's figures are worldwide platform totals; Adobe's are US.

**Gaps.** We found no independent randomised holdout of coupon or cashback extensions. Our search for regulator action on extensions was limited, so we make no claim either way.

**Secondary and loaded sources.** Trade-press reports are marked as secondary. Where a headline or web address uses loaded words, we cite the report by publisher and date and print only the domain.

**Conflicting records.** Where a court clerk's docket entry and a signed order disagree on a date, we follow the signed order.

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Benson shows online stores which coupon extensions and AI shopping agents are in their sessions. On paid plans it sets rules for them on the storefront, and each rule can run against a holdout.

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