

Retailer Intelligence

An analysis of recent initiatives at key U.S. retailers and their potential impact on commerce marketing opportunities for brands.

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As part of their ongoing mission to help clients stay ahead of the competition in a fast-paced, constantly evolving marketplace, the field teams in Publicis Commerce's Retail Consultancy closely monitor the strategic activity taking place across all key retailers and channels.

Each month, the teams compile Marketplace Assessment reports on the retailers (including Walmart, Target, Amazon, and Kroger) and channels (such as Regional Grocery, C-Store, Club, Pet, Beauty, and On-Demand Delivery) that are most important to the business success of our clients. The following report outlines noteworthy events across 9 key retailers from the team's most recent round of assessments. (To receive copies of the full reports, contact Kandi Arrington, EVP-Retail Consultancy, at kandi.arrington@publiciscommerce.com.)

Ahold-Delhaize USA Hosts First Supplier Summit



Ahold Delhaize USA hosted its first-ever Supplier Summit this spring, bringing together representatives from its retail banners and brand partners to discuss future growth, omnichannel commerce, retail media, sustainability, and collaboration. Key topics included the collaborative opportunities available through the AD Retail Media network and the company's health and sustainability initiatives.

"Suppliers play a critical role in helping our brands deliver value and great customer experiences every day," Keith Nicks, Chief Commercial and Digital Officer, said in a release. "By coming together in this way, we were able to create a dialogue on the approaches and mindset needed to partner effectively so that, together, we can unlock what's next for our businesses and for customers."

Relevance: Hosting its first supplier summit illustrates ADUSA's intensified focus on strategic brand collaboration, especially around the priorities it has set for future growth. Beyond traditional marketing and merchandising activity, brands are being encouraged to contribute to broader business initiatives such as retail media, digital commerce, customer engagement, and purpose-driven marketing.

Opportunity: Retailers like ADUSA are looking to build the deeper relationships that many brands have long desired: to be strategic business partners, not just product suppliers. Innovation and agility are becoming table stakes as retailers seek partners who can bring new ideas, test-and-learn approaches, and solutions that drive shopper engagement. For ADUSA, brands should consider omnichannel/retail media activation as well as programs that will help the retailer deliver community impact.



Image courtesy of Ahold Delhaize USA

Aldi Leans into Unboxing Craze



Aldi is looking to drive stronger shopper engagement by tapping into the growing trend across fashion, beauty, and collectibles for “Blind Box” merchandising. Over four days in late June, the value retailer released one “ALDI Blind Box” at precisely 12:00pm each day. The four releases contained products themed around snacks, fiber, protein, and a final “Mystery Box” assortment of items from around the store.

Relevance: “The Aldi Blind Box taps into the excitement our fans already feel walking our aisles,” said Bridget Kozlowski, Director of Communications. “Our shoppers come to Aldi for value, but they also come for discovery.”

Leaning into the mystery box trend aims to help Aldi shoppers break up their usual routine and discover more items throughout the store. Making the boxes available in limited quantities could generate some viral brand awareness for a retailer that has steadily increased its marketing activity in recent years.

Similarly, Dollar General is revamping its store layouts this year to create more of a treasure hunt feel that get shoppers visiting more aisles.

Opportunity: Leaning into the viral mystery box trend is a unique way to get shoppers buying items not typically on their list, and in an entertaining, low-commitment way. If successful in getting Aldi shoppers to break from their normal trip habits, the program could create opportunities for cross-selling or co-promotions — brand-specific blind boxes, perhaps?



Image courtesy of ALDI

Bath & Body Works Slides into Ulta Beauty

Bath & Body Works®

Bath & Body Works has launched a curated assortment of signature fragrances, body creams, hand soaps, candles, and air fresheners in roughly 600 Ulta Beauty stores. The partnership exemplifies both BBW's "Consumer First Formula" strategy of expanding product access beyond its own stores and Ulta's partnership-driven "Beauty Unleashed" initiative.

Relevance: The move gives BBW a new discovery-led shopping environment where consumers can smell, test, and interact with products, which is especially important in the fragrance and body care categories. For Ulta, it fills white space in ancillary categories that complement the retailer's core beauty assortment, according to merchandising leadership.

Opportunity: Growth doesn't always require new stores. Expanding through complementary retail environments from established partners can attract new shoppers, increase product trial, and create additional points of discovery. Bath & Body Works is leveraging different retail partners to address various shopper needs, like convenience with Amazon and now discovery at Ulta.



Image courtesy of Bath & Body Works

The Home Depot Scares Up Another Selling Season



The scope of home improvement inventory again expanded to Halloween decor this month as The Home Depot got a very early start to seasonal marketing by launching a now-annually anticipated holiday collection on its website and mobile app. The in-store rollout won't take place until August, but "with free delivery on over 2 million items and same-day or next-day delivery on select products, customers can start building their Halloween displays before products arrive in stores this fall," according to the [official release](#).

The Home Depot's status as a legitimate Halloween destination began in 2020, when an exclusive 12-foot outdoor skeleton now trademarked as "Skelly" became a social media-driven cultural phenomenon. This year's collection features a variety of decorative options, along with a new version of Skelly that boasts "real-time, app-controlled voice modulation" as well as customizable sounds, lights, and servo-motor movements. (Retail price: \$379.)

Relevance: The Home Depot's success with Halloween makes a great case study for retailers looking to drive new traffic streams and potentially new shoppers with merchandising and marketing concepts that go beyond their standard scope to add new occasions to the calendar.

Opportunity: If The Home Depot can sell decorations, why not Halloween candy? (Its online marketplace already does, btw.) Procter & Gamble capitalized on the natural fit between home improvement and cleaning supplies about two decades ago and has enjoyed extensive alternative-channel merchandising programs ever since. Meanwhile, endemic home improvement brands should explore Halloween-themed promotions that make their products part of the seasonal buy.



Image courtesy of The Home Depot

Instacart Adds Real-Time Shelf Intelligence to the Toolkit



Instacart has acquired Arpalus, an Israel-based technology company whose AI-enabled video tools provide real-time intelligence about in-store shelf conditions.

The technology runs on smartphones or any device with a camera — which turns Instacart's existing network of 600,000 shoppers into data collectors as they pick orders while using the same app. The capabilities will also be embedded into the Caper Carts that Instacart continues rolling out to grocery partners, which include Kroger, Schnucks, Weis Markets, and Wakefern Food Corp. Caper Carts are equipped with outward-facing cameras.

Relevance: The acquisition strengthens Instacart's overall toolkit as it works to distinguish itself from other on-demand delivery companies by becoming a technology partner for grocers. By improving inventory accuracy, the Arpalus solution is designed to improve both in-store operations and ecommerce fulfillment. The company claims to have 95% accuracy in identifying items on shelves.

Opportunity: Better, faster inventory insights should ultimately inform personalized, store-level media activation for brands throughout the Instacart ecosystem. New tools also typically lead to test-and-learn opportunities that will help brands better understand how to leverage the new insights coming their way.



instacart x arpälus

Sam's Club Takes a Health Break in Manhattan



Sam's Club executives visited New York City this month to host the retailer's first "Sam's Wellness Club" event for creators, merchants, and media representatives. Held to showcase products from Sam's Club's food, health & beauty, and apparel assortments, the event also boasted product giveaways and interactive components such as massage chairs, ear cleanings, and exercise classes.

"Wellness has been a part of our strategy for a long time. It's one of the top three things on our members' minds," Kaity Whitmire, DMM for Baby, HBA and OTC at Sam's Club, told *Modern Retail*. "This experience [demonstrates] how it comes together as an ecosystem."

In related news, Sam's Club also recently announced a partnership with Weight Watchers that provides free and discounted health programs for members, including a program offering support to GLP-1 medication users.

Relevance: The event illustrates Sam's Club's efforts to position itself as a trusted partner for the health and wellness needs of its members. "This is really what the member would find in the club," Whitmire explained to *Modern Retail*. "Really great items, really incredible values, brought to you by industry experts from our merchandising team in a curated and thoughtful way that supports the member's everyday wellness journey."

Opportunity: Brands should work closely with their Sam's Club partners to find ways of supporting the retailer's efforts in the health and wellness space and tailor their marketing messages whenever it's appropriate.





7-Eleven Gets a Custom Ride from Mattel

7-Eleven has again teamed with Mattel's Hot Wheels brand to promote an exclusive die-cast car — this time a 2017 Nissan GT-R. The limited-edition toy car is available in participating stores and online at [7Collection.com](https://www.7collection.com), the retailer's official storefront for branded merchandise.

The partnership kicked off in summer 2025 with a 7-Eleven-branded Toyota Supra and ancillary products. This year's activation "brings together two beloved pop culture brands for another high-octane release inspired by speed and nostalgia," the companies said [in a release](#).

Relevance: On their own, the exclusive toys provide a branded product that "die-cast livery collectors love to discover," according to the release. But they also align with the interests of the many young car enthusiasts who also happen to be 7-Eleven customers. Many of these enthusiasts have made 7-Eleven parking lots an underground meet-up spot, and they often share photos and videos of their rides on Instagram and other social media. The retailer itself has embraced this activity and become a credible part of related social conversation.

Opportunity: Although this partnership isn't extensive sales-wise, it offers a great example of a retailer unlocking new merchandising opportunities by fully understanding its customers — not just in terms of shopping behavior but also in their broader lifestyle interests. Brands looking to drive growth by establishing deeper relationships with key retailers should look beyond purchase behavior to address the broader lifestyle needs of their shoppers in meaningful, relevant ways.



Image courtesy of 7-Eleven and Mattel

Target Helps NBCUniversal Viewers 'Shop What Happens'



A first-of-its-kind shoppable digital series created by NBCUniversal and exclusively sponsored by Target lets viewers shop featured products from the retailer in real time on media platforms including Peacock, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

Called "Shop What Happens" and formatted for mobile viewing, the series features stars from the NBCUniversal-owned Bravo channel in talk-show style segments about summer trends, fashion, and beauty. Depending on the platform, viewers scan QR codes or click direct links to purchase products showcased in the segments.

Relevance: The partnership illustrates the way that entertainment content and commerce are converging to let brands reach consumers in places where they're already engaged and shorten the path from inspiration to purchase through seamless technology. (See Walmart below for another example of the trend.)

Opportunity: Brands can benefit from integrating into entertainment ecosystems to drive discovery rather than relying solely on standard retailer tactics. Creating frictionless paths to purchase — especially in mobile-first, multi-platform environments — can turn engagement into immediate conversion and drive incremental sales.



Walmart Experiments with Shoppable TV



Walmart is redefining the retail experience by using its VIZIO streaming TV platform to merge entertainment with commerce in shoppable content designed to inspire purchase earlier in the customer journey. Premium branded content specials developed and distributed by Walmart Connect and VIZIO organically weave multiple products into a storyline and send viewers to Walmart.com to buy them. The first iteration was a springtime “Backyard Escapes” program; the next, college student-themed special will run in August.

“For too long, the advertising industry has treated storytelling and commerce as separate disciplines,” VIZIO GM Courtney Naudo said [in a release](#). “Walmart is creating a new model where content, media, and commerce work together as one connected experience.”

Relevance: One key takeaway from this year’s [Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity](#) was that brand building and commerce should no longer be treated as distinct activities now that technology allows all media opportunities to facilitate purchase. Retail media networks have been addressing this trend by developing shoppable content opportunities for brand advertisers and, in the case of heavily resourced companies like Walmart, even looking to create the content themselves.

Opportunity: Initial reports say that early results have been promising, with “Backyard Escapes” generating strong digital sales and attracting new shoppers to key product categories. By integrating naturally into programming rather than advertising around it, brands can connect with audiences in less-disruptive ways that can drive engagement and foster trust. Plus, this is Walmart we’re talking about: brands should investigate the potential to get involved in future specials.



Image courtesy of Walmart and VIZIO



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