

Why and How We Close Buffer For The Last Week Of The Year

I've been fortunate that we've closed down for the last week of the year for the last seven years that I've been at Buffer. We kicked off this at the end of 2016 and have kept up every year since then.

Closing down for the last week of the year is an opportunity to pause and recharge. It's like a reset, except across the whole company. I love telling people about this practice at Buffer because they have so many questions about how we continue to operate while closing down for a week.

As we work with many small businesses and creators who can sometimes struggle with working over the holidays, it feels especially important to share how we're going about this.

So in this post, I'll cover what it means to close down for a week as a business whose customers are always using it, why we do it, and specifically how our largest teams manage this time off while still caring for our product and our customers.

Let's dive in!

What does it mean to close down for a week?

At the end of every year, we close down for the year's final week. The exact definition of "closed down" varies from company to company – some businesses will completely shut down operations while others will only close particular sections of their business.

This gives everyone at the company some extra time to rest, and it creates an environment where no one is worried about missing out on projects or updates while they're offline because we're all offline. We've done this sort of thing before, closing down for an extra long weekend in the summer, and it's always been refreshing for our team.

When I say that we're closed, that means that most of the company is off (I'll elaborate in the next section), we aren't releasing new features or changing our product at all, we aren't publishing new blog posts, and it is intentionally a time of rest.

In our business, creating tools for small businesses and creators building a brand online, this time of year is also reliably slow. So unlike some other industries that may pick up over the holidays, we can lean into rest by closing the company during a naturally slower period.

What does this look like in practice?

For most teams at Buffer, closing for the holidays means a full disconnect. Our two largest teams, Engineering and Customer Advocacy have to create systems where we can still serve our customers and ensure Buffer is operational while also making space for additional rest. So here's how Engineering and Advocacy tackle the week off.

How our Advocacy team handles a week closed

Our Advocacy team is a group of absolute pros who are taking care of our customers. This year, they've helped solve over 60,000 customer support requests with an average first response time of just three hours.

Over the years that we have been closing, they have figured out the right balance to ensure we can still help customers

while also giving our Advocates that extra rest.

To start, we take steps to make this period visible to our customers. They post a clear message stating that we're shut down for the holidays in all the main channels where we communicate with customers. Those include a banner for people who are in Buffer, an auto-reply to customer support email, a pinned tweet on our account, and several other places.

This year, the message reads:

The Buffer team is observing a company shut down between December 24 and January 1.

We are still responding to customer support emails and messages but will take longer than usual to reply. We'll get back to you as quickly as we can. Happy Holidays!

For Advocates, we ask that each person on the team works one full day or two half days in that period. We have 21 people on the Advocacy team, and we'll have two or more people online most days. We don't always have people on December 24th or 25th, or January 1st, and we're okay with that.

The team has in place a clear schedule, expectations when people are online with how to prioritize their work and get back to customers, and guidelines for emergencies. (We have those guidelines in place all the time, but it's always good to review ahead of the holidays.)

How our Engineering team handles a week closed

Similar to Advocacy, for our engineers, we need to have some coverage of engineers who are on call in case something happens.

For Engineering, their break looks different because they are on call, meaning they are available if something breaks, rather than fully online during this time. That means that the load of being on call can be spread among fewer people because

the likelihood of them needing to be online is lower.

The way that the on-call schedule works is that there are several specialized or senior members of the team who are immediately placed in all of the on-call spots. Then we ask for volunteers from the rest of the engineering team to be on-call throughout the week.

In addition to having folks on call, we also do a code freeze before the end of the year. This simply means we stop shipping new code and making changes to Buffer. The goal of this is to increase our confidence that things will go smoothly for the engineers on-call and our Advocacy team.

A few questions from our community about closing down for a week

We reached out on social media to see what questions people had about closing down for a week, and we got a few good questions. Here's our response:

Do clients find this frustrating or ever complain?

We haven't heard major complaints or frustration about this in the past, and if ever things have not gone as planned, we've adjusted our plan for the following year. We make sure to be very transparent that we're taking this time off across our communication channels. We still have our Advocacy team spending some time online and can reply to anything urgent.

Did this impact your bottom line at all?

No, we intentionally choose a slow time for us to be closed. So it's the right time to take a break without any major impact. In addition, since the Advocacy team is still monitoring for urgent customer requests and the Engineering team is on call, we can still jump on any issues that pop up, and our customers still have support.

I'd love to know about the benefits your company has seen and

how it positively impacts employees!

The biggest benefit we've seen from closing down for the holidays is that our team is more rested and refreshed. It's a unique opportunity for everyone at Buffer to take a break, rather than it happening in spots throughout the year. It means the energy levels in the first few weeks of the year are always really high for us. Taking this week off for all of us at once also gives us a greater opportunity to relax because no one needs to think about projects that are moving forward without them or missing out on team communication. After all, we're all offline. This is great for us as a team, which translates into being great for our product and our customers.

Do you take breaks from work or your business, and if so, what's your approach? We'd love to hear from you on Twitter or Discord.

<https://buffer.com/resources/closed-for-the-holidays/>