

Rewinding CES 2026

Commerce Edition

Seven Signals from the Near Future

CES 2026



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**At CES, we do
a *little* less
gadget
gawking than
the average
attendee.
Why? We're
trying to see
where
commerce,
experiences,
and human
systems are
heading next.**

If you've been to CES, you know the show floor is equal parts discovery, energy, and inspiration. This year, somewhere between the robots, the dashboards, and the many visions of what the future might hold, a handful of ideas emerged that feel especially worth pausing on.

What follows isn't a tour of shiny objects so much as a small collection of signals – early hints of how commerce, experience, and intelligence may be beginning to take shape in new ways.

Happy reading!

When Machines Learn to Feel

Having attended CES 2026 last week, I'm still processing the sheer volume of technological advancement on display — including a lot of robots.

One in particular caught my attention: an autonomous blackjack dealer. Beyond the cards themselves, the word "tactile" kept getting dealt. The demo highlighted one of the most intricate challenges in robotics: replicating the nuance of human touch.

Robots are increasingly able to grasp and manipulate a single card, pick up loose fabric, or delicately handle a balloon, all of which are meaningful leaps in dexterity and sensitivity. These advances open enormous potential for customer experience. Imagine customer service robots that don't just guide shoppers through vast aisles, but provide tailored assistance more like a seasoned store associate.

For CPG manufacturers and large retailers, this evolution could transform robots from tools into operational partners — streamlining fulfillment, improving in-store support, and reshaping how consumers interact with physical environments.

- Amy Vollet, SVP Commerce and Media,
Saatchi & Saatchi X



"Beyond the cards themselves, the word 'tactile' kept getting dealt."

Are Cars a New Media Channel?

I flew to Vegas from Detroit. I walked the floor. But driving was the big takeaway for me — in-car media solutions, specifically.

What became clear is that the next generation of connected vehicles is reshaping the mobile experience. New technologies keep cars continuously online, contextually aware, and able to adapt in real time. For the right retailer and retail media network, this creates a powerful opportunity to target — and quite literally drive — shoppers to physical stores.

From sight to sound, these interactive platforms connect advertisers directly to mobile consumers, closing the gap between digital and physical retail. They are especially effective for retailers that thrive on impulse behavior or solve urgent, everyday needs, where proximity, timing, and relevance directly influence conversion.

- Michele Roney, EVP, Retailer CX,
Mars United

“...driving was the big takeaway for me — in-car media solutions, specifically.”



Health Data as a Shopping Signal

CES made a compelling case that we're entering the era of predictive health — where wearables and sensors don't just tell us what happened, but signal what may happen next.

We saw everything from bite guards that track jaw clenching and sleep quality to tools that analyze gait and speech patterns for early dementia detection.

In other words, we now have a growing volume of health data. The question becomes: what does it trigger? A poor night's sleep doesn't simply register as fatigue — it shapes caffeine choices, nutrition decisions, and impulse control. Elevated stress influences supplement purchases, self-care routines, and food selection. Health insights are increasingly shaping commerce far beyond traditional wellness categories.

As everyday products are evaluated through a functional, outcome-driven lens — How is this helpful to me? How does this meet my needs? — expectations for personalization at scale rise sharply.

Shoppers increasingly want recommendations that align with current needs rather than generic profiles, experiences that reduce friction and anticipate decisions, and messaging that feels timely, useful, and credible. The brands that gain an edge will be those that meet people as informed, data-aware consumers — and respond accordingly.

- Amanda Rogers, President,
Saatchi X

“Health insights are becoming shopping triggers beyond the traditional health and wellness space.”



Calm Screens, Serious Commerce

In home entertainment, CES signaled a clear shift toward “calm tech” — displays designed to blend into living spaces as art or decor when not in use, paired with infrastructure upgrades like Wi-Fi 8 that promise faster, more stable connectivity.

Home entertainment remains one of the dominant daily media environments, especially Connected TV, which continues to surpass linear viewing. That makes it prime real estate for advertising and audience engagement. Streaming platforms also generate deep viewing data, enabling increasingly precise personalization, audience segmentation, and performance optimization.

Beyond media itself, entertainment franchises are expanding revenue well past content. Merchandise, gaming, live experiences, and even food and beverage extensions are turning entertainment into holistic brand ecosystems — opening new profit centers and deeper consumer relationships.

**- Mike Bartlett, Chief Growth Officer,
Publicis Commerce**

**“Home
entertainment
remains one of
the dominant
daily media
environments**

...”

From Touchpoints to Living Systems

The innovations unveiled at CES 2026 – particularly in AI and Physical AI – point toward a fundamental reshaping of commerce through agentic systems, hyper-personalization, and hybrid retail models.

For commerce marketing, this means shifting away from fragmented touchpoints toward fully connected shopper journeys. Brand and commerce marketing can no longer operate as separate systems. AI enables integration across discovery, decisioning, conversion, and retention into a single continuous experience.

Personalization scales dramatically in this environment, flattening traditional funnels and elevating creators as strategic partners. Agencies increasingly treat AI as essential operating infrastructure, using it for dynamic content, optimization, and placement. As search evolves, brands must prioritize visual platforms and AI-optimized discovery surfaces. Physical AI also introduces emotional dimensions, such as robotic influencers guiding purchasing behavior.

Marketing must become more embedded in the user experience – adding value rather than interrupting it. Stronger relevance, better timing, and meaningful personalization will define the winners.

- Prabhpreet Sidhu, Vice President, Analytics,
Mars United

“Brand and commerce marketing can no longer operate as separate systems.”



Smart (but not yet brilliant) Homes

At CES 2026, a persistent tension emerged: undeniably impressive technology that remains difficult to ground in everyday life.

The smart home showcased remarkable advances — AI-powered ovens that can plan meals and order groceries, washers and dryers that precisely dose detergent, and systems designed to learn our preferences over time. The technology is real. The progress is real. But the friction is still there.

Most of these “smart” products continue to operate in silos and don’t connect in ways that meaningfully reduce effort for consumers (yet). Instead, the consumer remains the orchestrator — still tapping, confirming, managing, and stitching experiences together manually. There were glimpses of a more cohesive future, moments when devices felt connected rather than isolated. That’s the direction that truly matters.

Innovation only earns its place when it solves real human problems. The future won’t be won by intelligence alone. It will be won by technology that genuinely makes everyday life easier.

- Tyler Rosten, Director, E-commerce
Saatchi X



“Innovation only earns its place when it solves real human problems.”

Designing for Recognition at Scale

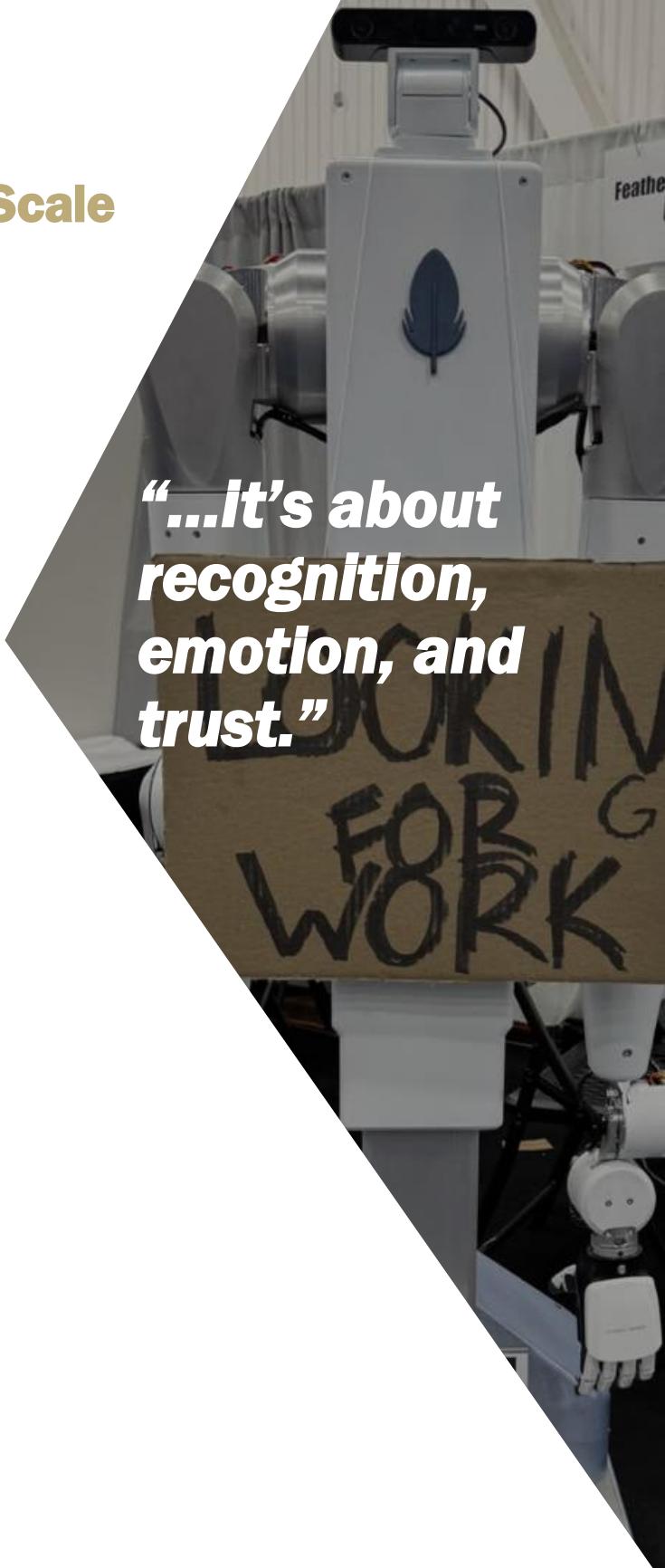
Across CES conversations, a clear shift emerged in how personalization, experience, and AI are understood.

We're moving away from designing experiences that require consumers to navigate toward outcomes, and instead, toward systems that anticipate needs and act on intent. But personalization is no longer just about relevance or efficiency — it's about recognition, emotion, and trust.

Personalization breaks when it's treated as content or product matching. The next evolution is recognizing who someone is, what they value, and how they want to be spoken to — not simply what they might buy. When brands honor those signals, experiences feel human; when they don't, they feel robotic.

As AI becomes more agentic and experiences more ambient, success depends less on technology and more on how organizations design experiences, organize teams, and build cultures capable of delivering meaning at scale. Emotion becomes the true differentiator — efficiency alone can't manufacture loyalty. Scale must be engineered without sacrificing humanity, making collaboration a structural capability rather than a soft skill.

- Jill Cruz, EVP, Commerce Strategy,
Publicis Commerce



**“...It's about
recognition,
emotion, and
trust.”**



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sapient

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