

NRF '26 RETAIL'S BIG SHOW

JAVITS CENTER


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COMMERCE

Recap Report

January 2026

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NRF '26: Capitalizing on the AI in 'Retail'

Six key themes from retail's annual blockbuster event, where agentic commerce and other forms of AI activation basically stole the show.

"If you haven't noticed, every single exhibitor at NRF is an AI company."

Publicis Groupe Chief Commerce Strategy Officer **Jason Goldberg** wasn't exaggerating too much when he made that comment during his closing keynote at NRF '26 earlier this month. In fact, he wasn't the only speaker at this year's event to make that tongue-in-cheek observation.

Clearly not all of the 1,000-odd exhibitors at "Retail's Big Show" in New York were specialists in artificial intelligence. And not every speaker on the event's lengthy conference agenda focused on AI as a topic. But it certainly seemed that way for many of the roughly 40,000 retail practitioners in attendance.

No, global retailing as seen through the lens of NRF '26 did not completely revolve around AI: the topic of reverse logistics earned its own distinct companion event this year. And in-store retail media again had its own one-day side conference, sponsored by digital signage specialist **Stratacache**. But AI was pervasive throughout those discussions as well.

And we all know why: because "it's a tool that can impact almost anything," as Goldberg noted in his keynote. "There are lots of improvements to supply chain, staffing, order management, and product merchandising that AI efficiencies can dramatically help."

Naturally, the AI activation creating the greatest amount of buzz was agentic search, thanks in large part to an earth-shattering announcement from Google on the show's first day, and then follow-up news from Apple that was only slightly less ground-shaking.

Google unveiled an open-standard [Universal Commerce Protocol](#) that can work across individual agents to assist the complete shopper journey, naming **Walmart**, **Target**, **Shopify**, **Etsy**, and other retail and ecommerce leaders as co-developers. Apple then unveiled that it will adopt a customized version of Google's Gemini agentic platform to fuel its consumer technology.

"Think about what that means. Agentic commerce is not, 'Hey, Google, order a new ingredient for my kid's lunch.' Agentic commerce is, 'Hey, Siri, never let me run out of ingredients for my kid's lunch again,'" Goldberg said.

Here are six key themes from this year's event — all now "powered by" AI to some degree. ▶



1. The Agents Have Arrived

Extrapolated traffic data from July 2025 had already positioned ChatGPT as the 11th largest U.S. ecommerce site — and since then the agentic search engine has grown exponentially and added actual ecommerce functionality. (Note: news of paid advertising didn't break until a week after the show.) Shopify merchants have experienced a 14x increase in orders from agentic platforms in the last year, according to **Harley Finkelstein**, the ecommerce platform's president.

"This isn't the future. This is already happening," said Goldberg in his keynote, as he explored the rapid pace of change occurring in agentic commerce (see page 10 for more).

Industry, technology, and cultural conditions are ripe for this retail transformation, explained **Kiri Masters**, industry analyst with the **Retail Media Breakfast Club**, who compared it to the landmark shift from store clerk order fulfillment to customer self-service in the early 20th century (at a Piggly Wiggly grocery store in Memphis, for retail trivia fans out there). Agentic commerce can similarly be viewed as a move to "cognitive self-service," she suggested.

And now Google's Universal Commerce Protocol could be poised to align what — from the consumer's perspective — seemed to be heading toward a fragmented, agentic platform free-for-all. "It's literally the flip of a switch and we'll be connected to all of them," marveled **Ben Francis**, CEO & Founder of **Gymshark**.

Retailers need to develop strategies that will let them "remain the locus" of consumer transactions, advised **Leora Kelman**, Managing Director and Partner at **Boston Consulting Group**. Evidence of that has been recent moves made by marketplace leaders such as Walmart and Target to forge partnerships, first with ChatGPT and now Google.

And the prospect of automated shopping that eliminates human consideration entirely is certainly a concern for any brand or retailer. "We're going to learn all about brand loyalty as we enter the era of AI," which will require consumers to actively tell their agent of choice to select their favorite brands, said **VaynerMedia** CEO **Gary Vaynerchuk**.

In general, though, agentic commerce might not be the bogeyman that retailers fear, according to several speakers. The allure of retail media might diminish as networks lose some of their first-party data advantage and retailers move farther away from customers, "but if agentic really takes off there is a big upside to the core retail business," suggested **Collin Colburn**, VP-Commerce and Retail Media for **IAB**.

Agentic search users "might never actually come to a **Lowe's**," said **Joe Cano**, the retailer's SVP-Digital Commerce, noting that 8% to 9% of ChatGPT searches are related to home improvement. "You have to meet [consumers] where they are. We want to make sure we're relevant and show up in the right way." ▶



To prepare for a marketplace where purchase decisions are made by shopping agents that intimately understand the consumer's needs — and may never even consult retailer or brand websites — the most important initiative for commerce companies will be organizational change management.

"The technology is important. The strategy is important. [But] we have to think about how we're going to take all those human beings in our organization and get them comfortable with this disruption," Goldberg advised.

2. AI is an Enterprise-Wide Enabler

Agentic commerce gained most of the "future of retail" attention, but speakers outlined a wide range of use cases for AI as a driver of efficiency and effectiveness across all retailer operations. "If you want to make money today with AI, that's probably where you should look," said Goldberg.

In one prime example, an internal AI agent is helping **Sam's Club** optimize product assortment at the store level by analyzing sales trends across the chain — and then tapping into outside data sources to identify potential new additions to the planogram, explained Chief Merchandising Officer **Julie Barber**. These capabilities free up the merchants to "focus on the strategy, the supplier relationships, the product quality — and it's fantastic," she said. And they are especially critical as merchandising continues moving from an annual cycle of chain-wide decision-making to store-level assortments determined in near-real-time.

"We're able to do some things that we weren't able to do in the past, to be a little bolder, because we're more agile and we can change" more easily, Barber said. AI is also helping "get as accurate as possible" with order volume, an outcome that ultimately lets Sam's Club reduce prices for members. "And that's the ultimate goal."

3. Retail Media is Coming of Age

It's been a minute since retail media wasn't the predominant topic at a commerce event. Rest assured, it was still a pervasive theme as practitioners discussed expanding audience reach through the physical store, measuring success through metrics that prove real business impact, and building shopper-first strategies that will deliver better, more sustainable results for retailers and advertisers.

If those needs are addressed, in-store activation might not just add a critical third leg to the retail media stool but give networks an unassailable advantage against any and all competing media platforms.

Moving into the Store: Despite the fact that more than 80% of product purchases still take place in physical locations, less than 1% of retail media ad spending is devoted to the channel — which won't break \$1 billion in outlays until 2029, according to **eMARKETER**. Stratacache is more bullish, pegging the overall advertising opportunity at \$20 billion, according to CEO **Chris Riegel**. ▶

In addition to providing access to the vast majority of purchases, a greater focus on in-store could be retail media's best bet for long-term viability. For one, in-store is the only channel where Amazon can't gobble up most of the ad spending, noted several speakers. That's important because Amazon will "easily" continue capturing as much as 75% of the overall U.S. market through the end of the decade, predicted **Sarah Marzano**, Principal Analyst at eMARKETER.

In addition, Wall Street views the store as a "durable asset" compared with other forms of media, according to **Mark Boidman**, Partner and Head of Media & Entertainment at **Solomon Partners**. "In my opinion ... someday all ads will be blocked on your mobile phone," he said.

What's more, as consumers move to agentic search platforms, traffic on retailer websites — and therefore ad value — could decline, and the first-party data advantage networks bring to offsite media could also diminish. That leaves in-store as "the most resilient aspect of retail media," suggested Masters.

Measuring real impact: Commerce marketers aren't doubting the effectiveness of in-store retail media. But they are demanding evidence.

According to eMARKETER, 60% of retail media advertisers now identify brand awareness as their primary objective, with sales lift trailing at 56%. In the store, they're looking for real-time audience measurement and consistent SKU-level sales attribution — and they won't scale their spending without them, warned Marzano.

Mars, Inc. wants to see "change in shopper behavior" such as new-to-brand buyers and growth in basket size, said **Meera Patel**, the CPG's Senior Director, Global Omnichannel Advanced Analytics. "Our brands and merchants basically want the same thing," which is new buyer/category penetration, agreed **Mark Williamson**, AVP Retail Media at **Costco**.

Standards for in-store impressions, to facilitate comparisons with digital media, are needed "but also what impact the impression has," emphasized **Liz Roche**, VP of Media and Measurement at **Albertsons Media Collective**. As Albertsons expands its digital screen pilot to hundreds of stores in 2026, the retailer is working to make measurement "a reliable component" that delivers "repeatable results and not just a grab bag of various lifts," said Roche.

"I think the 'why' is probably the most important thing, because it enables [advertisers] to do better decision making," said **Jeffrey Bustos**, SVP-Retail Media Analytics at **Merkle**.

Improving the shopping experience: A newly released study from **Babson College** Professor of Marketing **Dhruv Grewal** finds that digital signage drives an average overall sales lift of 8.1% but increases substantially in specific cases such as new products (24.7%), popular brands (16.7%), and impulse buys (15.1%). The average lift is also higher later in the day and on weekends, according to Grewal.

Meanwhile, 60% of shoppers have told eMARKETER that in-store media has influenced purchases. And **CVS** has found that 50% of its shoppers compare products at the shelf even when they come to the store with a specific purchase in mind, noted **Sarah Reynolds**, Senior Director of Retail Experience Strategy. ▶

But while Grewal suggested that a digital sign every 10 feet wouldn't be overly intrusive for shoppers, nearly all retailers and brands at NRF asserted the need to focus on the shopper experience when building out retail media opportunities.

Brands and retailers must "always put the consumer at the center of everything we do," said **Arthur Sylvestre**, VP Digital Commerce for **Danone North America**. "It's very stupid not to do it this way."

"It's 'retail' all caps, 'media' all lower case," said Williamson at Costco. "[The store] is where the magic happens. Disrupting that is non-negotiable."

Costco takes a "merchant-first mentality" because "the objective of the media is to sell merchandise," said Williamson. "If you chase after profitable media revenue, you might diminish member value [and] at some point, the whole thing is going to fall apart."

"We always want to go back to what we're known for, our secret sauce, [which is] exploration," said **Aaron Dunford**, VP-**Nordstrom** Media. "How do we channel that same level of service into a retail media environment?"

Activated thoughtfully, that focus can even be applied to non-endemic advertising, as it was last holiday season when Shutterfly offered free in-store photos with Santa Claus. "That [added] value to our customer's life — brought to you by retail media," Dunford said.

4. Marketplaces Are Traffic Drivers

Retailer-operated marketplaces are "a trend to stay, and how you transform your website into a profitable business," summarized **Sophie Marchessou** at Mirakl (which, full disclosure, operates marketplaces for retailers).

The Lowe's Marketplace lets the retailer expand its category assortments to products that simply don't fit "within the four walls — or even the regular retail ecommerce model," said Cano. It also expands the product offering to relevant "everything for the home" adjacencies such as "pools and tiny homes," he said. Similarly at **Best Buy**, "We had Christmas trees as a holiday doorbuster," said **Frank Bedo**, Chief Marketplace & eCommerce Officer.

Target likewise thinks its marketplace enhances the digital shopper experience by broadening the assortment, but it also helps the retailer identify product trends and potential new item additions more quickly, said **Sarah Travis**, Chief Digital and Revenue Officer. New items can be tested "almost risk-free," concurred **Miguel Almeida**, Nordstrom's President of Digital & Customer Experience. "That is the promise of a marketplace."

"It is a massive traffic driver" at Target, with 10% of all external traffic now coming through third-party products, Travis said. "And no one just shops the marketplace," said Cano. They also provide an ideal advertiser base for retail media networks. "It's the number one way for sellers to get recognition," according to Cano. ▶

Traditional merchants do often consider a marketplace to be internal competition. And there are cases where enterprise and marketplace products end up “vying for the buy box,” according to Bedo. But because they expand the shopper base, marketplaces can actually increase category sales. Best Buy, Lowe’s, and Nordstrom address these concerns by giving category merchants credit for marketplace sales.

5. TikTok Shop is a Retailer

In fact, TikTok Shop is “the fastest-growing retailer in the history of mankind,” having sold \$9 billion worth of product in its first full year of business, touted Goldberg.

“TikTok is a platform to build community and TikTok Shop is a conversion platform,” said **Richard Cox**, Chief Merchandising Officer at **Pacsun**. But they’re both great places for learning because of the immediate — and sometimes massive — response that can be gained. On Black Friday last year, Pacsun sold 11,000 pairs of a particular jeans SKU after “one creator with 5,000 followers” posted a video. The viral event led to elevated sales across the entire jeans line.

For **Crocs**, which hosted a month-long “Croctober” promotional event on the platform last fall, conversion is a “wonderful add” but “the engagement and learning is more important,” said **Feliz Papich**, SVP-Digital Technology, Experience and Insights. On the other hand, **tarte cosmetics** views TikTok Shop as “a bona fide retailer” where most customers have been new to the brand, said **Jenna Manula Linares**, VP-Digital Marketing. “If you get the product in the hands of creators ... [it] will absolutely sell,” she said.

Brands have been trying to “place some bets” by planning inventory based on “the categories that are working best,” said Linares. But identifying patterns within viral events is difficult, Papich acknowledged. Preparing for the actual commercial opportunities that TikTok Shop now offers, such as Super Brand Day events, is easier.

And the halo effect of sales through other channels that TikTok provides “is real,” said Papich at Crocs, which uses media mix modeling to track the off-platform impact. More anecdotally, shoppers regularly visit Pacsun stores to ask for “the viral TikTok jean,” said Cox.

“If you’re only paying attention to what TikTok Shop is selling, you’re missing the boat, because for every \$1 billion in revenue that TikTok Shop gets, TikTok is generating \$100 billion worth of interest in stuff that people want and will buy elsewhere,” Goldberg advised.

TikTok can be a retailer’s friend, too: the long moribund Barnes & Noble is in the midst of a revival that’s justifying 60 store openings in 2026, thanks largely to its exploitation of TikTok’s “BookTok” community, said Vaynerchuk. ▶



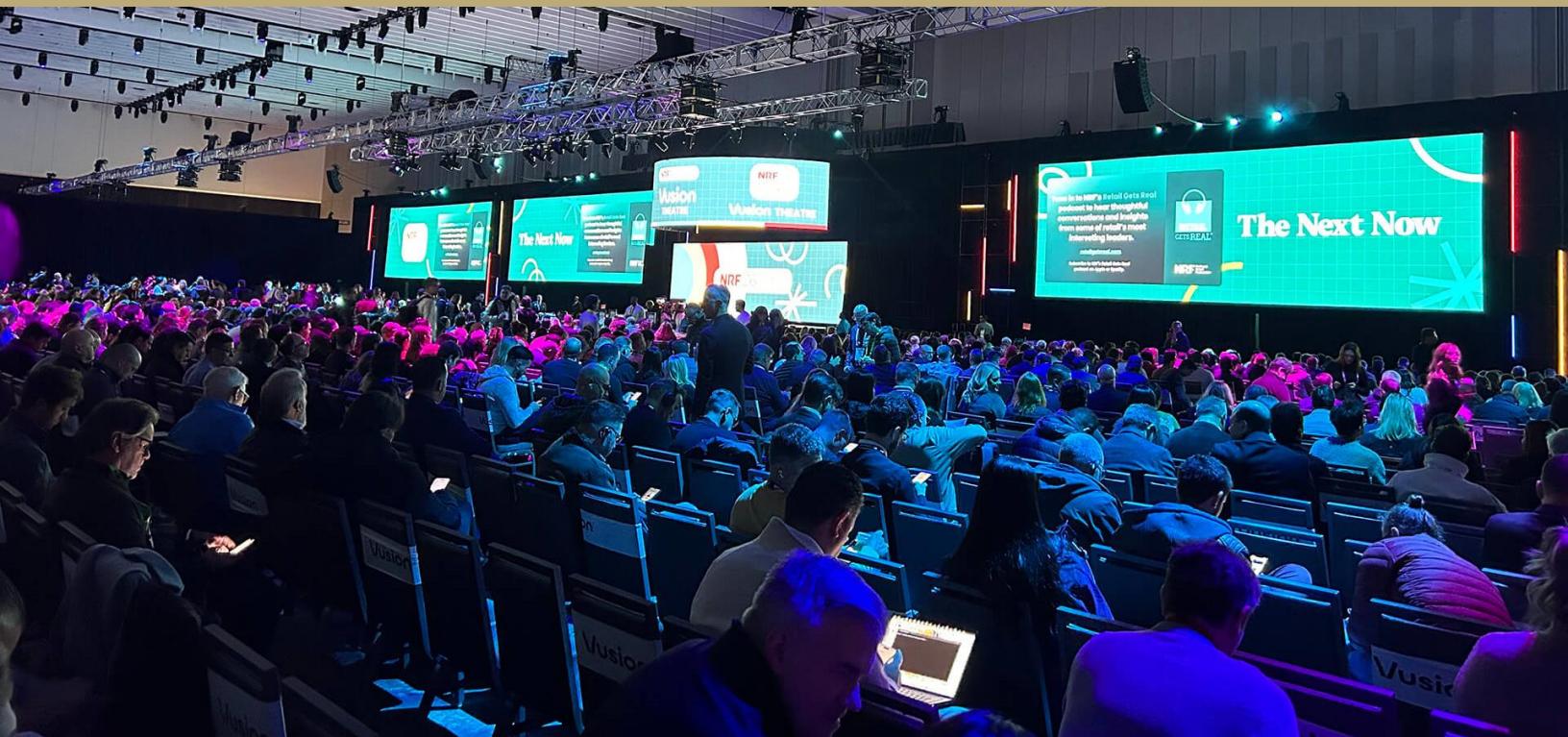
6. The Physical Store is Doing Just Fine

The names of leading retailers have changed considerably over the years, but brick-and-mortar remains strong. “It’s not our job to pick the winners and losers at retail,” said **Mark Barrocas**, CEO of **SharkNinja**, while noting that **Sears** and **Bed Bath & Beyond** both were once the appliance maker’s largest accounts. “We let the consumer decide where they want to buy. Our job is to make the products available wherever they want.”

For most transactions, that’s still the physical store, which needs to continue evolving but remains on solid ground (at least until the shopping agents take over the world). And retail media has the potential to improve the shopping experience while also boosting profitability — if implemented correctly. At Costco, retail media needs to be “the treasure map for the treasure hunt,” said Williamson.

In rolling out its in-store network, Dick’s Sporting Goods sought to employ digital signage that would “amplify the brand experience or [help shoppers] interact with products,” focusing on “story first, technology second,” said Michael Budzisz, VP-In-Store Creative & Innovation. The goal was to create “an experience that reflects the brand proposition.”

“Stores need to be hubs for entertainment and engagement,” said **Sun Choe**, Global Brand President for **Vans**. Global footwear retailer **JD Group** hopes to double its U.S. footprint (while rebranding Finish Line stores to the flagship banner) with an assortment curated for today’s youth culture. “We have a POV. We’re not just a place for those guys [brands] to put their shoes,” said CEO **Regis Shultz**. “If it’s only a supply shed, there is no future.”♦



Commerce Disrupted: The AI Native Consumer



Jason Goldberg
Chief Commerce Strategy Officer
Publicis Groupe

In this excerpt from his NRF '26 keynote, Jason Goldberg assesses the ever-changing state of agentic commerce

Think about how much has happened in the last four months. Think about how much has happened this week. ChatGPT launched a dedicated shopping research engine right before Thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving, Target launched an app that you could use to do research for sunscreen and buy it directly from Target on ChatGPT. Perplexity, which had been doing this for a year, launched a new version of its checkout that allows retailers to be the merchant of record the day after Target launched its app. By the end of Cyber Week, Walmart announced plans to make nearly its entire product catalog available. Last week, Microsoft announced that you could buy products direct from Copilot.

And on this very stage on Sunday, Google announced that you could do it all through Google. And yesterday, Apple announced that we're going to use that Google engine on all its devices.

Think about what that means. agentic commerce is not, "Hey Google, order a new ingredient for my kid's lunch." Agentic commerce is, "Hey, Siri, never let me run out of ingredients for my kid's lunch again." And think about what Siri is going to do. She's going to think, "Oh, Jason's kid goes to Chicago public schools, and here's the lunch schedule. And I see Jason's got a vacation booked for Hawaii, so he's not going to need lunch that week. And Jason buys his groceries at Walmart, and I see from his purchases that his kid doesn't eat peanut butter, but here is what he does eat. That is agentic commerce."

So all of that marketing, all of that persona work that we're doing to sell to the Goldbergs, goes away when the NVIDIA microchip makes sure that we never run out of lunch ingredients.

It's already happening. Over Cyber Five week, lots of consumers were introduced for the first time to Rufus and Sparky. Amazon announced that customers who used Rufus converted 60% more often than customers that didn't. And on Black Friday, 38% of all Amazon sessions used Rufus. For the first time this holiday season, a bunch of our shoppers met an agent.

But those agents live on a retail website. You already had to know that you needed something from Amazon or Walmart before you met the agent. Potentially, that's not the future. Potentially, you're going to use a robot that will pick the retailer for you. If you go to chat.openai.com, copilot.microsoft.com, gemini.google.com, or perplexity.com, you can get all this amazing research. You can get products recommended. You can even buy products – and you never have to pick a retailer. So the on-site agents may well lose some or all of their traffic to these off-site agents. And by the way, this isn't just happening online. ▶

Commerce Disrupted: The AI Native Consumer

But all of these websites and platforms that are hoping to win agentic commerce may lose to something even more upstream: They may lose to the browsers, because AI companies now have their own browsers, like [Perplexity's] Comet and [ChatGPT's] Atlas, and all the legacy browsers are building agents into their platforms, like Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome. Maybe we don't even go to a website to shop.

And the browsers may be in for a disruption because maybe you won't even use the browser; maybe the robot is just built into your phone, and your operating system does the answering before you ever do anything. That's what the Apple/Google announcement is about. The robots will be built into Apple devices, into Google devices, into Microsoft devices – and maybe one day into our brains.

This isn't the future. This is already happening. ChatGPT gave all their data from last July to Harvard researchers who published a study. They found only 1.9% of all prompts involved trying to buy something. But that's 1.9% of 12 billion prompts a day, 52 million prompts a day where people were trying to buy something off ChatGPT – and you couldn't buy anything on ChatGPT last July. It was a research-only engine, and it already was getting 52 million visits a day. And ChatGPT is doubling [in prompts] every six months.

And we know from the analytics companies that each robot has different criteria and is giving us different answers. The robots aren't giving the same answers that the search engines gave, and they don't even have the same criteria that people have.

How do the robots decide what is important? They are reading tons of micro-influencer blogs to learn what's important. They're reading Reddit to learn what's important. But they're not relying on our manufacturer websites or our retailer websites nearly as much.

If we're going to win with the robots, we have to understand what's important to them – which is going to change every day. We need tools and business processes to understand what the robots care about. GEO (generative engine optimization) or AEO (answer engine optimization), depending on what you call it, is important, but what you actually need is something more strategic: Agentic Commerce Optimization. You're not just optimizing for the robots. You have to optimize for your product catalog. You have to optimize for business outcomes. You have to optimize for customer expectations. It's a bigger job, of which GEO is a small part. This is what we need if we're going to win the robots.

I want to leave you with one last piece of advice I got from a much smarter person. As you may have heard, Doug McMillon, the CEO of Walmart, is retiring this month. But for the last two years, whenever Doug has attended a meeting at Walmart, he would say: "Before we get started, how did you use AI to prepare for this meeting?"

Why did Doug ask that question? His job at Walmart was to be the change agent. The hardest thing in these disruptions is not the technology. It's not the strategy. It's getting 1.6 million Walmart associates to think different. It's the organizational change management. By asking that question, Doug was encouraging Walmart leaders to think differently. ▶

Commerce Disrupted: The AI Native Consumer

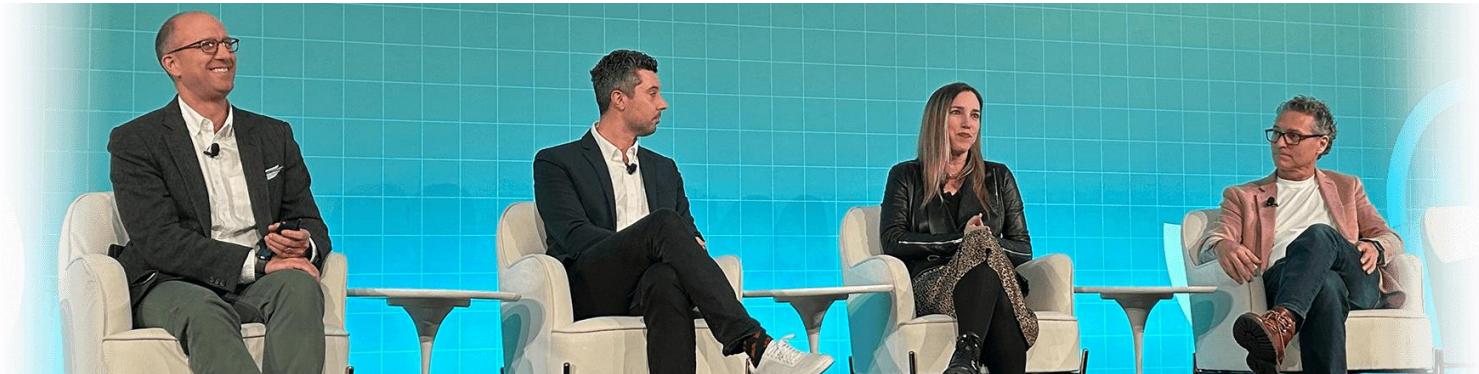
The first time he asked the question, the answer was likely, "It's illegal to use AI at Walmart, IT hasn't approved it." So think about what's happened over the last two years. Walmart has gone from locking down AI to buying AI tools for all 1.6 million associates and creating four of its own super agents (Sparky and Marty and the rest).

I want to leave you with this final thought: while the tech is important, and the strategy is important, we have to think about how we're going to take all those human beings, all those co-workers in our organization, and get them comfortable with this disruption so we don't get left behind. ♦



Unlocking Creativity In the Physical Store

MARS UNITED
COMMERCE



Mars United President Amy Andrews and an NRF panel discuss the need to develop creative strategies tailored to specific shoppers and environments.

The critical role that creative plays in driving shopper engagement and conversion is often overlooked in a commerce marketplace that's been driven by digital advertising practices that place a far heavier emphasis on ad positioning than messaging.

With retail media now moving into the physical store, commerce practitioners need to address this oversight and develop creative strategies that are informed by customer data, tailored to the specific retail environment, and ultimately able to deliver identity-driven, personalized content, according to a panel of executives at this week's NRF "Big Show" in New York that featured Mars United President Amy Andrews.

One clear way of identifying a media professional new to the retail space is hearing them assume "that their creative is going to be a CTV ad sitting on a big-screen TV in the store," said consultant, podcaster, and panel host Tom Limongello. But the reality is that the store is a wholly unique channel that demands special treatment.

In convenience stores, "the job of the creative is to close the sale. We call it 'conversion creative,'" explained Mario Mijares, Vice President of Marketing, Loyalty, and Monetization Platforms at 7-Eleven. In the impulse purchase-heavy c-store environment, the most effective in-store audio ads running on 7-Eleven's Gulp Media Network are very short messages that dispense with brand storytelling and go straight to a product offer, said Mijares. That's what makes Gulp an ideal partner for helping drive trial of new products or brand extensions, he suggested.

"You have to think about the right creative for the environment," and short-form, deal-focused messaging "makes a ton of sense in a small-format store where we're talking about a lot of impulse brands," Andrews agreed. "But as we look at different shoppers and different environments, there are different creative messages that are going to resonate."

What I'm really excited about is not just how we'll start to tailor the creative for different shoppers in different stores, but how we'll get much more personalized and relevant at an identity level, so that we ultimately can deliver different radio ads at 7-Eleven at different times of the day — or maybe even ads triggered by specific shoppers entering the store." ▶

Unlocking Creativity In the Physical Store

Other retail channels and store environments are suitable for brand storytelling and loyalty building. Ace Hardware is working to develop in-store media opportunities that will fit into the “hyper-local environments” operated by the 2,800 members of its retailer co-op and also provide easy-to-find solutions for the common home-improvement projects of its shoppers, according to Tyler Lusenbrink, Head of Sales for Ace’s RedVest Media Network.

Retail media can’t operate in a vacuum, however. Networks and brands need to make sure they’re “not just thinking about the physical environment ... but how we win at every shelf,” said Andrews. RedVest’s project-focused campaigns begin online and then carry through to stores (where static signage is still often used, by the way). 7-Eleven is even structured for this holistic approach: shopper marketing and retail media are handled by the same team “because that’s all going into the store,” said Mijares.

“What is that total solution for the shopper? [If] we put that lens on it, there’s so much connectivity we can drive” across all shopper touchpoints, Andrews said.

While the necessary tools might be available just yet, audience targeting will be vital to in-store success. “With all the data that we have now ... we’re at a real turning point. Before, we might have said, ‘We have our primary target and our secondary target,’” explained Andrews. “Now, we can have 37 different audiences, and we have the ability to create different creative messages that will resonate with [each of one] across 17 different touchpoints. With some of the AI capabilities that we have, driving that scale is more realistic and profitable now.”

“I love the idea of cranking out more creative — but absolutely in a way that is strategic, meaningful, and relevant,” said Andrews. “The word that came up a lot at CES [which she attended several days before NRF] was intimate. You can be a lot more intimate with shoppers today, because we have the ability not just to deliver a million messages, but to do it in a strategic and thoughtful way — [and then] test and optimize mid-campaign more than ever before. If we’re creating more, we can be learning more, and that starts with really, really sound targeting.” ♦





The Next Now: A New Model for Engagement



Juan Olea
VP-Commerce
Influential

Agentic AI, retail media, and intelligent stores are setting the new baseline; creators turn the retail engine into stories people believe and actions they take.

NRF '26 felt less like “future talk” and more like an execution mandate.

AI is moving out of pilots into day-to-day operating rhythm, with agentic AI and robotics getting real attention. For Creator Commerce, the implication is clear: creators can't sit on the sidelines. They are the trust layer — real people showing real use, making new tech and retail moments feel believable. The best creator work plugs into retail media, product data, and store reality—so it's authentic, measurable, and built to scale across organic and paid.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Creator speed & quality: AI helps do both.** Use AI to run creator programs like a system: faster creator discovery/matching, faster testing (hooks, edits, formats), and simple learning loops tied to high engagement + clicks + sales. Set clear rules early — usage rights, approvals, brand safety, and on-camera claims —so speed doesn't create risk.
- Creator Commerce should have a performance system.** Treat creators as a performance engine, not a one-time content drop. Set an ongoing cycle: launch, learn, refine, and scale what's winning. Constantly review KPIs: high engagement, PDP clicks, add-to-cart, conversion, CPA, and (over time) store lift. Use those signals to back the strongest assets: refresh hooks, sharpen CTAs, and put paid behind the top creator ads.
- Retail media gets more measurable, and closer to the store.** Creators are one of the fastest levers to improve retail media because they add proof and trust. Turn winning creator posts into retail-ready ads to scale (and whitelist when allowed). Match creative with a CTA to the retailer moment (“new,” “in stock,” “limited drop,” “best value”) and reduce friction with fewer clicks.
- Smarter stores make better creator content.** Creator content works best when it matches store reality: what's in stock, what's new, and how to find it (aisle/shelf) or buy it (pickup/delivery). Build scripts around availability and real shopping steps so shoppers don't hit dead ends. That alignment protects trust and keeps conversion strong.
- Scale needs an operating model and the right team.** Creator Commerce scales when it's run like a system: clear owners across brand, retail and media; simple approvals; and defined creator roles (education, conversion, store traffic, loyalty). Lock the basics — briefs, product data, FTC and claims, usage rights, and a weekly measurement cadence — so execution stays fast and consistent. ➔

The Next Now: A New Model for Engagement

KEY TAKEAWAYS - Continued

NRF '26 set a new baseline: AI as an operating layer, retail media with more in-store momentum, and stores evolving into intelligent platforms. The brands that win won't treat creators as a side tactic; they'll treat creators as part of the retail system — activated by channel, mapped to the funnel, and measured with a clear performance model beyond last-click.

Creator content will connect to retail media, product data, and store execution across organic and paid, with rights, claims guidance, and brand safety put into place so teams can move fast, scale what works, and defend results. ♦





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