

Retail Marketing Trends

How To Win in 2026





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Introduction

Retail Everywhere



Retail no longer begins with intent, and it rarely ends at a single destination. Today's consumers discover products while scrolling feeds, watching streaming content, reading articles, and engaging with entertainment. By the time a purchase decision is made, influence has already occurred across dozens of moments and touch points.

This shift has fundamentally changed how retail marketers drive discovery, relevance, and results. Linear funnels have collapsed. Visibility alone no longer guarantees impact. And relevance, delivered at the right moment, in the right environment, has become the new advantage.

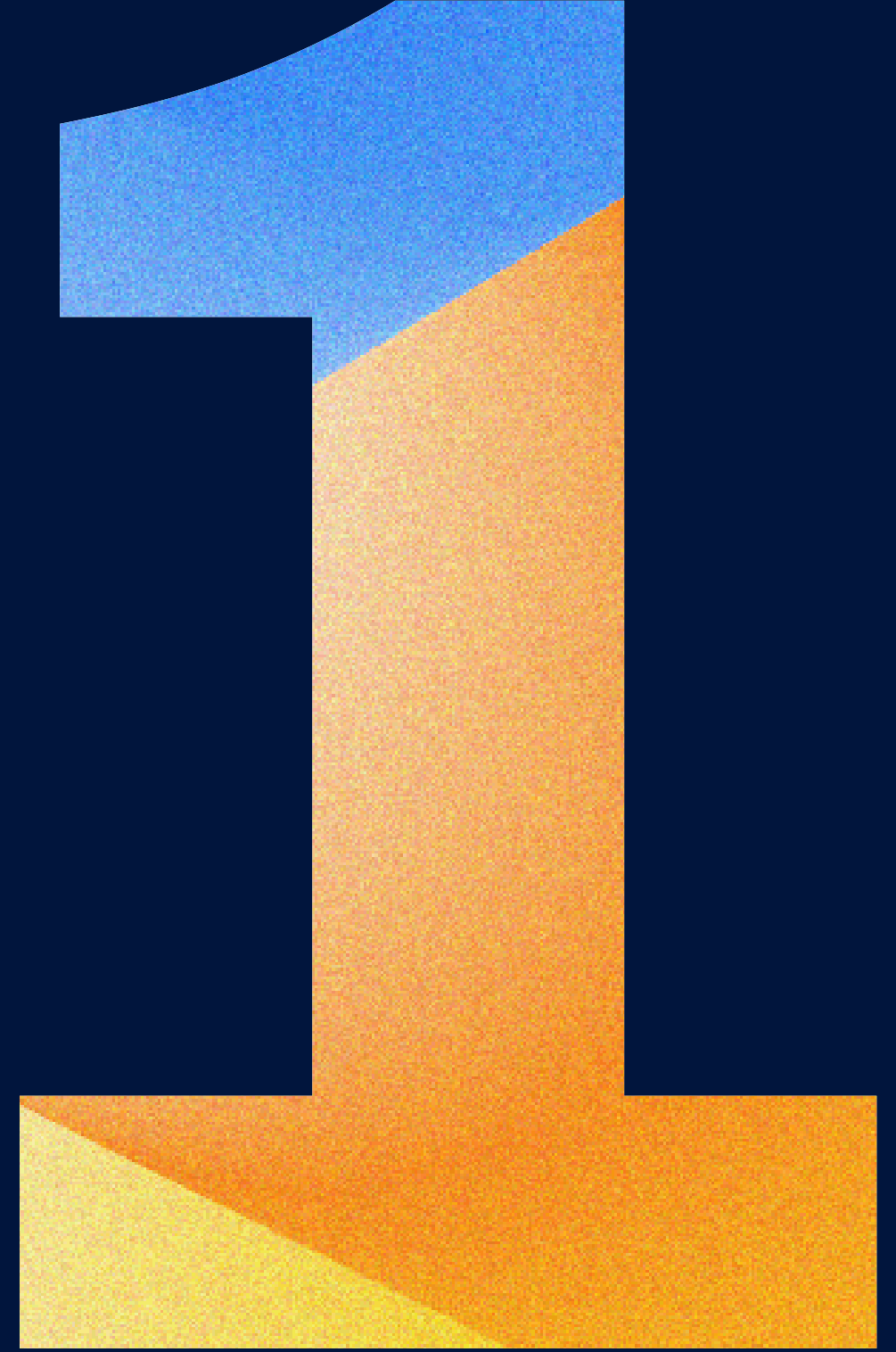
We created this report using StackAdapt platform insights and industry research to explore how retail marketing is evolving today and what will define success in 2026. Inside, you'll learn where budgets are flowing, how consumer behavior is reshaping strategy, and why programmatic orchestration is emerging as the connective tissue between data, creative, and performance.



Matt Phillips

SVP, Vertical Sales, StackAdapt

Relevance Is the New Real Estate



RELEVANCE IS THE NEW REAL ESTATE

Consumers are no longer navigating a linear path to purchase. Instead, they move through an infinite digital shelf where discovery occurs:

01

In-feed

02

In-stream

03

In the moment

The fight for visibility is no longer about being everywhere; it's about being relevant everywhere that matters.

In 2026, relevance will become the most valuable principle of real estate for retail marketers. Brands that succeed are those who transform fragmented signals into personalized, predictive experiences. The advantage goes to marketers who understand intent earlier, act on context faster, and show up with meaning, not just noise.

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In 2026, as consumer expectations rise, and tolerance for surface-level efforts fades, leaders across marketing, CX, and digital business must work together to deliver experiences that align with their brand promise.

Sharyn Leaver

Forrester

Source: [Forrester](#), 2026 Predictions Guide: B2C Marketing, CX, & Digital

How Marketers Are Investing in a Collapsed Funnel

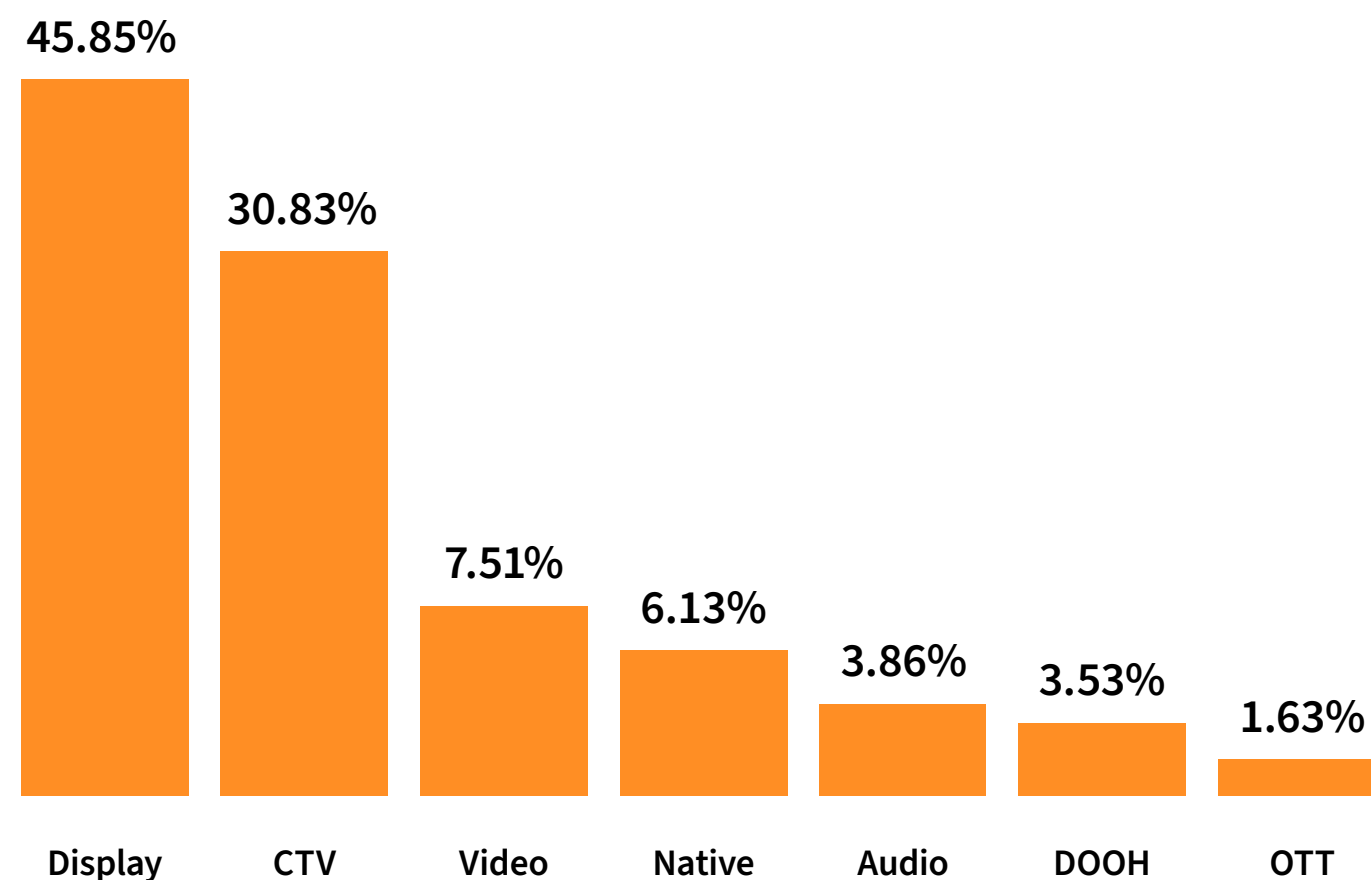
As consumers shift fluidly across screens and formats, retail marketers concentrated spend in the channels that reliably delivered reach, relevance, and measurable outcomes. StackAdapt Internal Data (2025) shows a clear consolidation toward the environments best aligned to today's collapsed consumer journey.



Programmatic Channel Share of Budget

(Average, 2025)

Seven core channels represent 99% of all programmatic media spend, demonstrating that marketers are doubling down on proven, scalable environments.



Source: StackAdapt Internal Platform Data, Retail Advertisers, 2025

What This Means

Display and CTV alone account for 77% of spend, validating their position as the primary channels to drive retail marketing success. Display delivers always-on visibility, while CTV provides premium storytelling and measurable lift. Together offering both breadth and depth across the customer journey.

Secondary formats, including Video, Native, DOOH, Audio, and OTT, contribute steady mid-funnel reinforcement. These channels excel at contextual relevance, helping marketers stay present in moments of curiosity, comparison, and early intent formation.

Overall, this channel mix reflects a mature omnichannel strategy that shows that marketers are prioritizing surfaces that capture attention, maintain continuity, and support full-funnel outcomes.



HOW MARKETERS ARE INVESTING IN A COLLAPSED FUNNEL



Insight

In 2025, retail marketers put most of their budgets into channels that help people notice their brand, stay interested, and take action. They focused on the places where shoppers spend time and where ads can make a clear difference. This helped marketers build a strong base for what will shape retail marketing in 2026.

Five Trends Reshaping Retail Marketing in 2026

The changes underway in retail marketing are not isolated trends, they are interconnected forces reshaping how consumers discover, evaluate, and buy. Together, these forces explain why traditional playbooks are breaking down and what marketers must do to stay relevant in a world where every moment can become a shopping moment.



TREND 1

Retail Is Everywhere

Shopping moments now span streaming, social, search, and in-content environments. Every touch point, from entertainment to education, can lead directly to transaction.

Why it matters:

Consumers no longer enter shopping mode. They move in and out of discovery and purchase fluidly. Marketers must ensure their brand is present across surfaces and contexts, not just retail platforms, because any moment can become a checkout moment.

82% of consumers use social or content platforms to research or discover products.

Source: [Hostinger](#), Social commerce: Definition, key trends, and statistics

TREND 2

The Funnel is Collapsing

The path to purchase isn't linear. Awareness, consideration, and conversion now occur simultaneously within the same environments.

Why it matters:

Consumers don't move through the funnel in a perfect order, so marketers can't plan in separate stages. People jump around and make decisions fast, often in the same place they first saw the brand. To keep up, marketers need ads and messages that work at every stage, plus flexible ways to measure what's working. The best results come from meeting consumers wherever they are with clear, helpful messages at the moment they show interest.

“

The traditional marketing funnel model now falls short in mapping the intricate, non-linear journey of the modern consumer.

Anton Lipkanou

Source: [Forbes Business Council](#)

*Consumers typically engage with a brand **3+** times across digital channels before making a purchase.*

Source: [Impact.com](#), The Modern Customer Journey

TREND 3

The Privacy Era Reshapes Data Strategy

With increased signal loss and the decline of cookies, 1st-party and contextual data become the core of durable retail marketing strategies.

First-party data draws from direct customer relationships such as site behavior, purchases, CRM, and loyalty signals to reveal intent. Contextual data uses the content, environment, and moment to deliver relevance without relying on personal identifiers. Together, they enable privacy-first targeting, personalization, and measurement across the retail journey.

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Marketers are increasingly turning to first-party data and identity alternatives to deliver relevance and measurement in a privacy-by-design ecosystem.

Interactive Advertising Bureau

Source: [IAB, State of Data](#)

Why it matters:

As old tracking tools fade, marketers need reliable, privacy-safe data to stay relevant. Strong first-party and contextual strategies help brands understand customers, target accurately, and measure performance even as signals disappear.

68% of consumers expect brands to use their data to create more relevant experiences.

Source: [Salesforce](#), State of the Connected Customer

TREND 4

The Rise of AI-Driven Creativity

AI is transforming retail creative from static assets into adaptive, always-on experiences that respond to context, intent, and moments in real time. As expectations for relevance continue to rise — with 71% of consumers now expecting personalized interactions (McKinsey, Next-Generation Personalization) — retailers are increasingly turning to AI-powered dynamic creative optimization (DCO) to deliver personalization at scale.

AI enables brands to tailor messaging, visuals, and offers dynamically across audiences and environments, turning personalization into a performance lever. As expectations for relevance rise, retailers are increasingly adopting AI-powered dynamic creative optimization (DCO) to deliver more relevant experiences and drive measurable improvements across the retail journey positioning AI-driven creativity as a core driver of retail marketing outcomes in 2026. (Celtra, What is DCO).

Why it matters:

AI unlocks hyper-relevant creative at scale, enabling brands to tailor messaging, offers, and experiences to real-time context, audience mood, and intent. As consumer expectations for personalization rise, AI-driven creativity becomes essential for maintaining relevance, improving performance across the journey, from awareness lift to conversion efficiency.

88% *of marketers use
AI daily in their work.*

Source: [SEO.com](#), AI Marketing Statistics


TREND 5

Conscious Shopping Shapes Brand Choice

Consumers increasingly expect brands to demonstrate authenticity, sustainability, and values-aligned action, and those expectations now directly influence purchase decisions. As the ability to shop expands across more touch points, consumers are evaluating not just what brands sell, but what they stand for. Trust, transparency, and consistency across messaging and experience are becoming critical drivers of preference and loyalty.

Why it matters:

Brand values now influence outcomes. Ethical practices, sustainability messaging, and authentic stories have become conversion drivers, not just reputation builders. Purpose and performance are converging and consumers reward brands that walk the talk.



51% of consumers say they've stopped shopping for a brand that didn't align with their values.

Source: [Kearney](#), Weighing Value with Values

The Relevance Mandate



As retail expands across more surfaces and signals become more fragmented, relevance is no longer a tactic. Instead, it's become a mandate. Visibility without intelligence leads to waste. Personalization without trust falls flat. And presence without consistency erodes brand equity.

In 2026, relevance is defined by four core capabilities:

01

Intelligence

Using 1st-party, contextual, and predictive signals

02

Adaptation

AI-powered creative that adjusts to moments and intent

03

Orchestration

Seamless delivery across every shopping touch point

04

Brand presence

Consistency between values, messaging, and experience

“

Technology leaders face a pivotal year in 2026, where disruption, innovation, and risk are expanding at unprecedented speed.

Gene Alvarez

Distinguished VP Analyst

Source: Gartner, Gartner Identifies the Top Strategic Technology Trends for 2026

Programmatic as the Engine of Modern Retail Marketing



Relevance at scale is impossible without automation. This is where programmatic becomes not just a media channel, but the operating system for modern retail marketing. Programmatic transforms signals into strategy, predicting intent, personalizing experiences, and connecting brand building with driving retail, CPG and e-commerce sales in real time.

What programmatic enables:

- 01 Identify and activate shopper intent
- 02 Deliver dynamic, personalized creative at scale
- 03 Connect brand impact to performance outcomes
- 04 Measure incrementality across the full journey

“

The future of retail marketing isn't about choosing between brand and performance — it's about connecting them. Programmatic is the engine that makes that connection possible, enabling relevance, measurement, and growth at every moment that matters.



Matt Phillips

StackAdapt



Conclusion

Winning When Retail is Everywhere

Retail marketing is no longer about choosing the right channel or optimizing a single moment. It's about orchestrating relevance across an ecosystem of touch points where discovery, influence, and conversion happen simultaneously.

The marketers who win in 2026 will be those who treat every surface as a storefront, unify their strongest data signals, and design for a world where brand and performance are inseparable. With programmatic as the connective tissue linking data, creative, and outcomes in real time, relevance becomes measurable, scalable, and sustainable.

When retail is everywhere, relevance is what turns attention into measurable action.

Turn Every Shopping Moment Into Measurable Growth

In a world where retail and e-commerce are found at every corner, winning advertisers don't chase the funnel, they orchestrate it. StackAdapt helps retail marketers connect data, creative, and media to identify high-intent moments and activate the right placements across channels in real time, turning relevance into measurable performance. From discovery to conversion, our platform empowers brands to reach shoppers with the right message, in the right environment, at exactly the right time, and measure what truly drives growth.



[Explore StackAdapt's Retail Solutions](#)



Methodology

Retail Marketing Trends combines proprietary survey research with StackAdapt platform data to provide a comprehensive view of how marketers are evolving their strategies for the year ahead. The quantitative survey, conducted in partnership with Ascend2, gathered responses from 484 senior marketing professionals across the US, Canada, and the UK. Respondents included brand-side marketers (64%) and agency leaders (36%), all at manager level or above, representing organizations with annual marketing budgets of \$5 million USD or more.

Questions explored marketing and advertising performance, budget direction, omnichannel maturity, AI adoption, technology integration, and measurement priorities. The findings were then cross-analyzed against StackAdapt's own platform performance and usage data—spanning campaign spend, channel mix, feature adoption, and creative production trends—to uncover where marketer sentiment aligns with real-world behavior.



StackAdapt is the leading AI advertising and orchestration platform marketers rely on to drive brand growth and revenue. Built entirely in-house with an easy-to-use interface, StackAdapt unifies programmatic and owned channels—including CTV, DOOH, display, native, audio, email, and more—into one seamless experience. The platform makes it easy to find the right audience, personalize creative, run campaigns, optimize, and measure results in one place. Trusted by the most forward-thinking brands and agencies, StackAdapt combines speed of innovation, deep vertical expertise, and partnership that powers real business growth.

For further information, visit stackadapt.com.