AI in retail

Global lessons from strategy to storefront

Everyday stories of how retailers are using AI from instant stock replenishment to personalized shopping agents.

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Contents

Foreword

All at once, retailers are reimagining how we shop, how we connect with brands, how supply chains are managed, and how value is created for consumers. At the center of this transformation is Artificial Intelligence (AI) — a technology surrounded by both excitement and skepticism. Can it truly deliver on the promise of revolutionizing retail, or will it remain a buzzword without substance?

At KPMG, we believe the answer lies in how retailers harness AI to create meaningful change — starting with the consumer. Our conversations with retail leaders around the globe, from grocery to luxury, electronics to health and wellness reveal that AI is already helping to improve customer experiences, boost productivity and unlock new efficiencies.

According to the KPMG 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook, 64 percent of sector executives say AI is a top investment priority. Yet many are only enjoying modest, incremental gains, and are still searching for the right approach to maximize impact. To realize this potential, retailers are rethinking how they design customer journeys, manage inventory, set prices, and engage consumers.

This shift calls for collaboration across functions, new operating models, ethical frameworks, and — above all — a willingness to innovate. Business as usual is no longer an option. Reinvention, workforce upskilling, and embracing AI-driven insights will likely define success in this new era.

This report is not another "why" of AI — the evidence is there in terms of advantage it can bring — but is exploring real-world examples of AI in action and considers both immediate opportunities and longer-term transformations. Inside, you'll find benchmarks, practical lessons, and case studies from leading retailers, mapped to each stage of the customer journey. Whether you're looking for inspiration, validation, or a roadmap for transformation, you'll find guidance that is grounded in real-world experience.

Where there was a choice to be optimistic or cautious, we chose optimism. We firmly believe AI can help retailers unlock growth, resilience, and customer-centricity — and we want to show you some of the ways they are doing this today.

> "AI in retail is both the great leveler and the ultimate differentiator: it promises to democratize access to innovation, yet rewards those bold enough to reinvent their business from the ground up. The paradox is clear — while every retailer can harness AI, those who embrace its disruptive potential can truly stand apart. In this new era, success means balancing the certainty of incremental gains with the courage to pursue transformative change."

Isabelle Allen,
Global Head of Consumer, Retail and Leisure
KPMG International

About the paper

This paper draws on both practical examples of AI in retail use from around the world, as well as research and insights from a number of KPMG reports, including the KPMG Global Tech Report, the KPMG 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook, and Intelligent Retail, augmented by the views of highly experienced KPMG retail professionals. We also include several case studies and would like to thank each organization for their contribution.

Retailers are embracing AI at pace

The message from the C-suite is unequivocal: AI is no longer a niche technology project but the central pillar of future growth and competitiveness. The numbers are stark: our research shows that 64 percent of retail CEOs now rank Generative AI as their top investment priority, a clear mandate to embed intelligence across every facet of their operations. This isn't a trend; it's a fundamental realignment of capital and strategy toward building a more resilient, efficient, and customer-centric enterprise.

This surge in investment is not driven by a single objective but by a shared belief that AI can solve the industry's most pressing and diverse challenges.

As retail leaders confirm, the goals range from foundational efficiencies to transformative innovation. For some, the focus is on boosting productivity and streamlining the supply chain. For others, particularly in the luxury space, it's about using AI to elevate brand storytelling and deliver hyper-personalized experiences. For all, it represents a powerful engine for creating new value. This broad consensus creates a clear imperative to move from strategy to execution, which is what the following sections will explore.

In 2024, only **29%** of organizations expected to scale AI use cases; this rises to **42%** in 2025 and is projected to reach **74%** by 2026.

Source: KPMG Consumer & Retail Technology Survey, 2023, 2024, 2025

64% of consumer and retail CEOs say AI is a top investment priority for their business

Source: KPMG Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook 2025

73% of consumer and retail CEOs expect their companies to spend between 10%–20% of their budgets on AI in the next 12 months

Source: KPMG Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook 2025

82% of retail executives believe that retailers who embrace AI will develop a competitive edge over those who do not

Source: Intelligent Retail, KPMG International, 2025

AI adoption and maturity today spans across three stages

Stage 1

Enable

...organizations adopt AI and build AI foundations to capture first wave of productivity

Stage 2

Embed

....AI into processes, products, services and value streams to deliver greater value

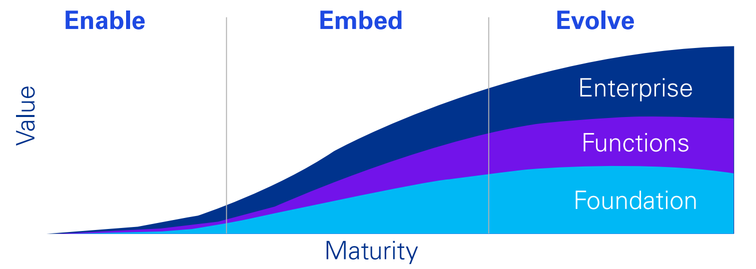
Stage 3

Evolve

...business models and ecosystems with AI/re-imagine your business

Four main catalysts for success change over time and stage but, for most companies today the main drivers are:

1. Path to **value**
2. Aligning **people**
3. Enabling **trust**
4. Access to the right **data and tech**



Level unlocked:

- Re-shape work
- Re-define performance
- Re-wire processes
- Re-inspire experiences

AI across the retail customer journey

The traditional, linear customer journey is obsolete. In its place is a dynamic, fluid experience that begins not with a search, but with conversational inspiration where AI anticipates true intent. From there, the customer becomes a co-creator, exploring and customizing products in real-time. The purchase evolves into an intelligent transaction, often delegated to AI agents, before transforming into dynamic ownership — a perpetual cycle of proactive service. This revolutionary journey does not run on its own. It is built upon three critical foundations: a modern technology and data architecture that provides the engine for intelligence; an empowered workforce that acts as the human co-pilot at every turn; and the unwavering bedrock of trust that governs every interaction and ensures lasting loyalty.

The 4 customer journey stages:

Inspiration and intent:

From searching to conversing

This stage is no longer about a customer typing keywords into a search bar. It's about AI curating inspiration and understanding complex, conversational intent.

Key AI enablers: Conversational discovery, AI-curated feeds, predictive trend analysis.

Exploration and co-creation:

From considering to interacting

The customer is no longer a passive viewer. They are an active participant, using AI to explore products immersively and even co-create variations.

Key AI enablers: AI-powered customization (e.g. "show me this bag in leather"), immersive AR try-ons, AI-generated product narratives.

Intelligent transaction:

From clicking to delegating

The purchase is becoming a frictionless, intelligent, and even automated event. this is where "Agentic AI" makes its dramatic entrance.

Key AI enablers: Agent-initiated commerce ("machine customers"), one-click checkout, predictive fulfillment & logistics.

Dynamic ownership:

From post-purchase to perpetual engagement

The relationship doesn't end at the sale. AI transforms ownership into a dynamic, ongoing service, anticipating needs and building lasting loyalty.

Key AI enablers: Proactive AI support (e.g. "your product needs maintenance"), frictionless returns, personalized loyalty rewards.

The 3 foundational layers

The empowered workforce:
AI as a companion for every employee

At every stage of the customer's journey, a human employee — from the store associate to the marketer — is augmented by AI. They have the data and tools to provide exceptional service, creativity, and support.

The bedrock of trust:
Governance as a strategic advantage

Trust is not a final step; it is the prerequisite for the entire journey. Without a foundation of ethical AI, data privacy, and transparency, customers (and their agents) will not engage.

The technology and data engine:
The foundation for intelligence

Neither the customer journey nor the human experience can exist without a modern, scalable technology and data infrastructure. This is the enterprise-grade engine that powers every AI interaction, from processing vast amounts of unstructured data to delivering real-time insights and enabling seamless commerce.

Case study

Fusing people and machines

Nordstrom

Leading fashion retailer Nordstrom has embraced AI across the business, with a firm eye on measurable results, as Jason Morris, Chief Technology & Information Officer, explains: "We see AI as an enabler for our people and approach it the same way we approach any technology: through the lens of how it can improve the way we serve our customers. We are seeing meaningful increases in productivity across several areas of our business. We've dramatically reduced the time and resources required to write code, can more easily troubleshoot in-store hardware and technical problems with a simple photo sent to a bot, and are evolving our staffing model so teams are increasingly cross-functional. We're also reducing the number of touches required to resolve customer orders and care issues — meaning customers get faster answers and our teams can focus their time where it matters most."

Merchandising has also benefited greatly from AI, reducing the cost of item pipelining. "There was a ton of human effort to map our item attributes and hierarchy on to purchase orders to list them on the site. But AI is proving super-efficient from an accuracy perspective, to determine what those several hundred attributes are, and then write the website copy."

Jason says that Nordstrom has invested in AI to support chat for its HR and recruiting functions in addition to its website and call centers.

"Our customer facing call center is pretty sacred ground for us, because our reputation is built on how we serve our customers, so putting the right experience and product in there with the right level of fidelity is something we've been really careful about," he said. We've found that, when implemented thoughtfully, AI can help our care teams provide more personalized service for our customers and address complex issues with reduced wait times."

Winning hearts and minds

Nordstrom has been exploring the most effective ways to encourage its people to use AI day-to-day, says Jason. "We brought an AI innovator on site for multiple days and had huge cohorts of our engineering teams not just sit and look at slideware, but get hands on keyboards, and bring examples of their work, to start driving the adoption curve. And we brought another provider to work with our legal business team to define the top 2-3 agents we need to create to support that business. We have 90-plus percent adoption from people who went through development enablement training. You truly have to be intentional about the way you support and enable your organization to adopt."

Key learnings

- **Maintain a sharp focus on customer experience — don't let efficiency initiatives undermine service levels**
- **Don't assume everyone will use AI — find opportunities to encourage teams to leverage this technology in their day-to-day work**

From personalization to partnership: redefining the customer experience

"In the evolving landscape of retail, AI should not be considered as merely a tool, but rather as a transformative partner. It offers the power to unlock efficiencies and forge deeper customer connections. Those retailers who seize AI's full potential are likely to be those who blend technological ingenuity with human intuition, with the aim of creating a future where businesses can be both smarter and more resilient."

Duleep Rodrigo,
Head of Consumer & Retail, America's and the US
KPMG in the US

For years, AI's promise in retail was exceptional personalization. Today, that is merely table stakes. The revolution is no longer about suggesting the right product; it's about building a relationship with a new type of customer entirely: the AI agent.

The journey to this new reality is happening in waves. The first wave, AI-driven personalization engines, delivered impressive results — one retailer saw a 30 percent increase in conversion rates from tailored recommendations.[1]

Now, we are in the second wave: conversational discovery. With two-thirds of consumers using AI regularly,[2] and 30 percent of 25–34 year olds in the UK already using it for purchase decisions,[3] the customer's path to purchase no longer starts on a retailer's website, but with a question posed to an AI.

This sets the stage for the third wave and the ultimate destination: Agentic Commerce. This is where your brand must compete not just for the human's emotional loyalty, but for their agent's algorithmic preference. In this world, success is defined by a new set of rules. An AI agent values data quality over brand story, API speed over aesthetic design, and transactional efficiency over immersive experience.

Herein lies the critical leadership challenge. While our research shows 52 percent of retail CEOs see agentic AI as "transformational," the majority still view it through an "assistant" lens for the near future.[4] This gap between acknowledging a revolution and preparing for it is where market leaders will be made or broken. The real partnership to build is not with a tech startup, but with your customer's AI agent. To win its trust, and by extension, your customer's loyalty, you must engineer your business to be the most reliable, transparent, and efficient option — not for a human click, but for a machine's decision.

H-E-B — Hyper-local intelligent retail

H-E-B has evolved from a Texas-based grocer into a hyper-local, multi-service platform integrating food, health, logistics, and community engagement. Its approach helps ensure that every customer interaction, whether online, in-store, or via home delivery, feels personal, relevant, and connected.

AI is embedded throughout the business. Predictive stocking ensures shelves reflect local demand, dynamic pricing responds to market changes, and personalization engines tailor offers to individual shoppers. Its acquisition of Favor Delivery provides last-mile logistics fully integrated into H-E-B's app, enabling customers to move seamlessly from selecting groceries to arranging delivery without switching platforms.

What sets leaders apart

Leaders in customer experience:

- Start with the customer's world, not their own organizational constraints.
- Leverage data responsibly to anticipate needs and personalize at scale.
- Break down silos, integrating channels, systems, and teams.
- Empower employees with tools, authority, and trust.
- Invest in technology that is invisible to the customer but essential to delivering seamless, reliable experiences.

Source: Global Customer Experience Excellence 2025–2026: Redefining excellence in the age of agentic AI, KPMG, 2025

1 Intelligent Retail, KPMG, 2025
2 Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence, KPMG and the University of Melbourne, 2025
3 Q3 Consumer Pulse, KPMG in the UK, 2025
4 KPMG Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook, 2025

> As AI capabilities mature, the conversation will shift from "How do I use AI?" to "How do I redesign my workflow with AI at the center?"

Dr Malina Ngai,
Group CEO, AS Watson Group

Raising the game in electronics customer service

An electronics retailer has introduced a conversational AI assistant that handles customer interactions across the website, mobile app and social media. The assistant addresses queries like product availability, shipping status and warranty information, as well as troubleshooting and setup processes for electronic devices. Critically, the assistant integrates with the retailer's inventory and logistics systems, to give customers real-time updates on stock availability and shipping timelines. It also escalates complex queries to human agents, passing on detailed conversation histories. Customer satisfaction scores have risen by 20 percent within six months of implementation.

Nike's lifestyle ecosystem

The Nike Membership platform unifies customer engagement across channels, retail, mobile, events, and e-commerce. A single data and AI layer enables a consistent, predictive customer experience around fitness, lifestyle, and wellness, with unique features like athlete storytelling to build loyalty. Its suite of digital platforms uses AI to personalize content from workouts, purchases, social engagement, and product interactions, to track performance, and offer coaching and product recommendations, to further drive stickiness.

Checkout-free shopping

German supermarket chain REWE has partnered with AI startup Trigo, to offer checkout-free shopping. With advanced cameras and sensors, the AI-powered system automatically detects products selected by customers, and integrates with payment processing and store operations.

Walmart's end-to-end technology support

Walmart's AI-powered ecosystem brings together commerce, logistics, health, and advertising. Its Walmart Scintilla AI analytics platform gives suppliers real-time retail intelligence to suppliers, which, with its omnichannel platform and AI-enabled inventory management, helps to optimize shelf availability and offer personalized promotions.

Sephora's focus on customer engagement

Sephora leverages value streams that unify online and in-store experiences. AI-based personalization engines recommend products based on browsing history and purchasing patterns, offering seamless suggestions online and in stores. This integration of AI into Sephora's customer journey value stream enhances both customer experience and conversion rates.

> Many retailers are quickly adopting tactical AI to help improve efficiency and outcomes, but the real winners are rethinking their operating model, their route to consumers, their capabilities, their ways of working within their organization and with their suppliers and partners."

Linda Ellett,
UK Head of Consumer, Retail & Leisure,
KPMG in the UK

Case study

Powered by AI, guided by humans

AS Watson's AI story

As one of the world's largest international health and beauty retailers, AS Watson Group is an adopter of AI. Dr Malina Ngai, Group CEO, explains further: "We're using AI for personalized promotions and dynamic pricing. Our recommendation engines suggest products based on customer behavior, which lifts basket size and conversion rates. Hyper-personalization is key. AI curates skincare regimens, sends replenishment reminders, and powers virtual assistants that make online shopping seamless."

To improve its margins, AI is also helping AS Watson generate demand forecasts and automated replenishment, to reduce overstock and markdowns, and optimize logistics routes to cut delivery costs. "Gen AI has been embedded into all functions" says Malina.

"Tailormade priority applications per function not only boost productivity, but also enhance collaboration, speed-to-decision, and creativity."

Measurement is a priority, to ensure broader enterprise value, by tracking return on investment (ROI) in AI projects, and continuous monitoring of member engagement, active rate, sales growth, and cost-to-serve reductions.

Evolving with discipline

"The next evolution will be agentic AI", continues Malina, "with systems that don't just assist but actively re-engineer processes for greater efficiency and impact. This will help us move from incremental gains to transformative change.

As these capabilities mature, the conversation will shift from "How do I use AI?" to "How do I redesign my workflow with AI at the center?""

According to Malina, AI is not a "plug-and-play" solution that instantly transforms the business. "AI success depends on data quality, integration, and very importantly, cultural adoption. It's not magic — it's a disciplined process of aligning AI with business goals and workflows. Direct purchasing on Gen AI platforms could grow quickly, but it depends on how ecosystems evolve. Retailers can stay relevant by integrating with these platforms and offering unique experiences that strengthen customer loyalty. We're already starting to adjust our digital content for greater visibility on AI platforms, ensuring our products and brand surface in AI-driven recommendations."

Putting people at the center

Malina sees AI partners acting as workplace personal assistants — helping colleagues with productivity, collaboration, and creativity. "These agents will be incredibly powerful, taking on routine tasks, enabling smarter teamwork, and even sparking new ideas, making every colleague more effective and innovative."

AS Watson's strategy is to move as one team globally, with a unified approach to adoption and change management, supported by consistent training, shared best practices, and collaborative platforms — so everyone learns together: "Gen AI is not about replacement; it's about partnership. Our vision is to "Grow as One" — where technology elevates human potential. Our Gen AI Sprint Programme helps employees understand how AI can support their role, with training for all levels, a growing network of Gen AI champions, and sharing of success stories and everyday wins."

Ultimately, as Malina explains, it's all about building confidence in AI and opening minds to its potential. "Great leaders make AI human-centric. Retail wins when machines and minds collaborate. Start small by making AI accessible to everyone, not just a few specialists or one department. Begin with simple tools that help colleagues in their daily work — things that save time or make tasks easier."

"And be bold in creating a culture of collaboration around AI. Encourage cross-functional projects, open sharing of ideas, and make AI part of how the whole organization works — not a siloed initiative. When people see AI as a partner, not a threat, adoption accelerates, and impact multiplies. The future of retail will be powered by AI, but guided by humans. Success will come from blending machine intelligence with human intuition to create experiences that feel personal, not programmed."

"Great leaders make AI human-centric. Retail wins when machines and minds collaborate. Start small by making AI accessible to everyone, not just a few specialists or one department. Begin with simple tools that help colleagues in their daily work — things that save time or make tasks easier."

Dr Malina Ngai,
Group CEO, AS Watson Group

Key learnings

- **Design workflows with AI at the center, aligned with business goals**
- **Encourage cross-functional projects and sharing of ideas and develop a network of AI champions**

Boosting efficiency: creating a more intelligent operation

While the promise of AI can seem futuristic, its most immediate and powerful impact lies in creating a more agile, data-driven, and efficient retail operation. According to our research, increased efficiency and productivity are the top benefits retail leaders are targeting with their AI investments. This is not about replacing human expertise, but augmenting it with intelligent tools that turn insight into action at unprecedented speed.

The core of this transformation is the creation of a "digital twin" of the retail value chain — a real-time, virtual model of your entire operation, from demand signals to last-mile delivery. AI acts as the intelligent engine for this model.

For example, AI-driven demand forecasting, which nearly half (48 percent) of US retailers are already developing,[5] becomes the digital twin's predictive eyes, allowing planners to anticipate stock requirements with far greater accuracy. This reduces waste, lowers inventory costs, and ensures products are where customers want them.

This intelligent model extends across the network. Predictive analytics optimize delivery routes, suggesting smarter journeys for human drivers. AI-powered chatbots handle routine return inquiries, freeing up service teams to manage more complex customer issues. In the warehouse, AI agents help orchestrate fulfillment by recommending optimal picking paths and scheduling courier pickups, dramatically improving efficiency while keeping human managers in control.

By connecting these AI-powered functions, retailers can move from reacting to historical data to proactively managing their business based on a live, intelligent view of reality. The result is a highly efficient, customer-centric operation where AI handles the complexity of data analysis and routine tasks, empowering teams to focus on what they do best: making smart, strategic decisions that drive innovation and growth.

Top benefits of implementing AI

Source: KPMG 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook

> **All our operations are AI-assisted, including product and supplier master data management, sales forecasting in stores, demand projection, warehouse management, and assortment optimization and pricing, which brings greater accuracy and consistency."**
>
> Large European retailer

[5] KPMG IHL Survey, KPMG in the US, 2025

Case study

Leading from the top

Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail Limited (ABFRL)

As one of India's major fashion retailers, ABFRL is a hugely complex organization with more than 4600 stores across the nation, as well as a thriving e-commerce business. CDIO Praveen Shrikhande says, with more than 50,000 SKUs, it's increasingly challenging to make the right product available at the right place at the right time: "It's not humanly possible to do this, given the complexity involved with a large number of variables that potentially impact demand. We, therefore are actively embracing AI, including Gen AI to help drive our supply chain planning.

"In fashion, cataloging is a big use case, especially for e-commerce, where you need to catalog the product, color, size, style and so on. We have AI algorithms which take the visual images, either photo shoot images or AI rendered, and directly extract visual attributes and generate product descriptions. So the whole process of cataloging has been automated."

Most of Aditya Birla's designers have started using various Gen AI tools, helping to significantly improve productivity. Internally, AI agents are being used in back-office functions like finance, source-to-pay, and HR, including onboarding and talent management.

Encouraging AI usage

Praveen is a passionate believer in leading from the top to ensure widespread AI adoption: "Implementation of technology is often seen as an IT project, but AI is not a specific outcome project. It's something you have to implement, iterate, learn, and reiterate, where you get the value over a period of time. And, unless there's an active involvement from the end-user functions as well as the technology teams, it's very difficult to succeed. So executive sponsorship is very important, working closely with the business function."

Although he appreciates the value of agentic AI, Praveen doesn't think it will replace humans entirely: "People may start using more conversational interfaces to do their shopping, but fashion buyers have very niche tastes, and their purchases are often emotional rather than purely rational. Shoppers browse products available, either online or in stores, and decide what they like and buy."

Key learnings

- **Automated cataloging can power a fast-moving omnichannel business**

Case study

Reshaping grocery shopping in Kenya through AI-powered data analytics

JAZA

JAZA is an ambitious, entrepreneurial and fast-growing chain of discount supermarkets in Kenya, aiming to disrupt the country's grocery market via a digital-first strategy. According to Founder Willy Kimani, one of the company's key strengths is its reliance on data: "We use AI to constantly analyze market data, making real-time price comparisons, and scrutinizing customers' every shopping decision. This enables us to adapt to consumer needs quickly, personalize our communications, and ensure inventory and logistics are closely aligned with market demand. And because we understand our customers intimately, we can tailor promotions and increase basket size."

In addition to driving a superior customer experience, AI systems can also identify operational challenges like energy-efficient electricity usage in stores, and optimization of truck routes, bringing substantial savings. "Because our stores sync with our head office and our centralized warehouse, replenishment is automated" says Willy. "Data informs everything we do, including marketing campaigns and locations for our rapidly expanding store network. As a discount store, we major on price — and it's our efficiencies that help us keep our prices low and keep our customers' happy."

Key learnings

- **Retail start-ups can gain competitive advantage by building connected AI/technology infrastructure from scratch**

Empowering employees: creating the augmented workforce

The true potential of AI in retail is not about replacing people but about augmenting their talent. The goal is to create a new class of 'bionic' employee, equipped with insights that elevate their roles and unlock value. The data shows leaders are seizing this opportunity: 73 percent are already redesigning roles to create a symbiotic partnership between their people and intelligent technology.[6]

This transformation goes far beyond simply automating routine tasks. It's about bestowing new capabilities. Consider the store associate: traditionally armed with their expertise and a product scanner, they are now being equipped with AI tools that provide real-time access to a customer's entire purchase history, preferences, and predictive recommendations. They are no longer solely a sales clerk; they are a high-value client advisor. Similarly, AI transforms merchants into predictive trend-spotters, analyzing global data to identify the next hit product before it even emerges.

From adoption to co-creation

Creating this augmented workforce requires moving beyond a simple "training" mindset to one of co-creation. The most innovative retailers are not just pushing new tools onto their teams; they are inviting employees into the design process. By involving frontline staff in workshops to help shape the AI solutions they will use, they ensure the technology is intuitive, effective, and enthusiastically adopted. This approach truly puts people at the center of change, turning apprehension into active partnership.

Ultimately, the battle for customer loyalty will be won on the retail floor and in the design studio, not in the data center. As AI technology becomes more accessible, the retailer that best empowers its people — turning employees into strategic, data-savvy partners — will help build the competitive advantage: a human advantage.

"We're trying to link AI initiatives to our core priorities — customer experience, team member enablement and operational efficiency. This means focusing on solutions that augment staff productivity, streamline communications, and automate routine tasks."

Stijn Casneuf,
Director, Data and AI Automation, DFI Retail Group

In a survey of senior consumer and retail executives in Canada,

92% **commented that productivity gains from Gen AI could ultimately help reduce employee stress and burnout.**

AI agent fully automates retail returns, driving faster customer service and scale

KPMG in Canada developed and deployed an AI-powered agent that fully automates the in-store returns process for a large, multinational retailer. Built using the Salesforce Agentforce platform capabilities, the solution delivers faster customer service while unlocking immediate operational value. The AI agent eliminates the need for human intervention, reducing the return resolution time for customers from several days to just minutes. Beyond the immediate gains, it has provided a strategic roadmap to address the company's people, process and technology considerations for integrating AI agents into core customer service operations at scale. It also includes a full rollout plan for implementing retail return agents across its North American customer contact centers.

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Case study

Mercado Libre's quest to democratize AI

Mercado Libre, one of Latin America's leading e-commerce and fintech companies, operates in a region with a complex tax and business landscape. Consequently, the company sees AI as a powerful accelerator for productivity and decision-making. Fernanda Nakamura, Tax Transformation Senior Manager, explains: "We have been working with AI solutions to reduce operational activities and structure data for analysis, thereby consolidating huge volumes of information into a single, accessible source of knowledge to optimize AI usage. For example, due to our complex tax scenario, exacerbated by the current Tax Reform in Brazil, we were required to evaluate more than 100 processes across different business areas in a very short time. AI proved to be an incredible accelerator for this work."

AI agents are increasingly helping Mercado Libre's analysts understand and organize data, to assist finance professionals with their decision making, and driving efficiency. This is neither an easy nor a short journey. Crucially, AI usage is spreading across the organization.

"We believe that the day-to-day use of AI should be accessible for all employees, in order to really impact our business. This means giving access not only to executives and IT teams, but also to staff and business analysts" says Fernanda.

By taking this approach, the company has created an internal community where employees can share knowledge and collaborate, and harness AI to make smarter decisions and drive innovation. The company is actively developing AI-powered personal assistants and the tax team has rolled out AI training sessions to employees from Brazil, Argentina, and other countries in just the past two months.

Mercado Libre is embedding AI in both customer-facing and back-office operations — offering smart assistance, personalized recommendations, logistics optimization, and financial reconciliation. For Fernanda, the real differentiator isn't just scaling AI solutions, but ensuring every team member can leverage them. "Innovation is part of our DNA. By embracing AI as a catalyst for growth, we empower our people with new skills and strengthen our competitive leadership."

100+ business processes mapped and analyzed using AI.

Key learnings

Democratizing access, investing in training, and embedding AI in everyday work brings rewards — don't treat it as a technology project.

Case study

DFI is heading for the moment of AI impact

Asian retailer DFI Retail Group operates a portfolio of well-known brands across health and beauty, convenience, food, home furnishings, and restaurants. According to Stijn Casneuf, Director for Data and AI Automation, the company is taking a highly strategic approach to AI: "We're quite intentional in terms of what AI means for us from a business, consumer, and team member perspective. Rather than jump onto the AI boat and start to do 10,000 things, we're trying to link it back to the core of our strategy, aligning AI initiatives to our core priorities — customer experience, team member enablement and operational efficiency. This means focusing on solutions that augment staff productivity, streamline communications, and automate routine tasks."

"There's a sharp focus on financials" Stijn continues. "We need to understand what AI means for us as an organization, and make sure we only spend in areas that bring value. So, we've instituted an AI governance forum that actively validates use cases. I like to call this 'proof of value' — as opposed to proof of concept — to ensure that it's worth the investment."

Data is the critical element within AI, and DFI has reviewed its entire data covenant and data policies, with an active program to address and restructure its data to be future-fit.

As Stijn notes "Typically, AI doesn't perform badly because it's bad AI; it's because the data quality isn't there. It's why we have data privacy, data governance, and AI governance boards to make sure that every solution that we build or procure really follows those standards. As a data-driven organization, we want to take control of our data as a strategic asset."

AI initiatives are validated through an AI governance forum focused on 'proof of value' — not just proof of concept.

Putting people first

Lakshmi Murthy, DFI's Head of Business Transformation, explains the importance of people in the AI equation: "It's vital to know the skills we need to bring into the organization, from an upskilling perspective, and what that means for the jobs of the future. But, if AI is doing a lot of the work traditionally performed by entry-level joiners, how do you create a healthy pipeline or a healthy career flow for people to then gain that industry expertise?"

This degree of care and thoughtfulness extends to customers as well, as Lakshmi explains: "I think it's in our culture to only do things that favor the consumer. So, we won't ask for data that we don't need, or necessarily use facial recognition, if it doesn't fit the business."

Stijn Casneuf is excited about the future of agentic AI: "We're still trying to learn what it truly, truly means to us — I don't think anyone in retail has fully defined this yet. Other industries may have tested AI ahead of retail, but I see this as a positive, as we can leapfrog ahead with their learning. In the next 18 months we could be heading for that moment of impact for retail, enabling us to take big steps forward."

Key learnings

- **Validate AI initiatives through an AI governance forum focused on 'proof of value' — not just proof of concept**
- **Invest in data privacy, data governance, and AI governance boards to assure data reliability and trust**

Case study

Using AI-powered virtual assistants to enhance customer service

Electronics retailer

"Our ambition is to apply more AI technologies to different departments within the company. The logistics department can initiate the use of a smart inventory management system, moving away from traditional Excel spreadsheets for statistics [and] the sales department can leverage AI algorithms to optimize promotional activities." Director (large retailer) — China.

Conversational AI

The retailer introduced a conversational AI assistant powered by natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning to handle customer interactions across its website, mobile app and social media channels. The virtual assistant can address common queries, such as product availability, shipping status and warranty information, while also guiding customers through troubleshooting and setup processes for electronic devices.

One key innovation is the assistant's ability to integrate with the retailer's inventory and logistics systems. Customers can receive real-time updates on stock availability and shipping timelines, significantly reducing frustration and increasing transparency. Additionally, the virtual assistant escalates complex queries to human agents with a seamless handoff, including detailed conversation histories to ensure continuity in service.

The retailer also incorporated sentiment analysis into the assistant's functionality, enabling it to detect customer frustration and prioritize such cases for immediate resolution by live agents. This has improved overall customer satisfaction scores by 20 percent within the first six months of implementation.

Exceptional ROIs

The impact of this single AI-powered use case has been profound. The retailer reduced customer service response times by 40 percent, cut operational costs by 25 percent through automation and enhanced customer loyalty by providing efficient, round-the-clock support.

- Improved overall customer satisfaction by 20 percent within 6 months
- Reduced customer service response time by 40 percent
- Cut operational costs by 25 percent
- Enhanced customer loyalty by round-the-clock support

Key learnings

Integrate AI assistants with inventory and logistics systems, to deliver real-time updates on stock availability and logistics

Building AI trust starts with clear governance

AI is the ultimate double agent — on one hand, it gives retailers the power to craft immersive, hyper-personalized experiences that captivate customers and streamline operations. On the other hand, smarter tools empower consumers to hunt for better deals, compare products instantly and align purchases with their personal values — all with just a few clicks. This duality raises the stakes for trust, transparency, and ethical use. But this duality is evolving. It's no longer just human vs. machine — it's agent vs. agent. Soon, a retailer's pricing and recommendation AI may negotiate directly with a customer's personal shopping AI. In this new economy, which brand's AI will the consumer's agent trust? Governance is no longer just about protecting data; it's about programming your agents to be transparent, fair, and trustworthy negotiators. Building AI trust starts with clear governance.

When asked about the most pressing concern of AI implementation, 56 percent of CEOs surveyed for the KPMG 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook[7] identified ethical challenges as significant. As AI becomes more embedded in customer-facing applications such as personalization, pricing, and recommendations, navigating issues such as bias, transparency, and consumer trust is becoming increasingly complex. Retailers need to ask themselves: How do we balance deep personalization with earning and maintaining customer trust?

Consumer trust: opportunity and risk

Recent research by KPMG and the University of Melbourne, Australia shows that more than half of consumers (46 percent) remain wary about trusting AI. Many lack a clear understanding of how AI works — 61 percent have no AI training, and 48 percent report limited knowledge.[8] Consumers are increasingly using AI-powered tools, but may not fully comprehend their implications. This can lead to autonomous AI agents making decisions that are not always in the consumer's best interests. Agents present both opportunities for engagement and risks of misunderstanding or mistrust if AI-driven experiences are not transparent or user-friendly.

From responsibility to opportunity: winning on trust

For years, retailers have treated data governance as a defensive necessity, navigating regulations like GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)and CCPA (California Consumer Privacy Act) to avoid risk. The rise of AI demands a radical shift in this mindset. Trust is no longer a compliance check-box; it is a core product feature. In an era where a customer's personal AI agent will choose which brands to interact with, proactive and transparent governance becomes a powerful strategic differentiator.

The new responsibility isn't just to protect data, but to build systems that are demonstrably fair and explainable, earning the confidence of both human customers and their digital counterparts. Retailers must focus on maintaining data safety and privacy, and ensuring that AI meets appropriate ethical standards. This includes proactively educating consumers about AI-driven features and benefits, supporting AI literacy, and providing accessible information to build confidence and loyalty.

> “The unification of customer data is one of the key challenges. For retailers like us, data sources are diverse, and the channels for obtaining data are numerous, including online shopping platforms, physical store POS systems, social media, mobile applications, and more. These data sources have different formats and structures, making integration extremely complex.”
>
> Director,
> Large retailer (Grocery) — China

[7] KPMG 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook

[8] Gillespie, N., Lockey, S., Ward, T., Macdade, A., & Hassed, G. (2025). Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025. The University of Melbourne and KPMG

A robust governance model, anchored in sound AI principles, policies, and procedures, is now essential. This means investing in enterprise-grade data platforms that support both structured and unstructured data, and establishing frameworks that prioritize data quality, integration, security, and long-term scalability. Governance, ethics, and accurate data are critical to unlocking AI's transformative potential and maintaining stakeholder confidence.

Guiding people on AI usage

Employees are also at the heart of responsible AI adoption. Many workers are turning to free, public AI tools rather than employer-provided options, which can lead to inappropriate and non-transparent use. Governance and training often lag behind adoption, increasing the risk of data leakage, errors, and reputational harm. Employees need clear policies, robust training, and ongoing communication to use AI confidently and responsibly.

Walmart's responsible AI at scale

Walmart has introduced its Responsible AI Pledge to guide ethical deployment of AI across its business. The pledge includes six commitments: transparency in explaining how data and technology are used; security through advanced measures and continuous review; privacy protection for sensitive information; bias evaluation and mitigation in AI tools; accountability, ensuring AI is managed by people; and customer-centric practices, including measuring satisfaction and acting on feedback. Walmart uses AI to personalize experiences, improve operations, and enhance supply chain efficiency, while reinforcing trust and safety as innovation accelerates.[9]

H&M Group's guiding principles for responsible AI

H&M Group has established a comprehensive Responsible AI Framework built on nine guiding principles: Focused, Beneficial, Fair, Transparent, Governed, Collaborative, Reliable, Respecting Human Agency, and Secure.

All AI projects are evaluated using a 'Checklist for Responsible AI', helping teams identify potential risks and ensure alignment with company values. To further embed ethical thinking, H&M Group created the Ethical AI Debate Club — a forum where employees discuss fictional scenarios and ethical dilemmas, preparing the organization for future developments that could impact the fashion industry.[10]

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For many retailers, developing AI capability across both senior management and frontline teams is critical to building a future-ready workforce. By pairing ethical AI governance with practical, business-focused training, retailers can ensure AI delivers real impact — whether that's anticipating customer needs, improving operational agility, or unlocking new growth opportunities.”

Anson Bailey,
Head of Consumer & Retail,
Asia Pacific,
KPMG in China

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[9] Walmart Makes Public Commitment to Ethical Use of AI, Retail TouchPoints, 23 October 2023, https://www.retailtouchpoints.com/topics/data-analytics/ai-machine-learning/walmart-makes-public-commitment-to-ethical-use-of-ai

[10] H&M's AI Playbook: The Tech Strategy Behind Its Transformation, CTO Magazine, 20 November 2025, https://ctomagazine.com/ai-at-hm-the-tech-strategy-behind-its-transformation/

Case study

How technology underpins Lidl and Kaufland Asia's value chain

Lidl International's sourcing arm Lidl & Kaufland Asia (LKA) is building a predictive, intelligent network to transform its entire value chain. Lennart Richter, Chief Financial Officer, Lidl & Kaufland Asia, says AI and big data analytics are their most powerful tools. "We are investing in Deep Multi-Tier Mapping to identify vendors across all supply chain tiers, far beyond our immediate partners. We want to instantly spot fundamental shifts in raw material flows, emerging capacity constraints, or regional instability. This will allow us to actively identify and onboard new vendors to build a robust and diversified supply chain before a shock hits."

When an external event does occur, the AI assesses risk by synthesizing geopolitical and environmental data, flagging specific low-tier suppliers — and consequently, end-products — that will be impacted, enabling immediate action. The mapping also informs ESG and compliance.

LKA is integrating AI tools into transactional and managerial processes, as Bastian Grafe, Vice President, Lidl & Kaufland Asia, explains: "We identify high-volume, repetitive tasks that can be handled by intelligent automation, which liberates our teams to focus entirely on high-value strategic work and market engagement. We also apply advanced analytics on historical data and market benchmarks to inform our negotiation strategies."

Product development is another beneficiary of technology. Digital twins, paired with 3D software, create a virtual replica of the product and its production line, to simulate manufacturing processes and test performance before committing to costly physical prototyping. Concurrently, Generative AI enables rapid, automated design and material combinations, drastically shortening the product lifecycle and hastening speed-to-market.

Overcoming data concerns

Lennart Richter recognizes that AI models are only as good as the data they are trained on: "Historical purchasing and supplier data often carry systemic biases that AI can learn and amplify. It may cause the AI to unfairly exclude emerging or diverse suppliers by assigning them higher risk scores, steering our teams toward more costly or less innovative incumbent options."

Furthermore, AI uses highly sensitive information like pricing, contract terms, and supplier financials. The collection, storage, and cross-border transfer of this data raise significant privacy, security and compliance risks. LKA applies robust security protocols to prevent data misuse or breaches, while ensuring transparent AI decision logic and critical human oversight.

Bastian Grafe emphasizes the importance of trust in AI and foundational readiness: "We understand that AI is fundamentally reliant on high-quality input; therefore, the groundwork must be done to establish a solid foundation of data integrity. Our recent large-scale data lake project consolidates all disparate data points across the business into one unified data platform, to counter the risk of inaccurate outputs and inherent bias at source. Our investment in a unified data foundation, backed by industry-leading security, ensures we can scale AI deployment with confidence, maximizing value while mitigating ethical and operational risk."

Key learnings

- **Deep AI-powered mapping brings supply chain transparency for early identification of disruption, enabling fast action**
- **A solid foundation of data integrity enables retailers to scale AI deployment with confidence**

Case study

Inspiring data-driven retail — T2

T2 is a chain of specialty tea shops with stores in Australia, Singapore and New Zealand. The company is integrating AI into its operations, as Managing Director Christelle Young explains: "Linear optimization is the most undervalued algorithm out there. Take our pricing and promotions, where AI has helped us get a better depth and frequency, leading to a significant increase in average unit price. The algorithm also lets us have financial and supply chain forecasts sing the same song together, which is vastly more efficient and accurate for replenishment, cutting stockouts."

AI forecasting also ensures T2 has the right number of people at each store to meet demand, as well as bringing relevant products physically closer together in the distribution center, reducing the walking distance and speeding up throughput.

Christelle is excited about T2's new 'brand bot': "It understands our tone of voice, our strategy, and our brand codes. You can ask whether a marketing proposal is 'on strategy', and gain ideas for campaigns, including copywriting for both external and internal communications. And with our retail bot, you can find out stock status in different locations and get instant answers to any question on policies and procedures, such as refunds."

Spreading the word

T2 has carried out full training for its workforce on how to create and work with agents, and educated the entire leadership team through a program on data for decision makers. Data and analytics has been embedded into employees' goals structure, to encourage an experimentation mindset.

"As a relatively smaller business, we have less red tape, which enables us to trial technology faster" says Christelle. "You can't start with a perfect world. You can actually start with Excel, create some value and reinvest that value back into the infrastructure as opposed to the other way around."

"Once one part of the organization starts using AI, it spreads its excitement to other functions: "Then all of a sudden they're promoting it throughout the entire organization and the finance business partner is talking to the marketing team, because they've done a proof of concept, seen the benefits, and wants to pass on the learning."

Key learnings

Smaller retail businesses can trial AI faster, create value and build infrastructure around early use cases

What's next: preparing for the agentic revolution

Retailers continue to invest heavily in AI, with 68 percent of CEOs surveyed for our 2025 Consumer & Retail CEO Outlook expecting to see a return on this investment within 1–3 years. The ultimate promise of AI is not just to optimize the present but to create a fundamentally new commercial fabric. As retailers look to secure a return on their AI investments, the greatest opportunity — and threat — lies in the rise of Agentic AI. This requires moving beyond today's best practices and preparing for a future where your primary customer may not be human.

Success will depend on mastering six strategic imperatives:

01 **Redefine "value" for a dual audience:**
Retailers must now serve two customers: humans who value experience, and their AI agents who value data. Your strategy must explicitly define what a "valuable experience" is for a machine — prioritizing API speed, data quality, and frictionless transactions.

02 **Develop a new scorecard:**
Yesterday's metrics are insufficient. Leaders must create a new dashboard to measure success in this new ecosystem, tracking KPIs like "agent conversion rate," "API uptime," and your brand's "trust rating" within third-party agent platforms.

03 **Build for bots first:**
The future of your digital presence is to become an "agent-native" channel. This means prioritizing a fast, clean, and well-documented API that machine customers can interact with seamlessly. Your human-facing website will become the secondary interface.

04 **Treat your data as a product:**
Your enterprise data is no longer just an internal asset. It is now a product you serve to external agents. If your product, inventory, and pricing data is not impeccably structured and machine-readable in real-time, your brand will be invisible in the agentic economy.

05 **Engineer for trust in a machine-to-machine world:**
Governance is no longer just about human trust. Your AI must be programmed to be a fair and transparent negotiator with your customer's AI agent. This requires investing in Explainable AI (XAI) to ensure your pricing and recommendations can win in machine-to-machine interactions.

06 **Cultivate machine-customer strategists:**
The critical new role your organization needs is a leader focused entirely on your "machine-customer" channel. This strategist will own the roadmap for how your brand shows up, competes, and wins within the agent-powered ecosystems of the future.

> "Retail leaders are preparing for the next generation of customers, but the most disruptive new customer isn't a generation at all — it's an AI agent. The central question is no longer just 'what do our human shoppers want?' but also 'what does their agent require to do business?'"
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> **Martin Sokalski,**
> US AI Leader,
> Consumer & Retail,
> KPMG in the US

How KPMG can help retailers win in the age of AI

The journey to becoming an AI-powered enterprise requires more than just technology; it demands a new vision for strategy, culture, and execution. KPMG firms can help retailers move from ambition to action, working with you to accelerate value.

AI strategy and program stand-up

We help you define a vision that goes beyond incremental efficiency. We work with you to build a broad-ranging AI strategy, a modern operating model, and a robust governance framework that is designed to turn trust into a strategic asset.

AI change enablement and workforce shaping

Technology is only half the answer. We can help you cultivate your augmented workforce, co-creating adoption programs, shaping new career paths, and upskilling teams, all of which can turn people into a powerful and enthusiastic drivers of innovation.

Functional AI transformation

KPMG professionals bring deep functional experience to help you re-imagine your business, transforming both your customer-facing front office and your essential back-office operations. We can help you evolve retail, marketing and sales into engines for hyper-personalized, 1-to-1 customer engagement. Simultaneously, we can advise on how you can re-imagine your back office (finance, procurement, HR, IT, etc.). Example includes empowering finance with self-learning forecasting models and agents and transforming IT by using AI to modernize infrastructure and platforms, automate operations, and accelerate software development. Our approach is seeks to ensure that AI is not siloed, but rather it can become the connective tissue or intelligent operating system across your entire organization.

AI technology implementation and integration

A bold vision requires a robust foundation. Our technical specialists can help you design, build, and integrate the scalable data platforms, APIs, and AI technologies needed to connect your enterprise and power your new capabilities — building the engine for your intelligent operation.

Trusted AI

We can help you embed ethics, transparency, and fairness into the core of your AI systems. Our frameworks are designed not just for compliance, but to help build the deep stakeholder confidence needed to win the trust of both human and machine customers.

Bespoke AI solution and product deployment

When off-the-shelf isn't enough, we can co-create custom AI solutions to help solve your unique challenges. This includes building models for intelligent forecasting, pricing & trade promotions, and preventing contract leakage; empowering teams with KPMG's retail solutions.

The question is no longer 'if' AI will transform retail, but 'who' will lead it. The journey requires not just investment, but courage. We help you build that courage and accelerate the path to value.

Further reading

- **Intelligent retail** — Intelligent retail
- **Agentic AI** Agentic AI advantage: Unlocking next-level value
- **CEE** Global Customer Experience Excellence (CEE) 2025–2026
- **Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025** — Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025

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