

A checklist for your annual December holiday shutdown

By [Anton van Heerden](#)

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If you're the owner or manager of small-to-medium business outside the retail and hospitality industries, you're probably looking forward to the annual break.



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Here's a checklist of some of the important things to do before you shut down for the December holidays.

1. Let your customers know when you will be away

Do not assume that your customers will know when you will be closed – send them an email or a text message notifying them about the dates of your holiday shutdown. If relevant, let them know who on your team will be available to help them in case of emergency. If you are an e-commerce business, make sure someone is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the online store.

Brief your team before you send out any customer communications to ensure they are able to plan for the season as well as answer customers' questions about the holiday shutdown.

2. Calculate bonuses if necessary

If you usually pay a 13th cheque, profit sharing or performance bonuses for team members that qualify, do the calculations well before your December pay run. Let your team members know the news - good or bad – ahead of payday. A good payroll solution can assist you to run this process smoothly, especially during the holiday season when everyone's request and pay may differ.

3. Work out leave pay and leave balances

At the end of the year, you should also calculate employees' correct leave pay. To get it right, you must follow the dictates of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA). The law outlines the rights of employees around annual leave and severance or notice pay. Also, ensure that there are no employees who are owed leave or who have built up a huge reserve of leave days.

4. Arrange the skeleton crew

December is a popular time for employees to take leave – it is summer, the kids have long school holidays and the office is usually quiet. While it may suit you to have most employees take their leave during the holiday slowdown, you should also make sure you are not short-staffed.

Ensure there are enough people around to attend to urgent customer requests, answer the phones, look after social media and keep an eye on the business. If you do have a skeleton crew running the show during this time, it might be a great idea to award them with a day of bonus leave or a small gift to show your appreciation.

5. Get ready for the New Year

When you get back to work in January, it is generally a rat race to first meetings, wrapping up key projects from the previous year, or catching up with admin. Ensure that you have a dedicated person to handle admin duties while you work on important tasks like business development. You may also be inundated with requests for loans and advances from employees who are broke after the December holidays. Prepare to answer these requests with a standard policy, whether you are able to help or not.

Remember, January can be as tight a month for your business as it is for your team because you will find yourself waiting for some payments. Be sure to contact people and businesses who owe you money to confirm when they will pay. If you expect a seasonal cash flow crunch, prepare for it by speaking to your bank about an overdraft.

6. Work from the beach

Rather than poring over a spreadsheet this holiday, you could do most of your numbers with a mouse click or screen swipe and spend the rest of the holiday season at the pool. As the global and technology market leader of integrated accounting, payroll and payment systems, we give business builders solutions that enable them to control their businesses from the palm of their hand so they can stay in control from a smartphone wherever they are – even the beach.

7. Start the New Year with a bang

Long standing customers will appreciate a New Year mailer to get them excited for opening specials when you are back in business to kick-start the New Year. This could be an opportunity to rid the business of old stock that did not sell during the holidays. Opening sales are very popular and if you want to attract new business, this could be one of the ways.

ABOUT ANTON VAN HEERDEN

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