

Amazon Is Trading Its 'Just Walk Out' AI Technology For 'Smart' Carts – And AI Reportedly Needed Humans to Do the Job Right

Amazon is phasing out its cashier-less "Just Walk Out" technology from Fresh grocery stores in the U.S. about seven years after it was first announced.

The program enabled customers to check in at an Amazon Fresh store with a credit card, mobile app, or Amazon One palm reader, grab directly from the shelves, and "just walk out" with their items.

But reports this week indicated that it wasn't actually AI technology doing all of the work.

Though Amazon claims that a system of scanners, video cameras, and generative AI were powering the tech, about 700 of every 1,000 Just Walk Out sales in 2022 had to go through human review by Amazon's team in India, The Information reported this week.

The cashiers were off-site, and they watched what U.S. shoppers picked up, put down, and walked out with on video, according to the report.

Amazon Fresh store on March 04, 2021, featuring Just Walk Out shopping. Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images

However, Amazon disputed how many purchases required human review, with Nathan Strauss, an Amazon spokesperson, telling Retail Dive that employees looked into “a small minority” of shopping visits if Amazon’s technology failed to determine what a shopper left the store with.

“The characterization that Just Walk Out technology relies on human reviewers is inaccurate,” Strauss said. “The primary role of our Machine Learning data associates is to annotate video images, which is necessary for continuously improving the underlying machine learning model powering Just Walk Out technology.”

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The Information was the first to report that Amazon is removing Just Walk Out from most of its stores, and instead replacing the technology with "Dash Carts" that keep track of what shoppers pick out and show a running total as they move through the store.

Shoppers can still skip the checkout line.

Smaller Amazon stores and U.K. grocery stores will still have Just Walk Out, according to The Verge.

A September Amazon blog post shows that the company characterized Just Walk Out as a combination of computer vision, sensors, and AI – with no mention of human review.

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"Customer trust and privacy are paramount to the experience," the post reads, emphasizing that Just Walk Out didn't use or collect biometric information from shoppers.

As of September, Just Walk Out was available at more than 70 Amazon stores and 85 third-party stores in the U.S., U.K., and Australia.

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