



SHOPTALK

[Trends Report 2025]



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Executive Summary

Shoptalk Spring: The Experience is Everything

In the evolving commerce marketing ecosystem, everything old is new again — you just need to measure it now.

“Experience” was the most-used buzzword at this year’s Shoptalk Spring event in Las Vegas, where a reported 10,000 attendees (half of them first-timers) convened to discuss, debate and, of course, pitch the latest innovations in consumer commerce, shopper engagement and retail operations.

The prolific use of the word represented an industry-wide (or at least agenda-long) call for marketers to step back from their recent intense focus on digital media efficiency to reconsider the core purpose of advertising: engaging consumers through relevant moments and messaging— that is, providing behavior-influencing experiences.

The most obvious environment to deliver these experiences is the physical store, which along with generating 80% or more of sales in most product categories currently accounts for 5.2% of all consumer “screen time” yet just 0.1% of ad spending, according to industry analyst Andrew Lipsman — while forecasting “experiential” as the next frontier for the advertising world.

But the concept extends to just about every other aspect and avenue of consumer engagement: insights-driven digital marketing that delivers personalized, relevant communication (see page 16); loyalty programs that build communities of brand followers through emotional connections (page 4), even generative AI-enabled search technology that provides helpful solutions instead of product options (page 7).

Speakers across the event’s five content tracks often called for a “back to basics” approach to marketing that requires brands and retailers to start every initiative with a full understanding of their customers and the core goal of satisfying their needs.

Fortunately, there is now an inexhaustible array of new technologies to accomplish those tasks more easily and effectively than ever before — with clear recognition that the human element should never get lost inside the algorithms and data clean rooms that are unlocking customer understanding.

With that in mind, conversations about retail media included talk of merchandising displays and taco trucks in parking lots (page 12), and even linear TV got a few shoutouts for its lasting ability to deliver scale— albeit with the modern aids of targeted audiences, shoppable ad formats, and measurable performance freshening it up.

“Measurement” was another popular word. In an era where even brand-building marketing campaigns are asked to deliver performance-based metrics, clear and consistent measurement must be applied to even the oldest-school tactics (even taco trucks).

Not that newer forms of marketing weren’t among the more commonly used words as well: The steadily growing role of “creators” and “influencers” was regularly mentioned as among the more productive methods of engagement (page 9) — often in the context of the need for stronger brand “storytelling” (page 10).

And the two hottest topics on the agenda remained “retail media” and “artificial intelligence” (everyone just says “AI” now), although both were discussed from more pragmatic points of view that moved beyond the heavy hype of recent years to drill down into the tangible progress being made toward effective activation and implementation.

This report explores these trends in greater detail, along with other key takeaways and unique perspectives from Publicis Commerce thought leaders who attended Shoptalk.

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The Convergent Power of Customer-Centricity, Data-Driven Personalization, and Agile Technology in Modern Commerce



Stacey Georgoulis

Vice President,
Strategic Partnerships & Solutions

CJ

The most impactful and unifying insight across discussions on loyalty, tech stacks, and retail media is the convergent power of customer-centricity, data-driven personalization, and agile technology as the foundational pillars of successful modern commerce. Retailers and brands are recognizing that achieving sustained growth and fostering deep customer loyalty necessitates a synergistic approach. This involves leveraging comprehensive customer data through flexible technology infrastructures to deliver highly personalized and valuable experiences across all interactions, including within the rapidly evolving landscape of retail media.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Rethinking Customer Loyalty: Beyond Traditional Programs: The pursuit of enhanced customer loyalty is no longer solely reliant on traditional programs. Wayfair emphasizes creating value at every customer touchpoint, from inspiration to delivery, rather than just a loyalty program. Their launch of Wayfair Verified, which ensures quality and trust, highlights a commitment to a positive customer experience as a driver of loyalty. Similarly, DSW and Lowe's panelists underscore that true loyalty extends beyond transactional rewards to encompass emotional connections and personalized value. The focus on understanding the customer ("know your customer") and aligning the entire enterprise around loyalty initiatives are deemed critical.

The Power of Personalization: Leveraging Data for Deeper Engagement: This customer-centric approach is intrinsically linked to data-driven personalization. Wayfair leverages its massive customer file to personalize messaging and offers, particularly for loyalty program members. They can target customers based on their purchase history and expressed needs. The discussion on future-proofing the tech stack explicitly identifies personalization and a single view of the customer as "advanced capabilities" that differentiate high-growth retailers. PetSmart and Mattress Firm are investing in data infrastructure and AI to create more relevant and personalized experiences for both customers and store associates. In retail media, the focus is shifting from broad ad placements to delivering the right ads to the right people at the right time, leveraging first-party data for precise targeting and measurement, as highlighted by Sam's Club's deterministic data capabilities. PayPal also emphasizes the power of its extensive consumer and merchant data to create rich profiles and personalized experiences within its media business.

Agile Technology: The Foundation for Innovation and Adaptability: Enabling these customer-centric and data-driven strategies is the imperative for agile technology. Traditional, rigid tech stacks hinder innovation and the ability to adapt to evolving customer needs. PetSmart's transition to a modern, open API-driven architecture with microservices and Mattress Firm's adoption of a headless and composable commerce approach demonstrate the necessity of flexible and modular technology to facilitate faster updates, seamless integrations, and the rapid deployment of new capabilities. This agility is crucial for incorporating emerging technologies like generative AI, which is expected to impact various aspects of the retail experience. The ability to quickly test and learn, as PetSmart now aims to do with its modernized digital stack, underscores the value of this technological agility. ▶

The Convergent Power of Customer-Centricity, Data-Driven Personalization, and Agile Technology in Modern Commerce



KEY TAKEAWAYS - CONTINUED

The Evolution of Retail Media: From Transactions to Experiences: In the realm of retail media, this convergence is evident in the push for more engaging and less transactional experiences. Nordstrom aims to move from a transactional to an experiential network, focusing on storytelling and creating emotional connections with customers. Sam's Club integrates in-store experiences with digital advertising through initiatives like scan-and-go display ads, demonstrating an omnichannel approach enabled by technology. The future of commerce media is envisioned as more interactive, sensory-rich, and ultimately focused on making consumers' lives easier and adding value, further reinforcing the importance of this interconnectedness.

Actionable Recommendations for B2B Marketers and Adtech Professionals:

1. **Integrate and Analyze Customer Data Holistically to Drive Personalized Experiences:** B2B organizations should break down data silos and establish a unified view of the customer across all touchpoints. Invest in technologies and processes that enable the collection, analysis, and activation of this data to deliver highly personalized marketing messages, product recommendations, and customer service interactions. This includes leveraging data to inform loyalty program design and targeting retail media efforts for maximum relevance.
2. **Modernize Technology Stacks for Agility and Innovation:** Prioritize the migration from monolithic systems to modular, API-driven, headless, and composable architectures. This will enable faster experimentation, easier integration of new technologies (including AI and advanced analytics), and greater responsiveness to evolving customer needs and market dynamics. A flexible tech stack is crucial for supporting personalized experiences and implementing innovative retail media strategies across diverse channels.
3. **Focus on Creating Value and Emotional Connections Across the Customer Journey:** Move beyond purely transactional marketing and loyalty programs. Develop strategies that focus on building genuine relationships with customers by providing valuable content, exceptional experiences, and personalized interactions. In the context of retail media, this means prioritizing creative storytelling, understanding the customer's intent and context, and ensuring that media placements enhance rather than detract from the overall shopping experience. Measure success not just in immediate sales but also in long-term customer sentiment and loyalty. ♦





Influencers and Content Take Center Stage



Steve Pomeroy
SVP, Commerce DNA
Digitas North America

Numerous brands shared strategies for connecting their content to consumers, with a strong focus on authentic storytelling and aligning with brand values. One standout approach was through Creator engagements, where several leveraged engaged influencers to test and share new products with their audiences. Some brands showcased consumer-sourced content in their 30-second TV spots, while one highlighted their founder's vision for clean beauty to inspire a new generation of creators to craft their own stories using its products.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Authenticity: In these partnerships, success comes from giving Creators and consumers the freedom to tell stories in their own way. Without this creative freedom, brands may not be nearly as impactful or resonant.

Measurement: Go beyond striving for authenticity—test, measure, and refine. Analyze what messaging and imagery drive engagement, site visits, and loyalty, then use those insights to optimize content for maximum impact.

Strategic Influencer Engagement: Brands should prioritize both paid and organic Creator partnerships, ensuring a diverse and authentic mix of content that aligns with your brand values and resonates with consumers.

Sustained Content Amplification: Don't limit campaigns to one-off activations. Adopt an always-on strategy by strategically boosting influencer-generated content over time to keep your brand visible, maintain momentum, and maximize reach.



The New Marketplace = AI Search Platforms



Christa Klausner
EVP, Commerce
Digitas North America

As consumer expectations and behaviors evolve, AI-powered search platforms like [Perplexity](#) are adapting in real-time to meet demand. More than just an AI-driven search engine and chatbot, Perplexity is emerging as a new marketplace—transforming search into a direct discovery and shopping experience. By delivering curated product recommendations alongside verified information, it streamlines decision-making and minimizes the need to visit multiple e-commerce sites. This shift positions Perplexity and other AI-driven search platforms as hybrid solutions, seamlessly integrating search, content, and commerce into a frictionless buying journey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Consumers are now making product searches more complex, often using six, eight, or even twelve-word queries. Imagine searching for a green dress with feather accents and long sleeves available for delivery tomorrow, or the best gifts for a non-tech-savvy dad who loves trains, fishing, and hockey (since today happens to be my dad's birthday). Perplexity delivers a curated list of recommended products from various retailers, providing side-by-side comparisons, pricing details, and expert insights...all in one place. With embedded shopping links, consumers can seamlessly navigate to e-commerce platforms to complete their purchase, making Perplexity a discovery-driven shopping assistant.

To stay relevant on Perplexity and other AI-driven search platforms, brands need to focus on authoritative, well-structured content that AI can easily index and reference.

- 1. Provide product data to priority platforms** – Ensure accurate product titles, detailed descriptions, precise technical specs are properly syndicated through platforms like Salsify, Syndigo and even directly into Perplexity's merchant API.
- 2. Target rising & relevant trends** – Identify trends across the entire digital landscape including social platforms, search engines and retailer sites; then utilize trending keywords across paid and organic search placements to establish relevance with priority Large Language Models; be sure to use more conversational searches that reflect how LLM users are actively searching today.
- 3. Create consistent & detailed retail listings** – Use consistent, detailed content across all retail platforms (Amazon, Walmart, Shopify, etc.) to increase the chance of LLMs referencing your products within the context of common themes.

Retail Media is The Blueprint For All Media Now



Jaclyn Nix
EVP, Brand Sales
Epsilon Retail Media

Retail media is already a cornerstone of modern marketing strategies for retailers—but as we heard time and time again at Shoptalk, it’s evolving. Fast. Simply put, the convergence of media and commerce is fundamentally transforming how brands engage with their shoppers. The “new” retail media market comes with opportunities and, of course, challenges with data, identity and in-store experiences taking center stage. Here are three key takeaways that marketers need to consider as retail media becomes an increasingly larger role for brands and retailers:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

“Retail Media is The Future of All Media”: This is something Andrew Lipsman, Founder & Chief Analyst at Media, Ads + Commerce said that caught my attention. At Shoptalk this year, retail media has become synonymous with all media. By placing high-quality media alongside commerce, there’s been an unlock for brands and retailers to reach customers more meaningfully and effectively. The combination of media and commerce is not just smoke and mirrors, but a tool that is redefining the way we engage customers. Brands that continue to capitalize on this convergence—on-site, off-site and in-store—will find themselves ahead in the race for consumer attention and engagement.

You Can’t Be Customer Centric Without Data and Identity: Customer centricity was a hot theme this year. Retailers are always striving to put the shopper at the center of what they do—but you can’t do this effectively unless you know what they want. And that’s where data and identity become a need-to-have, not a nice-to-have. Best Buy’s approach of using data to understand customer preferences is a perfect example: In their session, the retailer noted that because they have strong identity resolution and robust first-party data from working with Epsilon as a strategic partner, their customer can tell them what to do next—they don’t have to guess. That’s true customer centricity: Letting the shopper guide the content that resonates with their passions and habits.

The Next Major Media Channel is...in-store? The role of physical stores in the retail media ecosystem is evolving. With over 80% of transactions occurring in physical spaces according to eMarketer, the opportunity for in-store engagement is there. Retailers should start to think beyond their websites and leverage stores as dynamic media channels, through activations like digital signage, endcap displays, in-store audio advertising and interactive kiosks, to name a few. While in-store is not “new,” taking a data-driven approach to in-store retail media is a new way for retailers to reach shoppers across digital and physical channels—and tie those interactions back to each other—in a way they haven’t before.

The Creator Commerce Power Shift: Why Influencers Are the Engine of Full-Funnel Retail Media



Juan Olea
VP Commerce
Influential



Retailers aren't just selling ads anymore—they're building full-stack media ecosystems. And creators are the connective tissue making it all work. With retail media evolving beyond performance to include storytelling, social commerce, and immersive brand moments, influencer content is no longer a bolt-on. It's the engine. At Influential, we match brands to the right creators to drive measurable business outcomes across every phase of the funnel—turning shoppers into audiences, and audiences into action.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Retail Media is Becoming Creator-Powered Media: Retail media is evolving into a content-rich, brand-building engine. Creators now sit at the core—delivering not just impressions but emotional resonance, cultural relevance, and conversions. When retailers integrate creators into their media mix—especially with first-party data fueling personalization—the result is a full-funnel brand ecosystem that outperforms legacy media buys.

Creator-Led Commerce Is Redefining Product Discovery: The social commerce wave is no longer a trend—it's the engine of modern shopping. Platforms are integrating checkout and product discovery directly into content experiences, and creators are leading that charge. They're building storefronts, guiding purchases, and turning trust into transactions. The brands that win are those that treat creators as both storytellers and sellers.

Cultural Relevance Now Requires Unexpected Collaborations—and Creators Lead Them: Consumer attention today lives at the intersection of culture and commerce. The most impactful brand moments are born from unlikely collaborations—fashion with food, beauty with gaming—and creators are the thread that makes them make sense. They make brand moments feel native—not manufactured—driving emotional engagement and viral resonance that ads alone can't replicate.

AI Can Personalize, But Only Creators Can Humanize: As AI powers dynamic offers, audience clustering, and product recommendations, creators are still essential to humanize the experience. Authenticity is non-negotiable in a saturated attention economy. The most effective retail media strategies will marry AI efficiency with creator creativity to deepen brand trust.

Experiences Are the New Shelf Space—and Creators Are the Hosts: Immersive retail is on the rise, from live shopping to hybrid store events. Creators aren't just attendees—they're the architects of engagement. Their ability to blend entertainment with commerce transforms passive discovery into participatory shopping, delivering both instant conversion and community growth. Creators are transforming commerce into community.

Getting Shoppers to Feel Before They Buy



Michele Roney
EVP-Retailer CX
Mars United Commerce

As an industry, we've talked for years about the need to deliver a unique, informative, and entertaining customer experience. Rarely has that need been brought to life better than it was during a Shoptalk Spring panel discussion about storytelling featuring executives from Sephora, Meta, and Toys "R" Us owner WHP Global.

These panelists explored the emotions elicited through the act of shopping in a physical store. Shopping online evokes little emotion — you find what you need, you buy it, and it comes to your house. But there can be magic in the store experience when shopping for items like beauty products or toys as you touch the products, try them on, and play with them.

The lesson here is that retailers need to get "back to the basics" of understanding why people shop their stores to create experiences that will keep them coming back to the location where the majority of sales still take place.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Storytelling Comes In Many Forms: Storytelling informs consumer decision making by sparking emotion, both directly and indirectly. Toys "R" Us focuses heavily on nostalgia for its brand and iconic mascot (Geoffrey) to charm adults who remember their own childhood experiences, explained Kim Miller, Global Chief Marketing Officer for Toys at WHP Global. Sephora is using professional women's basketball sponsorships to spotlight the inequities women face in sports, a topic that resonates with its customer base.

Storytelling is Ripe For Partnerships: Creators and influencers have become a major part of brand storytelling — especially in beauty, where the goal is to sell "the look" not the product, said Celessa Baker, Sephora's VP-Marketing Partnerships. Sephora fosters organic partnerships and doesn't over-manage the relationship, seeking individuals who have the same core values even if they aren't 100% "on brand."

The Store is A Storytelling Playground: Buying toys is an emotional experience rather than a functional action, so Toys "R" Us seeks to deliver in-store experiences that cater to family outings instead of shopping trips. Stores present multiple photo opportunities and playtime activities with various brands and products — experiences that clearly differentiate the experience from online shopping.

Sephora views its stores as a playground for beauty. The experience is rooted in discovery, with the goal being a warm, welcoming environment where shoppers can touch, feel, and try products. One-on-one beauty sessions and special sales events are staged to drive traffic. But a trip to Sephora is an omnichannel experience as well, with many shoppers using their phones to look for styles, products reviews, and the other information they need to make purchase decisions. ▶

Getting Shoppers to Feel Before They Buy



KEY TAKEAWAYS - CONTINUED

Generative AI is a Storytelling Ally: Many industry practitioners are concerned that automation and generative AI could minimize (if not eliminate) the need for “human creatives.” Meta firmly believes that all marketers should be experimenting with automation – and that gen AI is the next natural transition for creative automation.

But Meta also believes that “‘Creative’ will be automated in the future, but ‘Creativity’ will not,” said Karin Tracy, Group Lead for Retail & Ecommerce. Gen AI will handle ad versioning and other tedious aspects of the creative process, which will give human creatives more time and opportunity to develop the storytelling and experiences that drive shopper engagement. ♦



Pushing the Limits of Commerce Media



Amy Andrews
President
Mars United Commerce

The future of retail media appears to have one foot planted firmly in the past — and both eyes focused clearly on the shopper.

In the Shoptalk Spring panel discussion I hosted on the future of “retail media,” media executives from Nordstrom, PayPal Ads and Sam’s Club used that phrase sparingly and instead focused more on the hottest word at this year’s event: “experience.”

That led to some unexpected conversations about taco trucks, yurts, and small businesses and almost none about the topics of search, offsite display, or artificial intelligence that typically dominate retail media discussions. It’s a sign that forward-thinking retail media networks are building commerce experiences that will drive business impact for brand partners by resonating with shoppers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Experience is Everything: “The ultimate goal is to better serve the customers,” said Aaron Dunford, VP-Media at Nordstrom, where in-store media is “not focused on screens but a curated, visually compelling content experience” that includes more traditional in-store tactics such as seasonal merchandising displays — like the yurts created last fall to showcase winter apparel.

“What’s old is new again,” said Harvey Ma, VP & GM of Sam’s Club Member Access Platform, where the shopper experience includes parking lot tailgating events but also helpful reminders (“Ads that don’t feel like ads”) delivered through the retailer’s Scan & Go in-store app. “We’re going back to very traditional marketing mixes now because they are effective ways to blend digital technology with physical footprints,” he said. “The cool thing” about stationing taco trucks outside stores these days “is figuring out how to measure that.”

Emotion Might Be a KPI: All three panelists agreed that, if the shopper experience represents the core of retail media, consumer sentiment might be just as important a metric for success as ROAS or other performance-based metrics. Networks that understand how shoppers feel about the actions they’re taking will be able to deliver more powerful and engaging retail media solutions.

“We should not look at this as straight performance media,” said Ma, suggesting that working toward lifetime customer value “is more beneficial than the results of a single campaign.” ▶

Pushing the Limits of Commerce Media



KEY TAKEAWAYS - CONTINUED

Internal Alignment is Critical: A seamless shopper experience isn't possible without cross-functional collaboration. At Nordstrom, Dunford oversees all media planning to maintain cohesion across both internal functions and shopper touchpoints. In addition to the adoption of partnership-enabling technology, Sam's Club appointed its first chief experience officer (Diana Marshall) in January – "We all have the same boss now," noted Ma.

PayPal, meanwhile, is building a network that helps small businesses monetize their websites while delivering convenience and rewards to users of its flagship and Venmo payment apps, explained Jenna Griffith, VP- PayPal Ads. Cross-merchant data analytics will be crucial to the business model, she said.

Networks Need a Unique Selling Proposition: Retail media networks should be designed to "capture the ethos" of the retailer rather than merely offering a list of standard capabilities and opportunities, said Ma. Sam's Club MAP adheres to the four elements in the retailer's diamond logo: value, trust, experience, and assortment. Nordstrom is emphasizing longer-form storytelling methods of advertising (including social and CTV) as it works "to move from a transactional network to an experiential network," said Dunford.

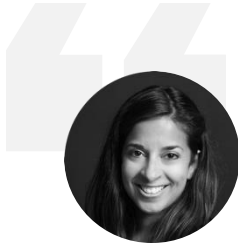
Non-endemic Brands Can Fit In: The shopper experience can be enhanced through thoughtful, relevant non-endemic advertising, said Dunford. For Nordstrom's upscale customers, that could include cruise lines, airlines, and streaming services, he said.

Personalization Must Be Improved: The industry needs to develop dynamic creative optimization tools that equal the sophisticated targeting capabilities already available. Retail media ads should serve as "a personalized lever in the moment," said Griffith. ♦



From Possibility to Priority: AI's Role in Retail's Next Chapter

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Sabrina McPherson
Sr Managing Director,
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At Shoptalk 2025, Publicis Sapient's Sabrina McPherson doesn't talk up AI—she breaks it down. In this sharp, no-hype conversation, she explains why the best retail innovation starts with structure, not speed—and why beauty is still the benchmark everyone's learning from.

This article was previously published on [Unofficially Shoptalk](#).

At Shoptalk 2025, Publicis Sapient's SVP of Strategy outlines a disciplined path forward—where AI serves clearly defined use cases, not abstract ambition.

There's no denying the retail industry's appetite for AI. But amid the excitement, Sabrina McPherson offers a measured stance: real transformation starts not with the technology itself, but with how clearly you understand the problem you're trying to solve.

Representing Publicis Sapient—the digital transformation arm of Publicis Groupe—McPherson arrived at Shoptalk to share a grounded perspective. Her message to retailers was consistent throughout: take a step back, cut through the noise, and focus first on customer experience pain points.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Search Isn't Just a Feature—It's Embedded: AI-powered search was the focal point of McPherson's session, and for good reason. It's one of the most active areas of retail innovation, with an influx of new providers and capabilities. But she cautioned against jumping in too fast.

Rather than viewing search narrowly, she emphasized thinking of it as an embedded layer across the full customer experience. The challenge is no longer “how do I build search?”—it's “where is search helping, or failing, in the journey to conversion?”

Retailers, she advised, should identify specific friction points—like cart abandonment or low conversion—and then assess how search technologies might address those. It's a simple, use-case-first approach in a time when the temptation to chase the “shiny object” is everywhere.

Where Beauty Leads, Others Learn: Asked which sectors are doing this well, McPherson didn't hesitate: beauty and fashion are leading the charge. Their edge, she noted, comes not just in aesthetics, but in data-driven marketing, personalization maturity, and experience design.

Even outside search, beauty brands are ahead in areas like returns optimization and customer journey orchestration. Their example is being studied closely by other verticals—including household goods and food—which have traditionally lagged in digital strategy but now look to beauty for cues. ▶

From Possibility to Priority: AI's Role in Retail's Next Chapter

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KEY TAKEAWAYS - CONTINUED

Data Before Channels: The conversation soon turned to short-form video, social commerce, and retail's ongoing struggle to meet changing consumer behavior. Here again, McPherson urged strategic patience.

She emphasized the need to link identity across touchpoints—to know who your customer is in every channel, and how they behave. Without this, retailers risk targeting the same person twice, sending irrelevant messages, or simply wasting budget.

Before launching aggressive social strategies, she said, the foundation needs to be there: data, identity resolution, and unified views of behavior across platforms. Only then does the rest of the marketing mix make sense.

Internal AI Use Cases Are Hiding in Plain Sight: While much attention is given to customer-facing AI, McPherson pointed to internal use cases as a powerful entry point—especially in marketing.

Publicis Groupe, she explained, is already applying AI to reengineer its own marketing value chain. This enables efficiencies that free up investment for more ambitious, consumer-facing efforts.

It's not about starting big. McPherson advocates for small, bite-sized AI investments that drive operational gains. These become funding engines for broader digital programs.

The Structural Challenge Behind the Tech Hurdle: Asked what advice she'd give to retailers struggling to keep up with evolving expectations, McPherson didn't cite tools or talent. She cited internal alignment.

Most companies, she said, face a fundamental challenge: business teams (like marketing) own the demand, but IT holds the implementation power and the budget. And those functions are rarely working in sync.

Companies that have reorganized—sometimes via a Chief Digital Officer, sometimes via cross-functional teams—are seeing faster progress. Those still locked into siloed org structures are falling behind, not because of a lack of interest in innovation, but because they can't act on it effectively.

What We Learned from Publicis Sapient's Strategy Lead:

- Start with the pain point—not the technology
- Beauty and fashion are still setting the pace on personalization
- Identity resolution must precede channel execution
- AI can begin with internal use cases to drive reinvestment
- Organizational alignment is often the real unlock

As McPherson wrapped up, the takeaway was clear: transformation isn't a race to adopt—it's a discipline in how you decide.

In a conference where AI is everywhere, her perspective offered something rare: clarity. ♦

Building Customer Loyalty and Engagement

razorfish



David MacDonald

EVP, Head of Retail & Commerce Experience Practice
Razorfish

This year at Shoptalk 2025, the focus on customer engagement and building loyal customers was a significant theme. Retailers are emphasizing the importance of providing value and differentiating themselves from competitors through engagement-focused initiatives. Leveraging data and audience insights to connect with customers on an emotional level was a key strategy discussed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Leveraging Data and AI for Personalization: Retailers are using AI and data to enhance efficiency and customer engagement. By understanding customer preferences and behaviors, they can create more personalized and authentic interactions. For example, data initiatives help in tailoring marketing messages and product recommendations, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, maintaining authenticity is crucial, as seen in SoulCycle's failed attempt to use AI in instructor shoots. Evelyn Webster, CEO of SoulCycle, noted, "We lacked the human element, and the shoot lacked the authenticity we have with our customers."

Interactive Retail Media: Sam's Club is evolving Retail Media by incorporating more interactive store displays. This approach aims to bring retail to the customer rather than the other way around. Interactive displays can enhance customer engagement and provide more value, making the shopping experience more enjoyable and memorable. Harvey Ma, VP and General Manager of Retail Media at Sam's Club, discussed the future of Retail, emphasizing the shift toward more interactive store displays, and the need to take Retail to the customer instead of driving the customer to retail locations.

Social Listening for Proactive Engagement: Social listening is playing a crucial role in understanding and engaging customers. American Eagle, for instance, has established a dedicated social listening group to stay proactive and reactive to customer preferences and emerging trends. Craig Brommers, CMO of American Eagle, explained, "We have to be proactive and reactive to understand what the customer loves and be aligned with the customer." By building the muscle memory for the team to engage in trend conversations, the execution becomes seamless, leading to better customer alignment and satisfaction.

Building Loyalty Through Emotional Connections: The discussions emphasized the need for retailers to build loyalty through emotional connections and authentic engagement. Consumers crave authenticity, and brands that can deliver on this will thrive. By focusing on emotional connections, retailers can create a deeper bond with their customers, leading to increased loyalty and a stronger brand presence. This was a key focus of most of the talking points brought up from a vast array of retailers, highlighting the importance of emotional engagement in building a loyal customer base.

Bridging the Physical and Digital Retail Divide



Andy Murray
Executive Chairman
Saatchi & Saatchi X

As the retail landscape redefines itself, Shoptalk 2025 highlighted an overarching theme: the seamless integration of physical and digital experiences is essential for future success. This year's event brought the physical shopping experience back into the spotlight as a critical opportunity for brands to offer tangible interactions, immediate gratification, and personalized service, thereby enhancing customer engagement and brand loyalty. With more than 80% of shopping transactions still occurring in brick-and-mortar stores, Shoptalk speakers reinforced the unique role stores serve as community hubs integral to effective omnichannel strategies, providing experiential and social benefits that digital-only platforms cannot replicate.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Contextual and Real-Time Shopping: A significant insight from the keynote “From Screen to Scale: Unlocking Opportunities at the Intersection of Retail and Media,” featuring NBC Universal, was the power of contextual alignment. Integrating products directly into content—such as shoppable cooking shows—engages consumers in innovative ways. Real-time shopping moments during major events, like the Olympics, combined with fulfillment from on-demand retailers such as Instacart, maintain sales momentum far beyond the event itself. This strategy not only keeps consumers engaged but also creates a longlasting sales impact.

Retail as The New Media: Perhaps the most striking theme was retail's evolution as a media powerhouse. With retail media networks outperforming traditional media in driving incremental sales, the future clearly lies in leveraging retail environments as major media channels, both online and offline. The rapid growth of retail media, surpassing \$50 billion in eight years, underscores its potential. This trend is supported by the strategic use of first-party data and creator campaigns, driving a new wave of digital advertising that seamlessly integrates commerce and media.

The Path Forward: Shoptalk 2025 showcased the critical importance of marrying physical spaces with digital innovation. Retailers are increasingly recognizing the need to use both in tandem to engage today's consumers. From transformative advertising models and AI-driven personalization to leveraging retail media networks to drive brand relevance in the commerce context, the retail industry is embarking on a journey where digital and physical are not just coexisting but enhancing each other in unprecedented ways. This event illuminated the path forward, where the convergence of retail, media, and commerce will reshape the future of shopping.

It's Time for Brands to Own Their Destiny



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We are now nearly five years post-COVID, and the competitive landscape is more intense than ever. Some brands thrive while others struggle. How can the winners continue to surge ahead, and the challengers rewrite their future? Brand building—paired with the power of Retail Media—could be the strongest bridge to success over the next three to five years.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Competition is More Intense than Ever: For many, a very interesting thing happened during Covid – businesses entered an organic growth mode driven by increases in online shopping leading to greater revenue overall. Now that we are five years past, business growth has reverted to a pre-Covid landscape where there are clear winners and losers and the need to build momentum is real. The critical point here is that to succeed in the highly competitive space of online commerce, your business needs to be managed effectively into the future, and to do that two, three, or four years out, you need to build your Brand today.

Lead with Consumer Insights: The CEO of SharkNinja, Mark Barrocas, highlighted how critical it is to gather consumer insights directly from your users. For example, SharkNinja ran a focus group to understand the way users clean the bristles of their vacuums in their own homes. Seeing consumers turn over the vacuum to cut away hair caught on the roller led to the Self-Cleaning Brushroll innovation. While this is only one example of how SharkNinja has continued to pioneer innovations in the home appliances category year after year, the approach is very telling – nothing is more valuable than direct consumer insight and use case visibility.

Brand Investment is a Long-Term Bet: Gap CEO, Richard Dickson, was clear about who Gap is: “we give you the ability to be who you want to be.” This emphasis on a larger vision and embracing the digital dialogue that consumers engage in all day long is critical for understanding where brand building happens. From equipping store teams with real-time data to help employees personalize interactions with customers, to creating more agility within the supply-chain leading to faster response timing on the back of a viral TikTok video, or more authenticity in storytelling that help consumers feel the vision and mission of Gap. Each of these actions individually and collectively help build long-term brand value.

Retail Media is the Bridge Between National + Commerce Investment: Knowing that brands are solving for long-term success, maintaining top-of-mind awareness is a critical step on a longer journey. Three key components highlighted by various speakers demonstrate how to setup Retail Media investment as the bridge along this road. From Paypal’s perspective, they are leveraging rewards data to drive one-to-one personalization. From Sam’s Club perspective, they are leveraging shopping data to open category affinities and cross-shopping behavior. Nordstrom’s perspective is service-focused and how their interaction data can help enable a better human connection. Each retailer and Retail Media Network has an advantage that they bring to the table which needs to be clearly communicated to unlock upper funnel investment from brands and support growth goals into the future.



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