



DIGIVANTE RESEARCH · PEAK SEASON 2026

The Vendor Freeze *Gap*

Your code freeze protects the code you control. We examined 628 ecommerce vendors to find out who protects the rest.

CAN CHANGE YOUR STOREFRONT WITHOUT YOU
DEPLOYING

404 of 628

YOUR CODE · FROZEN



YOUR VENDORS · STILL SHIPPING



A living dataset, not a verdict

Every autumn, ecommerce engineering teams lock down production and wait for January. This report asks a question that the ritual rarely does: when you freeze, does everything else freeze with you?

We mapped the vendors a modern ecommerce stack could contain, prioritised the ones whose changes can reach a live checkout, and went looking for each vendor's public position on shipping during peak. Where we found one, we recorded it with a date and a source. Where we searched and found nothing, we recorded that too.

Who this is for. Ecommerce engineers, platform leads, QA and release managers, heads of ecommerce, and the agency architects who advise them.

How to read it. Chapters 1–3 set out the problem and the method. Chapters 4–7 are the findings, vendor by vendor. Chapter 8 offers a model for judging where your own risk concentrates. Chapters 9–11 turn that into a calendar and a playbook, and the appendices give you a questionnaire, a baseline checklist, and a week-by-week plan you can use this season.

What "none found" means. It means we searched the vendor's public documentation, changelog, status pages, and help centre on the date stated and found no peak change policy. It does not mean no policy exists. Several vendors may communicate policies privately to enterprise customers. We will correct the record gladly.

Evidence standard. Every named-vendor finding in this report rests on a primary or reputable secondary source listed in Appendix D. Where we offer judgement rather than evidence, we say so.

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Executive summary

A code freeze stops your team shipping. It does not stop anyone else. Most of the vendors inside a modern ecommerce stack can change what a shopper sees at checkout without the merchant deploying anything... and almost none of them tell you, in public, whether they do so in November.

628

ecommerce vendors mapped across 23 stack categories, from CDN to carrier

404

can change a live storefront without a merchant deploy — their script, API, hosted app, or edge configuration sits in the shopper's path

5

vendors publish a vendor-side peak freeze we could verify: Adyen, Google Cloud, Shopify, PowerReviews, and Mastercard

10

priority vendors searched thoroughly with no public peak change policy found, including Stripe, Cloudflare, and Klaviyo

Key findings

1. **Good vendor discipline exists — which makes its absence a choice.** Adyen names the exact days it freezes deployment, requires senior sign-off for exceptions, and lets merchants pause point-of-sale updates. PowerReviews publishes dated freeze windows and tells merchants in advance what will degrade. The standard has been set in public.
2. **The largest infrastructure vendors diverge sharply.** Google Cloud says it freezes key services around Black Friday and times the freeze to its retail customers. AWS holds its biggest launch event of the year, re:Invent, from 30 November to 4 December 2026 (opening on Cyber Monday).
3. **Mandatory upgrades land weeks before peak.** Salesforce's Winter '27 release reaches **most** production instances on 3 and 10 October 2026. It cannot be declined or delayed, and one enforced change can break integrations that still use the OAuth username-password flow.
4. **The best freeze in the category did not cover the season.** Shopify freezes code around Black Friday, but still shipped its Winter Edition (with more than 150 updates!) on 10 December 2025, seven weeks earlier than its historical January slot.
5. **The DTC application layer is almost entirely silent.** We found no public peak policy for Klaviyo, Attentive, Recharge, Yotpo, Bazaarvoice, or Gorgias. Bazaarvoice's direct competitor PowerReviews publishes one, though.



6. **Some of the biggest mid-freeze changes are not code.** FedEx's 2026 peak surcharges run from 28 September to 17 January 2027, rising 12–23% year on year at the top tier. The freeze does not cover your cost base.

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS REPORT

This is not a case that vendors are reckless, nor that everyone should freeze. It is narrower and harder to dispute: **if merchants are going to freeze, they are entitled to know whether the freeze meaningfully reduces risk across their wider stack.**

Before 15 October, every ecommerce team should:

- Inventory every vendor that can change a revenue path without a deploy.
- Pin every version you are able to pin: payment APIs, SDKs, AI model versions, runtimes.
- Ask each critical vendor, in writing, what they will ship between mid-October and early January (Appendix A).
- Capture October baselines for the rates that vendor changes move silently (Appendix B).
- Plan for December as a second risk window, not a recovery period.



The ritual and its blind spot

The holiday code freeze is one of the oldest rituals in retail engineering. It protects exactly one thing: the code you control.

Most retailers begin a code freeze roughly a month before Thanksgiving and hold it for the rest of the holiday shopping season. The logic is sound. During the few weeks that carry a disproportionate share of annual revenue, the cost of an outage dwarfs the cost of waiting to ship. So the repository is locked, the release train stops, and only emergency fixes pass.

The practice is widespread beyond retail. A survey of 185 engineering organisations by *The Pragmatic Engineer* found two common week-long freezes each year: Thanksgiving week and the end of December; with later-stage companies **more** likely to freeze than smaller ones, and teams closest to revenue, such as advertising, the strictest of all.

What the ritual assumes, without usually saying so, is that once the merchant stops deploying, the system is stable. For a monolith hosted in your own data centre, that was close to true. For a modern ecommerce stack, it is not.

DEFINITION

The vendor freeze gap is the difference between the code a merchant freezes and the code that can still change in their live storefront.

A contemporary storefront is assembled from dozens of third parties. The CDN in front of it. The platform beneath it. The payment SDK in the checkout, the fraud model deciding which orders to approve, the bot rules deciding which visitors are human. The personalisation script rewriting the homepage, the review widget on every product page, the consent banner gating every tag, the email and SMS platform carrying peak week's most profitable channel. Each has its own release train. None stops because yours has.

Akamai, whose edge network carries a large share of retail traffic, estimates that more than half of commerce websites rely on third-party JavaScript they do not fully control. That is the gap in a single sentence.





Figure 1 — Runtime exposure across the 628 vendors in our dataset. Exposure is our structural assessment of where a vendor's code runs, not a vendor claim.

An information problem, not a recklessness problem

It would be easy to read this as an indictment of vendors. The evidence does not support that. Several vendors in this report run peak discipline that is better than most of their customers' own, and some of the vendors we found silent may well be careful in private.

The problem is an **asymmetry of information**. The merchant carries the revenue risk of a change they did not make, cannot see coming, often cannot roll back, and in many cases cannot even detect until the numbers arrive. They freeze on the assumption that the system is now still. For most of the stack, that assumption has never been checked.

Freezing your own repository does not freeze your stack. It freezes your ability to respond when your stack changes.

That second-order effect matters. A frozen team has deliberately reduced its capacity to ship a fix. If a vendor change breaks a checkout path mid-freeze, the merchant faces a choice between breaking their own freeze and absorbing the loss. Knowing in advance which vendors might force that choice is the purpose of this research.



How we did this

We mapped the stack first, prioritised by exposure, and then held every vendor to the same evidence standard.

Scope

We catalogued 628 vendors across 23 categories that a mid-market or enterprise ecommerce operation could plausibly run: from commerce platforms, CDNs and cloud infrastructure, through payments, fraud, search, personalisation, reviews, lifecycle marketing and analytics, to fulfilment, carriers, customer service, consent, point of sale, marketplaces, localisation, and AI shopping channels.

Prioritisation

Each vendor was assessed for **runtime exposure**, by looking at whether its code, script, hosted API, or configuration sits in the shopper's live path. From the 404 with direct exposure and 60 with partial exposure, we flagged 125 as Tier 1: those where a mid-freeze change can reach checkout or materially alter the picture, plus a small number whose public stance is itself significant.

Per-vendor protocol

Step	Action	What we recorded
1	Locate the changelog	URL, and whether entries carry dates. An undated changelog cannot serve as evidence, which is itself worth knowing.
2	Search for a stated policy	The vendor's own domain, developer documentation, status and trust pages, help centre and engineering blog, for terms including code freeze, change freeze, deploy freeze, peak season, holiday readiness, BFCM, and release calendar.
3	Check for known releases in the window	Dated launches, mandatory upgrades, patch schedules, and event calendars falling between mid-October and early January.
4	Classify	Freezes (a published, verifiable vendor-side commitment), Ships (a confirmed release or change inside the window), or None found (searched, no public position).
5	Date-stamp	Every finding carries the date it was checked. Release policies change.

Limitations

- **This covers Tier 1 vendors.** Of 628 vendors, the findings here cover the Tier 1 vendors where public evidence was available or its absence was conclusive. Many vendors remain to be researched; Digivante will continue to improve the coverage of this report each year.
- **"None found" is not "none exists".** Vendors may share policies privately under contract.



- **We report positions, not outcomes.** A vendor with a published freeze can still suffer a peak incident; a vendor with none may ship nothing risky. Chapter 6 shows both at once.
- **Judgement is labelled.** Chapter 8's category-level risk assessments are our judgement about stack position, not findings about any named vendor. Where a vendor's latest public statement is several years old, we say so.



The findings at a glance

Twenty-two vendors now have a verified position. They fall into three groups (and one of them, Shopify, belongs in two of them).

5 Freezes Adyen · payments Google Cloud · cloud Shopify · platform* PowerReviews · reviews Mastercard · payments	8 Ships into the window AWS · cloud Salesforce · platform, marketing Adobe Commerce · platform Shopify · platform* OpenAI · AI channel FedEx · carrier UPS · carrier USPS · carrier	10 None found Stripe · payments Cloudflare · CDN Akamai · CDN Klaviyo · email/SMS Attentive · SMS Recharge · subscriptions Yotpo · reviews Bazaarvoice · reviews Gorgias · service Quantum Metric · analytics
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* Shopify appears in both columns: a documented freeze around Black Friday, and its largest seasonal release shipped on 10 December 2025. See Chapter 6. GitLab and GitHub are discussed separately as tooling and practice references rather than vendor-side commitments.

Five patterns

Payments is the most mature category. Two of the five published freezes, Adyen and Mastercard, are payment vendors, and Adyen's is the most complete policy we found anywhere. That makes the silence of the category's largest DTC player, Stripe, conspicuous rather than normal.

Infrastructure splits down the middle. Google Cloud publishes a freeze timed to retail. AWS launches at scale during Cyber Monday week. Cloudflare and Akamai — which together sit in front of a very large share of storefronts — publish nothing about their own change behaviour.

Platforms ship on their own calendars. Salesforce's mandatory autumn upgrade, Adobe's monthly patches, and Shopify's December Edition all land during the period merchants are told to hold still. The difference is how much control each leaves the merchant: Adobe leaves the timing to you; Salesforce and Shopify do not.



The application layer is silent. Six major DTC app vendors (with auto-updating code inside the storefront and the least merchant-side version control) all published no policy we could find. One competitor, PowerReviews, did.

The newest layer has the least discipline. AI shopping surfaces and agent payment protocols are going through their first full peak as live purchase channels, built by vendors whose release cadence has historically accelerated in December.



The vendors that freeze

Five vendors publish a vendor-side peak freeze we could verify. Together they define what good looks like.

Adyen

Payments | [Freezes · benchmark](#)

Adyen publishes a peak season page listing the specific days on which it freezes code deployment: Singles Day, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day. During those freezes, new code may deploy only if it is a critical bug fix that has been reviewed by multiple senior engineers and approved by Adyen's operational leads. The company describes this as a modified release schedule for the peak season, running alongside extended support hours.

The policy extends to hardware. Adyen does not push new software to point-of-sale terminals on automatic updates during peak periods, and in the last cycle offered merchants the option to pause automatic roll-outs across a longer window, from early November to mid-January, on request.

WHY IT MATTERS

Named days, a named exception process, and a merchant-controllable opt-out. This is the most complete vendor peak policy we found, and it is public. Every vendor elsewhere in this report that publishes nothing is choosing not to do something Adyen has shown is possible.

Sources: docs.adyen.com/industries/peak-season · docs.adyen.com/industries/peak-season/in-person-payments

Google Cloud

Cloud infrastructure | [Freezes](#)

In its retail season recap, Google Cloud stated that it mirrors many retailers by initiating code freezes for key Google Cloud services across the two-week period around Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and that it will continue to adjust the timing of that change freeze as its retail partners require. It paired this with capacity projections validated with customers and a capacity reservation option for peak.



WHY IT MATTERS

The second half of the commitment is the important half: a freeze timed to the customer's risk window and revisited as that window moves, rather than one timed to the vendor's own convenience. Two caveats. The commitment covers "key services", not all services, so merchants should confirm their own dependencies are in scope.

Sources: cloud.google.com/blog/topics/retail/2021-black-friday-cyber-monday-season-recap-with-google-cloud

Shopify

Commerce platform | **Freezes · with caveat**

Shopify's engineering organisation documents both a feature freeze and a code freeze in the run-up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. In normal operation, it deploys around forty new versions of the platform a day; during the code freeze, only critical fixes go out.

WHY IT MATTERS

The most disciplined platform-layer freeze we found, published by the vendor's own engineers. It is also the clearest demonstration that freezing the Black Friday weekend and freezing the season are different things. (Chapter 6 explains why Shopify appears in both columns.)

Sources: shopify.engineering/preparing-shopify-for-black-friday-cyber-monday

PowerReviews

Ratings & reviews | **Freezes · app-layer model**

PowerReviews published a dated Holiday Peak Readiness Plan for 2025, with a code freeze running from 24th November to 2nd December and normal operations resuming on 3rd December. It told merchants exactly what would change during the freeze: new reviews would stop refreshing on site, product feed processing would pause, and syndication and review migration requests would be handled after the freeze. Review collection itself continued as normal throughout.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is the only published peak freeze we have found anywhere in the DTC application layer, and it is honest about its cost. The freeze degrades merchant functionality, and PowerReviews says so, in specifics, in advance. That is the behaviour this report is asking the rest of the category for.

Sources: powerreviews.com/holiday-code-freeze-2025



Mastercard (Merchant Cloud)

Payments | [Freezes](#)

Mastercard documents a development code freeze on the payment software it builds for Merchant Cloud customers. Its stated reasons are to keep payment gateways stable across peak shopping days, to prevent updates that could introduce new bugs, and to let merchants concentrate on holiday sales rather than gateway maintenance.

WHY IT MATTERS

A second payment vendor with a published freeze confirms payments as the most mature category we investigated and sharpens the contrast with the category's silent players.

Sources: mastercard.com/us/en/business/payments/merchant-cloud/insights/holiday-code-freeze-best-practices.html

TOOLING REFERENCE · GITLAB AND GITHUB

GitLab supports configurable deploy freeze periods that block deployments across dates a team sets, turning a freeze from a convention into an enforced rule. GitHub, by contrast, is reported not to mandate code freezes centrally, leaving the decision to individual teams; an effective freeze tends to emerge from holiday absence rather than policy. **Neither is a vendor-side peak commitment**, but together they illustrate the difference between a freeze that is hoped for and one that is enforced.

What good looks like

Taken together, the five published policies suggest a practical standard that any vendor in a merchant's live path could meet:

Attribute	What it means	Best example
Named dates	The freeze window is stated in dates, not "around the holidays".	Adyen, PowerReviews
Named exception process	What qualifies as an emergency, and who signs it off.	Adyen
Customer-timed window	The freeze follows the customer's risk period and moves with it.	Google Cloud
Merchant opt-out	The merchant can pause automatic updates for their own account.	Adyen
Disclosed degradation	What stops working during the freeze is stated in advance.	PowerReviews
Public and dated	Published openly, refreshed each season, not only in contracts.	PowerReviews



The vendors that ship into the window

Eight vendors have a confirmed release, mandatory upgrade or material change inside the peak period. Several are defensible decisions. All of them land while merchants have been told to hold still.

AWS

Cloud infrastructure | **Ships · re:Invent**

Black Friday 2026 falls on 27 November and Cyber Monday on 30 November. AWS re:Invent 2026 runs from 30 November to 4 December in Las Vegas, with more than 2,200 sessions and, for the first time, re:Inforce security content folded into the same event. re:Invent is where AWS announces new services and major updates to existing ones, live on stage.

WHY IT MATTERS

The largest cloud provider's biggest launch week opens on Cyber Monday. We found no published retail change-freeze commitment from AWS comparable to Google Cloud's. Announcements are not deployments, and many launches are opt-in, however managed services change beneath customers, support attention is divided during event week, and new launches attract immediate adoption pressure from inside merchant organisations to be competitive in customer experience.

Sources: aws.amazon.com/events/reinvent · pages.awscloud.com/2026-reinvent-interest.html

Salesforce

Commerce Cloud · Marketing Cloud | **Ships · mandatory**

Salesforce's Winter '27 release reaches production instances across three weekends: 29 August, 3 October, and 10 October 2026, with the two October weekends carrying almost every instance. Salesforce upgrades all organisations automatically. Customers can choose whether a sandbox previews early, but cannot decline or delay the production upgrade.

Five Release Updates are enforced with Winter '27. The one with the most damaging failure mode removes the OAuth username–password flow. Integration jobs that authenticate this way (which were often set up years ago and rarely revisited) simply stop on the upgrade weekend, without a deprecation banner, and the first sign is typically an empty order or inventory sync the following morning.

Separately, Salesforce asks Commerce Cloud merchants to log a support case two weeks before any sale event that meets its volume thresholds, so that capacity can be planned.



WHY IT MATTERS

A mandatory platform upgrade seven to eight weeks before Black Friday, affecting Commerce Cloud B2C, B2B and Marketing Cloud together, with no opt-out and a silent failure mode. (Check your instance's date on Salesforce Trust; published schedules vary slightly by source.)

Sources: salesforceben.com · enway.com · salesforcedictionary.com · trailhead.salesforce.com (B2C holiday readiness)

Adobe Commerce

Commerce platform | **Ships · monthly patches**

In January 2026, Adobe moved Adobe Commerce from quarterly releases to monthly isolated security patches, consolidating major feature work into an annual release in May. Confirmed 2026 patch dates include 14 July, 11 August, and 8 September, with the cadence continuing through the run-up to peak.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is arguably a better model for merchants: security fixes are separated from feature changes, and merchants (not Adobe) choose when to apply them. But it turns every month of the run-up into a live decision: apply a patch during the freeze, or carry a known vulnerability through the busiest weeks of the year. Teams should agree in advance which severity levels justify breaking the freeze, and who signs off.

Sources: tomandco.co.uk · ayko.com (Adobe Commerce 2026 patch cycle)

OpenAI

AI shopping channel | **Ships · December cadence**

On 4 December 2024, OpenAI announced "12 Days of OpenAI", informally known as Shipmas: a launch or demo every weekday from 5 to 20 December. The first run included the general release of the o1 model, the ChatGPT Pro tier, the Sora video model, Projects, and a preview of o3. In 2025, they worked under "code red" competitive landscaping to speed up certain releases over others.

WHY IT MATTERS

A launch cadence deliberately aimed at the Christmas window, from a company that now operates a live purchase surface through ChatGPT shopping and Instant Checkout. Shipmas did not repeat in December 2025, but with the speed of launches around commerce-focused updates, it seems likely to be a busy season regardless. For merchants, AI shopping surfaces combine high change velocity with zero version control, no merchant-facing status page, and weak attribution — so a change may not be noticed at all.



FedEx, UPS and USPS

Carriers | **Ships · commercial change**

FedEx announced its 2026 demand surcharges on 23 July 2026. The first fees take effect on 28 September for additional handling, oversize and unauthorised packages; most package surcharges begin on 26 October; the highest rates apply from 23 November to 27 December; and the programme ends on 17 January 2027. At the top tier, core per-package surcharges are up roughly 12% to 23% on 2025.

UPS has previously timed its annual general rate increase into the peak itself, with a 22 December effective date in the last cycle — the earliest in recent memory and two weeks ahead of FedEx. USPS has an 8% temporary fuel-related price change running from 26 April 2026 to 17 January 2027 across Priority Mail Express, Priority Mail and Ground Advantage, stacking on top of any holiday pricing.

WHY IT MATTERS

Nobody deployed anything. Unit economics moved anyway, during the period when merchants are least able to reprice, renegotiate or re-route. A code freeze does not cover your cost base.



The Shopify paradox

The platform with the most disciplined Black Friday freeze now ships its largest seasonal release in the middle of December.

Around the Black Friday weekend, Shopify's freeze discipline is the best we found at the platform layer: a documented feature freeze and code freeze, with deployments cut from around forty a day to critical fixes only.

Shopify Editions are its seasonal showcase releases, bundling large numbers of updates across the platform. Historically, the Winter Edition arrived in late January — Winter '24 went live on 31 January 2024. The Winter '26 Edition, titled RenAIssance, launched on 10 December 2025, with more than 150 updates. Among them were Agentic Storefronts, a feature that makes merchants' products discoverable and purchasable inside AI platforms including ChatGPT, Copilot and Perplexity.

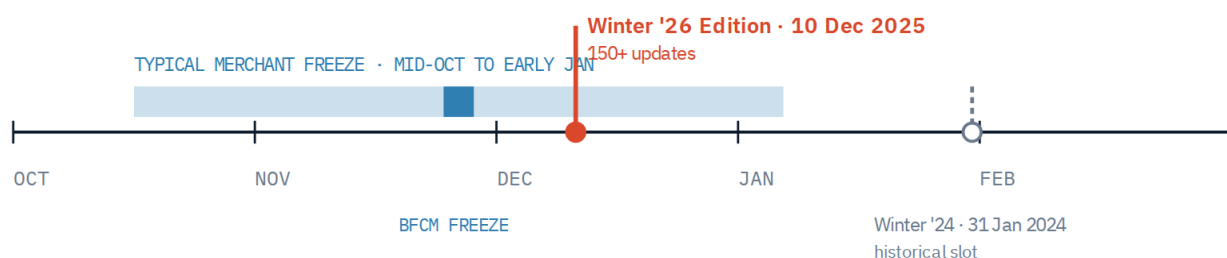


Figure 2 — Shopify's Winter Edition moved from its historical late-January slot into the Christmas trading window. Freeze window shown is the typical merchant pattern, not a Shopify policy.

Two lessons

Freezing the weekend is not freezing the season. Merchants who treat the first days of December as the all-clear have misread where the risk sits. Editions features typically roll out in phases after the announcement, some automatically. December is now a second risk window, not a recovery period — and it is the window in which Christmas order volume, gifting journeys and delivery cut-offs all converge.

A freeze is not immunity. On Cyber Monday 2025, Shopify experienced a degradation in which merchants reported trouble logging in to administrative portals and problems processing checkouts through point of sale; it was resolved later that day. The most disciplined freeze in the category did not prevent an incident on the most important day of the year.

Freeze discipline around the Black Friday weekend is not freeze discipline across the season.

None of this makes Shopify careless. Shipping a bundled release after the Black Friday peak is a defensible product decision, and a freeze that reduces deploys to critical fixes is a genuine



commitment. The point is narrower: even the best vendor-side freeze covers a window the vendor chooses, which may not be the window the merchant is protecting.

Sources: [shopify.engineering](#) · [changelog.shopify.com/posts/the-winter-26-edition-is-live](#) · [changelog.shopify.com](#) (Winter '24) · [cnbc.com](#) (1 Dec 2025) · [nbcnews.com](#)



The silence

Ten priority vendors, searched thoroughly, with no public peak change policy found. We record these as findings, not gaps.

Vendor	Category	Why the silence matters
Stripe	Payments	The highest-volume payment layer in DTC. Publishes extensive peak guidance for merchants and reported handling up to 152,000 transactions a minute over Black Friday and Cyber Monday 2025 — but discloses nothing we could find about its own release behaviour. Radar and Checkout changes can move authorisation and conversion rates without a merchant deploy. Merchants can pin API versions, which is a genuine mitigation.
Cloudflare	CDN / edge	The largest single concentration risk identified. See below.
Akamai	CDN / edge	Plans around the merchant freeze and argues against it, while disclosing nothing about its own deploys. See below.
Klaviyo	Email / SMS	Runs auto-updating code inside the storefront and carries the highest-revenue owned channel of peak week, with no version for a merchant to pin.
Attentive	SMS	The highest-converting peak channel, and the least reversible: a send cannot be recalled.
Recharge	Subscriptions	Recurring billing can fail quietly for a full cycle before anyone notices.
Yotpo	Reviews / loyalty	Widgets render on product pages and in checkout — social proof at the point of decision.
Bazaarvoice	Reviews	Reviews plus a syndication network, so a change can propagate to retail partners as well. Direct competitor to PowerReviews.
Gorgias	Customer service	Helpdesk plus a client-side chat widget, under maximum ticket load.
Quantum Metric	Experience analytics	Publishes a considered position on how retailers should freeze, favouring partial freezes, but nothing on its own release behaviour.

Searched August–September 2026 across each vendor's own domain, developer documentation, changelog, status page and help centre.

The comparison that does the most work

Bazaarvoice and PowerReviews are direct competitors, in the same category, serving overlapping merchants, with the same kind of code in the same place on the page. One publishes dated freeze windows and a specific list of what will degrade. The other publishes nothing we could find.

A like-for-like comparison removes the usual explanations — technical constraints, category norms, the nature of the product. What remains is a decision about disclosure.



Cloudflare: concentration without disclosure

According to Store Leads data reported by eMarketer, around 99.3% of Shopify storefronts — more than six million store domains — run on Cloudflare's network. On 18 November 2025, days before Black Friday, a Cloudflare outage disrupted store and payment platforms, APIs and commerce flows across its customer base. Services were restored, but recovering the lost sales could take retailers hours or days.

Cloudflare's own post-incident report attributes that outage to a bug in the logic that generated a feature file for its Bot Management system — a change on Cloudflare's side, not an attack. On 5 December 2025, inside the Christmas trading window, a second and much shorter Cloudflare outage again left Shopify merchants among those reporting problems.

Every affected merchant was, by then, already frozen or about to be. Their freeze bought them nothing against a failure one layer beneath them.

WHAT THIS DOES AND DOES NOT SHOW

We found no Cloudflare peak change policy either way, and we make no claim that Cloudflare is careless — its post-incident reporting is unusually candid. What the record shows is narrower: the layer with the greatest concentration of merchant risk changed during peak, twice, and merchants had no visibility of that change behaviour in advance. No freeze of their own reaches it.

Akamai: planning around the freeze while arguing against it

Akamai publishes a multi-part holiday readiness series for its retail customers that assumes they are already in, or entering, a code freeze. It includes genuinely useful advice — such as renewing edge certificates early if their expiry falls within a freeze window or too close to a peak traffic day, a self-inflicted outage many teams would not think to check.

In December 2025, Akamai published a piece arguing that the idea of preparing for peak as a date on the calendar or a holiday code freeze is outdated, and that peak season is now the permanent environment businesses operate in.

Planning around the merchant freeze, arguing publicly against it, and disclosing nothing about its own deploys. It is the vendor freeze gap stated out loud.



Where the risk concentrates

Not every silent vendor is a risk, and not every vendor that ships is dangerous. Five factors decide how much a vendor's peak behaviour should worry you.

To prioritise 125 vendors we built a simple scoring model. It is offered here as a tool for your own stack rather than a league table: your exposure depends on which vendors you run and how you integrate them.

Factor	Question	Weight
Blast radius	If this vendor's change goes wrong, how much breaks, and for how many merchants at once?	×2
Runtime exposure	Does their code sit in the live shopper path, or only in the back office?	×1
Change likelihood	Is a change inside the window documented as unlikely, unknown, or confirmed?	×2
Control deficit	Can you pin the version, defer the upgrade, or roll back — or does it simply arrive?	×1
Detection lag	Would the failure be loud and immediate, or a silent drop in conversion you see next month?	×1

Each factor is scored 1–5, giving a maximum of 35. Blast radius and change likelihood are double-weighted because together they determine whether a problem is likely and whether it matters.

The model applied to verified findings

Vendor	Driving factor	Profile
Cloudflare	Blast radius, verified. Sits in front of most Shopify storefronts; two outages inside the 2025 peak, the first attributed by Cloudflare to its own Bot Management change.	Critical
AWS	Change likelihood, verified. Largest launch week of the year opens on Cyber Monday.	Critical
Salesforce	Control deficit, verified. Mandatory October upgrade; cannot be declined or delayed. Silent integration failure.	Critical
Shopify	Control deficit and change likelihood. Merchants cannot decline platform changes; December Edition confirmed.	Critical
Stripe	Blast radius high, control moderate. No policy found, but API version pinning is available and failures are usually visible.	High
Adobe Commerce	Change likelihood high, control deficit low. Monthly patches, but the merchant decides when to apply them.	High



Vendor	Driving factor	Profile
Adyen	Change likelihood low, control deficit low. Named-day freeze and a merchant opt-out.	Moderate

By category: where to look first

The table below is a **structural assessment** — our judgement of each category's typical position in the stack, not a finding about any named vendor. Use it to decide where to spend your own vendor due diligence.

Category	Blast radius	Runtime exposure	Control deficit	Detection lag
CDN & edge	High	High	High	Medium
Cloud infrastructure	High	High	Medium	Medium
SaaS commerce platforms	High	High	High	Medium
Tag management & consent	High	High	High	High
Personalisation & experimentation	Medium	High	High	High
Reviews, loyalty & widgets	Medium	High	High	High
Fraud & bot defence	High	High	Medium	High
Payments & wallets	High	High	Medium	Low
Email, SMS & CDP	Medium	High	High	High
AI shopping channels	Medium	Medium	High	High
Carriers	High	Medium	High	Low
ERP, OMS & back office	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium

The quiet cluster

One group stands out: **client-side scripts** — tag managers, consent platforms, personalisation, experimentation and review widgets. These score high on control deficit and detection lag almost by construction. They are hosted by the vendor and update themselves. They execute in the shopper's browser, often before the page renders. And when they fail, they rarely throw an error. A consent banner change stops analytics firing. A personalisation update rewrites merchandising. A bot rule becomes slightly stricter and begins challenging real customers. Each looks like a quiet day until someone reads the numbers.

The same pattern applies to fraud models: a retrained model that declines a few percent more legitimate orders during the busiest week of the year produces no alert at all, only a loss.



WHY YOUR TEST SUITE WILL NOT CATCH THIS

Automated regression suites verify your code against a known state of its environment. Vendor-side changes alter the environment itself — in production, on real devices and browsers, without a pull request to trigger a test run. The failure modes above are also the ones automation handles least well: visual layout shifts, script-ordering conflicts, consent-dependent behaviour, device-specific rendering, and conversion effects that only show at the level of a real customer completing a real journey. Detecting them requires verification of live journeys, on real devices, that can be run at short notice when a vendor change lands.



The 2026 collision calendar

Confirmed vendor dates and watch points across the peak run-up, set against the merchant freeze. Status as at 21 September 2026.

Date	Event	Status
14 Jul 2026	Adobe Commerce isolated security patch	Passed
23 Jul 2026	FedEx announces 2026 demand surcharges	Passed
11 Aug 2026	Adobe Commerce isolated security patch	Passed
19 Aug 2026	Salesforce Winter '27 release notes published	Passed
28–29 Aug 2026	Salesforce Winter '27 sandbox preview; production wave 1	Passed
8 Sep 2026	Adobe Commerce isolated security patch	Passed
28 Sep 2026	FedEx first demand surcharges take effect	Confirmed
3 Oct 2026	Salesforce Winter '27 production wave 2 — mandatory	Confirmed
10 Oct 2026	Salesforce Winter '27 production wave 3 — mandatory	Confirmed
Mid-Oct 2026	Typical merchant code freeze begins	Norm
26 Oct 2026	FedEx main package demand surcharges begin	Confirmed
23 Nov – 27 Dec 2026	FedEx maximum surcharge window	Confirmed
27 Nov 2026	Black Friday	—
30 Nov 2026	Cyber Monday	—
30 Nov – 4 Dec 2026	AWS re:Invent 2026 — opens on Cyber Monday	Confirmed
c. 5–20 Dec 2026	OpenAI December launch run — projected from the 2024 precedent	Watch
c. 10 Dec 2026	Shopify Winter Edition — projected from 10 December 2025	Watch
Early Jan 2027	Merchant freezes lift; post-freeze backlog release	Norm
January 2027	Returns peak	Norm
17 Jan 2027	FedEx and USPS peak pricing programmes end	Confirmed



READING THE CALENDAR

Three windows matter. **Early October**, when mandatory platform upgrades land just before most freezes begin and leave little time to fix what they break. **Cyber Monday week**, when peak traffic coincides with the largest cloud launch event of the year. And **December**, when the Black Friday freeze has often been relaxed, but vendors with December release habits are shipping and Christmas order volume peaks. January brings its own risk: the post-freeze release of everything that queued up, straight into the returns peak.



The case against freezing

The code freeze is contested practice. A report that ignored the argument against it would be advocacy, not research.

Freezes conflict with modern delivery. Quantum Metric argues that long freezes sit uneasily with agile and continuous delivery, create artificial deadlines, and complicate the release of accumulated work afterwards. It proposes partial freezes instead: continue low-risk front-end changes such as HTML and CSS while protecting payments, shipping, security and fraud paths.

Feature flags make freezes unnecessary. Feature management vendors argue that separating deployment from release lets teams ship safely year-round: code goes out dark, and features are switched on or off without a deploy.

Peak is permanent. Akamai argues that traffic surges, fraud and bot attacks do not follow the retail calendar, so preparing for a single annual peak is the wrong model.

Freezing reflects maturity, not proven outcomes. *The Pragmatic Engineer's* survey found later-stage companies more likely to freeze, and smaller and bootstrapped companies least likely. That shows who freezes, not whether freezing works.

Freezes are often a symptom. Some retailers freeze not because they want to, but because rigid systems cannot absorb change without risk. The composable commerce vendors make this case, not without self-interest.

Our position

Each of these arguments has merit, and several of the teams best placed to ship safely in November have stopped freezing altogether. But the arguments share a blind spot with the practice they criticise: they are all about *the merchant's* change. None addresses the change a merchant does not make.

A team that has replaced its freeze with feature flags and progressive delivery has solved its own release risk. It has done nothing about a fraud model retrained on 20 November, a consent script updated on Cyber Monday, or a mandatory platform upgrade on 10 October. The vendor freeze gap applies whether or not you freeze.

If merchants are going to freeze, they are entitled to know whether the freeze covers everything. And if they are not going to freeze, they need to know even more.



The peak readiness playbook

Nothing here depends on vendors changing their behaviour. Seven moves close most of the vendor freeze gap from the merchant's side.

1. **Inventory what can change without you.** List every vendor with code, scripts, hosted APIs or configuration in a revenue path: browse, search, product page, basket, checkout, payment, confirmation, post-purchase messaging. Include anything loaded through a tag manager — the list will be longer than you expect.
2. **Pin every version you can pin.** Payment API versions, SDKs, framework and runtime versions on your host, and model versions on any AI in a customer-facing path. Do not accept upgrades after September. Where a vendor offers no pinning, that vendor goes to the top of your monitoring list.
3. **Ask in writing before October.** Send each critical vendor the questionnaire in Appendix A. An answer gives you a document to plan against; a non-answer tells you something too.
4. **Verify your critical journeys before the freeze — on real devices.** The freeze assumes a known-good starting point. Establish it: full end-to-end journeys across the devices, browsers, payment methods, markets and consent states your customers actually use, completed before your freeze date and repeated after any mandatory vendor upgrade. For Salesforce customers, that means after your October upgrade weekend, not before it.
5. **Capture baselines in October.** Most vendor-side changes do not throw errors; they move a rate by a few points. Record the rates in Appendix B during a normal October week so a movement in November is visible rather than arguable.
6. **Alert on rates, not just errors — and be ready to re-verify fast.** The dangerous peak failure is rarely an outage. It is a fraud model declining more good orders, or a bot rule challenging real shoppers. Alert on deviations from baseline. When a vendor change is announced or suspected mid-freeze, have a way to re-verify the affected journeys on real devices within hours, without breaking your own freeze to do it.
7. **Extend the plan past Cyber Monday.** Treat December as a second risk window, with its own vendor watch list: platform seasonal releases, AI channel launches, carrier cut-offs. Plan the January thaw deliberately, so the post-freeze backlog does not all ship at once into the returns peak.



IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

Find your Salesforce, Shopify or Adobe upgrade and patch dates and put them in the freeze plan. Pin your payment API and SDK versions today. Record your October authorisation, decline and conversion rates so that you will know if they move.



What we still need

This is the first edition of an open dataset. The findings will grow, and some will change.

Changelog volumes for the client-side cluster. The highest-value next step is to count dated changelog entries for tag management, consent, personalisation, experimentation and review vendors between October and December across three years, against a July–September baseline. That would convert the most important structural argument in this report into measured evidence.

Payments, fraud and bot defence in depth. Beyond Adyen, Mastercard and Stripe, the payment, BNPL, fraud and bot categories need individual verification. These are the vendors whose silent changes most directly affect revenue.

Incident records. Status page histories for October to December, cross-referenced with post-incident reports that attribute cause to a change or deployment.

IF YOU WORK AT A VENDOR NAMED HERE

We would rather publish your policy than your silence. If you have a peak change policy and we missed it, send it to us and we will update the record, and say that we got it wrong.

IF YOU ARE AN ENGINEER WITH A STORY

A vendor change that broke something during your freeze — or a vendor that handled peak well — is exactly the evidence this research needs. Contributions can be anonymised.



Vendor peak-change questionnaire

Send before 1 October to every vendor with code in a revenue path. Copy, adapt and keep the replies.

SUGGESTED COVERING NOTE

We are finalising our peak trading plan for the period from 15 October 2026 to 10 January 2027. Because your service runs in our live customer journey, we would be grateful for written answers to the questions below by [date]. We will use them to plan our own change freeze and monitoring.

#	Question	What a good answer looks like
1	Do you operate a change or code freeze during peak trading? If so, on which dates?	Specific dates, refreshed for this year.
2	What changes are permitted during that freeze, and who approves exceptions?	A defined emergency category and named sign-off level.
3	Which of your components run in our customers' browsers or apps, and do they update automatically?	A clear list, with update behaviour for each.
4	Can we pin versions, defer updates, or pause automatic roll-outs for our account during peak?	Yes, with instructions.
5	Are any mandatory upgrades, deprecations, API retirements or model changes scheduled between 1 October and 31 January?	A dated list, including "none".
6	Will any features degrade or pause during your freeze?	Specifics, as PowerReviews provides.
7	How and when will you notify us of changes that affect our integration during peak?	Named channel, minimum notice period.
8	What are your support hours, escalation path and response targets over peak?	Named contacts, 24/7 cover on peak days.
9	Do you publish capacity guidance, and do you need notice of our sale events?	Thresholds and a notice period, as Salesforce specifies.
10	Did you experience any customer-affecting incidents last peak season, and what changed as a result?	An honest answer.



Baselines to capture before the freeze

Record these during a normal October week, segmented by device, market and payment method where you can. Alert on deviation from your own baseline, not on generic thresholds.

Metric	What a vendor change looks like	Vendors that move it
Payment authorisation rate	A drop by payment method, card scheme or market with no change on your side.	PSPs, gateways, wallets
Fraud decline rate	More legitimate orders declined; complaints about failed checkouts from good customers.	Fraud decisioning
Bot challenge & block rate	Rising challenges, falling sessions from real users, particularly on mobile.	Bot defence, WAF, CDN
Search conversion & zero-result rate	More null results; lower conversion from search sessions.	Site search
Recommendation click-through	Changed merchandising, lower engagement with personalised slots.	Personalisation
Tag firing & consent rate	Analytics or ad tags stop firing; consent acceptance shifts.	Tag management, consent
Core Web Vitals (LCP, INP, CLS)	Heavier scripts, layout shift from widgets, slower largest paint.	Any client-side script
Email & SMS delivery and revenue per send	Lower delivery, broken templates, flows not triggering.	ESP, SMS, CDP
Subscription charge success rate	Failed renewals, dunning spikes.	Subscription platforms
Checkout completion by device & browser	A drop isolated to one browser, OS or device class.	Almost all
Review & widget render	Missing stars, blank loyalty panels, stale content.	Reviews, loyalty
Shipping cost per order	Rising cost per parcel from surcharge tiers.	Carriers



Week-by-week readiness plan

A working timeline for peak 2026, built around the confirmed vendor dates in Chapter 9.

September

- Complete the vendor inventory (Playbook move 1).
- Send the Appendix A questionnaire to critical vendors.
- Find your Salesforce Trust upgrade date, Shopify changelog feed and Adobe patch plan.
- Audit integrations using OAuth username–password authentication.
- Pin payment API, SDK, runtime and AI model versions.
- Check edge certificate expiry dates against the freeze window.
- Model FedEx, UPS and USPS peak surcharges into Q4 margins.

1–15 October

- Regression-test after your Salesforce upgrade weekend.
- Capture October baselines (Appendix B).
- Full real-device verification of critical journeys.
- Agree which patch severities break the freeze, and who signs off.
- Lock tag manager publishing permissions.
- Freeze consent, personalisation and experimentation configuration.

Mid-October – Black Friday

- Freeze begins.
- Daily rate monitoring against baseline.
- Stop or lock all live experiments.
- Freeze email and SMS flows; human approval on peak sends.
- Confirm vendor escalation contacts for peak days.

Black Friday – Cyber Monday week

- War-room cover including vendor status pages.
- Watch AWS re:Invent announcements for services you depend on.



- Re-verify journeys immediately after any vendor incident or change notice.
- Alert on fraud decline, bot challenge and authorisation deltas.

December

- Treat as a second risk window, not recovery.
- Watch the Shopify changelog and any Winter Edition release.
- Monitor AI shopping channel traffic and conversion separately.
- Re-verify gifting, delivery cut-off and messaging journeys.
- Keep baselines and rate alerts running.

January

- Plan the thaw: stage the backlog, do not release it all at once.
- Verify returns and exchange journeys ahead of the returns peak.
- Review every vendor change that landed during the freeze.
- Record which vendors answered the questionnaire, and how well.
- Feed findings into next year's plan — and into this dataset.



Sources

All sources accessed August–September 2026.

Subject	Source
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Google Cloud	Google Cloud Blog, 2021 Black Friday/Cyber Monday season recap — cloud.google.com/blog/topics/retail/2021-black-friday-cyber-monday-season-recap-with-google-cloud
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AWS	AWS re:Invent event page — aws.amazon.com/events/reinvent; 2026 re:Invent interest page — pages.awscloud.com/2026-reinvent-interest.html
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Adobe Commerce	Tom&Co, Adobe Commerce monthly patch release schedule; Ayko, the 2026 patch cycle shift
OpenAI	MIT Technology Review, "OpenAI's 12 days of shipmas" (9 Dec 2024); Inc., features announced during OpenAI's 12 Days (24 Dec 2024)
Carriers	Cahoot, FedEx 2026 peak season surcharges; AFMS, FedEx peak season charges 2026; 3PL Center, FedEx 2026 demand surcharges; LateShipment, FedEx & UPS 2026 rate increases; Pro Fulfill, peak season surcharge 2026
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Akamai	Akamai Blog, Holiday Readiness series (parts one to four); Akamai Blog, "Peak Season Isn't a Season. It's the World You Operate In." (Dec 2025)
Stripe	Stripe Guides, preparing for peak shopping season



Subject	Source
Industry practice	The Pragmatic Engineer, "Code freezes"; Quantum Metric, "6 code freeze best practices for the holiday season"; InFlow, ecommerce site holiday optimisations; Bluepes, code freeze for seasonal e-commerce; The Future of Commerce, holiday code freeze risks
Dataset	Digivante vendor universe and Tier 1 risk tracker (628 vendors, 23 categories), August–September 2026. Available on request.





ABOUT DIGIVANTE

Know your journeys work. Before the freeze, and during it.

Digivante helps ecommerce teams find the defects and conversion blockers that automated testing misses, using real people on real devices to test the journeys customers actually take.

Ahead of peak, that means verifying your critical journeys across the devices, browsers, payment methods and markets your customers use before your freeze begins, **and** re-verifying at short notice when a vendor change lands mid-freeze, without breaking your own.

Five test days delivered in five hours. More than 300 device and browser combinations. Round-the-clock coverage, including weekends and peak days, from a community of over 1,000 experienced testers. When Orlebar Brown replatformed from Salesforce Commerce Cloud to Shopify, Digivante tested across 443 device and browser combinations, and the brand recorded zero critical issues at launch or during high-volume trading.

Peak readiness enquiries · enquiries@digivante.com

Web · digivante.com/blog/resource/ecommerce-code-freeze/

Contribute to the dataset · enquiries@digivante.com