

How to Trade the Golden Quarter

A trading kit for the event days: five tools, each with its template, its rules and its owner.

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By the week before the event the plan is fixed: the stock is bought, the offers are agreed and the media is committed. What remains is the trading, and trading decides how much of the plan turns into margin. This kit covers that stretch, from the launch checks to the review two weeks after the last day.

It assumes the readiness question has been answered. Whether to trade the event, and how hard, is what the Golden Quarter playbook settles. Use the playbook first, then this.

The five tools

#	TOOL	WHEN	OWNER	PAGE
1	Launch checklist	The week before Day 0	Event lead	3
2	Morning read	Every event day, circulated before the meeting	Trading	4
3	Daily action grid	Every event day, written at the meeting	Event lead	5
4	Same-day retrospective	End of each event day	Event lead, with every function	6
5	Lost-sales review	Within two weeks of the last day	Commercial	7

Starting late? If the event has already begun and none of this is in place, run tools 2 and 3 tomorrow morning. They need no preparation. Then put the date for tool 5 in the diary today.

BEFORE YOU START

Set the dates now

Every date in the kit counts from Day 0, the first day of the event. Fix these five before anything else, and put the last two in the diary of everyone who will attend them. The right-hand column works them through for an event that starts on Black Friday and runs to Cyber Monday.

DATE	RULE	YOUR EVENT	WORKED EXAMPLE
Day 0	First day of the event		Fri 27 Nov 2026
Launch checks begin	Day 0 less seven days		Fri 20 Nov 2026
Last day of the event	As planned		Mon 30 Nov 2026
Lost-sales review delivered	Within two weeks of the last day		Mon 14 Dec 2026
Next year's kick-off	Fourteen weeks before next year's Day 0		Fri 20 Aug 2027

Agree the review date before the event starts. A review left to whoever has time after peak does not get written, because nobody has time after peak.

FROM THE FIELD

My kick-off ran fourteen weeks before Day 0, which is earlier than most teams want to think about the event and about right.

In the second of two cycles I have notes for, no formal review was written. What survived was a list of capabilities wanted for the following year, made on the last day of trading.

TOOL 1 · THE WEEK BEFORE

Launch checklist

WHEN

Day 0 less 7 to Day 0 less 1

OWNER

Event lead

DONE WHEN

Every line ticked, with a name against it**Part A. The four alignments: all ticked before Part B starts**

ALIGNMENT	DONE WHEN	OWNER	DATE
☐ Customer service	They know the offer, the terms and the expected volume		
☐ Delivery	Capacity matches the forecast		
☐ IT	The event is confirmed with whoever runs the platform		
☐ Stores	Store operations know what is online and what is not		

Part B. The launch checks

CHECK	DONE WHEN	OWNER	DATE
☐ Target	One number, agreed		
☐ Offer and business rules	The mechanic, its limits and its terms, tested end to end		
☐ Delivery promise	A test order placed for every gift and bundle combination, and the promise date read on each		
☐ Hero products	Named, in stock and published		
☐ Merchandising plan	Which products sit where, written down		
☐ Creative	Ready for every channel and reviewed across functions		
☐ Marketing activity and spend	Confirmed against the target		
☐ Communications	Email, web and app push scheduled, and the link held back until go-live		
☐ Staffing	Who is on, and who is on call, by name		
☐ Load	A number written in: what happens above _____ concurrent users?		

FROM THE FIELD

My checklist for a one-day event ran to three pages. Page one held only the four alignments, all ticked before page two was started. The load line carried a number even on a platform we had built for two million concurrent users, because a question without one gets a reassuring answer. The test order is there because one September a free gift on a large item gave several hundred customers a delivery date already in the past, fixed the same day because somebody was looking.

TOOL 2 · EVERY EVENT DAY

Morning read

WHEN

Every event day, before the meeting

OWNER

Trading

OUTPUT

One page, circulated in advance

The same five readings, in the same order, every morning. Circulate them before the meeting. The meeting decides what to do about them; thirty minutes of somebody reading a dashboard aloud decides nothing.

#	READ	AGAINST	TODAY	ACTION?
1	Sales by category	Budget and the prior day		
2	Orders and average order value	Budget and the prior day		
3	Stock-outs on hero products	The hero list		
4	Competitors and marketplace partners overnight	Prices, placements, launches		
5	Anything broken	Payment, promise dates, order sync		

Rules

- **Read by category, never only the total.** A total hides the category that is failing.
- **Never skip line 2.** The mix moves during an event, and sales can rise while the business sells the wrong things.
- **Every stock-out on line 3 is a customer who came for the advertised product and found it gone.** Each one goes to the grid.

FROM THE FIELD

One morning during a peak event I ran, the read showed this:

6%

SALES UP

46%

ORDERS UP

27%

AVERAGE ORDER VALUE
DOWN

Read only the first number and it was a good day. The other two showed customers buying a different, cheaper mix from the one the stock had been bought for.

TOOL 3 · EVERY EVENT DAY

Daily action grid

WHEN

Written at the morning meeting

OWNER

Event lead

OUTPUT

One line per action, rewritten daily

Each line on the morning read that needs action becomes a line here. The first three rows are a worked example from one of my own grids; the rest are yours.

CATEGORY	ACTION	OWNER	WHEN
Televisions	Manual bundles on the top 25	Trading	Today
Televisions	Paid search focus on the two hero sizes	Marketing	Today
Laptops	Availability	Commercial	Today

Rules

- **"When" takes three values only: this morning, today or tomorrow.** Anything longer is not a trading action. Log it for the lost-sales review and keep it off the grid.
- **One owner per line, from a short list.** Set the list before Day 0. Mine was trading, marketing, commercial and the site experience team. An action owned by two functions is owned by neither by lunchtime.
- **Rewrite the grid every morning.** Yesterday's unfinished lines are carried over deliberately or dropped deliberately, never left to drift.

Owner list for this event: _____

TOOL 4 · END OF EACH EVENT DAY

Same-day retrospective

WHEN

End of each event day

OWNER

Event lead, with every function

TIME

Ten minutes, written down

Five headings, asked while the day is still fresh. Write the answers down: by the following week nobody will remember which banner was late.

HEADING	ASK	WHAT HAPPENED	FIX NEXT TIME	OWNER
Marketing plan	Were all communications confirmed in advance?			
Creative	Was it prepared early and reviewed across functions?			
Terms and conditions	Were they confirmed with everyone affected?			
Product	Were gifts in stock, and was the pricing process followed?			
Systems	Did payment, the site and store information hold?			

FROM THE FIELD

From my note after a one-day event. Under marketing plan: "Ensure link not shared until go live". Under product: "NO offline only products are published". Under creative: prepare banners earlier and share the homepage in advance.

None of those is sophisticated. Each was a real problem on the day, and each became a line on the next launch checklist.

TOOL 5 • WITHIN TWO WEEKS OF THE LAST DAY

Lost-sales review

W H E N

**Delivered within two weeks
of the last day**

OWNER

Commercial

OUTPUT

One spreadsheet and a covering note

Value what the event did not sell. This is the most useful single document a retailer can produce after peak, and the one most often left unwritten. It turns "we could have done with more stock" into named lines with a value against each.

Method

- 1 Take the top 30 products in each category.
- 2 Lay actual sales against stock on hand for every day of the event.
- 3 Mark each day a product was out of stock.
- 4 Value the sales lost on those days. A simple basis: the product's average daily sales on the days it was in stock, multiplied by the days it was out, at the event price.
- 5 Send it to the people planning the next event, with the date of that event in the covering note.

Template

PRODUCT	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAYS OUT	LOST SALES VALUE
Sales / stock on hand each day							

Covering note

FIELD	ENTRY
Event and dates	
Total lost sales, and the top ten lines	
Lessons, in plain words	
Date of the next event	
Date of next year's kick-off	

FROM THE FIELD

After the first cycle, the review was one spreadsheet and a short covering note, circulated within days and used for the next event the following week. The lessons list from that year, written down the following July as the first input to the next plan, read:

"COMPLETE PLAN EARLIER" · "ROBUST BACK UP PLAN IN PLACE" · "NUMBER OF KEY LINES OOS EARLY IN CAMPAIGN" · "DEPTH IN HERO ITEMS + GOOD ALTERNATIVES"

The capitals are in the original. Open next year's kick-off with your own version.

Where this comes from

These tools come from my own notes on two cycles of the same event at one retailer, with a marketplace partner carrying a large share of sales. One of the cycles ran during the pandemic. Change them to fit the business: a retailer with no marketplace has one fewer thing to read each morning, and a retailer with 400 stores has several more. The readiness question sits upstream of all of it, in the Golden Quarter playbook at barkingcat.ai/thinking/bulletproof-for-the-golden-quarter.

Diagnosis before solutions.

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