

# Columbus<sup>®</sup>



C | The Shift | Retail reimaged



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# Why agility, intelligence and execution define retail success

**Retail has always evolved, but the shift in 2026 marks a turning true point. What once felt like emerging trends have now become structural changes. AI has moved from experimentation into agentic everyday operations of leading retailers. Sustainability has transitioned from ambition to accountability. And unified commerce has become the backbone of modern retail rather than an aspirational target. The industry is entering a new phase defined not by speed alone, but by precision, clarity, and resilience.**

This guide continues the work we began last year: helping retailers navigate a landscape where customer expectations grow faster than operating margins, where technology advances more quickly than organisations can adapt, and where every decision, from assortment to fulfilment, must balance profitability with responsibility. It aims to give retailers a clear view of what truly matters, stripping away the noise and focusing on the shifts that will shape the year ahead.

“Whether you are scaling AI across your organisation, strengthening your unified commerce foundation, reducing operational waste, or responding to shifting customer expectations, this guide is designed to help you make confident, informed progress.”

–Søren Krogh Knudsen, Chief Executive Officer & President, Columbus

At Columbus, we have seen firsthand how retailers across the Nordics and Europe are grappling with rising complexity. Agentic AI has moved beyond the hype cycle and into the engine room, powering forecasting, supply chains, customer service, merchandising, and returns. Unified commerce has matured into a practical necessity as retailers connect stores, online platforms, warehouses, and service operations into one coherent system. Meanwhile, customers continue to demand faster, more sustainable, and more meaningful interactions, without compromise. These changes are real, and they are reshaping how retailers operate, prioritise, and grow.

Retail reimaged is grounded in our close work with retailers across categories, tradeshows and markets. The goal is not to predict the future, but to give retailers a clearer foundation for the decisions they need to make today. Through practical examples, case reflections, and honest perspectives from the field, we explore how to turn the defining forces of 2026 into opportunities for smarter operations and stronger customer relationships.

Here’s to a future of more connected, more intelligent, and more resilient retail.

Happy reading,

**Søren Krogh Knudsen**  
Chief Executive Officer & President  
Columbus

# The new consumer reality – demand, discernment, and the race for relevance

If 2025 was the year consumers became more selective, then 2026 is the year they became uncompromising. The gap between what customers expect and what retailers deliver has widened, not because retailers aren't trying, but because expectations continue to accelerate faster than organizations can adapt. What actually matters? And what should we do first?



# The rise of the connected customer

The modern customer moves fluidly between online and in-store, expects complete transparency in product and sustainability information, and demands experiences that are fast, accurate, and tailored, while also being respectful of privacy. The paradox is simple: consumers want more, but they are willing to engage less. They grant attention sparingly and loyalty even more cautiously.

The retailer–customer relationship has shifted from transactional to conditional. Consumers no longer reward novelty; they reward usefulness. They no longer tolerate friction; they abandon it. And they no longer stay loyal to brands that do not align with their identity, values, or time. Convenience is still a primary driver, but now it is joined by a deeper desire for certainty. Certainty that products are in stock, that returns won't become a burden, that personal data won't be misused, and that sustainability claims are genuine rather than decorative.

Against this backdrop, retailers are wrestling with a new challenge: how to meet rising demands without overcomplicating their operations. The danger is not a lack of innovation but an excess of it. Many retailers have invested in patches, separate systems, standalone loyalty programmes, unconnected marketing tools, fragments of AI capabilities. Only to realise that the customer doesn't experience channels or technology stacks. They experience the whole. And when the pieces don't fit, friction becomes visible.

This dissonance is most evident in loyalty. Traditional programmes continue to lose relevance because customers no longer view loyalty as a trade of data for discounts. They expect recognition, transparency, and relevance woven through the entire experience. Loyalty now lives in the everyday moments: how accurately a product recommendation reflects their needs, how fast a store associate can locate an item, and how effectively a size guide prevents a return. Loyalty is less about accumulation and more about alignment between values, expectations, and delivery.

Sustainability also plays a larger role in shaping demand. The impact of returns has become impossible to ignore, and consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental costs of their shopping habits. Yet few are willing to sacrifice convenience outright. This tension, between sustainable intent and convenience-driven behaviour, is creating a new battleground where retailers must balance responsibility with reality. The winning retailers will be those who make sustainable choices the easiest choices, integrating them into the customer experience rather than turning them into moral tests.

The economic climate continues to heighten scrutiny on spending. Consumers are still cautious, still price-sensitive, but more willing to choose brands that signal integrity, value, and clarity - particularly in categories like apparel, home goods, and electronics. Promotions may drive short-term kicks, but long-term engagement hinges on reliability and trust. Retailers who promise too much and deliver too little see the consequences faster than ever.

As a result, customer experience has become a strategic discipline, not a marketing exercise. It requires unified data, operational agility, connected systems, and the ability to make decisions in real time. This is why Agentic AI, OMS, and unified commerce have risen from technical topics to boardroom priorities, because they reveal the very capabilities consumers now assume by default.

In 2026, relevance is no longer defined by how much retailers offer, but by how consistently they deliver. The retailers gaining momentum this year are those who recognise that customer expectations are not obstacles, they are instruction manuals. And the brands that follow those instructions with clarity, coherence, and empathy are the ones consumers increasingly choose.



## Best-in-class retailers

**Nike:** Nike continues to excel at meeting shoppers where they are: personalised apps, connected retail stores, strong community engagement, and fast fulfilment.

**H&M:** H&M remains one of the best examples of a retailer who balances consumer expectations, sustainability pressures, and unified commerce maturity.

**Glossier:** Continues to lead with staff empowerment and seamless tech integration in-store.

**Starbucks:** Remains a leader in loyalty and mobile-first convenience



## Final thought

The consumer landscape of 2026 is defined by sharper expectations and diminishing patience. Customers no longer reward good intentions, they reward reliability, clarity, and relevance. They gravitate toward retailers who respect their time, who don't overcomplicate the experience, and who show integrity in both values and execution. As convenience merges with conscience and identity becomes a determining factor in brand relationships, retailers are entering a year where the fundamentals matter more than ever.

Success will not be about offering everything everywhere, but mainly about offering the right things, delivered consistently, with a customer journey that feels coherent rather than constructed. The retailers who embrace this shift will not only win more moments of attention but also earn something far more valuable: trust that lasts beyond the next transaction.

# Bubbleroom: Rebuilding E-commerce for European growth

**Scaling a fashion brand across borders is rarely just a marketing challenge. New languages, payment methods, logistics partners, legal requirements and customer expectations all add complexity long before the first order is placed. For Swedish fashion retailer Bubbleroom, this complexity became the catalyst for a strategic rebuild of its digital commerce platform.**

Founded in 2005, Bubbleroom has grown into one of the Nordic region's fastest-growing online fashion retailers for women. But as the brand's European ambitions accelerated, the existing e-commerce setup struggled to keep pace with the speed and flexibility required for cross-border growth. The team realised that scaling internationally demanded a new digital foundation.

Together with Columbus, Bubbleroom embarked on a transformation to rebuild its e-commerce platform on Shopify. The objective was not simply to migrate systems, but to create a scalable architecture that would allow the company to launch new markets quickly while maintaining control over operations and customer experience.

The ambition was bold: launch new European storefronts in Belgium and the Netherlands within seven weeks. At the same time, the project had to align with Bubbleroom's ongoing campaigns, product launches and seasonal fashion cycles.

To make this possible, the teams adopted a highly collaborative delivery model. Workshops, blueprinting sessions and agile processes created a shared roadmap from day one, ensuring that technology decisions supported real business needs. Tools like Jira and Confluence provided transparency and coordination across teams, helping maintain speed without sacrificing quality.

The result was a successful launch of new Shopify storefronts tailored to local expectations, followed by the migration of the Danish site, including 17,000 products, 53,000 customers and 70,000 historical orders, with no disruption to the customer experience. Orders began flowing almost immediately after launch, confirming the stability of the new setup.

But the real impact goes beyond a single migration. The new platform created a blueprint for scalable European expansion. Shortly after the first launches, Bubbleroom successfully entered Germany, one of Europe's most competitive fashion markets, while preparing additional Nordic market migrations for 2026. Equally important, the architecture was designed with the future in mind. The same platform foundation now supports upcoming initiatives, including a dedicated outlet store and continuous improvements to accessibility and customer experience.

What began as an ambitious seven-week launch has become something much more valuable: a repeatable model for international expansion.

[Read the full story](#)



# Sustainability 2.0: Accountability becomes the new currency

**Sustainability has stopped being a nice-to-have and become a test of whether a retailer can operate at all. In 2026 the conversation has moved well beyond greenwashing and green PR: regulators are tightening reporting rules, consumers expect traceability, and the economics of returns, logistics and inventory simply make waste expensive. What used to be framed as moral positioning is now an operational and financial imperative, and those who treat it as a checkbox will be left paying for the consequences.**



# From compliance to competitive advantage

The most obvious pressure point is returns. The time of unlimited, cost-free returns is ending: retailers and analysts are flagging the unsustainable cost and carbon burden of current return rates, and companies are experimenting with tighter policies, smarter reverse-logistics, and new commercial models to change shopper behaviour. This is not just about protecting margin; it is also about reducing unnecessary transport, repackaging and landfill. Outcomes that investors, regulators and customers increasingly count. Recent industry analysis predicts a tightening on liberal return policies as companies balance cost and consumer expectations. (Forrester)

Circularity has now moved from pilot programs into strategic operating models. Leaders are designing products for longevity, enabling repairs and resale, and embedding recommerce into the customer proposition. These moves are both brand-strengthening and pragmatic: they extend lifetime value, capture revenue that would otherwise be lost, and reduce the material intensity of growth. In practice this looks like repair services and take-back schemes that are integrated into e-commerce flows, localised restocking operations for resold goods, and even product designs that make repair and recycling straightforward. European outdoor and fashion brands that prioritise durability and repair are often the earliest to demonstrate measurable upside from these models.

Regulation is changing the math, and fast. Initiatives such as the Digital Product Passport and expanded ESG reporting requirements are pushing retailers to trace materials, record lifecycle impacts, and publish evidence. - not slogans. Compliance

alone creates workstreams across procurement, data and product teams, but the smart approach treats regulation as a forcing function: a way to build robust supplier relationships, unearth inefficiencies and generate competitive advantage by proving claims transparently. Retailers that invest in traceability platforms and supplier collaboration now will be both compliant and differentiated when disclosures become “market-normal”. (EverBlue Partners)

Technology is also starting to close the gap between intention and impact. AI and real-time data are being used to model the carbon cost of different fulfilment options, dynamically prioritise greener delivery routes, and simulate the environmental trade-offs of inventory decisions. At the same time, cloud-based data platforms are making it possible to measure scopes of emissions across complex supplier networks, turning abstract targets into operational levers. The combination of smarter analytics and more connected systems means sustainability is increasingly actionable at the same cadence as sales and margin decisions.

But the operational heavy-lifting is still often where programmes stumble. Reverse logistics, in particular, exposes gaps in fulfilment, customer service and product design. Conferences and industry fora have begun to treat reverse logistics as a separate domain, a recognition that returns deserve the same strategic focus and technical rigor as forward fulfilment. The retail industry is organising around that idea: new forums and events are dedicated to circular retail and reverse-logistics, a sign the sector sees this as a structural challenge, not an afterthought.

# Where are the practical wins?

- Start small and operational.
- Reduce returns through better fit and sizing tools, richer product content and buy-with-confidence flows.
- Localise returns collection and grading to reduce transportation and accelerate resale where appropriate.
- Build recommerce propositions tied to loyalty so customers see sustainable choices as convenient and rewarding.
- Use carbon-aware decisioning in OMS and fulfilment logic so environmental impact is included in routing and allocation decisions.

**These wins are not theoretical:** We see retailers turning repair shops, local restocking points and recommerce marketplaces into repeatable revenue channels.

# Final thought

Sustainability is neither a marketing slogan nor a distant goal. It's a set of operational choices that determine whether a retailer can grow profitably, meet regulatory demands and keep the trust of customers who expect more than good intentions. The retailers that win will be those who treat sustainability like any other critical business domain: instrument it, measure it, and iterate relentlessly.

# Best-in-class examples make the strategy concrete

**Norrøna:** A pioneer in product repairs, with spare parts and DIY repair guides supporting long-term use.

**Fristads:** A circular fashion brand utilising deadstock fabrics, transparent sourcing, digital traceability, and local production for measurable impact.

**Kappahl:** Leveraging supply chain traceability and lifecycle tools to align internal practices with EU legislation.

**Zalando:** Combining AI, OMS, and sustainability scoring to optimise the delivery and return experience.

NORRØNA  FRISTADS Kappahl  zalando



## CASE IN FOCUS

# *Kappahl:* Scaling circular fashion through data, traceability and digital foundations

**For many fashion retailers, circularity remains an ambition. For Kappahl, it has become an operational strategy. As sustainability regulation tightens and customer expectations evolve, the Nordic fashion retailer is moving beyond isolated initiatives and building scalable circular business models supported by data, traceability and modern digital platforms.**

Kappahl's transformation is driven by a clear ambition: create a responsible fashion world while maintaining commercial performance. With more than 330 stores and online sales in over 20 countries, scaling circularity is not a branding exercise, it requires systems capable of handling second-hand flows, traceability data, regulatory compliance and new lifecycle-based business models.

Under the leadership of sustainability VP Sandra Roos, Kappahl has taken a structured approach. The retailer is expanding into second-hand and circular offerings, with a target that 50% of the assortment should be enabled for circular models by 2026. The logic is simple: by extending product lifecycles and enabling resale, repair and reuse, fewer garments need to be produced - reducing environmental impact while creating new revenue streams.

But circularity at scale requires transparency. To achieve this, Kappahl has implemented traceability tools such as the Higg Index and TrusTrace, enabling visibility across the entire supply chain, from raw material to finished garment. These tools allow the retailer to measure environmental and social impact, collaborate with suppliers and prepare for upcoming EU regulations requiring detailed product-level data.



The regulatory shift is a major driver. The upcoming Digital Product Passport (DPP) and EU circular economy initiatives demand that retailers provide detailed lifecycle information, e.g. materials, origin, manufacturing, recyclability and more. Kappahl is proactively building the data foundation needed to support these requirements, ensuring products can be tracked throughout their lifecycle and enabling resale, recycling and transparency for consumers.

What makes Kappahl particularly interesting is how sustainability is tied directly to technology and operations. Circular business models introduce new complexities: second-hand inventory, repair flows, supplier traceability, sustainability reporting and lifecycle data. These requirements demand scalable IT architecture, integrated ERP capabilities and structured product information, not isolated sustainability initiatives.

For Kappahl, digital transformation is therefore not just about efficiency. It's about enabling entirely new ways of doing business, where products are designed to last longer, sold multiple times, and tracked across their full lifecycle. This shift positions the retailer to meet regulatory requirements, reduce emissions and create new customer value at the same time.

What emerges is a blueprint for modern fashion retail: sustainability powered by data, circularity enabled by technology, and growth driven by transparency.

[Read our blog post here](#)



## Retail media: From hype cycle to hard reality

Retail media entered 2025 as one of the most talked-about revenue opportunities in the industry. In 2026, the conversation has shifted. The excitement hasn't disappeared, but retailers have become far more sober about what it takes to make retail media profitable, and what happens when it isn't.

# When retail media meets reality

In the US and UK, retail media continues to mature into a fully-fledged growth engine. The largest players — Walmart, Target, Amazon, Boots — are not just monetising their digital real estate; they are building sophisticated advertising ecosystems centered on first-party data, predictive modelling, and AI-driven personalisation. For them, retail media is an extension of a decades-long transformation where scale, data, and operational excellence give them a structural advantage.

But in the Nordics and wider parts of Europe, 2026 has become a year of recalibration. Retailers now realise that retail media is not a plug-and-play revenue stream. It requires a strong data foundation, real advertising demand, technical readiness, and an internal commercial model that can support it sustainably. Many have invested in small pilots only to discover that the cost of running a retail media network, from measurement to sales to content production, outweighs the initial returns.

**The result:** a shift from “we must have retail media” to “we must have retail media that actually works.”

# The shift: Relevance over reach

Consumers have also grown more cautious. After a year of rising concerns about digital tracking and intrusive advertising, retailers are rethinking the balance between monetisation and trust. The most successful retail media strategies now prioritise relevance, transparency, and value for the customer, not simply volume.

The best-performing networks are those that integrate retail media directly into the shopping experience, enhancing discovery rather than interrupting it. Ads that help customers make better choices, such as size-fit guidance, sustainability insights, or compatible product recommendations, are greatly outperforming traditional display formats.

Meanwhile, the market has seen a clear move from “build your own RMN” to “partner smartly.” As technology providers introduce more modular and cost-efficient RMN platforms, retailers no longer need to shoulder the full investment burden. 2026 is becoming the year where collaboration replaces over-ambition.

## EXPERT'S BLOG REVIEW

[Why you shouldn't rush into retail media](#)



“For consumers, the best retail media experiences don't feel like ads at all. They're helpful, relevant, and seamlessly integrated into the shopping journey.”

– Samuel Sapire VP Digital Commerce Scandinavia Columbus

# The Nordic perspective: A strategic slow burn

**Nordic retailers, known for their quality, customer-centricity, and operational discipline, are now asking sharper questions:**

- Do we have the data depth to make retail media credible?
- Is the advertiser demand strong enough in our category?
- Can retail media support our brand without saturating our customer?

This more thoughtful stance has prevented costly missteps. Swedish and Danish retailers have learned from early overextension in the UK and US markets, where some networks struggled due to inconsistent measurement or customer pushback. 2026 is now about building the right foundation: unified data layers, strong product information management, and better audience segments. These fundamentals matter more than the rapid launch of an RMN.

## Take these key steps to prepare your company to use retail media effectively:

**Conduct a thorough analysis of your current marketing strategy.** See where retail media can add value. Strategic and financial analysis provides a good basis for making the right business decisions.

**Start with small-scale pilot projects targeting specific products or markets.** Implement trial-and-error testing to try out various approaches and fine-tune your efforts by adapting your messaging. These tests can give you an indication of the effectiveness of retail media and provide valuable insights to support future decisions.

**Scale up gradually.** Use what you've learned from the pilot projects to scale up your activities. Ensure that the data collected from the pilots are used to adjust and optimise your campaigns.

Success in this space will automatically require more than ad space, it demands real operational capability. Leading retail media networks are therefore hiring editorial and creative teams, partnering with ad tech platforms, and offering brands closed-loop reporting. The ability to tie ad exposure directly to sales conversion is transforming how marketers allocate budgets and pushing retail media to the top of the funnel planning conversation.

## Retailers casted as storytellers

For consumers, the best retail media experiences don't feel like ads at all. They're helpful, relevant, and seamlessly integrated into the shopping journey. Think contextual search placements, personalised homepage takeovers, or product videos on mobile. The key is to add value, not noise.

Retailers are also extending their media footprint into new channels. In-store screens, self-checkout displays, loyalty apps, and even connected TV are being used to deliver targeted brand messaging with measurable outcomes. Meanwhile, AI is enabling real-time optimisation of media content, placement, and targeting. Allowing retailers to maximise performance across formats and touchpoints.

Therefore, retail media isn't just a monetisation strategy, it's a digital transformation accelerator. It forces cross-functional collaboration, better data infrastructure, and a more agile marketing mindset. And it's giving retailers a new role in the brand ecosystem: not just as sellers, but as storytellers.

The most effective retail media strategies deliver value for all parties: the retailer, the brand, and, most importantly, the end-customer. While scale helps, even mid-sized and niche retailers can succeed by activating first-party data, building the right tech stack, and securing strong ad partnerships.

Mid-market retailers and category specialists might be eager to enter the space by leveraging marketplace models, loyalty programs, and ecommerce platforms that provide the reach and relevance needed to attract their audiences. Although, it does require a combination of market timing, strategic patience, and organisational readiness. Jumping in without a clear business case or operational plan can be costly. But moving too slowly could mean missing the window to lead in an emerging space.

# Best-in-class retailers

**Decathlon:** Decathlon continues to redefine what “retail experience” means. Their blend of experiential stores, rapid product innovation, in-house brands, and digital-first services positions them as one of the world’s most adaptive retailers.

**IKEA:** A global role model for price value, sustainability, customer-centricity, and business model evolution.

**Ulta Beauty:** Offers brands opportunities to advertise through the loyalty program, app, and in-store displays — creating a seamless ecosystem.

**Patagonia:** The archetype of value-driven loyalty. Consumers increasingly demand brands with purpose, and Patagonia demonstrates how value alignment creates devotion beyond transactional loyalty programs.



# Final thought

Retail media is no longer a race to the starting line; it’s a measured ascent. The winning retailers will be those who invest in strong foundations, navigate consumer expectations with sensitivity, and resist the temptation to over-commercialise the customer journey. Done well, retail media enhances both profitability and loyalty. Done poorly, it becomes noise in an already crowded digital world. The choice, in 2026, is clearer than ever.

For best-in-class global retailers, the formula is becoming clear: retail media must enhance the customer experience, not interrupt it. It must build supplier relationships, not strain them. And it must be tied to measurable commercial outcomes, not theoretical revenue projections. The Nordics, as always, will adopt the model with caution, but also with clarity. Those who succeed will be the ones who see retail media not as a shortcut to new revenue, but as an extension of their core value proposition: helping customers find what they need more easily, more intelligently, and on their own terms.

# Beyond back office: ERP's leap into retail's frontline

In 2026, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems have evolved far beyond being the quiet financial or accounting engine at the back of the house. They have become the pillar of modern retail, a unified, cloud-native, AI-augmented platform that powers everything from inventory and supply chain resilience to customer experience, compliance, and growth agility. For retailers aiming to lead rather than just survive, modern ERP is foundational.

# Smarter retail starts with ERP

Retail today is defined by volatility: shifting consumer demand, supply-chain interruptions, rising regulation, and increasingly complex omnichannel operations. Legacy systems, rigid, siloed, on-premise, struggle under that weight. Modern, cloud-based ERP offers a different path. By integrating data across financials, supply chain, inventory, e-commerce, CRM, and more, ERP transforms fragmented operations into a single source of truth, delivering real-time visibility, improved efficiency, and scalability. Moreover, ERP helps retailers respond faster to unpredictability: late shipments, sudden demand surges, regulatory change, or shifting costs. It enables retailers to re-allocate stock, prioritise replenishment, adjust financial forecasts, and adapt on the fly, freeing up capital and reducing risk.

In 2026, more vendors have also started to added AI, automation, and cloud-native architectures to ERP. No longer just data processors, ERP systems are becoming decision systems. That evolution marks a turning point for retail

## What modern retail ERPs do, and why it matters

### **Real-time, unified inventory & supply-chain visibility**

Modern retail involves multiple channels: online, physical stores, marketplaces, even pop-ups. All requiring live synchronisation of stock levels. A cloud ERP ensures inventory changes flow instantly across channels, reducing overselling, dead stock, and lost sales. This real-time visibility allows retailers to react quickly to demand swings or supply disruptions.

### **AI-powered demand planning, replenishment & pricing**

In fast-moving categories like fashion or electronics, demand is volatile, and overstock or stockout can be costly. AI-powered ERP modules now forecast demand at SKU-level, considering seasonality, promotions, historical sales, even external signals like weather or local events. That enables smarter replenishment, dynamic pricing, and fewer markdowns.

### **Omnichannel order orchestration & checkout consistency**

Whether a customer buys online, picks up in-store, exchanges via mobile, or returns in a locker, ERP ensures that orders, regardless of origin, flow through the same backbone: inventory, fulfilment, finance, and customer profile. Cloud ERPs and headless architectures make this possible without brittle custom integrations.

### **Efficiency, cost control, and agility**

With manual tasks automated, reconciliations, order entries, vendor management, and reporting, retailers reduce operational overhead, minimize human error, speed up financial closes, and free up staff capacity for higher-value work. Cloud-based ERPs lower total cost of ownership by eliminating on-premises infrastructure, enabling pay-as-you-grow models, and simplifying maintenance.

### **Support for sustainability, compliance, and transparency**

With increasing regulatory demands, around supply-chain traceability, ESG reporting, labour compliance, ERP offers structured data, audit trails, and traceable material/production records. Some next-gen ERP solutions embed sustainability metrics directly, helping retailers track carbon footprint, supplier compliance, and circular-economy operations.

### **Scalability and resilience**

As retailers grow, adding stores, markets, distribution centers, and product lines, cloud ERP scales along. Modules can be added, customised, or upgraded without major capital investments. And because cloud ERP lives behind enterprise-grade security and redundancy, it offers resilience against disruptions, whether supply-chain crises, financial volatility, or market shifts.

# Best-in-class retailers

Some recent, standout examples show how modern ERP + cloud + AI can transform retail operations:

**Devold (Norway):** After implementing a new ERP system, Devold strengthened its global growth ambitions, streamlining order-to-fulfillment processes, improving supply-chain agility, and supporting expansion to new markets.

**Bang & Olufsen:** Their ERP transformation has helped balance high-end product complexity, global supply chains, and omnichannel retail, enabling luxury-level customer experience while keeping operations efficient.

**Fristads:** As sustainable workwear becomes more important, Fristads uses ERP to connect product metadata, manufacturing, supply-chain compliance and resale/repair, ensuring transparency and traceability across the lifecycle.

These examples illustrate that ERP is not just a back-office tool. When deployed properly, it becomes a strategic enabler of growth, sustainability, and customer experience.



## What's new: Trends that make modern ERP even more critical

**Cloud-first, modular, subscription-based ERP.** The shift from heavy upfront investments to flexible, pay-as-you-grow models is accelerating. This lowers entry barriers, allowing even mid-size retailers to access best-in-class platforms.

**AI & automation embedded end-to-end.** From replenishment and procurement to returns and pricing, ERP systems now come with built-in AI agents that automate

complex tasks, while humans focus on strategy. Expect reductions in inventory holding costs and improved stock turnover.

**Omnichannel, headless, API-driven architectures.** As customer journeys span social commerce, marketplaces, mobile, physical stores, ERP must integrate with everything without breaking. Modern, API-first ERP makes that possible, enabling retailers to launch new channels quickly.

**Sustainability, compliance, and circular-economy support.** With rising regulatory and consumer pressure for transparency, ERP becomes the truth platform — capturing sourcing data, production footprints, returns, recycling, and material lifecycle information.

**Operational resilience and agility, from crisis to growth.** In a world of supply-chain disruptions, fluctuating demand, tariffs, and geopolitical uncertainty, ERP gives retailers visibility, flexibility, and control. Inventory, orders, vendors, finance, all connected and updated in real time

## The human and strategic impact: ERP is more than software

ERP alone doesn't guarantee success. Real value comes when technology, processes, and people align. Retailers must approach ERP as a strategic transformation: redesign workflows, invest in data hygiene, train employees, and embrace cross-functional operations. The lightest, cloud-ERP will fail if underlying processes remain fragmented. When done right, when cloud ERP is paired with good data, disciplined process and a culture ready for change, the result is a retail engine that moves fast, scales reliably, adapts to disruption, and delivers consistent customer experience across channels.

## Final thought

In 2026, retail's complexity has grown but so has its potential. ERP is no longer just a technical necessity; retailers have come to understand that it's a growth enabler. Retailers who see ERP as the strategic backbone of their business will not only survive in uncertain markets: they'll thrive. For those still relying on legacy systems, the choice is increasingly clear: modernize, or risk falling behind.

CASE IN FOCUS

# *Devold of Norway:* Building a foundation for future growth

**The strategic value of a modern ERP system can be seen not just in theory, but in the tangible transformation of real businesses. And few exemplify this as clearly as Devold of Norway. This 170-year-old wool manufacturer and retailer knew it was at a crossroads: to protect its heritage and grow globally, it needed an operating backbone that could support complexity, transparency and agility. In response, Devold embarked on a comprehensive ERP renewal with Columbus, choosing Microsoft Dynamics 365 to replace its legacy platform and unify operations across production, retail and distribution.**

Devold of Norway's story begins with pragmatic objectives: streamline processes, connect data, and create a scalable platform to support future growth. Over the course of a year, Devold of Norway and Columbus worked closely to migrate from an older AX system to Dynamics 365, on time, with high quality, and under budget, enabling seamless integrations with AutoStore robotics, transport solutions, the e-commerce platform, and more.

For Devold of Norway's leadership, the value was clear from day one. ERP Manager Maria Fugelsnes highlighted that bringing production, sales, procurement, retail and finance onto a single platform fostered collaboration and provided new insights that simply weren't possible before. Where information had once lived in siloes, the new system created a unified truth that teams could act upon.



The impact extends beyond efficiency. CEO Øystein Vikingsen Fauske noted that the new ERP system is not just a tool for internal processes, it underpins Devold's global growth ambitions. With rising demand for natural materials and increasing consumer interest in traceability and sustainability, Devold now has the data and agility to respond quickly to market shifts and tell a compelling product story that resonates across borders.

A particularly powerful outcome has been how Devold of Norway has tied operational transformation to business strategy. By integrating modern ERP with robust data flows and reporting tools, decision-making is no longer reactive. It's predictive - enabling Devold of Norway to forecast with confidence, align inventory with demand, and support its retail network with accurate insights. In a retail landscape where responsiveness defines winners, this foundational shift positions Devold of Norway to thrive long into the future.

The new ERP system strengthens Devold of Norway's global growth ambitions. Read the full case to see how a heritage brand transformed operations and future-proofed its business for global expansion.

[Read the full story](#)



## Loyalty reimaged: Passive memberships vs. active relationships

Loyalty is not what it used to be. A decade ago, retailers believed that building a points system, a tier structure, and an app was enough to retain customers. Today, that model is collapsing under the weight of shifting customer expectations, commoditised rewards, and an increasingly value-driven society. Loyalty is no longer earned by transactions; it is earned by alignment with identity, values, time, and trust.



# When loyalty isn't loyalty anymore

Most loyalty programmes today look impressive on paper: millions of members, strong activation rates, and a constant stream of behavioural data. But beneath the surface, something fundamental has changed. Consumers are now members of dozens of “loyalty programmes”, while being loyal to almost none of them.

This is the loyalty paradox of modern retail: Customers sign up because it's easy. But they stay only when it's meaningful.

In 2026, the baseline expectations for loyalty have shifted dramatically. Customers now assume free returns, personalised offers, and smooth omnichannel services. These features are no longer competitive advantages, they're hygiene factors. What truly differentiates retailers is how they make customers feel: recognised, respected, and reflected.

The rise of digital identity, AI-driven personalisation, agentic commerce, and value-based purchasing has accelerated this shift. Loyalty can no longer be viewed as something retailers manage, purely - it's something they earn every day.

## The new currency of loyalty: identity, values, and attention

Customers are increasingly asking: Why should I give you my data? What do I get in return? How does this benefit me beyond discounts? The answer can no longer be a coupon. In 2026, the new loyalty winners are those who deliver something worth returning for:

- **Identity:** Loyalty programmes that feel personal, not generic.
- **Values:** Retailers who act with integrity, sustainability, and fairness.
- **Attention:** Brands who respect consumers' time with relevance, not noise.
- **Experience:** Journeys that feel effortless across every channel.

Retailers like Nike, Zalando, and H&M have leaned into identity-driven loyalty, offering styling tools, exclusive content, early access, or personalised sustainability insights. These are not to be viewed as transactional mechanisms, more like emotional ones leaning on customised experiences.

# AI reshapes the loyalty landscape

2026 marks the year loyalty becomes dynamic, not static. Powered by generative AI and real-time behavioural signals, loyalty is no longer about monthly campaigns but about moment-by-moment relevance.

## AI is now being used to:

- Tailor rewards based on predicted lifetime value
- Identify early churn signals and act before the customer leaves
- Personalise offers in real time based on context
- Help customers make better purchasing decisions (size, fit, sustainability impact)

The best programmes are less about “earning points” and more about “earning trust,” as AI helps retailers understand intent, not just behaviour.

## The Nordic loyalty advantage (and challenge)

Nordic consumers are more privacy-conscious and sustainability-oriented than many global markets. That creates a unique dynamic: retailers can't rely on overly intrusive data practices, but customers reward brands that are transparent, responsible, and respectful.

This is where Nordic retailers have an opportunity to shine, not with the biggest loyalty systems, but with the most thoughtful ones. Retailers like Varner, Björn Borg, KICKS, and XXL continue to push loyalty into experience-led territory. Meanwhile, several Columbus customers — such as Vitamail, Tretti, and Intersport Denmark — have built loyalty around service, relevance, and personalised commerce experiences rather than pure discounts. The real question is: Are you keeping customers loyal or simply keeping them subscribed?

# Best-in-class retailers

**Starbucks:** A masterclass in app-driven loyalty, personalised rewards, and seamless omnichannel ordering.

**Nike:** Offers emotional connection through content, community, and exclusive access—not just discounts.

**Ulta Beauty:** Combines loyalty with AI-driven personalisation, in-store events, and expert guidance.



# Final thought

Loyalty is all about active relationships, not passive registrations. Customers no longer have patience for irrelevant messages, transactional gimmicks, or programmes that offer little more than clutter. What they want is authenticity, alignment, and added value, delivered consistently and respectfully.

Retailers who succeed will be those who treat loyalty not as a marketing function, but as a strategic promise: We see you. We hear you. We value you. The rest will be forgotten in a sea of unused memberships.

# Cybersecurity: A silent guard of the modern retail engine

**Cybersecurity is no longer a niche IT concern, but rather a central pillar of retail resilience, trust, and competitiveness. As retailers digitalise more processes, integrate ERP, OMS, AI-driven personalisation and unified commerce, they expand their attack surface.**

Every system, from product information management and digital identity platforms to supply-chain integrations and AI assistants, becomes a potential entry point. Ignoring cyber risk is no longer an option.



## Why 2026 is a turning point for retail cybersecurity

Retailers entered this decade with high hopes for AI-powered growth, seamless omni-channel operations, and unified commerce. But 2025 and early 2026 have brought a sobering reality check. According to recent industry data, e-commerce platforms are now prime targets for cyberattacks: credential theft and identity-based attacks like phishing, quishing (QR-based phishing), and smishing surged across many markets. (McKinsey)

Meanwhile, bad bots and API-exploiting traffic now account for a large share of retail web traffic, especially during high-volume sales periods. Threatening inventory availability, transaction security, and customer trust.\*

And it doesn't end there. Supply-chain vulnerabilities and third-party software integrations have become weak links; a compromised vendor can open the door to the retailer's entire network. At the same time, ERP systems, once mostly internal and "behind the scenes," now synchronise with cloud platforms, mobile apps, and third-party services. Increasing exposure to external threats, especially if patching, access control or identity governance is weak.

**In short:** the complexity and interconnectivity that delivers great retail also creates serious risk. In 2026, retailers must build not just for growth, but for resilience.\*

## The new threat landscape: AI-powered attacks and identity risks

Perhaps the most worrying evolution is the weaponisation of advanced tools against retailers. Attackers now use AI to craft hyper-realistic phishing emails, deepfake voice and video scams, synthetic-identity abuse, and automated bot attacks. Often combining these with social engineering or supply-chain exploits.

According to World Economic Forum 66% of organisations expect AI to affect cybersecurity within the next year, but still, most do not have a process in place for safe AI deployment. Even well-protected systems are vulnerable because the threat comes not just from brute-force intrusion but from deception; impersonation, fake support tickets, compromised credentials, and insider-style behaviour.

For retailers deploying AI internally, in marketing personalisation, inventory forecasting, or customer-facing chatbots, there's a further tension: AI tools add value, but also expand attack surfaces. Public or lightly controlled AI tools used by employees may inadvertently expose customer or company data, risking compliance, privacy, and trust.

# Building cyber resilience: What retailers should do in 2026

Cybersecurity isn't a one-off show, it needs to be built into the architecture, culture and strategy of retail. Here's some suggestions and considerations for forward-looking retailers:

**Identity as foundation:** Treat human and machine identities equally. Ensure rigorous authentication, least-privilege access, and zero-trust principles for employees, bots, services, and suppliers alike.

**Secure the supply chain:** Vet vendors, monitor third-party software, and enforce security standards for all partners, because one weak link can compromise everything.

**Continuous monitoring & patch hygiene:** Legacy infrastructure and outdated modules are among the most common entry points abused by attackers. Regular updates, real-time monitoring, and vulnerability scanning must be standard.

**Bot & API protection:** As bots and malicious automation grow in sophistication, retailers need to deploy tooling that distinguishes between legitimate traffic and attack traffic, something more complex than traditional firewalls or simple CAPTCHA.

**AI risk governance:** If you use AI for personalization, operations, or analytics, you need clear governance, data classification, and usage rules. This includes controlling "shadow AI" and securing training or inference data.

**Incident readiness & response:** Plan for the worst. A well-drilled incident response and communication strategy can be the difference between a breach and a breakdown.

**Culture & training:** People remain the first line of defence; train staff at all levels in phishing awareness, identity hygiene, and responsible data handling.

# Why ERP, OMS & unified commerce make cybersecurity critical instead of optional

Modern retail relies on a network of interconnected systems: ERP, OMS, PIM/DAM, POS, e-commerce, customer identity platforms, third-party logistics, payment gateways, etc. While this creates efficiency and offers seamless customer experiences, it also compounds risk. A breach in one system can rapidly cascade across the entire ecosystem, undoing weeks of meticulous supply-chain planning or loyalty investments.

Moreover, as more legacy on-prem systems migrate to cloud or hybrid infrastructures, many retailers find that their existing security practices are inadequate. Without real-time threat detection and robust identity management, cloud-hosted ERP or OMS systems become high-value targets. Therefore, cybersecurity must shift from being an IT afterthought to a board-level business priority, just as important as sustainability, omni-channel strategy, or customer experience. By now, it needs to become an integrated part of the culture of successful retailers.

## Raising internal awareness and building a security culture

Today's most effective attacks rely on deception, impersonation and social engineering rather than technical flaws. As phishing and AI-generated scams become harder to spot, employees are increasingly the primary target.

Building resilience therefore requires more than technology. Retailers must embed security as a key part of their culture. This can be done through practical training, clear escalation paths, and a work environment where questioning suspicious requests is encouraged. When security becomes part of everyday behaviour, not just policy, people turn from a risk into a first line of defense.



## Best in class retailers

Bang & Olufsen (B&O) has taken a proactive approach to strengthening security by simplifying and standardising how user access is managed across the organisation. As the company's digital landscape expanded, ensuring consistent and controlled access became a priority to support both security and efficiency.

“Right now, we have 4,000 individuals in 400 stores in 70 countries connected to our system. We need to have a secure model to be able to efficiently handle the hundreds of consultants worldwide who enter and exit our system every day”,  
Jonas Dan Jørgense, CIO at Bang and Olufsen

By streamlining access management, B&O improved control while enhancing the employee experience. The result is a more resilient organisation where security is built into daily operations rather than treated as a separate control function.

This approach supports B&O's global retail and enterprise environment by ensuring the right access at the right time—protecting the business, its employees and its customers.



## Final thought

In 2026, cybersecurity is essential. Retailers no longer compete just on assortment, price, or experience, they also compete on trust and continuity. In a world where AI-driven attacks, bot swarms, deepfake impersonations and supply-chain vulnerabilities have become the norm, resilience is the new differentiator.

For those who integrate cybersecurity into their core, from identity and data governance to resilient architecture and human awareness, the rewards won't just be protection from harm. They'll be brand trust, operational stability, and a foundation for growth in an uncertain world.

# *Bang & Olufsen:* Building the future of luxury retail

For almost a century, Bang & Olufsen has been recognised globally for its iconic design, premium craftsmanship and exceptional customer experiences. But as customer expectations, business models and technologies continue to evolve, even the world's most admired brands must reinvent the foundations that support their growth.

To prepare for the future, Bang & Olufsen embarked on an ambitious digital transformation programme together with Columbus. The objective was not simply to modernise legacy technology, but to create a scalable digital platform capable of supporting a global business operating across retail, distribution, service and partner channels.

After more than three decades of relying on highly customised systems, the company recognised the need for a more agile and connected operating model. By implementing Microsoft Dynamics 365 as the foundation for future operations, Bang & Olufsen created a platform designed to improve efficiency, strengthen collaboration and support continued innovation across the organisation.

The transformation extended beyond technology. Through workshops and strategic alignment initiatives, teams across sales, retail, service and distribution worked together to reimagine how the company delivers value to customers. The goal was to create a seamless experience across every touchpoint — from the first product interaction to installation, service and long-term customer relationships.



Today, Bang & Olufsen operates across more than 70 countries and 400 stores worldwide. Supporting that scale requires more than great products. It requires connected systems, reliable and secure data and the ability to adapt quickly to changing market conditions. The new platform provides the foundation needed to simplify operations, improve visibility and strengthen collaboration across the brand's global ecosystem.

What makes Bang & Olufsen's transformation particularly relevant is its recognition that customer experience and operational excellence are no longer separate disciplines. The most successful retailers understand that every process, system and data flow ultimately influences how customers perceive the brand.

In a retail landscape defined by rising expectations and increasing complexity, Bang & Olufsen demonstrates how a strong digital core can become a competitive advantage.

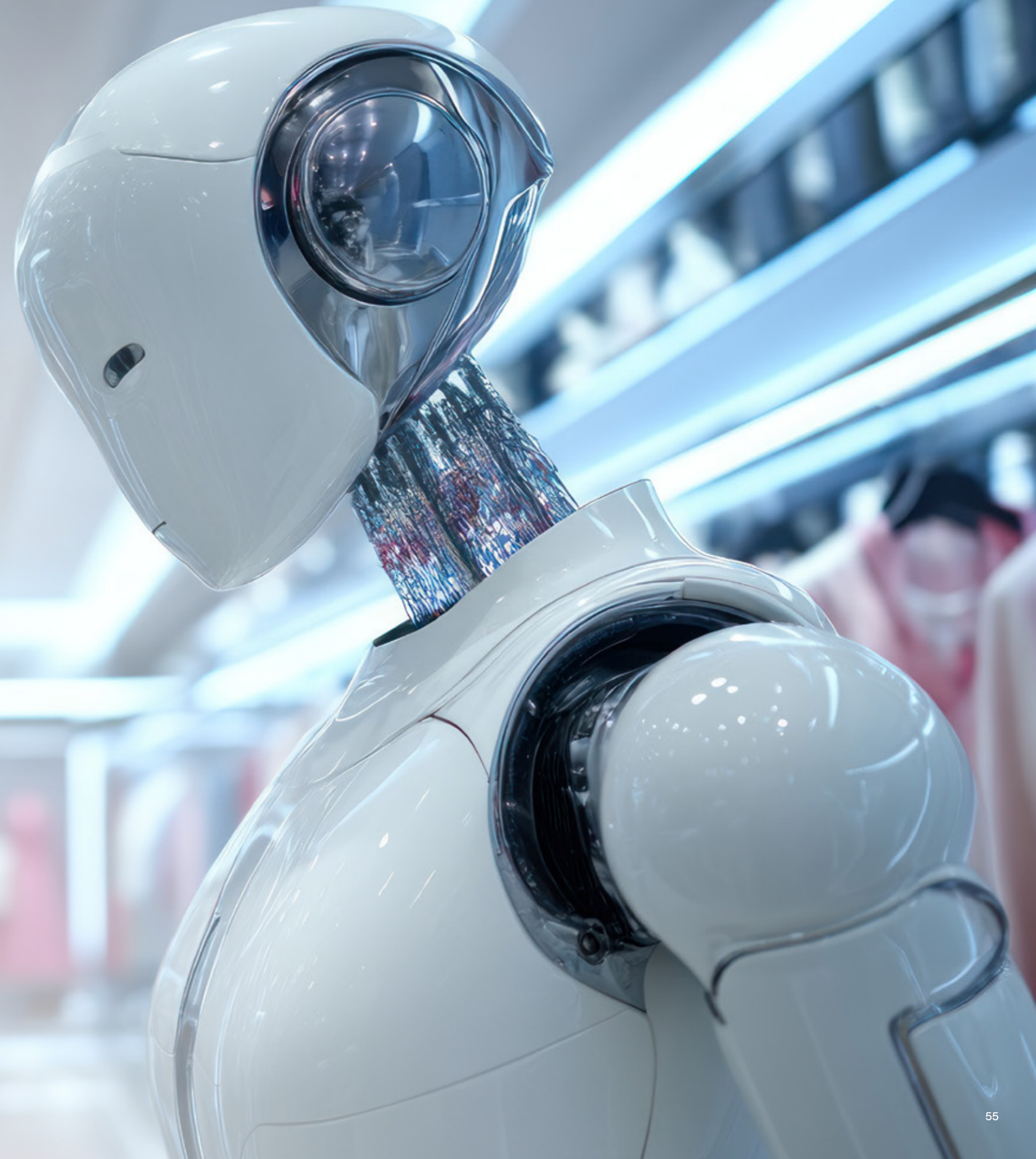
[Read the full story](#)



## Beyond pilots: AI powers retail in 2026

AI stopped being an experiment years ago. In 2026 the conversation has shifted from “can we?” to “how fast, and how well, can we put AI to work across the business?” What was once a scatter of pilots and point solutions is consolidating into a new operating model where agentic algorithms, real-time models and product-centric data work together to run parts of the business. The stakes are high: when AI is built on fragile data, it produces fragile results. When it is built on clean product truth, geo-aware localisation and enterprise pipelines, it becomes a reliable engine for growth.

The most important change this year is simple: AI now touches the whole value chain. It nudges demand planning, it runs pricing experiments, it tunes search and discovery, it generates product content, and it orchestrates fulfilment decisions, often with minimal human intervention. That shift from “assisted” to “autonomous where it makes sense” is what separates pilots from productivity.



# The moment of truth: AI becomes business critical

Just a few years ago, generative-AI trials and proof-of-concepts felt like innovations for experimentation. Today, they're part of the core retail agenda. The global AI-in-retail market, valued at over US\$14 billion in 2025, is expected to grow sharply this year, consolidating appetite for scalable, enterprise-quality deployments.

But the shift that matters isn't just size, it's also in maturity. AI is no longer simply automating isolated tasks. In 2026, leading retailers deploy agentic AI systems that can make decisions; adjust inventory, trigger promotions, manage returns, or optimise pricing, often in real time and at scale.

This evolution signals a crossroads. Retailers who treat AI as a novelty risk falling behind. Those who integrate it deeply across operations, systems, and culture may reveal real competitive advantage.

# From chatbots to agents: The operational leap

Early retail AI was front-loaded: chatbots, campaign assistants, a few personalisation tags. 2026's winners treat those features as hygiene and focus on agentic AI, software that can make bounded decisions and act on them. Many retailers have partially deployed agentic capabilities already; recent market reporting shows over two-thirds of retailers have implemented agent-style solutions in some form, even if full, enterprise-wide maturity remains rare. This partial deployment matters: it proves the concept and exposes the organisational work that must follow. (TechRadar)

The real payoff comes when those agents coordinate; when inventory-optimisation agents feed pricing agents, and when merchandising agents share learnings with search and content systems. During peak shopping moments, such systems also demonstrate tangible value: AI-powered assistants and recommendation flows were credited with a substantial portion of holiday sales in late 2025, proving that when AI is productionised it moves revenue and not just stories.

# What works and what's on fire

## 1. Supply chain, inventory and pricing:

AI as the control tower Traditional demand forecasting and shelf-planning are quickly becoming relics. In 2026, AI-powered replenishment engines use real-time signals, from sale velocity, weather, regional demand spikes, to social-media trends, to steer inventory, avoid stock-outs and limit overstocks.

Meanwhile dynamic pricing is no longer a flash-sale tool. AI engines adjust prices and promotions continuously, reacting to market conditions, competitor activity, and demand elasticity, enabling margins and competitiveness to coexist.

## 2. Personalisation and shopper experience:

AI-tailored, not one-size-fits-all Consumers expect relevance. The biggest wins in 2026 come from AI systems that personalise every step; recommendation algorithms tuned to real-time behavior, semantic and visual search that understands intent, and content dynamically adjusted to customer profile, location, purchase history or even weather.

For many retailers, this level of personalisation is becoming table stakes. When done right, it boosts conversion, reduces returns, and deepens customer loyalty. Recent field studies show generative-AI enhancements lifting conversion rates by as much as 16 %, proof that well-executed AI can materially affect bottom-line performance. (Cornell University)

## 3. Operations, automation & post-purchase:

AI behind the scenes Beyond customer-facing features, AI quietly transforms operations. From automated content generation (product descriptions, tagging, metadata) to AI scheduling for store staff, automated fraud detection, and AI-guided return management, retailers are streamlining workflows and lowering cost per order.

The retailers investing in this infrastructure are those achieving higher efficiency, faster fulfilment and scalable growth.

# PIM & GEO: The product data spine that makes AI trustworthy

A recurring lesson in 2026 is that AI's outputs are only as reliable as the product data they consume. Product Information Management (PIM) systems, once thought of as catalog tools, are now central to AI success. A modern PIM supplies structured, enriched, geo-aware product truth that AI models need for trustworthy automation: accurate attributes, high-quality media, translations, compliance metadata (for DPP and local rules), and channel-specific variants. When PIM is healthy, AI can safely generate localised descriptions, tune recommendations per market, and synchronise offers across storefronts; when PIM is weak, AI amplifies errors at scale.

GEO capabilities, the ability to localise product data, pricing, labeling and availability by country, region or fulfilment zone, are the second half of that equation. AI can propose the perfect offer for a customer in Malmö, Hamburg or Milan, but only if the PIM and the commerce stack know which SKUs, sizes and labels apply locally. For international and multi-brand retailers, PIM + GEO + AI together are what turn global ambition into local reality.

# Integration: ERP, OMS, PIM and AI must be one story

One of the most common failure modes in AI projects is treating models as standalone deliverables. The best retailers build AI into the entire systems fabric: models are part of data pipelines that run from ERP and OMS through PIM into front-end channels. That architecture means the same stock reality that the OMS uses to allocate fulfilment is the reality surfaced by product recommendations and the AI shopping agent. It also means pricing and promotion decisions account for cost and margin signals from ERP rather than optimistic assumptions.

# AI is also a test - human, ethical and structural

With power comes great responsibility. As AI moves deeper into operations, retailers face new challenges:

**Bias, privacy and fairness:** As AI tailors offers, searches, and content, it must still respect fairness and transparency. Consumers, especially in Europe, demand ethical data practices. Retailers must balance hyper-personalisation with privacy and fairness standards.

**Governance & risk:** Agentic AI-systems that make autonomous decisions introduces new risks: incorrect decisions, over-automation, or unintended consequences. Without strong governance, oversight and human-in-the-loop checks, those risks grow.

**Integration & data quality:** Advanced AI only works when it is fed high-quality, integrated data from ERP, OMS, PIM/DAM, CRM and other systems. Disconnected systems or poor data hygiene can sabotage even the smartest models.

**Talent & change management:** AI adoption isn't only about tech; it's also about culture. Organisations must retrain staff, redesign workflows, and build trust in AI-assisted decision-making.

## Adaptive > technical challenges

Despite the wave of AI tools available, many implementations still stall. Not because the tech doesn't work, but because the adaptive change it requires hasn't happened. In many cases, retailers underestimate the cultural, organisational, and operational shifts needed to support AI. Here are the most common blockers:

- Lack of internal alignment on how AI connects to business outcomes
- Inadequate training and enablement for front-line employees
- Poor data governance and fragmented tech stacks
- Unrealistic expectations of AI as a magic bullet, not a co-pilot

## What the experts at Columbus focus on and how we help

At Columbus, our Data & Artificial Intelligence services have evolved alongside the market. We offer tailored end-to-end AI solutions that go beyond hype: from data strategy and pipeline architecture, through model building and deployment - to governance, maintenance and performance tracking.

**We know success doesn't come from a single tool, rather it comes from embedding AI across systems. That means:**

- Unified data platforms bridging ERP, OMS, PIM/DAM and e-commerce.
- Layered AI by combining demand forecasting, dynamic pricing, search optimisation, fraud detection, and personalisation.
- Governance and compliance frameworks ensuring privacy, fairness, and transparency.
- Training, change-management and user adoption, because AI only delivers value when people trust and use it.

## The rise of "Agentic AI": More than automation

At NRF 2026, major cloud providers presented AI agents designed not just for chat or recommendations, but for deeper retail functions: inventory & replenishment optimisation, dynamic pricing, real-time fulfilment routing, in-store analytics, fraud detection, and more.

Recent academic research, like a 2025 AI study on "smart inventory replenishment", shows that agentic AI models can outperform traditional heuristics, reducing stock-outs and holding costs while improving product-mix turnover. (ArXiv)

**Implication:** 2026 will increasingly be the test of whether these agentic solutions can scale profitably. Retailers that successfully integrate agentic AI will see cost savings, improved liquidity, and leaner inventory. But those relying on pilots risk falling behind.



## AI & ethical implications: Privacy, trust and responsible AI in retail

As AI becomes embedded in every customer interaction, ethical questions move from compliance teams to the boardroom. Retailers are expected to balance personalization with privacy, innovation with transparency, and automation with fairness.

### Future Bytes: for business leaders who need to understand AI

How can retailers unlock the full potential of AI without compromising customer trust? In Columbus' very own podcast, Future Bytes, Magnus Oxenwaldt explores why responsible AI, strong data governance, and ethical decision-making are becoming competitive advantages rather than regulatory obligations.

Learn more about how organisations can build AI strategies that are transparent, scalable, and designed for long-term business value.

[Listen to Future Bytes: Bits of business transformation](#)

Hosted by Magnus Oxenwaldt, VP Group AI, at Columbus.



## How to make the AI leap

Retailers in any market, especially those in Scandinavia, can benefit from AI's full potential by shifting mindset and execution. Here's what that looks like:

- 1. Standardise and productise pilots.** If an AI test worked in one store or one category, define how to roll it out consistently. Turn one-off use cases into replicable processes.
- 2. Move from data lakes to data products.** Don't just collect data—transform it into consumable, valuable assets that AI models and business users can both leverage.
- 3. Embed AI into business workflows.** AI must live where the work happens. Integrate it into ERP, CRM, ecommerce, and OMS platforms to augment decisions and drive actions.
- 4. Train the organisation—not just the tech team.** The best AI outcomes happen when business users understand what AI can do. Build AI literacy across roles to unlock cross-functional innovation.
- 5. Measure impact early and often.** Establish clear KPIs for each initiative. Whether it's improved sell-through rates or reduced returns, track and communicate results.



## Best-in-class retailers

Ulta Beauty continues to lead with AI-powered beauty consultations, virtual try-ons, and replenishment reminders. Their goal? Enhancing human connection, not replacing it.

Decathlon uses AI to forecast demand and reduce overproduction, tightly linking its sustainability goals with machine learning.

Zalando leverages AI not just in styling recommendations but to power their entire returns optimisation strategy, cutting both CO2 impact and costs.

Sephora deploys generative AI to help store staff deliver expert advice more consistently and confidently across all stores.



## Final thought

AI has graduated and is now part of the core retail operating model. The difference between aspirational and actual will come down to execution: to data quality, integration, governance, and willingness to transform. Retailers that see AI not as a buzzword, but as the backbone of smarter, faster, more resilient commerce, that's where winners will emerge. Let AI do the heavy lifting. Then you decide where to grow.

The headline this year is less about capability and more about composition: AI matters, but only as part of an integrated, product-centric architecture. The competitive edge goes to retailers who pair agentic decisioning with a disciplined product data spine (PIM), geo-aware localisation, and enterprise pipelines that tie models to ERP and OMS reality.

# The new fulfilment frontier: Why OMS defines retail

**If AI is the brain of modern retail, then the Order Management System (OMS) has become its circulatory system. Silent, essential, constantly moving beneath the surface. In 2026, OMS is no longer a back-office engine that simply routes orders. It has become one of the most decisive drivers of customer experience, profitability, and operational resilience.**

Consumers may never see it. They aren't supposed to. But every promise retailers make; same-day delivery, store pickup within two hours, accurate stock levels, eco-friendly shipping choices, and smooth returns, lives or dies based on one question: Does the OMS actually work?

“The modern retail journey is anything but linear. A customer might browse online, purchase via app, pick up in-store, and initiate a return through a third-party locker.”



# The OMS awakening: Why 2026 marks a structural shift

Retailers spent the past decade building “omnichannel journeys”. Many succeeded at the surface: they redesigned store concepts, personalised digital experiences, unified loyalty systems and automated marketing.

But beneath that, behind the brand films and in-store experiences, the plumbing often remained fragmented. ERP systems struggled to talk to e-commerce. Stock accuracy was inconsistent. Returns overwhelmed warehouse capacity. Store fulfilment was manual and unreliable. What changed in 2025 and exploded in 2026 is a realisation that no amount of front-end innovation can compensate for a broken fulfilment engine. As inflation, supply-chain turbulence, sustainability pressure and rising customer expectations converge, OMS is no longer purely “infrastructure.” It is strategy.



# The retailer payoff: Financial and operational gains from OMS

While customer convenience often headlines the value of an OMS, the real return for retailers lies in operational and financial impact. A modern OMS does more than orchestrate orders it, unlocks capital.

**Freeing up working capital** is one of the most immediate gains. By providing real-time visibility across all stock locations and enabling dynamic fulfilment, retailers no longer need to hold excess inventory “just in case”. Inventory can be balanced across stores, warehouses, and suppliers with precision, reducing the need for safety stock and freeing up cash that can be reinvested elsewhere in the business.

**Markdown reduction** is another major benefit. Idle inventory in one location can be surfaced to online channels or redirected to high-demand areas before it ages out. Rather than reactive discounting, OMS enables proactive stock movement, minimising margin erosion and clearing seasonal goods on time.

**Customer service costs** also decrease. With better order transparency and real-time tracking, fewer customers contact support for status updates, missed deliveries, or return issues. Staff across channels, store, online, call centre, can access the same order data, enabling faster resolution and higher first-contact resolution rates.

**Returns orchestration** not only improves the customer experience but reduces internal handling costs by optimising restock logic and consolidating shipments. This has direct implications on reverse logistics budgets and resell potential.

Not all retailers benefit equally, retailers with high SKU counts, complex fulfilment flows, global growth and fluctuating demand patterns do see an extra need. OMS provides them with the agility to adapt stock to where demand is peaking, especially during seasonal spikes or promotional periods. For pharmacies, where availability and speed are critical, OMS enables safe, compliant, cost efficient and reliable delivery from the most suitable source.

*In essence, OMS shifts fulfilment from a cost centre to a profit lever. For retailers navigating thin margins, fragmented demand, and rising service expectations, it's a financial imperative.*

# From static inventory to omni-inventory

The biggest mindset shift is simple but powerful: Inventory is no longer owned by a channel; it belongs to the customer. Retailers that adopt omni-inventory, making all stock available to all channels, are seeing dramatic improvements in availability, sell-through and customer satisfaction. But the strategic impact goes deeper than that. Omni-inventory reduces safety stock, shrinks working capital tied up in warehouses, and transforms stores from cost centres into fulfilment assets. This frees up capital for what retailers need most:

- Investment in AI and automation
- New sustainability initiatives
- Flagship store refreshes
- Faster market expansions
- Ability to react to unforeseen disruptions

In an economy where supply chains are still shaken by geopolitical tension, shipping delays, canal closures, raw material shortages, production bottlenecks and sudden tariff changes, capital efficiency has become survival strategy, not just optimisation. OMS is what makes it possible.

## Retailers face growing pressure from all angles:

- Higher customer expectations around availability, delivery speed, and flexibility
- The rise in returns, which now account for up to 30% of all online purchases
- Sustainability demands, including emissions tracking, smarter fulfilment, and reverse logistics
- Increased costs and fragmentation across warehousing, 3PLs, and stores
- Demand for omnichannel excellence where digital promises must match physical performance
- An advanced OMS helps retailers stay competitive by creating a unified view of inventory and intelligently managing order routing across every channel.

# OMS + AI + ERP: The unified retail engine

In 2026, OMS doesn't live alone. It sits at the intersection of: ERP (financials, supply, replenishment, compliance), AI (demand forecasting, fulfilment logic, anomaly detection), E-commerce (CX, product availability, checkout logic), CDP/CRM (customer promises, loyalty integration) and store systems (POS, click-and-collect, ship-from-store operations).

**The most advanced retailers are now layering AI on top of OMS to:**

- Predict the most profitable fulfilment route
- Automate split shipments
- Reduce out-of-stocks
- Enhance forecast accuracy by integrating real-time fulfilment data
- Optimise routing to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions
- Personalise fulfilment choices based on customer behaviour

This combination of intelligence and orchestration is also defining the next layer of unified commerce. OMS is no longer just a system; it is the operational logic that powers the modern retailer.

## Don't overlook the sustainability factor

Returns and fulfilment are now among the biggest contributors to retail's environmental footprint. OMS can help drive meaningful change:

**Smart routing:** Route orders to the closest fulfilment point to reduce last-mile delivery emissions.

**Bundled returns:** Combine return shipments or restock products locally to reduce waste and transport.

**Carbon-aware logic:** Prioritize eco-friendly delivery options at checkout, powered by real-time CO<sub>2</sub> scoring.

**Circular economy:** Support recommerce platforms and in-store drop-off points for pre-loved or repaired goods.



## Best-in-class retailers

**Nordstrom** has long focused on premium fulfilment. Its OMS supports flexible delivery and high-touch returns—crucial for maintaining its luxury reputation.

**Decathlon** leverages OMS insights for better demand planning, stock balancing, and reducing deadstock.

**Zalando** integrates its OMS with its sustainability engine, offering customers the greenest shipping option at checkout and optimising the return loop.

**Mango** uses OMS to streamline its click-and-collect service and optimise cross-border order flows from a central platform.

**Nordic multi-brand retailers:** Several Columbus client cases have leveraged OMS to unlock new fulfilment models, BOPIS, ship-from-store, endless-aisle, and returns optimisations. Enabling faster market expansion without increasing warehouse footprint or stock complexity.

NORDSTROM **DECATHLON** MANGO

## Final thought

In 2026, fulfilment excellence is retail excellence. The OMS is no longer background architecture. It is the retail engine where customer experience, margin, speed and sustainability intersect. Retailers who invest in OMS now are preparing for a decade where fulfilment becomes their sharpest competitive edge, quietly powering convenience, trust and profitability. Everything else is window dressing.

OMS has finally stepped into the spotlight, not because the industry suddenly discovered it, but because retail complexity, customer expectations and economic pressures have made it indispensable. This year, retailers need systems that can adapt faster than the market can shift. OMS delivers that adaptability. It is the difference between efficiency and excess, between availability and disappointment, between growth and fragmentation.

Retailers who have embraced OMS as their operational engine are building resilience, unlocking capital, and creating the foundations for long-term profitability. In an unpredictable world, OMS has become retail's most reliable source of truth.

“This is digital maturity, and it’s reshaping everything from store design to tech architecture to staff training.”

## Unified Commerce 2.0 – Where retail finally acts as one?

**If A** For many years, retailers have spoken about omnichannel as if it were a destination, a milestone to reach rather than an ongoing capability to evolve. But by 2026, the conversation has shifted dramatically. Omnichannel was the warm-up. Unified commerce is the main event. And for the first time, retailers are truly beginning to build the foundations required to operate as one coherent business rather than a cluster of semi-connected channels.

# The end of channel thinking

What's driving this shift is not ambition, but necessity. As customer journeys stretch across search, social, store, mobile, marketplaces, AI assistants and everything in between, the old "patchwork" approach breaks. Consumers expect a retail experience that is continuous, predictable and personalised at every touchpoint, and they do not care which system is responsible for which part of the process. Retailers who still operate with fractured data, separate stock pools, siloed teams or legacy integrations are discovering the costs quickly: lost sales, operational friction, poor staff experience, and an inability to adapt when disruptions hit.

Retailers that are getting this right have unified not just their sales channels but their thinking. They no longer view stores and e-commerce as separate businesses. Instead, they've embraced the idea of "commerce everywhere", backed by centralised data, shared inventory, and integrated customer profiles. This allows them to deliver consistent pricing, service, and personalisation whether the customer is on an app, in a flagship store, or speaking to a chatbot.

## The platform moment: What's changing?

The biggest shift in 2026 is the move away from incremental omnichannel fixes toward a more strategic platform mindset. Retailers are no longer looking for point solutions to patch gaps. They want ecosystems where ERP, OMS, POS, CRM, e-commerce, PIM/DAM, analytics and AI work as one.

In practice, that means retailers are re-platforming not to gain shiny new features, but to gain control. Control of data. Control of inventory. Control of customer journeys. Control of fulfilment. And the flexibility to respond when the world inevitably shifts again.

If 2025 was the year retailers acknowledged the patchwork problem, 2026 is the year they started to dismantle it.

## Why unified commerce is now mission-critical

### 1. Customer journeys are no longer linear — they're simultaneous.

Shoppers may research in an AI assistant, browse TikTok, check stock online, pick up in store, return by mail, and expect loyalty benefits regardless of channel. Without a unified view of identity, history and preferences, personalisation collapses.

### 2. Inventory must be a single truth, not a set of guesses.

With OMS providing the backbone, unified commerce syncs what's available, where, and at what cost to fulfil — preventing lost sales, unnecessary markdowns, and over-ordering. It turns stock visibility into a profit engine rather than a liability.

### 3. AI cannot function without unified, high-quality data.

The agentic AI systems rising in 2026 feed on real-time, accurate integrated data. Personalisation, forecasting, pricing optimisation and automation all break down when systems aren't aligned.

### 4. Disruption is the new normal — platforms must be flexible, not fragile.

Retailers who lived through the Suez Canal blockage, pandemic waves, production shortages, inflation shocks and geopolitical disruptions know this too well: agility is not optional. Unified commerce platforms give retailers the ability to switch fulfilment flows, reroute stock, update pricing or shift service models in days.

# The biggest wins we're seeing in 2026

In 2026, leading retailers are using unified commerce to achieve productivity, protect margins, and strengthen customer loyalty. The most impactful outcomes include:

**Channel-agnostic experiences** where loyalty, identity, pricing and stock remain consistent

**Dramatically reduced operational cost** through automation and system simplification

**Fewer lost sales** thanks to accurate inventory and flexible fulfilment rules

**Higher conversion** through connected personalisation powered by real-time data

**Stronger financial control** with ERP, OMS and commerce working as a single source of truth

**Faster innovation cycles** because teams no longer spend months integrating systems

# The end of omnichannel washing?

Too many retailers have claimed "omnichannel" status while still operating in silos. Separate inventory pools, disconnected customer data, and inconsistent experiences are signs of 'omnichannel washing'.



## Retailers who move beyond it are:

- Centralising inventory and order management across all channels
- Providing unified promotions, pricing, and service regardless of touchpoint
- Enabling staff to access full customer histories and preferences—anywhere

The consensus? Making every channel feel like one brand. A shopper might discover a product on Instagram, check availability via mobile app, visit a store to try it on, and complete the purchase online, all within 24 hours. Retailers must adapt to this hybrid behaviour by creating consistent content and experiences across all platforms, using AI and personalisation to tailor messaging and recommendations and ensure customers can start, pause, and complete their journey on their terms.

# Best-in-class retailers

**Lululemon:** Invests heavily in experiential retail, community-building, and mobile-enabled staff who can serve customers fluidly whether in-store or via app-based engagement.

**Starbucks:** Masterfully connects mobile ordering, rewards, and in-store pickup across platforms.

**Sephora:** Fuses social content, in-app services, and physical product testing for a unified beauty journey. Sephora also integrates loyalty, tutorials, in-store bookings, and e-commerce into one cohesive ecosystem.

**Nordstrom:** Offers fluid in-store, curbside, and online experiences with consistent branding and service.



# Where we help retailers get it right

Unified commerce is not something that happens by accident. It requires architectural clarity, process redesign, and long-term thinking. Columbus supports retailers by:

- Modernising ERP as the financial and operational core
- Implementing OMS to unify inventory, fulfilment and delivery logic
- Connecting commerce, POS, PIM/DAM, CRM and marketing automation into cohesive workflows
- Building unified data platforms to enable AI, analytics and real-time decision-making
- Ensuring governance, integration and change management — so systems are adopted and value is realised

**Our emphasis is simple:** replace reactive fixes with proactive architectures that scale.

# Final thought

Unified commerce has always been the industry's north star, but 2026 feels like the year retailers finally begin closing the gap between ambition and reality. The most successful brands are no longer the ones with the most channels, but the ones with the most coherence; the ones who operate with a single version of truth guiding every decision, every interaction, and every fulfilment action.

Retail is only going to get more complex. Unified commerce won't simplify the world, but it will give retailers the structure, intelligence and agility to meet it head-on. Shoppers expect retail to feel effortless. In 2026, unified commerce is how retailers finally make that possible.

# Hageland: Bringing the garden centre experience online

**For Hageland, Norway's largest garden centre chain, digital transformation was never just about selling more products online. It was about extending the expertise, inspiration and personal service customers associate with its stores into the digital world.**

As online demand accelerated and customer expectations evolved, Hageland recognised the need for a more modern and scalable e-commerce platform.

Together with Columbus, the company launched a new digital experience built on Crystallize, combining commerce, content management and Product Information Management (PIM) into a single platform.

The objective was clear, creating a more intuitive shopping experience while making it easier for customers to discover products, access expert advice and find inspiration for their gardening projects. At the same time, the new platform simplified content management and provided greater flexibility for future growth.

Following the launch, Hageland saw stronger customer engagement, increased online sales and improved operational efficiency. More importantly, the company succeeded in translating its in-store strengths into a digital experience that feels both inspiring and helpful.



What makes Hageland's journey particularly relevant is its recognition that digital commerce is not just about replacing human expertise, it is about making it more accessible. By combining modern technology with trusted product knowledge, Hageland created a platform that supports both customer experience and long-term growth.

In a retail landscape where differentiation is increasingly difficult, Hageland demonstrates that the strongest digital experiences often begin with what makes a brand unique.

[Read the full story](#)



# Conversion Rate Optimisation – Experience is still the engine of performance

**In 2026, conversion rate optimisation has outgrown its old reputation as a tactical exercise in button colours and A/B tests. Today, CRO is a strategic discipline — an intersection of psychology, data science, customer experience, and operational excellence. What was once the job of digital specialists has become a board-level focus, because the economics of retail leave little room for waste: every abandoned cart, slow page load, poor product detail page or irrelevant recommendation erodes the bottom line.**

The landscape has shifted dramatically over the past year. As acquisition costs rise, privacy regulations tighten, and traffic growth plateaus across many mature markets, retailers have realised the simplest truth of modern commerce: optimising what you already have delivers more value than chasing new traffic you can't convert. CRO is no longer about squeezing out micro-wins, but about creating frictionless, relevant, emotionally resonant journeys that respect customer time and intention.



# The CRO shift: Page-level tweaks & customer-level understanding

Retailers used to obsess over conversion rates in isolation. But in 2026, the winners understand CRO as part of a broader ecosystem: unified data, real-time personalisation, inventory accuracy, product content quality, trust signals, and fulfilment options all shape the moment a customer decides to buy, or bail.

**Two trends clearly dominate**

## 1. Intent-driven commerce

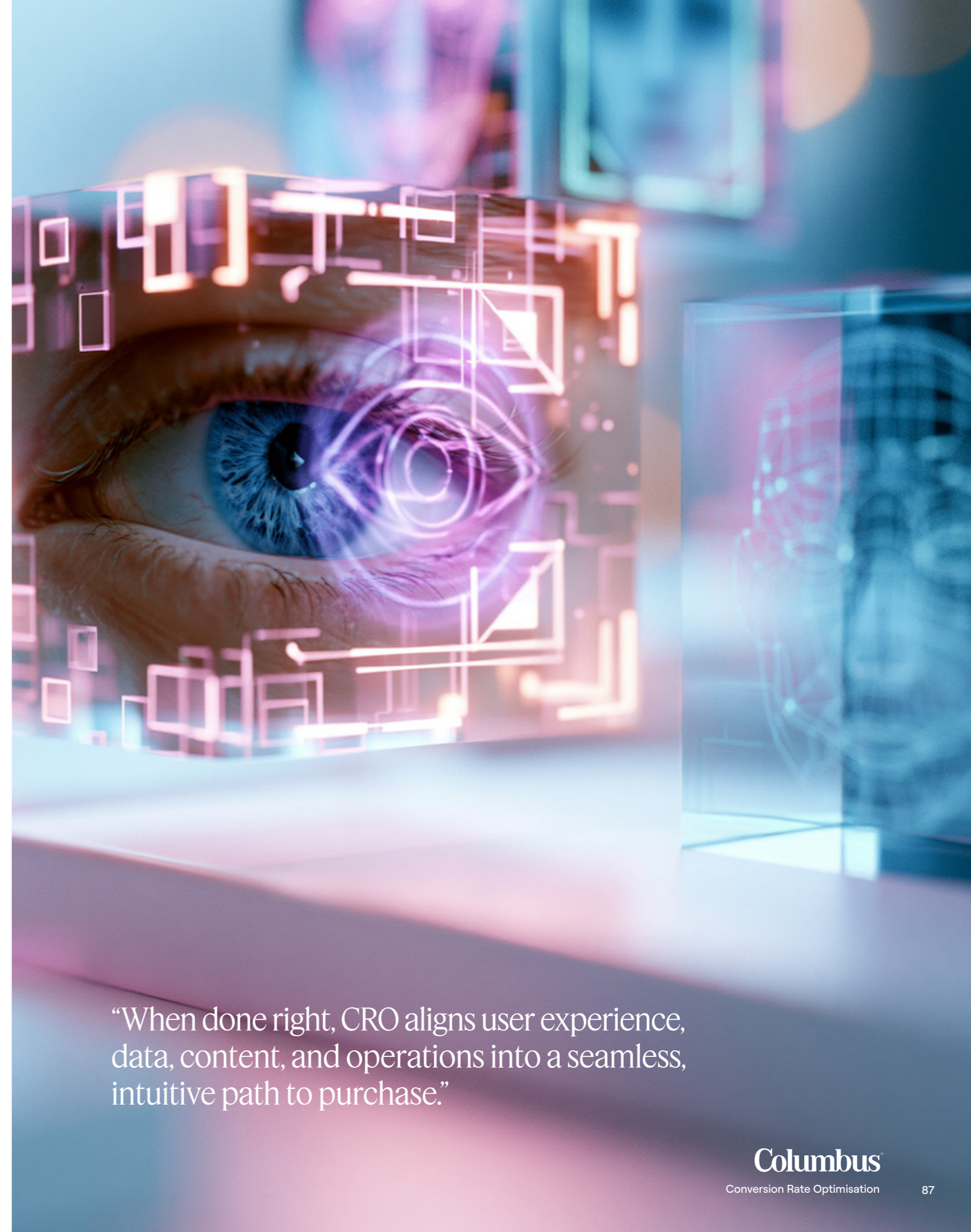
Retailers have started to move beyond averages. AI-powered platforms can now detect signals of buying intent in real time, analysing scroll behaviour, search patterns, dwell time, device type, loyalty status, and even regional stock availability. This allows experiences to shift mid-journey: surfacing urgency, simplifying product comparisons, adjusting recommendations based on what shoppers are actually trying to achieve.

Instead of the old one-size-fits-all funnel, it is more about shifting UX dynamically to meet individual intent.

## 2. Experience as a KPI

The most ambitious retailers no longer separate UX and CRO. They treat experience as a measurable business driver. Emotional resonance, clarity, trustworthiness, relevance, efficiency, now sits alongside cart abandonment and checkout completion metrics. Retailers track “experience debt” the same way developers track technical debt, recognising that outdated design, clunky navigation and irrelevant recommendations hurt conversion just as much as poor pricing.

This philosophy marks a return to something retailers forgot for years: people convert when the experience makes sense.



“When done right, CRO aligns user experience, data, content, and operations into a seamless, intuitive path to purchase.”

# AI's role in CRO: Smart assistance, not full automation

Generative AI plays a meaningful, but not magical, role in 2026. It enhances copy, creates product tags, rewrites PDP content, analyses testing data, predicts drop-off points, and powers conversational selling through assistants. Yet the real value lies in how AI integrates with the rest of the retail engine: OMS, CRM, ERP, and design systems.

AI does not replace CRO teams. Adequately, it accelerates them. Retailers increasingly adopt a hybrid model: human insight defines the strategy, AI executes variations, and data decides the winner.

**The biggest challenge?** Governance. With more AI-generated content comes the responsibility to ensure accuracy, fairness and brand consistency. Retailers who don't control their AI pipelines risk degrading experience instead of elevating it.

# The new CRO mandate: Performance with purpose

As sustainability becomes a purchase factor, CRO extends into new terrain: helping customers choose better. Retailers increasingly surface eco-impact, durability data, supplier transparency, and reparability at critical decision moments. This shift, from optimisation to empowerment, builds trust and long-term value.

At the same time, conversion extends past checkout. Post-purchase flows (*order tracking, proactive communication, flexible returns, digital receipts & loyalty integration*) have become vital to retention and lifetime value. CRO has expanded beyond initial conversion into full-journey performance

# Best-in-class retailers

**Nike:** excels at intent-driven personalisation, context-aware recommendations and frictionless mobile experiences that blur inspiration and conversion.

**Zalando:** Continues to lead on UX clarity, extensive product data, return-risk prediction and dynamic PDP elements that increase size confidence and reduce returns.

**Sephora:** Pioneers hybrid real-life/AI-assisted customer journeys with virtual try-ons, community insights, and behavioural segmentation.

**Fjällräven:** Combines high-quality content with clear specifications and flexible payment to support confident conversion.

**IKEA:** Integrates content, logistics transparency, 3D visualisation and availability to create highly informed, conversion-strong journeys.

**Columbus clients:** Many mid-market retailers working with Columbus have made significant progress by connecting CRO with unified platforms, e.g. Moss Bros, Hotter Shoes and Fragrance Direct.





## CRO meets sustainability

With growing concern over waste and return emissions, CRO is now being used to align performance with purpose. By optimising toward lower returns and smarter purchases, CRO becomes a driver of both profit and sustainability:

- Smarter sizing tools reduce fit-related returns
- Clear material information supports ethical decision-making
- Simplified paths to pre-owned or alternative products reduce overconsumption

## Final thought

CRO is about understanding people, not just behaviour patterns. The brands that win are the ones that simplify decisions, respect customer intelligence, reduce friction and deliver clarity at every step. Optimisation is not just about incremental gains; clearly the approach has shifted towards shaping better, more confident retail experiences.

Retailers who connect data, design, systems and empathy will not only convert more, but they'll also build loyalty that lasts.

## CASE IN FOCUS

# *Moss Bros:* Turning customer friction into growth

**For many retailers, growth is often pursued through increased marketing spend, new channels or larger product assortments. For Moss Bros, one of the UK's leading menswear retailers, the biggest opportunity lay elsewhere: improving the customer experience already in front of them.**

Founded in 1851, Moss has built a strong reputation for quality menswear, formal-wear and tailoring. But as online shopping became increasingly competitive, the company recognised that even small moments of friction in the buying journey could have a significant impact on conversion and revenue. Together with the Columbus CX team, Moss Bros embarked on a continuous optimisation programme focused on understanding customer behaviour and improving the online shopping experience through experimentation and personalisation.

Research revealed that customers shopping for suits often encountered unnecessary complexity when selecting products online. Purchasing a complete outfit required multiple size selections and several separate "Add to Bag" actions, creating confusion and increasing the risk of abandoned purchases. By redesigning the buying journey and simplifying the process, Moss made it easier for customers to complete their purchases while improving conversion performance.

The team also identified challenges within site navigation. Customers struggled to find relevant products due to an overly complex menu structure. Through user research, analytics and experimentation, Moss Bros introduced a redesigned navigation experience that helped customers discover products more easily and improved key performance metrics including conversion rate, engagement and average order value.



What makes Moss Bros particularly relevant is its recognition that customer experience optimisation is not a one-time project. It is a continuous discipline built on research, testing and evidence-based decision-making. Rather than relying on assumptions, the company uses experimentation to understand how customers behave and what genuinely improves their shopping experience.

For Moss Bros, growth was not achieved by adding more complexity. It came from removing it. The case demonstrates a simple but powerful lesson: when retailers make it easier for customers to buy, performance often follows.

[Read the full story](#)



# Conclusion

## – How adaptive retailers define 2026 and beyond

**If there is one thread connecting every chapter in this year's guide, from sustainability and loyalty to OMS, unified commerce, AI, cybersecurity, ERP and beyond, it is this: the retailers who thrive in 2026 are the ones who move with the world, not behind it.**

Because the past decade has taught the industry many things, but perhaps nothing more clearly than this: retail is no longer a fixed model. It is a continuously evolving ecosystem where adaptability, intelligence and operational coherence matter more than scale, budget or heritage.

# When everything changes at once

In 2026, retailers faced a world where change doesn't arrive in waves; it arrives all at once. Consumer demands shift overnight. Technology redefines capabilities in real time. Global events continue to disrupt supply chains with little warning. Regulations tighten. Competition intensifies. Channels converge. And the customer, empowered, impatient and constantly connected, expects brands to meet them with value, speed and meaning.



# So, where do you want to go from here

**Start with your customers. Then use the tools, insights, and best practices in this guide to:**

- Identify the biggest friction points in your customer journey and turn them into opportunities.
- Align your tech stack with your business goals, not the other way around.
- Train and empower your people, because your staff are your differentiators.
- Build partnerships that help you go further, faster.
- Measure progress not just in profit, but in loyalty, satisfaction, and sustainability.
- Treat data as a strategic asset, creating a trusted foundation for AI, personalisation, and smarter decision-making.
- Unify your operations across channels, inventory, and customer touchpoints to create seamless experiences at scale.
- Build resilience into your business by preparing for disruption, whether it comes from supply chains, regulations, cyber threats, or changing consumer behaviour.
- Focus on adaptability over perfection, because the retailers that learn and evolve fastest will be the ones that lead tomorrow.

# The most adaptive retailers share three traits:

## **1. They make decisions rooted in data, not legacy.**

They invest in unified architectures, modern ERP, intelligent OMS, connected cloud environments and real-time analytics because they understand that decisions are only as good as the systems behind them.

## **2. They operationalise innovation instead of experimenting indefinitely.**

AI doesn't live in labs or pilot groups—it powers merchandising, forecasting, employee experience, personalisation, supply chain visibility, content automation and store execution.

## **3. They act with purpose—toward customers, society and their own organisation.**

Sustainability, loyalty, cybersecurity and unified commerce all intersect around one core responsibility: creating value that endures.

And that is the retailer's story: Not who has the best technology, the most stores or the flashiest brand, but who can evolve, repeatedly, without losing sight of the customer.

This is where Columbus can help you progress and keep a steady pace. So, ask yourself: **Are you ready to take the lead?**

“The next decade of retail will not be won by the biggest, the loudest or even the most technologically advanced brands. It will be won by the retailers who build organisations capable of shifting, quickly, intelligently and intentionally, whenever the world demands it. The most adaptive retailer doesn't wait for certainty; they build for possibility.”

– Dan Andersson, GTM & Solution Director & Retail Lead, Columbus

