



Press Release

NRF Retail's Big Show Europe: AI, the New Engine of Value Creation for Retail

Paris, 4 May 2026 – Artificial intelligence is now an operational reality for the retail sector. A recent National Retail Federation [study](#) found that while 77% of retailers currently allocate 5% or less of their technology budget to AI, 39% plan to dedicate more than 10% within three years. That signals an unprecedented acceleration.

Against this backdrop, the NRF 2026: Retail's Big Show Europe [Advisory Board](#) — comprised of executives and industry experts from across Europe and beyond — has produced a report analyzing the AI transformations underway. Among the key findings: AI is moving beyond optimising operations and is fundamentally redefining the retail business model, opening the door to new sources of value and revenue.

A Structural and Organisational Shift: AI as the New Foundation of Retail

After a period of experimentation, the sector is now entering a phase of large-scale deployment. AI is progressively establishing itself as operational infrastructure at the heart of the strategies of the most advanced retailers.

The results are already measurable. A recent [study](#) by the Centre for Economic Policy Research, conducted among more than 12,000 European companies, estimates that AI adoption drives an average 4% increase in labour productivity. Meanwhile, [PwC's 2025 Global AI Jobs Barometer](#) highlights that productivity in AI-exposed sectors has quadrupled since 2022.

This momentum is well underway in Europe, where some major retail players have already gained a head start: Brands like Zalando and H&M have invested in unified customer data platforms, enabling them to deploy large-scale personalisation strategies while orchestrating every customer touchpoint.

"In Europe, the retail sector has matured considerably in its relationship with AI. The experimentation phase is now behind us. What matters now is what actually works." **Aliyah Khaki, Advisory Board Member and Technology Innovation Manager at Marks & Spencer.**

From Cost Reduction to Revenue Generation: A Paradigm Shift

The most compelling example is retail media. While the growth of online advertising networks has attracted the most attention in recent years, the next battle is being fought in-store. The vast majority of grocery and convenience purchases in Europe still take place in physical stores, a colossal opportunity to monetise foot traffic that the most forward-thinking retailers have clearly identified.

Through technologies such as connected digital screens, electronic shelf labels, managed audio environments, and smart shopping trolleys, points of sale are being transformed into fully programmable and measurable media channels, giving partner brands privileged access to consumers at the precise moment of purchase.

While the European market still lags behind the United States, where retailers like Walmart and Kroger already generate hundreds of millions of dollars annually through their retail media networks, the gap is closing rapidly. Tesco, through its Dunhumby infrastructure and

Tesco Media and Insight platform, has established itself as one of Europe's most advanced players. Other retailers such as Carrefour, Ahold Delhaize, and Lidl are now investing heavily in comparable infrastructure, driven by margins structurally far superior to those of traditional retail.

“AI is not only changing what we build, but also who we build it with and how we do it. The companies that will create lasting competitive advantage are those that combine technological progress with deep organisational transformation.” — **Anika Vooes, Advisory Board Member and Chief Acceleration Manager at Rewe Digital.**

Isolated Tools or Integrated System: The True Differentiating Factor

As AI adoption accelerates, not all retailers are progressing at the same pace. The real dividing line is no longer between those that use AI and those that do not. It lies between those deploying isolated tools and those that have built an integrated system capable of circulating data across the entire organisation.

Retailers that have invested in a unified AI infrastructure — one that connects demand forecasting, personalisation, inventory management, and customer experience — are able to concretely measure their performance and adjust their strategy in real time. This approach allows the entire system to self-feed and continuously improve in step with customer interactions.

In this context, competitive advantage is not built through one-off experiments, but by making AI the structural backbone of the entire operating model. The retailers that have taken that step will be best positioned to turn AI's promise into lasting, measurable, and concrete performance.

Join Us at NRF 2026: Retail's Big Show Europe

These are precisely the issues that will convene the global retail community at [NRF Retail's Big Show Europe](#), taking place Sept. 15 – 17, with dedicated thematic sessions including:

- **CRM and the Intelligent Use of Data: Privacy-First Strategies**, with Alan Jensen, Chief Information Officer and Executive Vice President at Salling Group; Aleksandra Olszewska, Chief Commercial and Digital Officer at Desigual; and Shailesh Jain, Chief Customer and Analytics Officer at Landmark Group.
- **Beyond the Basket: How Connected Retail is Reshaping Grocery**, with Ryan Hamburger, Chief Commercial Officer at Instacart.
- **How AI is Transforming Retail Pain Points into Opportunities**, with Bastian Sehnert, Head of Data and AI Initiative Office at Media-Saturn-Holding GmbH; Dorian Candavoine, Ecommerce Director EMEA at L'Occitane en Provence; and Marlies Hersbach, Chief Online and Customer Officer at Mango.

More than 12,000 attendees representing 4,200 innovative brands, 525 exhibitors and 200 speakers from over 60 countries will come together to explore the transformations reshaping the industry. NRF 2026: Retail's Big Show Europe is an unmissable event for those looking to make AI a driver of sustainable, responsible growth.

For more information, visit <https://www.nrfbigshoweurope.com>

Press accreditations will open on XX.

About Retail's Big Show Europe

Europe's most important retail event will take place in Paris from 15 to 17 September 2026. Be inspired by top retail leaders from across Europe in one of the world's most dynamic, consumer-focused markets. Over three days, retail professionals from around the globe will gain access to high-level content, explore the latest industry

solutions and innovations, and discover cutting-edge technologies in the Innovators Showcase and Startup Hub.

About NRF

The National Retail Federation passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail succeed. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation's largest private-sector employer, contributing \$5.3 trillion to annual GDP and supporting more than one in four U.S. jobs — 55 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies. nrf.com

About Comexposium

Comexposium is one of the world's leading organizers of professional and consumer events. The Group organizes 400 trade shows, exhibitions, conferences and one-to-one meetings in 80 cities across 20 countries, including SIAL, the world's leading network of events for food industry professionals; Wine Paris and Vinexpo, the leading global network of business events dedicated to wines and spirits; Who's Next; Les Assises de la cybersécurité; Foire de Paris; Retromobile; the Salon du Chocolat; and L'Étudiant.

Comexposium brings together communities of professionals and enthusiasts around the world through an omnichannel strategy designed to meet the real needs of its clients. Headquartered in Courbevoie (Île-de-France), the Group employs 1,200 people across its various subsidiaries.

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