



The 2016 Back-to-School Trends You Need to Know

Written by
Lisa Gevelber

Published
August 2016

Topics
Retail, Mobile,
Government &
Education

Back-to-school shopping is starting earlier every year—and it's increasingly starting on mobile. Here are the latest trends marketers need to know to be there and be useful for shoppers in their micro-moments.

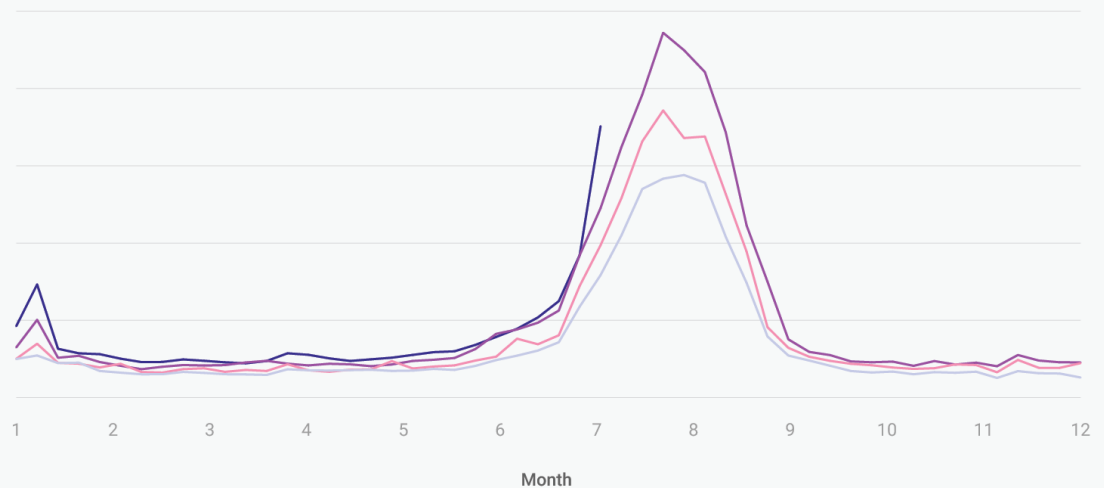
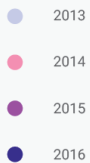
think with **Google**

Back-to-school shopping is one of the year's top spending bonanzas, second only to the holidays. This year, the [National Retail Federation](#) predicts back-to-school shoppers will spend a total of \$75.8 billion. With school supply lists in hand and the latest trends in mind, busy parents are turning to mobile during their [I-want-to-buy moments](#). For retailers, this means giving shoppers ideas and information in their [micro-moments](#)—being there and being useful. To help you stay on trend for back-to-school, we looked at how people are using Google Search and YouTube. Here's what we learned.

The back-to-school customer journey starts earlier than ever

The first step for busy parents facing a long back-to-school shopping list: research. And whether that means deciding [which one's best](#) or [where to buy](#), they're starting earlier than ever before. This year, back-to-school related search queries saw a sharp rise the week of July 11, a full week earlier than last year.¹

Early birds: Back-to-school shoppers searching earlier than previous years.



Source: Google search data, January 2013 - July 2016, United States

As [people shop in micro-moments](#) throughout the day, more of these searches are happening on mobile. In July, three out of five back-to-school searches happened on mobile, and there were 35% more mobile searches than last year.²

In addition to facilitating research, mobile is increasingly [connecting shoppers to stores](#). For back-to-school shoppers, there's strong evidence that searching actually leads to store visits. Consider this: Last August, searches about "back to school" followed by a visit to a department store within a week grew 20% over the previous year.³

This season, watch time for back-to-school videos on YouTube is already up more than 70% YoY

Trending products: specialty backpacks and the reign of Birkenstocks

What brands are making back-to-school shopping lists this year? Let's start with that back-to-school must-have: backpacks. In years past, [Herschel](#) was in. This year, the top five rising backpack trends reflect a wide array of new tastes, from bold to outdoorsy.

[Victoria's Secret's PINK](#) brand backpacks have seen a 1,000% spike in search interest this year over last, making it the top trending brand in the category.⁴ People are also flocking to specialty bag makers: [Sprayground](#) and [Fjällräven](#) (specifically the [Kånken bag](#)) are rising the ranks, while outdoorsy [Kavu](#), a Seattle-based company that makes cross body bags in a variety of styles, is a top brand this season. This year's viral gaming phenomenon Pokémon Go has likely [sparked massive interest](#) in Pokémon-themed backpacks, propelling them to fifth on our list.⁵

Top trending brands and styles for 2016

Source: Google Shopping Data, U.S., Jun.–Jul. 20, 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 20, 2016.

Backpacks:

- 1 PINK backpacks
- 2 Sprayground backpacks
- 3 Kavu backpacks
- 4 Fjällräven Kånken backpacks
- 5 Pokémon backpacks

Shoes:

- 1 Birkenstock
- 2 Nike Jordan
- 3 Chacos
- 4 Under Armour Curry
- 5 Adidas Yeezy Boost

For another back-to-school staple—shoes—some trends are showing surprising staying power. For three years running, Birkenstocks have been a top choice. In fact, interest is up 46% YoY.⁶ Like many categories, shoe trends are highly influenced by celebrities. This year, the Under Armour shoe created for basketball's three-point phenom Stephen Curry is hot, as well as Kanye West's Adidas Yeezy Boost.⁷

When it comes to school supplies, the hot brand this year is [Yoobi](#). Search interest in this colorful kids' stationery has doubled since last July.⁸

In addition to what products people are searching, retailers also want to consider where and how. For example, searches for “bookbag” are 3X higher this year compared to 2015.⁹ This regional term for backpack is especially popular in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Delaware.¹⁰ These kinds of [regional differences](#) can shape how you market the same product in one area versus another.

Kids and YouTube stars: back-to-school trendspotters and trendsetters

Parents may foot the bill, but kids hold sway over the back-to-school shopping cart. In fact, over half of parents say that their child(ren) is/are likely to influence their back-to-school purchases.¹¹ In [I-need-some-ideas](#)

[moments](#), both kids and parents increasingly turn to videos. This season, watch time for back-to-school videos on YouTube is already up more than 70% YoY.¹²

The videos getting a lot of eyeballs this year: DIY and dorm tours. Both genres are trending up from last year.¹³ These videos feature tips and tricks that help students put a personal stamp on trends while saving money. Brands are tapping into the trends: In a [DIY video from Target](#), one of the company's "college stylists" creates a set of smartphone speakers from [plastic cups and washi tape](#)! Speaking of smartphones, 85% of views for back-to-school DIY videos occur on a mobile device.¹⁴

How to win back-to-school shopping moments

Prepare for the second wave. Perhaps preparing for classes after winter break, people also search for back-to-school in January. In fact, this second wave has grown stronger every year since 2013.¹⁵ Use the insights above to prepare for this second shopping wave—and it's never too early to start thinking about back-to-school 2017.

Think mobile. In this mobile-fueled shopping landscape, the retailers who can [be there and be useful](#) for shoppers will win. First, identify the moments that matter to your brand and then provide useful information, like product reviews, tutorials, or quick ways to purchase that are mobile-optimized.

Go omni-channel. The [latest data](#) shows that mobile is connecting shoppers to brands and stores more than ever before. Make sure you're connecting the dots between channels. Brands like [Best Buy](#) and [Target](#) are using mobile to draw customers into stores and seeing a large lift in store visits and sales as a result.

Watch product trends and regional differences. Trends and tastes change faster than ever. Use [Google Trends](#) and our [Shopping Insights tool](#) to get the latest information on how and where consumers are searching.

Sources

- 1,2** Google Search data, U.S., Jul. 2015 and Jul. 2016.
- 3** Google data, U.S., aggregated, anonymized data from a sample of U.S. users that have turned on Location History, from Aug. 2014 and Aug. 2015.
- 4,5,9,10** Google Shopping data, U.S., Jun.–Jul. 20, 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 20, 2016.
- 6** Google Shopping data, U.S., Jun. 2014, Jun.–Jul. 20, 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 20, 2016.
- 7** Google Shopping data, U.S., Jun.–Jul. 20, 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 20, 2016.
- 8** Google Trends, U.S., Jul. 2015 and Jul. 2016.
- 11** Google Consumer Survey, U.S., among online adults aged 18+ who have done or plan to do any back-to-school shopping for their child(ren), n=1,007, Jul. 2016.
- 12** YouTube data, U.S., classification as a "back-to-school" video was based on public data such as headlines and tags, and may not account for every such video available on YouTube, Jun.–Jul. 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 2016.
- 13** YouTube data, U.S., classification as a "back-to-school DIY" video was based on public data such as headlines and tags, and may not account for every such video available on YouTube, Jun.–Jul. 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 2016; YouTube data, U.S., classification as a "dorm tour" video was based on public data such as headlines and tags, and may not account for every such video available on YouTube, Jun.–Jul. 2015 and Jun.–Jul. 2016.
- 14** YouTube data, U.S., classification as a "back-to-school DIY" video was based on public data such as headlines and tags, and may not account for every such video available on YouTube, Jun. and Jul. 2016.
- 15** Google Search data, U.S., Jan. 2013–Jul. 2016.