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The Changing World of Work in Retail

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Agenda

- Introduction and welcome
- Learning aim and outcomes
- Trends from the Retail sector
- Case Study Activity
- Technology in Stores
- Changing World of Work
- Learner Activity
- Human and AI Collaboration in Retail



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Learning Aim and Outcomes

Aim: To understand how emerging technologies, sustainability, and shifting consumer behavior are transforming the Retail sector.

By the end of this workshop you will be able to:

1. Describe how technology is changing retail operations and job roles.
2. Explain how consumer trends are reshaping the retail experience.
3. Identify the skills and behaviors needed to succeed in tech-enabled, customer-focused retail roles.
4. Discuss the examples given of Retailers that are innovating in the future of Retail.

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Why is Retail Work Changing

- Tech, customers, and economy are key drivers
- Online and offline integration through omnichannel
- Customer expectation of seamlessness and now seeking convenience
- The Rise of Social commerce
- The circular economy and the rise of eco responsible products
- Employee expectations of flexibility and wellbeing supports
- Skills of the future will be human skills empathy, adaptability, personalization, leadership, effective communication and social awareness

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Key Retail Trends

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- Omnichannel retail is the new normal
- Purpose-driven brands attract more employees
- Flexible scheduling and remote HQ roles
- Digital and data fluency as core skills

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Emerging Technology in Retail

Emerging Technologies in Retail



AI for personalization and inventory management



AR/VR for immersive product interaction



Smart shelves and RFID for tracking



Robotics and Chatbots for support

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Case Studies and Innovations

1. Sephora – AR-powered try-ons
2. Amazon Go – cashier-less stores
3. Walmart – Live Better U
4. Zara – Kronos scheduling for flexibility

See Activity 1.1

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AR-Powered Beauty try-ons- (Case study Sephora)





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AR-Powered with an AI Personal Assistant

- IKEA are taking the virtual experience to the next level in Retail. They have an AI Personal Assistant to help shoppers design their spaces without having to physical visit a store.
- The AR-Powered experience is now expected but what shoppers want is that personal support to help them design their home. That’s where AI powered tech can fulfil that need.



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The Benefits of a Cashier Less Stores

- 1. Frictionless Shopping Experience No checkout lines—customers scan their app, pick up items, and walkout. Reduces waiting time and improves convenience, especially during peak hours.
- 2. Operational Efficiency Automation of checkout reduces the need for cashiers. Real-time inventory tracking minimizes stockouts and shrinkage.
- 3. Data-Driven Insights Detailed analytics on customer behavior and purchasing patterns. Enables hyper-personalized marketing and product placement.

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The Benefits of a Cashier Less Stores

- 4. Labor Reallocation Associates can focus on customer service, stocking, and store presentation rather than checkout tasks.
- 5. Innovation Leadership Positions Amazon as a retail tech pioneer. Raises the bar for digital transformation in the sector.



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The Challenges Faced with Cashier Less Stores

- 1. High Initial Costs Requires heavy investment in cameras, sensors, AI infrastructure, and ongoing system maintenance. Limits scalability for smaller retailers.
- 2. Privacy Concerns Uses extensive surveillance and biometric-style tracking. Raises questions around how customer data is collected, stored, and used.
- 3. Job Displacement Risks, Reduces demand for cashier roles, impacting low-skill job opportunities. Raises social and ethical concerns about automation replacing human workers.

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The Challenges faced with Cashier Less Stores

- 4. Technology Limitations Errors in item recognition or checkout can lead to billing mistakes. Complex setup makes it difficult to adapt to certain store formats (e.g., large grocery stores with produce).
- 5. Limited Accessibility Requires customers to have a smartphone and Amazon account. Can alienate older adults, the unbanked, or those uncomfortable with tech.



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Walmart Education for Employees (Case Study Live Better U)

- **1. Education as a Strategic Workforce Tool Trend:**

Retailers are no longer just employers—they're becoming educators.

Walmart's Approach: Live Better U makes education accessible from day one, at no cost to the associate.

Implication: As jobs become more tech-enabled and customer expectations grow, retailers must upskill their teams to stay competitive.

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Walmart Education for Employees (Case Study Live Better U)

- **2. Rise of Tech-Augmented Frontline Work Trend:**

Automation and digital tools are becoming standard on the retail floor.

Walmart's Approach: The Ask Sam app empowers associates with real-time product info, company policies, and customer support resources.

Implication: AI and voice tools don't replace retail workers—they enhance their speed, accuracy, and autonomy.

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Walmart Education for Employees (Case Study Live Better U)

- **3. Internal Mobility and Career Pathing Trend:**

Employees expect more than a paycheck—they want growth.

Walmart's Approach: Staff who engage with LBU are significantly more likely to be promoted internally.

Implication: Career development tools improve retention and build leadership pipelines inside the organization.

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Walmart Education for Employees (Case Study Live Better U)

- **4. Future-Proofing the Retail Workforce Trend:**

Retail jobs are evolving—skills in data, logistics, and tech are increasingly required.

Walmart's Approach: Live Better U offers pathways in high-demand fields like cybersecurity, data analytics, and supply chain.

Implication: Retail can be a starting point for lifelong careers, not just entry-level work.

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The Changing world of work in Retail

The Changing world of work in Retail



New roles: Digital ambassador, content creator



Wellbeing focus (e.g., Lululemon)



In-store and HQ reskilling programs



Performance supported by real-time data

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The Changing world of work in Retail

Wellbeing Focus: Lululemon provides mental health support, paid wellness time, fitness benefits, and mindfulness programs. Retailers are realizing that burnout, stress, and disengagement directly impact performance and turnover.

Why it matters: Focusing on wellbeing helps retain staff, reduce absenteeism, and create a positive workplace culture.



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The Changing world of work in Retail

Focus on New Roles:

- Digital Ambassador & Content Creator: A customer-facing team member who helps shoppers use digital tools (apps, AR try-ons, online ordering kiosks). Think of them as the bridge between tech and human service.
- Retail Content Creator: Creates engaging social content (e.g., styling tips, behind-the-scenes videos) to promote products and boost brand visibility—often from inside the store.

Why it matters: These roles reflect how physical retail is merging with digital marketing, customer engagement, and experience-building.

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The Changing world of work in Retail

Performance Supported by Real-Time Data:

- Store associates and managers now use dashboards and mobile tools to track sales, inventory, and customer satisfaction in real-time.
- Example: A store manager sees live foot traffic and adjusts staffing or promotions immediately.

Why it matters: This data-driven approach enables faster decision-making and more responsive customer service.

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The Changing world of work in Retail

In-Store and Head Office Reskilling Programs:

- Programs like Walmart's Live Better U or Target’s leadership training equip staff with new skills in data, logistics, tech, or management. In-store staff are upskilled to use apps, manage omni-channel orders, and troubleshoot tech tools.
- Head Office teams are being trained in digital marketing, analytics, and sustainability.

Why it matters: Lifelong learning is becoming essential in retail to stay competitive and agile.

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Workforce Flexibility and Technology Integration

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Workforce Flexibility and Tech Integration

Workforce Scheduling with Kronos

- The clothing store Zara uses the Kronos workforce management system to offer app-based scheduling for store employees.
- Staff can view their schedules, request time off, and swap shifts digitally, reducing admin time for managers and giving associates more control.
- This reflects a broader retail shift toward flexible, tech-enabled work models.

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Workforce Flexibility and Tech Integration

Digitally Informed Inventory and Sales

- Real-time data from POS systems and foot traffic analysis help Zara match inventory to demand, store by store.
- Store associates use handheld devices for on-the-go stock checks, mobile POS, and customer support.
- Employees must be comfortable with data tools and mobile tech to succeed.

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Learner Activity

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

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Sustainability in Retail



RESALE VIA WORN WEAR (PATAGONIA)



SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY



DEMAND FOR ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES



SUSTAINABILITY AS AN EMPLOYMENT DRIVER

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

1

Patagonia Worn Wear Program- Buy-back & resale program for used Patagonia gear. Extends product life, reduces waste, promotes circular fashion. Customers receive store credit for trade-ins.

2

Patagonia Sustainable Employment Model- Purpose-driven culture: Employees aligned with environmental values. Offers paid time off for activism, on-site childcare, flexible work.

3

Eco-training- Staff educate customers on repair, reuse, and sustainability. Showing how retail work can be ethical, engaging, and future-focused.

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

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Initiatives in Sustainability



Zara (under Inditex) launched programs to improve sustainable sourcing and reduce waste. In 2022, they began implementing clothing recycling drop points, organic fabric lines, and green store designs.



Employee training now includes sustainability protocols, especially in flagship locations.

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

Circular Economy in Retail: Resale & Rental

- The circular economy in retail focuses on extending the life of fashion products through resale (pre-owned goods) and rental models. This approach minimizes waste, reduces demand for new production, and promotes sustainability.
- **Resale/Pre-Owned:** Consumers buy second-hand clothing and accessories from online marketplaces or brick-and-mortar stores.
- **Rental:** Consumers rent fashion items for a limited time, allowing them to enjoy a variety of styles without owning them permanently.

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

- Growing eco-consciousness drives interest in sustainable fashion. Millennials and Gen Z consumers increasingly prefer renting or buying pre-owned garments, valuing both uniqueness and reduced environmental impact.
- The resale market is projected to expand significantly, with major players like The RealReal and thredUP leading the way. Rental services (e.g., Rent the Runway) are innovating with subscription models and on-demand access, making high-end fashion more accessible.

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Sustainability in the changing world of Retail

- Embracing circular models can improve brand reputation by aligning with environmental and ethical values. Retailers are increasingly investing in eco-friendly practices, from sustainable sourcing to reducing carbon footprints throughout the product lifecycle.
- Traditional retail is evolving as brands integrate resale and rental operations alongside conventional sales. Hybrid models that mix direct sales, subscriptions, and rental services are emerging, offering flexibility and encouraging customer loyalty.

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Changes in Consumer Behaviour in Retail

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Changes in Consumer Behaviour in Retail

01

Shift to Entertainment Led Shopping: Consumers now treat shopping as an interactive, social experience not just a transaction.

02

Influencer Trust & Brand Loyalty: Many buyers trust recommendations from creators more than traditional advertising.

03

Impulse & Real-Time Purchasing: Live shopping events drive urgency and instant buying decisions through limited-time deals and interactive chat.

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Changes in Consumer Behaviour in Retail

- Live Commerce Platforms: Shopify Live, Instagram Live Shopping, and TikTok Shop enable real-time product demos and direct purchases during livestreams. Social Shopping Features: In-app checkout (Instagram, TikTok)Shoppable posts and stories.
- Augmented Reality (AR) try-ons, AI-Powered Personalization and Algorithms curate product feeds based on user behavior, boosting conversion through relevance.
- "See Now, Buy Now" Culture: Instant gratification is the norm now users watch and buy in seconds.

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Changes in Consumer Behaviour in Retail

- Influencer-Driven Commerce: Micro- and macro-influencers are now key retail partners, turning personal content into sales funnels.
- Post-Pandemic Digital Acceleration: Now, consumers expect brands to meet them where they are on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.
- Community-Led Buying: Consumers are influenced by peers and creator communities, not just brands.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Enhanced Inventory Accuracy with RFID Technology

- RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) enables retailers to track inventory in real-time, significantly improving stock accuracy and reducing manual errors.
- Unlike traditional barcodes, RFID tags can be read without direct line-of-sight and in bulk, streamlining inventory processes and ensuring products are available when customers need them.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Automation of Routine Tasks through Robotics

- Robots can autonomously navigate store aisles multiple times a day, scanning shelves to check stock levels, pricing accuracy, and planogram compliance.
- This automation frees up staff from repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus more on customer service and other value-added activities.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail



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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Improved Customer Experience

- With accurate inventory data from RFID systems and consistent shelf monitoring by robots, retailers can ensure that products are in stock and correctly priced, enhancing the shopping experience.
- Customers benefit from reduced instances of out-of-stock items and pricing discrepancies.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Data-Driven Decision Making

- The integration of RFID and robotics provides retailers with a wealth of data on inventory levels, shopping patterns, and shelf conditions.
- This information supports informed decision-making regarding stock replenishment, merchandising strategies, and workforce allocation.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Workforce Evolution and Skill Development

- As technology automates routine tasks, retail employees are transitioning into roles that require digital literacy and analytical skills.
- Staff are increasingly engaged in interpreting data insights, managing technology, and enhancing customer interactions, necessitating ongoing training and development programs.

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Technology and Robotics in Retail

Scalability and Adaptability

- The use of RFID and robotics is scalable across various retail formats and sizes.
- As these technologies become more affordable and adaptable, even smaller retailers can implement them to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

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Human and AI Collaboration in Retail



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Human & AI Collaboration in Retail

Humans and AI working together, not in competition. Retail staff use AI-powered tools to make faster decisions while still delivering the human empathy and creativity machines can't replicate.

- Store Staff use tablets or apps to check real-time stock, get personalized suggestions, or solve customer queries.
- AI tools like chatbots or product recommendation engines handle routine questions, allowing staff to focus on high-value service.
- Example: Sephora's AI-powered product matcher assists staff in personalizing beauty consultations.

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Human & AI Collaboration in Retail

Customer Experience Boosters Speed & Accuracy:

- AI handles inventory, recommendations, and checkout smoothly. This enables more time for personalization by staff through the assistance of AI, it offers a better tailored experience.
- Empathy and Efficiency: Machines handle data; humans build relationships. The future of Retail jobs will evolve into hybrid tech-human roles (e.g. digital stylist, tech-enabled customer advisor). Success will depend on soft and digital skills.
- The most competitive retailers will be those that empower people with tech, not replace them.

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Other AI Trends in Retail

- Global retail is moving from AI experimentation to full-scale execution. For employees, this doesn't mean replacement, but **role evolution.**
- Standard tasks like inventory tracking and basic customer queries are being increasingly handled by AI.
- Retailers in Ireland are now racing to "hard-wire" AI into **everyday workflows** to close this gap and remain competitive against global giants.

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Other AI Trends in Retail

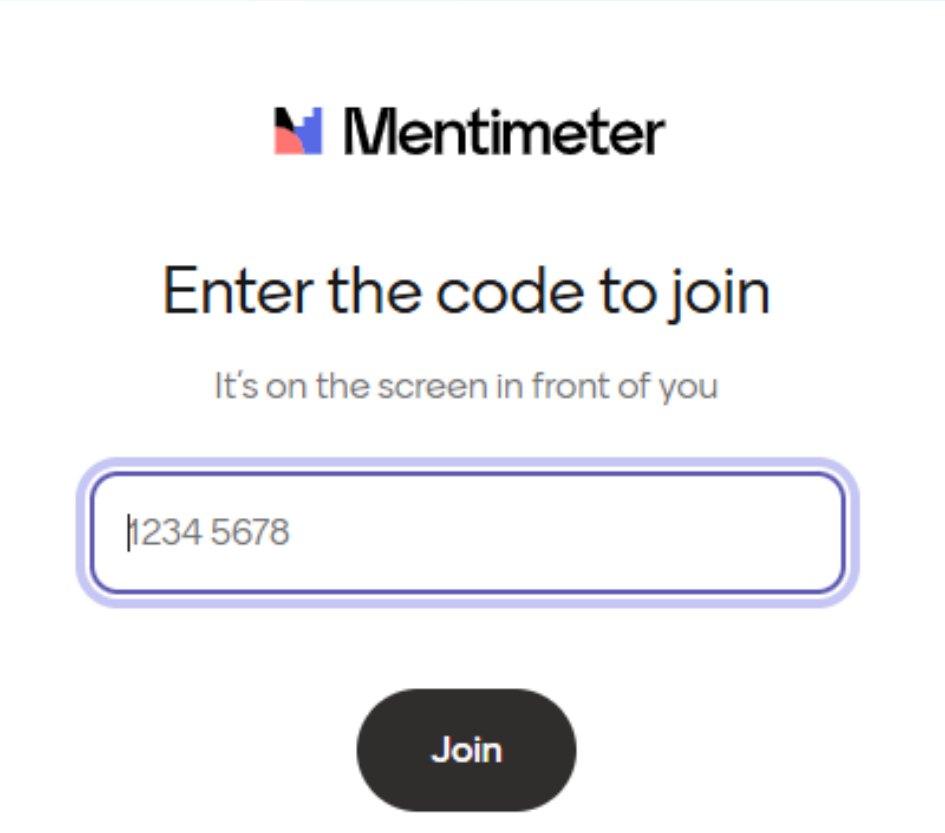
Retailers increasingly using AI for:

- **Workforce planning** – identify skills gaps and analysing market data
- **Sourcing** candidates through LinkedIn and other platforms
- Developing **job descriptions**
- **Screening**
- Pre employment **assessments**
- **Interviewing** and **Selection**
- **Onboarding**

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