

MASTERCARD INSIGHT REPORT

Future-Proofing Retail Strategies with Data-Led Insights & Personalisation

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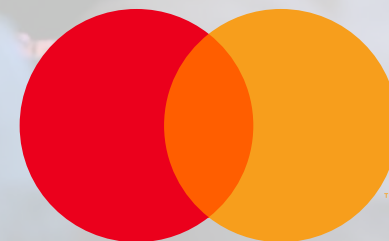
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Introduction

The retail industry is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by evolving consumer expectations and behaviours. Leaders today must navigate a landscape where personalisation, seamless omnichannel experiences and data-driven decision making are no longer optional - but are essential to survival. While many organisations recognise the immense potential of their data, significant gaps still remain in operationalising insights, integrating technology, and cultivating essential digital capabilities of the future.

This was the strategic context that drove discussions during the recent executive roundtable hosted by Mastercard, supported by Connect Media. Following the theme of *Future-Proofing Retail Strategies with Data-Led Insights & Personalisation*, the roundtable convened industry leaders to explore how Mastercard has become a strategic partner for businesses when it comes to unlocking growth through data, enhancing customer loyalty, and staying ahead in an increasingly competitive market.

Conversations were led by Nicola Clement, Advisor, Consultant & Mentor with exclusive insights from Tim Halaska, Former General Manager - Digital Strategy Asia, Toys “R” Us and Matthew Horn, Group General Manager Customer and Digital, Country Road Group





Bridging the Gap: From Data Insights to Delivery

Retailers today have access to vast amounts of data, yet many struggle to translate insights into tangible business outcomes. Siloed systems where e-commerce, store, and supply chain data fail to communicate force teams to rely on gut decisions rather than real-time insights, creating costly inefficiencies and missed opportunities for growth.

The use of digital technologies such as inventory forecasting tools are often ignored in favor of manual processes, due to employee distrust and skill gaps. As one speaker noted during the round table, **“Gone are the days where you run a query, get all this data, put it in an Excel sheet... People on the ground need to see that data and use it - and they need to trust it.”**

To compete in the future, retailers must democratise their data access - equipping frontline teams with intuitive tools and training to act on insights. Adopting a test-and-learn mindset is key – where starting with small, high-impact data initiatives can help build organisational confidence in broader data-driven strategies. This shift requires embedding data fluency into daily operations where every team, from merchandising to store ops, sees data as their responsibility.



Redefining Personalisation with Data

While AI-powered technologies have captured retail headlines, many businesses still struggle to embed personalisation effectively across their engagement strategy.

Fragmented technology stacks where CRM, loyalty programs, and e-commerce platforms operate independently still hinder the delivery of seamless customer experiences. The result? Customers receive irrelevant promotions and engagement from businesses - eroding trust and future spending.

Integrating a centralised decision engine that powers recommendations across all touchpoints from email and mobile to in-store can significantly enhance loyalty and drive revenue. Similarly, behavioral segmentation can deliver immediate improvements without requiring complex AI models. The key is to prioritise quick wins, like tailoring loyalty rewards to purchase history, to prove ROI and build momentum for future AI adoption.

Forging a Data-First Mindset

The most significant barrier to data-led transformation is not technology, but the people that use it. Many retailers face dual challenges: legacy teams clinging to intuition-based decisions, and frontline employees lacking the tools or training to act on insights. As one roundtable participant noted, **“We deployed an inventory forecasting tool across 160 stores, but teams gradually reverted to manual processes because they simply didn’t trust the system.”**

This divide creates a costly cycle where data is either ignored, misunderstood, or leveraged inconsistently, ultimately undermining ROI on tech investments.

Forward-thinking retailers are breaking this pattern through a variety of approaches:

- **Role-specific upskilling:** Training employees to interpret demand forecasts and equipping them with real-time dashboards
- **Cultural Incentives:** Tying performance metrics to data-driven outcomes
- **Cross-functional Collaboration:** Holding regular data reviews where teams jointly solve problems with insights

Those that embed these cultural shifts and practices today, will be better positioned to not just adapt to change, but lead it - turning data fluency into a competitive weapon for the future.



Conclusion

Retail's future belongs to those that make data-driven transformation their core strategic imperative - unlocking opportunity through insights and everyday customer interactions. To thrive in this new era, retailers must move beyond siloed data systems and embrace a cultural mindset where data fluency empowers teams at all levels.

The journey begins with breaking down barriers through democratising access to insights while equipping teams with tools they trust and understand. Pragmatic steps like behavioral segmentation and targeted personalisation can deliver quick wins, proving the value of data-driven strategies before scaling more complex solutions.

However technology alone isn't enough. Lasting success requires cultivating an environment where data literacy is nurtured through continuous learning, rewarded through meaningful incentives, and cross-functional collaboration. This cultural shift turns data from a mere functional tool into a long-term competitive advantage.

Mastercard plays a pivotal role in this transformation journey, providing businesses with the infrastructure and expertise to future-proof their retail strategies. In an era of rapid change, data literacy is no longer optional - it's the key to retail success.



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