



RETAIL 2050

**How experience, technology
and connection will redefine
future retail**

Retail's road to 2050

The retail sector's story is one of continual evolution, and this ability to adapt is what keeps the sector resilient in the face of ongoing challenges.

This report sets out to map the forces reshaping retail between now and 2050, and the opportunities that will define the sector's next era. American Express' research finds that the future will be forged by a widening channel mix, demand for even greater convenience and personalised experiences, along with innovative ways for brands and consumers to connect. Technology will accelerate and consumer behaviour will evolve as a result, creating exciting opportunities for retailers, especially those with a forward-looking mindset.

This research takes the pulse of the nation's shoppers, combined with industry expert interviews and in-depth horizon scanning to explore the UK's anticipated retail landscape in 2050 – probing consumer needs and behaviours, the macro trends that will shape the sector, and ultimately the opportunities for retailers large and small. The report presents an optimistic outlook – with retail remaining central to the future of our towns and cities. As urban centres continue to evolve, retail will act as both a social and economic anchor – shaping how communities live, connect, and thrive.

The road to 2050 will not be without challenges, and future success will hinge on everyone in the retail sector being prepared to respond and adapt. I hope the insights in this report will help play their part.



Dan Edelman
General Manager
Global Merchant Services
American Express UK



Research Methodology

On behalf of American Express, futures consultancy Trajectory undertook:

- A robust horizon scanning exercise, involving a systematic collection of insights and emerging retail trends to identify potential threats, risks and opportunities
- In-depth interviews with a range of retail industry experts
- Commissioned two surveys of UK consumers to explore current preferences and future behaviour – Research carried out by Potentia on behalf of American Express from June-July 2025
- Used both waves of quantitative research as the basis for new consumer segmentation

The shoppers of 2050

To uncover the latest shopping trends and behaviours across different demographics, American Express surveyed 2,000 UK consumers. The analysis revealed four distinct shopper groups, each defined by unique motivations, as well as four emerging retail trends set to shape the future of the industry. The research also identified which shopper group is most likely to engage with each trend over the next 25 years.



Experience Connoisseurs

Affluent urban and suburban explorers combining shopping with leisure activities – half of this group is composed of Millennials

Local Loyalists

Community-focused shoppers who are passionate about supporting neighbourhood independents – the majority being either Gen X or Boomers.



Showroom Shoppers

High earner, frequent in-store shoppers, who love local and large retailers and seek personalisation – two thirds of this group features Gen Z and Millennials



Trend and Tech Explorers

Social, trend-driven shoppers who embrace online and tech and seek stimulation – this group contains the highest proportion of Gen Z



Four future retail trends:

1. Experience, Engagement and Loyalty



THE EXPERIENCE CONNOISSEURS...

Affluent urban and suburban explorers combining shopping with leisure activities – half of this group is composed of Millennials.



Retail in 2050 isn't a place you visit, it's a connected stage you move through. Stores will become immersive, interactive environments, designed with a focus on creating memorable experiences and removing barriers to purchase.

Omnichannel is the backbone of this shift. Physical and digital touchpoints feed each other in a loop: stores mirror the ease and personalisation of online, while digital channels will carry the theatre of in-store.

The research revealed there is already appetite for this change; 64% of consumers believe that in future, retailers should focus on creating immersive experiences to build deeper connections; 62% agreed that in the future, they would like to feel like every store they visit offers something they can't currently get online – whether that's an experience, advice or deeper connection to the brand or product, or even the individual serving them. 55% said they expect stores to become multi-sensory experiences.

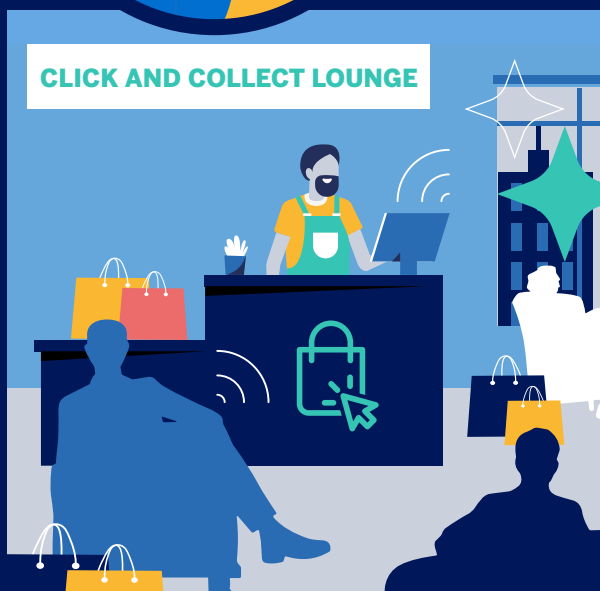
More premium experiences will lead the way. For retailers, offering a sense of exclusivity and theatre will become just as important as the products on the shelves when it comes to driving footfall and sales.



EXPERIENCE CONNOISSEURS TOP PRIORITIES:

More likely to agree that shopping is only enjoyable when combined with leisure activities and socialising.

They like to make shopping a social occasion, meeting up with friends and family



IN THE FUTURE EXPERIENCE CONNOISSEURS WILL:

Want physical stores to feel more like showrooms than places to buy things immediately

Welcome loyalty schemes that could offer hyper-personalised rewards in future

Shoppers will expect to be able to buy where and when it suits them. They will discover products through creator livestreams, building their basket in-app, testing the fit and look on a 'smart mirror' or Virtual Reality (VR), and they will check out later, hands-free at a till-less exit or even at home.

Technology will be advanced enough for this to feel genuinely useful for consumers both in-store and online. Augmented Reality/VR try-ons will become commonplace and curated multi-sensory environments will use light, sound and scent to make the experience more memorable. Spaces will be built to be social media 'worthy', generating rapid traction, visibility and advocacy.

Personalisation will no longer be a 'nice to have' but the norm, turbo charged by AI to drive footfall in store and traffic online. Data led insights will power tailored recommendations, bespoke products and a one-to-one service, but with clear parameters and controls around data transparency to maintain trust, driven by demand from consumers.

Shopping carts, preferences and rewards will travel with the customer across every channel, creating a seamless experience. Whether browsing in store or online, they'll be able to switch easily – supported by features such as click-and-collect lounges, universal returns (for both online and in-store purchases) and real-time inventory.

Engagement will be rewarded. Shoppers will earn value from actions like scanning in-store for perks or making online purchases that link back to physical visits. Loyalty expectations will reach unprecedented levels; Customers will expect retailers of every size to recognise them and deliver personalised offers and rewards.



62%

want future store visits to offer something they cannot experience online, such as experience, advice or connection



64%

agree that retailers should focus on creating immersive stores to deepen connection with shoppers

2. Local, social and shopping small



THE LOCAL LOYALIST...

Community-focused shoppers who are passionate about supporting neighbourhood independents – the majority being either Gen X or Boomers.



LOCAL LOYALIST TOP PRIORITIES

Motivated to help their local high streets and communities

Prepared to spend more to support local businesses, rather than shopping online or using bigger shopping centres

Prefer personal support from in-store staff rather than AI automated tools



According to our research, by 2050, town centres will have evolved further to become vibrant residential hubs - incorporating reinvented spaces and dynamic, mixed use destinations that blend retail, leisure and community life. There will be a renewed sense of connection which brings a ready-made local audience – and with it appetite – for retail spaces that combine shopping with expertise, experiences, and a local connection.

Future retail destinations will have independent retailers at their heart. In an ever-increasing digital world, these independents will stand out by offering what e-commerce simply can't replicate: expertise, personal service, and human connection that helps to foster lasting loyalty. In-store teams will be more than sales staff; they'll be trusted advisors, storytellers, and experience curators.



Independent retailers of the future will also blend seamlessly into the digital world to create an omnichannel experience. The research revealed that one in four shoppers (24%) say in the future they would make a conscious effort to buy from a broader range of independents if more operated online; almost two-thirds (63%) of shoppers state they'd be more likely to shop with independents in the future if they offered improved ordering options and better rewarded their loyalty.

Local authorities will increasingly recognise the value independents bring and actively support fledgling businesses, revitalised empty spaces, and encourage innovation through flexible agreements and leases.

Technology will power this future. AI and data analytics will help independents predict and respond to customer needs, personalise outreach, and refine product lines. Social media and local neighbourhood social and digital networks will amplify their voices, enabling them to attract and engage customers and compete on experience rather than size.



66%

of shoppers would like to see more independent businesses locally in future

IN THE FUTURE LOCAL LOYALISTS WILL:

Want to see even more small independent businesses on their local high streets

Say that a more personalised service from staff would most enhance their future in-store experience

Favour convenient, locally-accessible services that save time

"AI and new tech create endless opportunities for independents. The opportunity to scale without necessarily hiring, to manage your inventory, create a business plan, provide 24-hour customer service, to sell to different countries – it's transformative and could spur a new wave of entrepreneurial activity."

Michelle Ovens, Founder, Small Business Britain

3. Culture, Connection & Play



THE SHOWROOM SHOPPERS...

High earner, frequent in-store shoppers, who love local and large retailers and seek personalisation – two thirds of this group features Gen Z and Millennials.



By 2050, retail will be about going somewhere worth staying.

The long-blurred line between retail and leisure will have completely vanished. High streets, shopping centres, and retail parks will be cultural playgrounds – places where shopping is just one part of a day-long adventure – opening up opportunities for new retail concepts.

Spaces which thrive will be built for constant reinvention – adapting to shifting tastes, seasonal trends, and the social buzz that fuels footfall. Whilst many of today's retailers are taking advantage of social media-driven hype, 2050's trends are still unclear. But what is certain is that successful retailers at that time will tap into the latest set of desires and demands from shoppers.



SHOWROOM SHOPPER TOP PRIORITIES:

They like in-store browsing and consequently find 'shoppertainment' an enjoyable experience

They look for personalised services when they shop

They value smaller retailers and independents and actively seek to support them



54%

say in the future, they'd like shopping spaces to blend entertainment and retail even more than they do currently

From out-of-town retail parks reborn as hubs for food, sport, and entertainment; to historic buildings preserved and repurposed as vibrant market halls; to urban green spaces transformed into weekend-long micro-festivals – these spaces will offer hours of entertainment. Around half (49%) of shoppers say in future they want shopping centres and high streets to become a one-stop shop for retail, leisure, and community services, while 36% would welcome more space for cafés, bars, and activities – such as a yoga studio, art gallery or escape room.

Hospitality venues, having replaced department stores as high-street anchors, will draw visitors in and give them a reason to stay. Events, food, and culture will not simply complement retail – they will be fully integrated.

This evolution will allow new ways to celebrate history and heritage while embracing innovation. The majority (56%) of consumers say they would welcome transforming disused historic buildings into retail-leisure venues, provided they retain their character. These projects will merge past and future, giving communities unique destinations that combine local identity with new designs.

IN THE FUTURE SHOWROOM SHOPPERS WILL:

Shop more frequently, and anticipate shopping more often in the future (compared to other age groups)

Expect to embrace new technologies even more but would still like to speak to a human when they shop

Want retailers to focus on creating immersive or engaging experiences

"There is a symbiotic relationship between good retail and good hospitality – they can help each other out, and we need more collaboration. There is more scope for concessions within retail outlets and more formal partnerships. Technology can also play a role, for example, by allowing you to order your item and have it delivered to you whilst enjoying a meal or coffee."

Kate Nicholls, Chair, UK Hospitality

4. Convenience without compromise



THE TREND AND TECH EXPLORER...

Social, trend-driven shoppers who embrace online and tech and seek stimulation – this group contains the highest proportion of Gen Z.



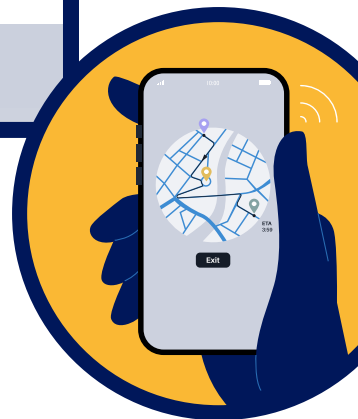
In 2050, convenience is the baseline that lets experience shine. Shoppers expect every task, from paying, returning, collecting, parking, charging an electric vehicle (EV) – to be quick and effortless. When friction disappears, people linger longer for culture, connection and play, and selling becomes the outcome of a seamless retail visit.

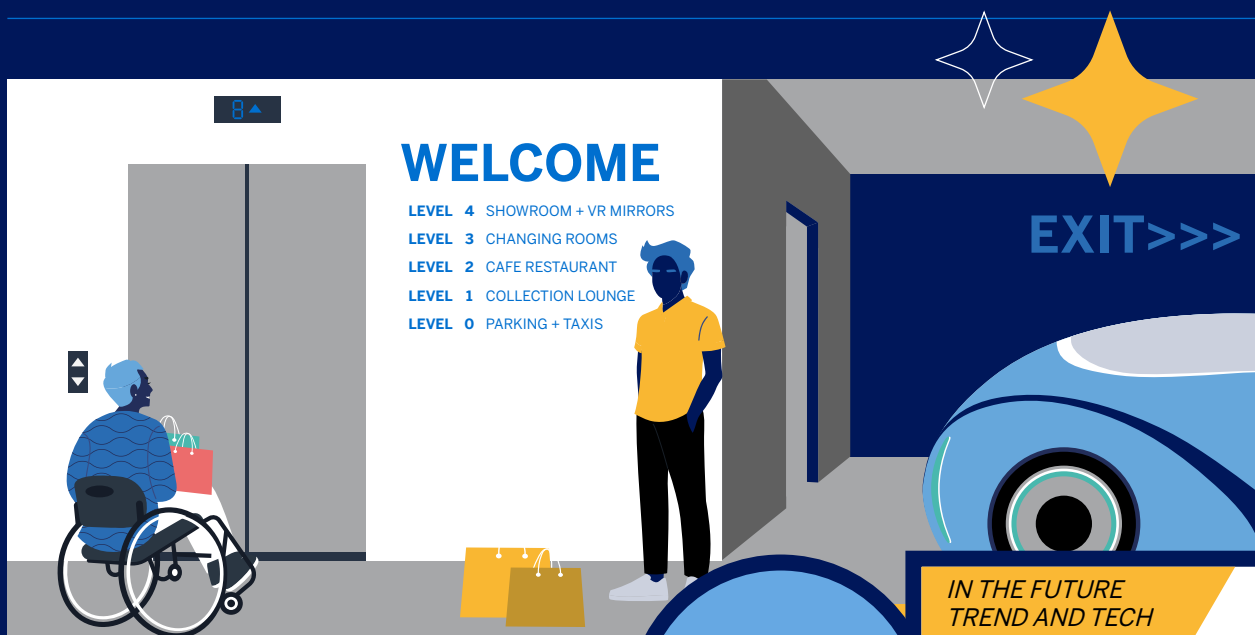
Looking to the future, shoppers anticipate significant benefits from deeper implementation of AI. Two-fifths (41%) believe it will 'make shopping quicker', and a further 30% expect to be presented with more personalised choices. The importance of convenient travel to retail destinations remains paramount; fast forward to 2050, and over half of consumers (56%) expect to be able to travel via autonomous vehicles.

TREND AND TECH EXPLORERS TOP PRIORITIES:

This group are prepared to travel to places that offer an enhanced or specialised shopping experience

They seek out stimulation, looking to shop in places that have good options for eating and drinking and other leisure activities available





By 2050, thriving retail destinations will work as mini logistics hubs; behind the scenes micro-fulfilment, smart lockers and universal returns both in store and kerb side will keep journeys effortless, and allow for out of hours services. Shoppers will book a space, pick up an order, return another, repair a product and charge an EV, all in one visit. Click-and-collect lounges with refreshments will make omnichannel journeys feel seamless. Stores with cafes and restaurants will allow customers to order lunch in app while they shop, selecting their desired time slot for table delivery and earning rewards in the process.

Delivery will be optimised. Retailers will offer a low-carbon delivery upgrade that consolidates customers' purchases across retailers into one greener drop; and the majority of consumers expect drone delivery to become commonplace.

Augmented reality will completely reimagine the role of the store itself, allowing shoppers to point their phone at products, instantly accessing information on stock levels, reviews and the rewards they will earn on their purchase.

Checkout queues will be a thing of the past; but the human touch will remain, with staff on hand to offer product advice, expertise and recommendations – the aspects of customer service shoppers value the most.

IN THE FUTURE TREND AND TECH EXPLORERS WILL:

Anticipate a future in which they visit physical retail less and use online and social media shopping more

Welcome new technology and want greater convenience including smart lockers for out-of-hours collection (38%), kerbside pick-up and hassle-free returns



64%

rated seamless checkout as appealing in future



60%

highlighted payment friction as a pain point – revealing they would shop elsewhere if their preferred method wasn't accepted.

PAUL FLATTERS, CEO OF TRAJECTORY

“As we look ahead to 2050, the retailers that will thrive will be those that best balance progress with proximity – marrying the efficiency of technology with the intimacy of human connection. The most successful brands will use technology to simplify and enhance, but never to replace, the personal touch. As part of this, brands won’t just meet their customer needs – they’ll need to anticipate them. The stores of the future will feel connected to their communities, offering experiences that are local, meaningful and rooted in everyday life, while innovating to make shopping more intuitive, seamless and rewarding.”

