

07



**Seven retail IT
trends shaping
2026**

The past year has made one thing very clear: the demands on retail IT departments are piling up faster than most teams can keep up with. Growing safety risks, security threats, and technology expectations are forcing IT teams to rethink how they work and where they invest their resources. In this report, we explore seven trends gaining momentum and what they mean for retailers heading into 2026.

01

Rising focus on staff safety

87%
of retail workers report experiencing verbal abuse.

Sadly, rates of violent and threatening events in retail stores have soared in recent years. In the months to come, we expect to see retailers massively step up their protective measures and with this, look to integrate technologies designed for the core purpose of keeping staff safe.

The alarming rise in customer aggression, violent behaviour, and retail crime has made headlines time and time again in the past year, with Australian Retail Association CEO Chris Rodwell declaring the situation now at crisis point.¹

The stats are sobering:

87% of retail workers report experiencing verbal abuse.²

In 2024, retailers recorded a 30% increase in violent or serious events and a 39% increase in threatening events.³

Theft has reached a 21-year high, with retail theft making up 45% of all 2024 theft.⁴

The rise in offences, combined with the fact that over half of retail workers are women, and more than a third of workers are aged 15–24 (factors which make the retail workforce more vulnerable to violent crime)⁵ are pushing staff safety to the top of retail's 2026 priority list.

Truis Retail Team Lead, Lachlan Jefferies, reiterates how big of a focus staff safety is to retailers at this moment in time:

"The uptick in verbal and physical abuse directed at frontline workers, fuelled by the current cost of living crisis, means that physical staff safety has been a major focus of most retailers over the past year and will continue to be an area where they're focusing their attention," Lachlan says.

In turn, we're seeing retailers look beyond traditional measures and adopt technologies that give staff immediate ways to signal for help. Wearables, discrete alert devices, and real-time threat monitoring technology are becoming part of the retail safety conversation, with uptake set to grow in 2026.⁶

¹ National Retail Association

² National Retail Association

³ Australian Retail Association

⁴ ABS

⁵ National Retail Association

⁶ BusinessWire

02

Smarter store deployment

Moving into a year where operational efficiency is critically important to retail CIOs,⁷ we expect to see many retailers revise how they handle store deployments, shifting these duties from in-house IT teams to external IT specialists local to the area of the site.

The skills shortage and resulting overload of IT teams have been defining traits of the IT industry for 5+ years, and there's little to indicate this is going to change any time soon. Gartner reiterates this in their 2026 CIO Agenda for Retail report, suggesting that increasing IT headcount isn't a driving ambition of retail CIOs in the new year, and instead they'll need to explore how they can maximise the impact of their existing team.⁸

When it comes to productivity sinks in retail IT, arguably the most overlooked is the investment of human resources that goes into deploying your in-house team to handle store IT deployment.

Lachlan explains:

“There are still plenty of retailers that fly their IT teams around the country to do store deployments. It’s very taxing on the senior leaders and managers, who are spending so much of their time travelling to do this work, and on the business, because the time your senior team is spending on store deployment is time not spent on the business’s strategic priorities.”

It’s not a problem you can solve by simply pushing the work down the org chart, either. Flying junior engineers around the country for deployments is just as expensive, just as disruptive, and just as detrimental to the day-to-day running of the business.

Lachlan notes that this is exactly why many retailers now lean on Truis for store deployments.

“We have Truis staff ready to go and a network of partners available to assist with interstate deployments further afield. Across ANZ, we have access to a network of over 1,000 field engineers and technicians. It’s a network we’ve been using for decades. This ultimately means that retailers don’t have to fly staff across the country for every single deployment,” Lachlan explains.

“It This approach keeps costs down for businesses and lets their senior IT teams people stay focused on the strategic work they’re actually hired to do (and want to do).”



⁷ Gartner

⁸ Gartner

03

Stepping up cyber security

Year after year, the critical need to safeguard against cyber attacks has been high on the priority list for retailers. However, the rise of widely accessible agentic and generative AI has brought the urgency for stronger cyber security to a fever pitch.

The Q3 2025 Threat Landscape report from Rapid7 highlights the rising trend of attackers leveraging AI to carry out cybercrime. In particular, the report explores the use of AI tools to automate malicious campaigns and enhance the sophistication of malware and phishing scams.⁹

As AI tools reduce the need for deep technical expertise to carry out phishing and other cybercrime, the barriers to entry continue to fall. This year, we expect both the volume and complexity of AI-enabled cybercrime to grow.

In response, retailers are shifting from periodic checks to more continuous forms of defence. Penetration testing is being carried out more frequently, with teams keen to identify vulnerabilities before attackers do. Internal capability is also getting sharper. As Lachlan observes, more retailers are investing in staff-wide phishing training to strengthen the human layer of defence. It's a critical step, particularly as threats increasingly rely on manipulating frontline workers, as opposed to breaching systems outright.

This mirrors a wider cultural shift of viewing cyber security as responsibility of the entire organisation, not just the IT team alone. In 2026, the retailers making the biggest strides will be those that commit to treating cybersecurity as an ongoing practice across the entire company.



04

Consumer-driven tech updates

43%

of all consumers would pay more for greater convenience

Customers are already being exposed to smart retail technologies (SRTs) in their shopping experiences. With the presence of smart tech in the consumer journey only set to grow, we anticipate a hastening in the transition from consumer-focused SRTs being 'nice-to-have' to 'expected' in the year to come.

This is because customer experience remains one of the strongest commercial levers available to retailers. As demonstrated in a study from PwC:

- 43% of all consumers would pay more for greater convenience
- 42% would pay more for a friendly, welcoming experience.
- 65% find a positive experience with a brand to be more influential than great advertising.¹⁰

In other words, experience doesn't just strengthen the emotional affinity consumers feel towards your brand, it has a tangible dollars-and-cents financial impact.

This expectation is now flowing directly into the technologies shoppers prefer. Studies show growing consumer demand for SRTs, particularly 'smart mirrors' and 'scan-and-go' checkout technology.¹¹ These align with what we're seeing on the ground: shoppers wanting faster and smoother paths through stores, and retailers responding with tools to streamline the in-store journey.

We're already seeing these technologies make their way into the Australian market. You only need to look so far as your local Uniqlo, now fitted with RFID-enabled checkouts that remove the need to scan items individually, or take a walk through an upmarket shopping district, where increasingly, luxury fashion brands are introducing augmented reality try-on tools.

As these technologies become more common, the baseline consumer expectation rises. And while this shift won't happen all at once, momentum is building. Now is the time for retailers to start exploring which SRTs will meaningfully enhance their target customers' journey and where early adoption will deliver the strongest return.

¹⁰ PwC

¹¹ Australian Retailers Association

05

AI agents supporting staff

77%

of AU and NZ retailers believe that within a year, AI agents will be essential to remain competitive.

In 2026, agentic AI will expand its footprint across the market, with more retailers testing the waters of AI by bringing in AI agents to support their workforce.

The view that agent-driven AI will be a defining feature of retailers' 2026 IT strategies is supported by Salesforce, with findings in their Connected Shoppers 2025 report showing that 77% of AU and NZ retailers believe that within a year, AI agents will be essential to remain competitive.¹²

This focus has already begun to pick up steam across retail. In late 2025, Coles made headlines as the first major Australian retailer to deploy ChatGPT at scale as a part of its newly forged collaboration with OpenAI¹³. Among other uses, the supermarket giant claims this technology is already making a difference through task-specific generative-AI chatbots, built with the specific intent of supporting their team members.

Many retailers are planning to follow in the Coles Group's footsteps, particularly in their use of agents to support frontline employees. Like Coles, many retailers are deploying AI agents to support staff through the day-to-day scenarios that may otherwise require manager intervention.

“We’re seeing these agents be incredibly valuable for helping floor staff navigate the common challenges they come up against in the everyday: What’s the process for handling a spill? Am I able to approve this refund? Who do I call for x?” says Lachlan.

For many retailers, the notion of using AI agents to support staff with tackling customer questions or locating specific information is an appealing way to test the waters of AI's business case before diving head-first into full digital transformation. It's a small, practical, economical first step, which is why we can expect to see uptake rise noticeably over the year ahead.

¹² Salesforce

¹³ Coles Group

06

98%

of Australian consumers still shop in physical stores

Sharpened focus on unified commerce

Unified commerce has been a key principle of omnichannel retailers since their existence. While it's not a new concept in itself, the way it comes to life is continuously evolving. In 2026, we're expecting to see more retailers take on technology enhancement projects focused on making their front end and back end systems work in harmony with one another, forging a deeply integrated platform that puts the customer experience at the centre.

Much of the momentum behind this shift comes down to changing customer behaviour. While 98% of Australian consumers still shop in physical stores, 81% conduct their research online before stepping through the door.¹⁴ The gap between intention and purchase means retailers can no longer afford disjointed systems or mismatched information across channels. Customers now expect the same consistent information about product availability, pricing, payment options and fulfilment, no matter how or where they're interacting with the brand.

These rising expectations are accelerating unified commerce activities. Deloitte notes that the benefits of unified commerce initiatives reach beyond customer experience, with retailers seeing sharper inventory accuracy and stronger sales performance when their systems operate as a single, real-time ecosystem.¹⁵

For many retailers, the benefits of unifying their systems is an immediate priority. "It's absolutely a primary focus," says Lachlan, noting that retailers are increasingly investing in the upgrades needed to close the gap between what customers expect and what legacy systems can deliver.

In practice, this means a growing number of retailers will spend 2026 strengthening their retail structure from front to back and in between. By tightening these connections, retailers can tap into what's estimated to be a \$3.3 trillion global opportunity.¹⁶



¹⁴ Inside Retail

¹⁵ Deloitte

¹⁶ Deloitte

07

Expanding computer vision

In the past year in particular, the possibilities and opportunities of in-store computer vision have piqued the interests of retailers right across the world. In the new year, we expect to see more retailers take that next step and invite computer vision technology into their tech stack.

Like AI or the internet, “computer vision” can feel nebulous and abstract, but the idea is simple: to combine AI with camera technology to interpret visual information across retail environments.

“Where we’re seeing major hype is around computer vision,” Lachlan says.

“Cameras are seeing everything anyway. The question now is how we activate them to provide better shopping experiences or more data back to the business,” he says, noting that at Truis, this activation comes with the ethical exclusion of facial recognition technology.

Retailers are already exploring early use cases:

- Programmatic signage, where digital screens update based on the shopper in front of them.¹⁷
- Optimised people-counting, moving beyond basic people-counting to understand age ranges, dwell time, gender mix, and shopper behaviour.¹⁸
- Operational optimisation, using in-store insights to better roster staff, refine store layouts or identify mismatches between shopper demographics and marketing activity.
- Loss prevention and stock monitoring, used to detect everything from theft patterns and safety threats, to ageing stock or low inventory levels.¹⁹

Some tier one retailers have already begun full-scale rollouts, while tier two groups are entering proof-of-value phases.²⁰ With interest growing, 2026 is poised to be a defining year for in-store computer vision.

As Liz Buchanan of NielsenIQ notes: “The future of retail will be shaped by those who embrace the shift from data analytics to AI-retail intelligence. Not just collecting data, but operationalising it through intelligent systems that drive efficiency, agility, and growth.”²¹

¹⁷ Grand View Research

¹⁸ ResearchGate: International Conference on Advanced Computing

¹⁹ ScienceDirect: Intelligent Systems with Applications

²⁰ DHL

²¹ Forbes

Looking ahead

The past year has shown retailers exactly where their pressure points sit: protecting staff, tightening security, and getting smart tech up and running without adding strain to already stretched thin IT teams. The trends in this report reflect what we're hearing every day: that retailers aren't looking for silver bullet transformations, but for practical progress towards their departmental and organisational goals.

At Truis, we help retailers move their IT strategies forward at a pace that feels manageable and aligned with the unique rhythm of their operations.



Get in touch

If you'd like support bringing any of your 2026 IT priorities to life, start the conversation with us today.

[Contact us](#)



About Truis

Established in 1979, Truis is a multi-vendor IT solutions and managed services provider supporting retailers across Australia. We build long-term partnerships through a people-first approach, delivering solutions designed for growth, efficiency, and sustainable success.

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