AI agents for shoppers: Creating a new path to purchase through consumer-focused *agentic AI in retail*

Capgemini

A new curve is forming in the AI era—one that maps the growing integration of agentic AI, autonomous tools that can act on behalf of shoppers, into the customer journey. While still in its early days, what does this technology mean for retailers—and how should they respond?

Shopping will always be part of the human experience. But with the advent of consumer-facing AI agents - intelligent algorithms that can research, compare, and even purchase products on behalf of shoppers - humans may not always be part of the shopping experience.

No longer just a recommendation engine, AI in this context is evolving into an active participant in the commerce journey, anticipating individual needs and preferences, identifying optimal products, and factoring in a wide variety of inputs such as price, availability, and delivery—all with minimal human input.

While agentic AI is still extremely early on the adoption curve, consumer appetite for intelligent solutions suggests that *retail AI technology* could fundamentally reshape how consumers discover, compare, and purchase products, changing the role of the retailer and brands from providers to problem solvers. As a result, retailers will need to rethink their digital strategies, not just to resonate with human shoppers, but to catch the bionic eye of an AI agent.

How *Agentic AI* is transforming retail and reshaping the shopping experience

Consumers can think of AI agents as "virtual butlers", like proactive assistants that respond to requests, anticipate needs, and act on behalf of the individual. Much like a trusted aide, these agents will reason, recommend, and initiate actions in service of their user. But the next big question emerges: Who will own this role of digital butler? Will it be the retailer, deeply embedded in the customer journey? Or an independent third party? Consumers themselves?

Earlier this year, OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, introduced Operator, an AI-powered shopping agent to consumers in the UK. Like ChatGPT, Operator uses a conversational text-based interface that can understand and respond to specific user queries throughout the shopper journey, among other things. In addition to returning recommendations to the customer or answering their questions, Operator can take action on their behalf, purchasing a product that meets the shopper's criteria.

In addition to independent AI tools entering the market, some retailers are developing and integrating their own customer-facing AI agents into the digital shopping experience. For example, Walmart is experimenting with AI-enabled virtual assistants to recognize customers, analyze their intent, and take action on their behalf.

Whether AI agents are brand-owned or provided by third-party platforms, our latest consumer research—What Matters to Today's Consumer—shows that shoppers are increasingly open to intelligent technology in the retail experience. According to the study, 71% of consumers want Gen AI integrated into their shopping interactions, and 68% are interested in tools that aggregate search results across online search engines, social media, and retailers' websites.

As agentic tools become more common in the shopping journey, an interesting paradox may emerge, in that shoppers may become less aware of, or even indifferent to, the mechanics behind them. As long as their needs are met seamlessly, they won't focus on whether their search results are curated by a human-driven algorithm or an AI agent working in the background. Instead, they will simply appreciate that an AI-powered shopping experience is faster, more intuitive, and highly personalized.

1. Removing traditional constraints within the shopping experience with agentic AI

The real value of an agentic AI shopping assistant isn't just that it can hyper-personalize the experience or streamline purchasing. It's that it effectively removes some of the biggest constraints within the shopping journey, like time, energy, and mental capacity for shopping as a daily activity.

In so doing, it can challenge traditional retail strategies and customer engagement models.

Traditionally, the online shopping journey was limited by the amount of time shoppers were willing to spend researching their options and keeping track of details. An AI assistant, on the other hand, does not have such constraints. It can scan, evaluate, and recommend products across the literal world-wide web, providing a shortlist of options to the shopper, perhaps surfacing brands and products the customer is unfamiliar with alongside those they know and love. As homes become more connected, these assistants can also communicate with different tech-enabled assets, such as an IoT-connected refrigerator or smart packaging, automatically detecting when items run low and triggering refills without the need for a shopping list.

AI agents can also help address challenges and limitations within the in-store experience. For example, assistants can streamline pre-shopping activities by generating curated lists based on personal preferences, special occasions, promotions, and current pantry items. They can also guide consumers in choosing the most convenient channel—whether that's online, in-store, or curbside pickup—and enhance the in-store experience itself through features like intuitive navigation, product location assistance, personalized recommendations, and seamless checkout support.

2. Reframing shopping as problem-solving in daily living

Agentic AI may also have a profound effect on how people think about and approach shopping, in that it will shift the focus from browsing products to solving for daily real-world problems and opportunities in their lives.

For example, instead of searching for individual items, consumers can present specific needs—such as "I want to plan four weeknight meals for under $80 without using any dairy products"—and AI will not only generate customized orders, based on the customer specifications, but also complete the purchase and arrange delivery.

This transformation turns shopping into a more intuitive, personalized, and efficiency-driven experience, where AI acts as an intelligent intermediary, streamlining decision-making and reducing the time and effort required to find the products that will solve the shopper's problem.

3. How agentic AI can challenge loyalty

Being able to access a wider array of choices via an agentic tool raises an important point about loyalty.

AI agents can be programmed to automatically repeat purchases under certain circumstances, such as when an item is available at a given price or within a set amount of time from the last purchase. They are also likely to create more choice among consumers. This could upend long-held brand loyalties if and when shoppers discover a product more tailored to their unique needs and preferences.

For example, a shopper's loyalty to an athletic brand because they offer wide-width running shoes could be shaken by AI-enabled recommendations that offer new alternatives to their favorite.

Unfortunately, this excess of choice could spell trouble for brands with weak loyalty scores. Our recent consumer research reveals that as many as 70% of consumers globally and 75% of Gen Z consumers have reported switching brands simply as an experiment. In addition, 70% of Gen Z consumers reported trying a competitor because they felt membership

programs and shared preference data failed to result in a better experience.

4. Differentiating the brand through sustainability and value-based issues

Finally, the advent of AI assistants could make brand differentiation around value-based attributes, such as sustainability, fair trade, fair labor practices, social justice, or equality, a more pronounced decision factor, as these features can also be factored into a shopper prompt.

Take, for example, a consumer who wants to purchase running shoes that are made from synthetic materials and are manufactured in a specific region, two points that tend to be difficult search features using traditional methods.

With an AI agent that is either integrated into a retailer's online experience or through the use of an independent tool, this barrier could potentially be removed, allowing shoppers to find products that meet their specifications for value-based preferences like materials, traceability, product origin, or carbon footprint.

Our consumer research confirms that consumers are welcoming the use of AI tools to streamline the search experience. Nearly six in 10 consumers (58%) have replaced traditional search engines with gen AI tools for product/service recommendations, an 86% increase from 2023. Meanwhile, of those shoppers who use gen AI tools, 68% have bought products recommended by them.

Embracing change: 6 considerations for retailers and brands to get ahead of the agentic AI curve

While companies shouldn't feed too much into the hype cycle of AI agents, they must accept that they have a role to play in the digital shopping experience. To that end, here are a few considerations for brands and retailers to seize the growing opportunity of agentic AI.

| 1 | Prioritize channel-agnostic customer journeys. |

Today's consumers seek more than transactions—they want inspiration, support, and seamless experiences embedded into their daily lives. That means delivering personalized relevance across all physical and digital touchpoints. Brands and retailers can go a step further by using first-party data, behavioral insights, and AI-powered personalization to anticipate customer needs and proactively present relevant products. When paired with intelligent agentic support, this not only simplifies the path to purchase but also creates a unified, frictionless shopping experience.

| 2 | Personalize the experience through data. |

AI is only as valuable as the data it operates on. While general AI capabilities will continue to improve, retailers relying solely on widely available AI models risk losing their competitive edge. To stand out, retailers need to leverage proprietary data, as well as third-party data collaborations and partnerships within the ecosystem, to make AI-driven experiences smarter, more relevant, and more valuable to customers. By integrating unique insights—such as customer behavior, purchasing trends, and personalized preferences—retailers can ensure their AI solutions go beyond generic automation and deliver truly distinctive experiences that keep customers engaged and loyal.

| 3 | Underpin the agentic AI strategy in back-office operations. |

Agentic systems need not be customer-facing to have a profound effect on the customer experience. Behind the scenes, AI agents can optimize supply chain logistics, predict demand fluctuations, and automate restocking processes—ensuring that popular products remain available while reducing waste and inefficiencies. By improving operational precision, these systems indirectly enhance customer satisfaction through a more seamless and frictionless shopping experience. For many organizations integrating agentic AI through back-end systems could be a more logical first step towards experimenting with this technology and building capabilities as compared to customer-facing applications, which tend to carry a higher level of risk.

4	Avoid the "uncanny valley."

Agentic AI represents a fundamental shift in how humans interact with technology, redefining user experience and engagement. While these systems have the potential to deliver highly intelligent and autonomous capabilities, their success hinges on user trust. If AI fails to communicate naturally or oversteps personal boundaries, people may be hesitant to engage. To drive meaningful and trusted adoption, organizations must focus on designing AI that is not only functional but also intuitive, approachable, and respectful.

5	Prepare the workforce for "symbiotic intelligence".

For human workers, agentic AI tools don't aim to replace roles so much as augment them by enhancing creativity, insight, and decision-making. Organizations will need to reevaluate their talent strategy to upskill and reskill workers as multidisciplinary professionals who can triangulate across domains. As companies continue to adopt advanced technology solutions, human workers must also recognize that embracing symbiotic intelligence doesn't just benefit the company—it's also an investment in their own career growth and long-term relevance.

6	Lead with purpose.

As AI agents become more integrated into the shopping experience, decisions will be made not just on the product itself but the brand's values. Commit to issues that matter to your customer in a meaningful way and offer clear metrics and proof points for how programs create real impact.

But is it safe? Addressing privacy, security and auditability concerns

Even when thoroughly tested, AI models in retail can inherit and amplify past patterns-like favoring certain profiles or outcomes-simply because the data reflects legacy decisions. That's why a strong data foundation and structured guardrails are an essential part of helping organizations build, deploy, and scale trustworthy, compliant, and operationally effective AI systems.

To help companies address this need, our data and AI experts have created a checklist outlining the core attributes organizations must consider when designing, adopting, and deploying AI solutions:

Responsible:	Auditable:	Inclusive:	Secure:	Efficient:
Aligned with ethical principles, legal standards and relevant regulations, such as GDPR and the EU AI Act	Provides clear documentation and explainability	Accounts for bias and fairness in data and outcomes	Built with appropriate privacy and data protections	Engineered to deliver business value with operational sustainability

These attributes are the basis for Capgemini's proprietary AI framework, **RAISE**. Short for **Responsible AI solution engineering**, our approach helps retailers establish the processes, protocols, frameworks and guardrails for responsible AI use across functions and geographies, helping them address common concerns around governance, bias mitigation, regulatory compliance, explainability, and cost-efficiency,

Learn more.

Seizing the *benefits of AI agents* in retail

With nearly 7 in 10 shoppers (68%) already purchasing products recommended by AI tools, the integration of agentic AI into the shopping journey is no longer a novelty—it marks a fundamental shift in how consumers engage with brands and what they expect from every interaction.

As AI-powered agents take on more decision-making responsibilities, retailers must rethink their digital strategies to continue to deliver seamless, engaging, and relevant experiences no matter who—or what—the shopper is.

For more information on how your organization can jumpstart your agentic AI journey, please contact our authors to set up a consultation and learn more about our *retail AI solutions*.

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