

# Retailer Intelligence

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

SEPTEMBER 2026

# Engaging Across All Shopper Touchpoints

*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.*

*The teams regularly 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 EVP-Retail Consultancy Kandi Arrington at [kandi.arrington@publiciscommerce.com](mailto:kandi.arrington@publiciscommerce.com).)*

## Best Buy Joins TikTok Shop



Best Buy in late October is launching a TikTok Shop storefront that will showcase nearly 10,000 products “well suited to social discovery” and let users make purchases without leaving the social platform’s environment. Featured categories will include headphones, cameras, small appliances, laptops, and accessories from brands such as Oura, Bose, Dyson, and Microsoft, [according to a company release](#). The launch is timed to capitalize on the upcoming holiday shopping season.

The storefront will tap into the Best Buy Creator program to connect the retailer’s stable of creators with brand partners to develop shoppable videos. “Brands can use creator content in their campaigns to feature products, give shoppers a direct path to purchase through shoppable content and affiliate links, and extend the reach of the content through paid advertising,” the release said.

“Social media isn’t just influencing what people buy anymore. It’s shaping how they discover products, with creators playing an increasingly important role in what people notice, consider, and want to try,” said Jonathan Greer, Best Buy’s Vice President of Ecommerce. “Launching on TikTok Shop lets us meet customers at that exact moment of discovery and make it easy to shop.”

**Relevance:** EMARKETER expects sales through TikTok Shop to reach \$23.4 billion this year and surpass \$30 billion by 2028. That level of growth is why Jason Goldberg, Chief Commerce Strategy Officer at Publicis Groupe, often calls the platform the “fastest-growing retailer in history.”

“AI is not going to help you make your numbers this quarter. But TikTok Shop might,” Goldberg advised recently, while speaking at the “Future of Commerce Summit” in Bentonville, Arkansas.

**Opportunity:** Best Buy is coming right out of the gate to position its TikTok Shop as a retail media vehicle that will help “Best Buy Ads partners [unlock] new ways to work with creators,” the release stated. “Brands can use creator content in their campaigns to feature products, give shoppers a direct path to purchase through shoppable content and affiliate links, and extend the reach of the content through paid advertising.” Brands should already be on the phone with their Best Buy Ads rep to discuss the possibilities.

## Circle K Takes Retail Media Full Circle

Circle K has formally expanded and rebranded its retail media business as Full Circle Media by Circle K, a name intended to reflect the network's omnichannel reach and ambitions “to help brands connect with convenience and fuel shoppers across the United States, Canada, and Europe,” according to [the official release](#). The network was initially introduced in February at parent Alimentation Couche-Tard’s annual investor event.

“Full Circle Media reflects the role we believe convenience can play in retail media,” said Joell Robinson, Circle K’s Director of Retail Media. “For brands, the value comes from reaching shoppers in a setting defined by frequency, intent, and multiple points of engagement, from the pump to the store and through digital channels.”

In the U.S., Full Circle Media will employ at-pump media, in-store digital screens and checkout displays in 6,600+ stores, as well as owned digital channels encompassing the Circle K app, Inner Circle loyalty program (with 16 million members), SMS, and email platforms. The media delivers a total of 200 million monthly impressions and is supported by approximately 2.9 billion annual shopper visits.

**Relevance:** Circle K’s release notes that “the relaunch reflects the growing role of retail media within the convenience industry, providing advertisers with opportunities to engage customers throughout their daily routines, from morning coffee stops and fuel purchases to snack trips and evening fill-ups.” Full Circle Media joins with 7-Eleven’s Gulp Media Network, Wawa’s Goose Media Network, and Casey’s General Stores’ Casey’s Access to give CPG brands numerous options to reach on-the-go shoppers and drive impulse purchases in the channel.

**Opportunity:** Circle K has a national footprint that spans 48 states. Full Circle Media provides brand partners with a scaled and measurable opportunity to reach a broad audience of impulse shoppers.



Image courtesy of Circle K

## Costco's Footprint Is Getting Larger



Costco plans to open 14 more clubs in the next two months, including 10 U.S. locations and four stores in Canada. The openings, which include several replacements for existing clubs, reflect the retailer's longer-term plan to add up to 15 U.S. clubs and the same number internationally each year for the next decade.

**Relevance:** Although ecommerce and retail media are now key pieces of the business plan, Costco continues to view physical stores as the centerpiece of its omnichannel strategy and the leading driver of new customer acquisition and sales growth. Expansion of the store footprint also gives Costco additional locations from which to fulfill ecommerce orders and offer unique in-store media opportunities.

**Opportunity:** New club openings are an ideal time to find ways of standing out inside clubs and through Costco's other marketing vehicles, such as offsite media that helps drive awareness and traffic. Brands should also work to solidify existing relationships to make sure their presence grows along with the store base.



Image courtesy of Costco Wholesale

## Dollar General Unites Forecasting, Replenishment via AI

**DOLLAR GENERAL**

Dollar General is looking to improve its inventory forecasting, replenishment, and allocation capabilities through a deal with supply chain platform Relx Solutions.

Through the partnership, AI-powered Relx will handle store replenishment, ordering schedules, lead times, supplier coordination, and fulfillment methods. It will build sales patterns and other demand drivers directly into the planning process so that Dollar General distribution centers and stores will all work from the same data sets.

“We chose Relx because it gives us a practical way to use AI in our planning and helps our teams focus on the issues that truly need attention,” said Jeff Vaughan, Dollar General’s Senior Vice President of Global Inventory Management. “The platform brings forecasting, replenishment, and allocation planning into a single environment, giving our teams greater visibility across the network.”

**Relevance:** With a relentlessly growing store base that’s already blown past 21,000 doors, a footprint consisting largely of rural locations, and an assortment model that relies heavily on high-turnover goods, it’s critical for Dollar General’s inventory management to be state of the art. Relx also recently signed deals with regional grocer [Hy-Vee](#) and c-store chain [Wawa](#).

**Opportunity:** Bringing a third-party expert on board to handle the supply chain should help Dollar General build a stronger — and faster — supply chain, which is crucial to success as the value retailer continues growing both the store count and its on-demand delivery capabilities. The partnership ultimately should reap benefits for brands as well, especially partners that are prepared to respond to the advanced planning capabilities that will be coming their way.

Learn more about [“How to Win at Dollar General” here](#).

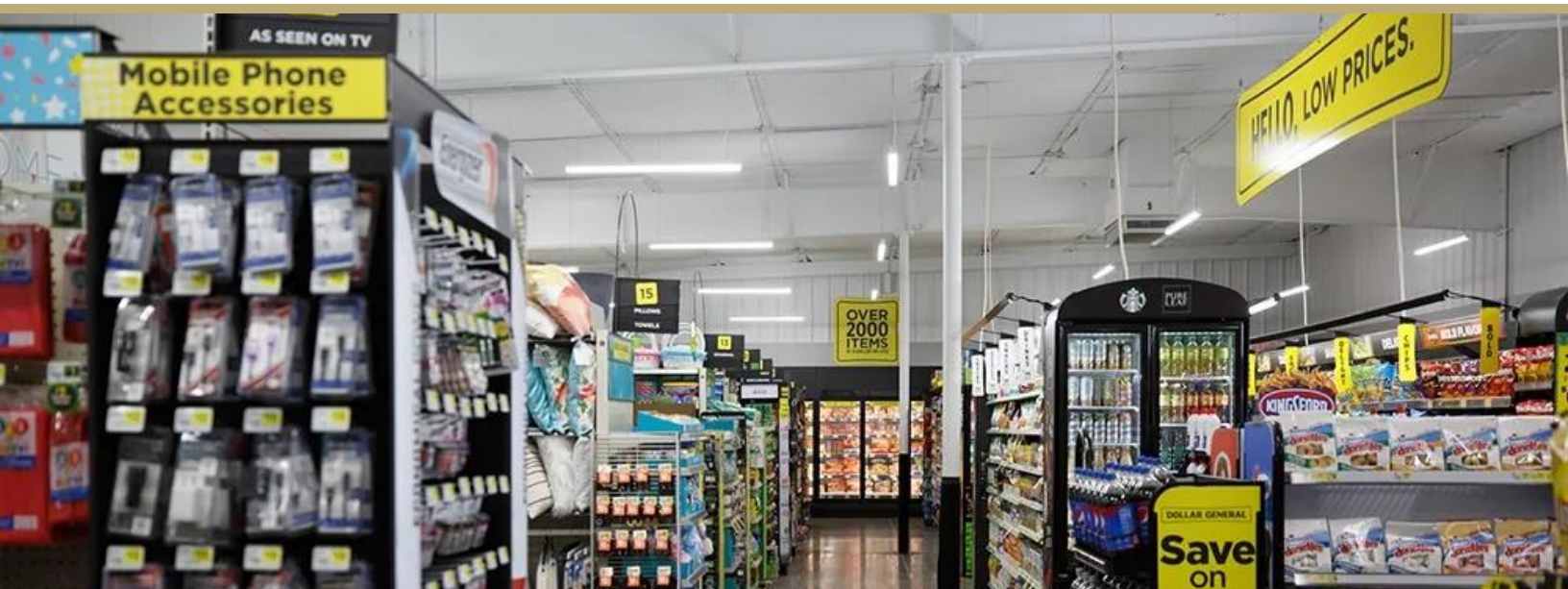


Image courtesy of Dollar General

## Instacart Has a New AI Darling



Instacart has introduced Clementine, a “synthetic shopping partner” embedded directly into the Instacart Marketplace app and website to help U.S. and Canadian shoppers with meal planning and other activities.

The AI-enabled tool converts text messages, handwritten or photographed recipes, and even “scribbled grocery lists” into shopping carts ready for checkout and based on real-time shelf availability at the user’s preferred store, [the company said](#). The tool’s data foundation consists of 1.6 billion Instacart orders, a catalog of two billion+ products, and more than 10 million daily inventory signals from retailer partners.

Clementine additionally generates original recipes, pulls curated options from outside sources, and applies personal dietary preferences. It also can showcase deals and cheaper alternatives and rebuild pantry staples from past orders.

“We’ve spent nearly 15 years learning how families shop and eat, and Clementine puts that knowledge to work,” said CEO Chris Rogers. “It learns from the preferences you share and the way you’ve shopped on Instacart.”

**Relevance:** Instacart has fully embraced agentic commerce. Alongside Clementine, the on-demand leader has reached integration deals with Meta’s Muse, Anthropic’s Claude, OpenAI’s ChatGPT, and Google’s Gemini/AI Mode that allow grocery-related conversations on those answer engines to flow seamlessly into Instacart purchase orders.

Instacart also recently rolled out [Cart Assistant](#), a white-label version of Clementine that retailer partners like Food Bazaar, Woodman’s, Save Mart, and Stew Leonard’s are adopting for their own ecommerce channels.

**Opportunity:** Instacart is rapidly building a commerce ecosystem that gives brand partners numerous opportunities to reach new shoppers well beyond its own environments. Brands should spend time identifying these emerging opportunities — which already seem to include a few options for surfacing in Clementine.



Image courtesy of Instacart

## Shipt Has Shoppers Asking Questions



Shipt has introduced a generative AI-enabled shopping assistant that's designed to "end decision fatigue" by creating customized baskets for users who describe their needs or upload images to the on-demand delivery service's app or website. Named "Ask Shipt," the tool becomes accessible after the shopper selects a preferred retailer from Shipt's list of 100+ partners.

"Whether they're planning family meals, preparing for a celebration, or tackling everyday errands, shoppers can discover the products they need across Shipt's marketplace ... with greater ease and confidence," Chief Growth and Strategy Officer Katie Stratton said [in a release](#).

**Relevance:** The release of Ask Shipt was announced on the same day that Instacart officially unveiled Clementine, a clear sign that conversational search and agentic shopping assistants will soon be commonplace across the retail landscape. Similar to Instacart, Shipt also recently struck integration deals with ChatGPT and Claude.

**Opportunity:** If optimizing product detail pages and other ecommerce content for agentic search isn't already at the top of their to-do list, brands need to put it there now. Retailers are quickly gearing up for conversational search as consumers continue to adopt the technology, and brands need to prepare as well. And even if these retailer-owned shopping assistants don't always launch with sponsored brand placement, media opportunities are sure to follow shortly.

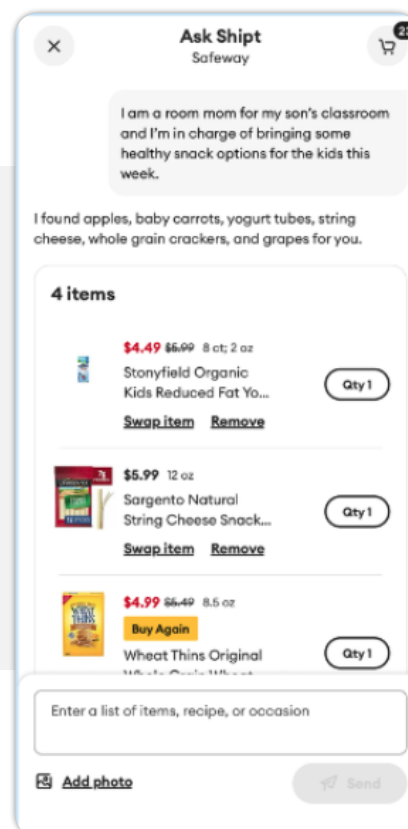


Image courtesy of Shipt

## Target Keeps Sharpening Its Shopper Tools



Target introduced four AI-powered upgrades to its app this summer that were all designed to improve the shopping experience for the retailer's guests and, ultimately, drive conversion:

- A photo search lets shoppers upload or take photos of products to find similar items in Target's inventory without the need for accompanying text.
- New insights functionality analyzes reviews to find commonly discussed product attributes and organizes the feedback into themes.
- Enhancements to the "Buy Again" feature launched in 2025 facilitate more personalized recommendations and relevant offers in the tool, which uses AI to let shoppers reorder past purchases.
- Improvements to the "Continue Shopping" feature, which reminds guests about recently viewed products while also presenting relevant alternatives and offers.

"We're focused on creating a shopping experience that's easy, inspiring, and friendly," said Sarah Travis, Chief Digital and Revenue Officer. "Customers move naturally between our stores and digital channels, and we're using AI and personalization in purposeful ways to help them find what they need faster, discover new possibilities, and shop with confidence."

**Relevance:** Target says the older tools are already improving shopper engagement and sales. Buy Again, for instance, is driving strong year-over-year sales growth by making it easier for guests to reorder everyday favorites; Continue Shopping, too, is driving strong engagement and sales.

**Opportunity:** As Target continues building out its menu of digital shopper tools, brand partners need to make sure their product content is accurate, complete, and compelling so their SKUs will surface at relevant moments. They also should look for the formal marketing opportunities that may arise from these initiatives.

Learn more [about "How to Win at Target" here](#).

## The easiest way to shop and save

Get more Target in one place.



Image courtesy of Target

## The Home Depot Is Building a Future Workforce



The Home Depot Foundation is looking to introduce 15 million young people to skilled construction trades by 2032 through a new “Path to Pro Skills Explorers” initiative. Developed in partnership with Scouting America and piloted with Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the program is a free, educational experience designed to expose middle and high school students (ages 11–17) to high-demand construction careers through a hands-on and online curriculum.

The curriculum is designed to equip teachers, parents, and other community mentors with turn-key modules to teach foundational skills in woodworking, plumbing, electrical repair, painting, and other trades. It also includes age-appropriate content on leadership and soft skills. The modular content is adaptable to a variety of learning environments, including classrooms, after-school programs, community centers, and homes. Successful participants ultimately can also receive help finding employment when they turn 18.

"For years, the Path to Pro programs have helped separating military, career changers, and others build pathways to the trades," said Michael Rowe, executive VP of Pro for The Home Depot. "We know that closing the skilled labor gap starts much earlier. We need more young people to see what's possible and understand the lucrative opportunities these careers provide."

**Relevance:** While more than 4.1 million skilled trade jobs are expected to become available in the next decade, only 6% of youths currently express interest in these careers. Home Depot's program could help fill an impending skills gap for the nation and expose young people to viable careers — while engendering a future generation of loyal home improvement professionals.

**Opportunity:** Brands should investigate how they might be able to head back to the classroom with The Home Depot to assist with education while introducing young people to their products. Beyond standard cause-minded marketing activation, product donations, course sponsorships, and even co-hosted training are among the possible unique opportunities that could be considered.



# PATH TO PRO SKILLS EXPLORERS



## Walmart Adds Community Health Ambassadors



Walmart last month kicked off a six-month proof of concept at five stores in rural communities to evaluate a “health ambassador” position. The idea is to give pharmacists dedicated time to consult with shoppers through coaching sessions covering such topics as nutrition, movement, sleep, and stress rather than just filling prescriptions.

The ambassadors, who will be selected by each store from the existing pharmacist pool, will also direct shoppers to relevant Walmart services or community resources such as immunizations, health screenings, virtual care, and nutrition programs. The role also entails community engagement and partnerships. The early phase of the pilot will concentrate on diabetes, weight management, and maternal health, the company said.

“By giving pharmacists dedicated time to listen, coach, and connect customers with relevant support, this pilot will help us learn how a familiar, trusted setting can make health resources more accessible, practical, and actionable for people living in rural communities,” said Emily Aaronson, Walmart’s U.S. Chief Medical Officer.

**Relevance:** An estimated 90% of U.S. residents live within 10 miles of a Walmart or Sam’s Club location, and the majority of stores operate in communities designated as medically underserved, the company said [in a release](#) announcing the initiative. Becoming a trusted health and wellness partner is a key initiative for Walmart as it seeks to move beyond product sales to become a trusted solutions provider for more aspects of consumer lives.

**Opportunity:** Relevant brands should find plenty of opportunities to help Walmart tell its expanding health and wellness story through joint programs or, more simply, tailored messaging. Note: Given the initial pilot’s early-stage focus on diabetes and weight management, expect GLP-1 medications to be a hot topic of discussion.

Learn more about [“How to Win at Walmart” here](#).



Image courtesy of Walmart



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