



The State of Enterprise AI: Retail Industry Briefing



Executive summary

Retailers are accelerating AI adoption to strengthen customer-facing applications, focusing on proven capabilities like personalized recommendations, automated service interactions, and improved product discovery. These areas help teams gain experience quickly, demonstrate ROI, and advance adoption without major operational disruption.

This retail industry briefing is drawn from [The State of Enterprise AI: Gaining Experience and Managing Risks](#), a broader Forrester Consulting study commissioned by Akamai. From it, we learned that retail leaders are adopting AI with a strategic yet cautious mindset shaped by concerns around security, compliance, and brand reputation. Thus far, customer experience, revenue impact, and loyalty are the primary measures of success in implementing AI initiatives.

Key findings

AI drives customer experience and efficiency. Retail leaders prioritize AI that strengthens customer relationships and improves operational performance. In the survey, 72% plan to measure AI success by improved customer experience, while 71% will evaluate revenue impact. Respondents frequently cited established use cases like personalized recommendations, customer Q&A automation, and visual product search, which help improve retention, streamline workflows, and boost speed to resolution.

Risks center on customer trust and brand reputation. Nearly half (48%) of respondents are equally concerned about poor customer experience and harm to brand reputation as they scale AI into customer interactions, underscoring how quickly trust can be lost if performance falters. Many also worry about financial loss, noncompliance, or increased churn if AI outputs are inaccurate or mishandled. Open-ended responses emphasized fear of eroding customer trust, especially in high-touch service scenarios.

Partners deliver the AI infrastructure retailers now see as mission-critical. Retailers are shifting AI from isolated initiatives to core, business-critical operations.

Across the board, almost 90% of respondents say cloud native platforms, managed AI training and inferencing services, and even in-house inferencing are important or critical to meeting their AI application goals. Roughly three-quarters already have these technologies in production, with many expanding or upgrading existing deployments. To achieve that scale, retail teams lean on external partners: Most rely on public cloud platforms (58%), followed by specialty AI providers, global systems integrators, and edge providers to fill gaps in talent, infrastructure, and interoperability.

Scaling retail AI without sacrificing trust

Retailers are moving quickly to integrate artificial intelligence into customer interactions, choosing established use cases that improve product discovery, automate support workflows, and personalize experiences. These applications offer fast impact and help teams build fluency while limiting disruption.

The Forrester study shows retailers are guided by measurable outcomes: improved customer experience, higher revenue, and stronger retention. Nearly 60% expect AI strategies to function at a global scale in the long term, reflecting rising expectations for seamless user performance across devices and geographies.

However, this acceleration happens amid fragmented data environments, limited internal expertise, and heightened scrutiny around security and compliance. Retailers need consistent, low-latency performance and strong governance to deploy AI safely. Cloud native technologies and managed AI services are widely adopted, forming the infrastructure foundation required to scale reliably and maintain customer trust.



Retailers prioritize AI that strengthens CX and operational efficiency

Retailers are focusing their AI investments on capabilities that improve product discovery, personalize experiences, and accelerate resolution. Teams value use cases that deliver measurable impact, integrate cleanly into existing environments, and help them build confidence with AI before expanding into more advanced applications.

Personalized recommendations, automated customer Q&A, and visual search remain the most widely implemented or actively scaled capabilities. These workflows reduce friction, help convert intent into action, and relieve pressure on support teams. Retailers also see AI as a way to improve internal efficiency by reducing manual tasks, delivering faster insights, and creating more consistent service quality across channels.



Together, these deployments reflect a practical approach: Start with proven applications that show immediate customer and operational benefit, then scale as teams gain experience and infrastructure matures.

AI accelerates CX impact and business results

82%

are implementing/scaling implementation or experimenting with automated customer Q&A

77%

are implementing/scaling implementation or experimenting with visual search

74%

are implementing/scaling implementation or experimenting with personalized recommendations

72%

measure success by improved customer experience

71%

measure success by increased revenue



Our most important [AI] use case is personalization of customer preferences. It is the best opportunity to grow revenue.

Retailers manage AI risks tied to trust, compliance, and brand reputation

Retailers are scaling AI in environments where customer trust, regulatory pressure, and data protection shape every decision. Security clearly stands out as the top concern for a majority of respondents, followed by compliance requirements, platform gaps, and uncertainty about where AI will deliver the most value.

These risks influence how quickly teams deploy customer-facing AI. Nearly half (48%) are equally worried about poor customer experience and harm to brand reputation, concerned that inaccurate or inconsistent outputs could harm the brand, degrade customer experience, or increase churn. This concern is rooted in the high-stakes reality of real-time customer interactions. As one survey respondent noted, “If AI technology fails to provide satisfactory and effective service promptly and accurately, customer goodwill will decrease, leading to them abandoning decisions and eventually churning.” Retailers also face friction from legacy systems, siloed data, and shortages of specialized talent, all of which affect how reliably AI can be integrated into high-stakes interactions.



Despite these challenges, retailers are continuing to advance AI adoption, supported by more structured governance and clearer visibility into model behavior. With the right controls in place, teams can scale safely while protecting customer trust and regulatory alignment.

Trust and compliance shape AI deployment decisions

65%

cite security as a top challenge

52%

cite compliance and regulatory requirements

48%

are concerned about harm to brand reputation

48%

are concerned about poor customer experience



We're really flying the plane as we build [our AI strategy for customer-facing applications]. As such, we're worried about going too far too fast and for too long.

AI at scale: The real retail baseline

Retail teams are expanding AI across customer touchpoints, but this is no longer early-stage experimentation. The majority of retailers now treat AI as an enterprise requirement that spans global environments, omnichannel journeys, and operational workflows.

88% are already using or planning AI for consumer-facing applications

77% cite operational efficiency as a primary driver

66% cite the need to augment staff and skills

57% expect customer-facing AI to run at a global scale in the long term

Retailers depend on partners to deliver the mission-critical AI infrastructure they need to scale safely

Retailers recognize that scaling AI requires infrastructure built for consistency, security, and global performance. As a result, nearly 90% rate cloud native platforms and managed AI services as important or critical — a near-unanimous view of their foundational role.

Partnerships also play an essential role in reducing complexity and helping teams maintain governance across distributed environments. Public cloud platforms support model training and deployment at scale. Specialty AI providers offer targeted expertise. Global systems integrators help modernize workflows and maintain compliance across regions. Edge partners enable low-latency experiences for real-time interactions like recommendations, search, and assistance.

As AI expands into more time-sensitive and personalized capabilities, these partners help retailers deliver the responsiveness customers expect without overextending internal resources.

Top partners for AI building and deployment in retail

	For building:	For deployment:
Public cloud platforms	58%	63%
Specialty AI providers	52%	60%
Global systems integrators	43%	42%
Edge providers	37%	35%

Guidance for retailers: Building fast, trustworthy, and scalable AI

As retailers expand AI across customer journeys, the most successful teams follow a pragmatic approach that balances innovation with reliability. The survey findings point to several practices that help reduce risk, streamline operations, and ensure AI delivers measurable value at scale.

Retailers can strengthen their AI strategies by:

- **Defining clear outcomes before expanding use cases.** Teams that tie AI initiatives to customer experience, revenue impact, or operational efficiency gain faster organizational alignment and avoid overextending limited resources.
- **Starting with proven, low-friction applications.** Prioritizing recommendations, customer Q&A, and product discovery allows teams to build fluency and refine governance before moving into more complex or high-stakes workflows.
- **Adopting a phased deployment model.** Gradual expansion helps teams validate performance, monitor real-world behavior, and adjust guardrails before rolling out AI globally or across channels.
- **Strengthening security, compliance, and governance early.** With security and reputation among the top concerns, retailers benefit from establishing visibility into data flows, API behavior, and application interactions before AI becomes deeply embedded in operations.
- **Improving observability across distributed environments.** Understanding how AI-driven interactions perform across clouds, regions, and devices helps teams respond quickly to anomalies, maintain consistency, and meet compliance expectations.
- **Leveraging partners to close talent and infrastructure gaps.** Many retailers depend on external experts for scalable compute, workflow modernization, integration support, and distributed performance needs. These partnerships help teams accelerate without increasing operational burden.

Together, these practices support AI strategies that are resilient, compliant, and aligned with customer expectations — allowing retailers to innovate confidently while protecting trust and long-term value.

Looking ahead

Retailers are expanding AI across customer journeys, but future growth depends on strong governance, simplified workflows, and infrastructure that supports consistent performance across regions. As foundational technologies mature, teams are shifting from adoption to optimization, focusing on reliability and scale.

Partnerships with cloud platforms, specialty AI providers, and systems integrators will remain central to helping retailers manage complexity, maintain compliance, and deliver seamless customer experiences. With these elements in place, retailers can advance AI innovation while preserving trust and long-term business value.

For more insights, visit akamai.com to access the full Forrester study, **The State of Enterprise AI: Gaining Experience and Managing Risks**.

Methodology: This spotlight draws from a Forrester Consulting study commissioned by Akamai, surveying 400 decision-makers in June 2025. The sample includes 65 respondents across the retail and consumer packaged goods (CPG) segment, 46 of which represent retail organizations. For the main survey questions, participants were allowed to select multiple answers or rank their responses according to their preferences. This paper focuses on insights from the combined retail/CPG dataset, using only retail respondents' open-ended comments to provide a targeted perspective. The survey was conducted in a double-blind fashion.



Akamai is the cybersecurity and cloud computing company that powers and protects business online. Our market-leading security solutions, superior threat intelligence, and global operations team provide defense in depth to safeguard enterprise data and applications everywhere. Akamai's full-stack cloud computing solutions deliver performance and affordability on the world's most distributed platform. Global enterprises trust Akamai to provide the industry-leading reliability, scale, and expertise they need to grow their business with confidence. Learn more at akamai.com and akamai.com/blog, or follow Akamai Technologies on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Published 05/26.