# Why Every Company Will Need an AI Specialist by 2026 — and What Happens If You Don’t

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## Key Takeaways

- An AI specialist is someone who connects business problems to AI solutions. They identify where automation adds value, wire it safely to your data and help your team use it every day.
- Companies that delay hiring an AI specialist will fall behind in productivity and face the risks that come with ungoverned AI.
- In your search for an AI specialist, look for someone who is experienced, curious, practical and focused on results.

Every company will need an AI Specialist by 2026. Not eventually. Not in five years. By 2026.

If that sounds bold, look at what’s happening in your own business right now. Your teams are already using AI tools every single day. The real issue is whether you manage it strategically or let it run on its own without any governance. Companies that don’t have someone intentionally managing this shift will fall behind fast.

**Related: Why Your AI Strategy Will Fail Without the Right Talent in Place**

# What an AI Specialist actually is

When I say “AI Specialist,” I’m not talking about a coder in a hoodie or someone who’s just good at writing prompts. I mean someone who connects business problems to AI solutions — mapping where automation adds value, wiring it safely to your data and helping your team use it every day. The role is part strategist, part technologist and part teacher.

At DOXA Talent®, we learned this the hard way. We started experimenting with AI tools for fun, testing things and tinkering on the sidelines, but when those experiments began touching real business processes like revenue tracking, client analytics and internal reporting, we hit a wall.

Using tools turned out to be the easy part. Scaling their impact safely was where things got complicated, so we created DOXA Labs®, a dedicated function to explore, test and operationalize AI across the business instead of just playing with it on the edges of our company. That’s when we realized we couldn’t keep treating this like a side project.

# Why 2026 is the inflection point

You might wonder why specifically 2026, and the reasoning is sound. The major platforms we all use — Microsoft, Google, AWS — are building AI directly into their ecosystems right now. By 2026, it’s baked in.

Add new regulations and standards kicking in around that time, and you’ve got a perfect storm of accessibility and accountability. Companies that still “haven’t gotten around to it” will be behind, but will also be gambling with the future of their organization as a whole.

## What actually happens if you wait

Waiting costs you in two places, and both matter. On the productivity side, competitors who've already embedded AI into their workflows will simply move faster, cheaper and smarter. They'll automate away the tedious work, make better decisions backed by better data and innovate while you're still in meetings arguing about whether AI is worth learning. That gap compounds over time.

Risk is where it gets truly dangerous. Ungoverned AI becomes a liability because when no one owns it, you either lock everything down and gain nothing, or you open it up and risk exposing sensitive data. An AI Specialist helps you navigate that middle ground, making sure you get the upside without the meltdown. Companies that ignore that role will start losing ground quietly at first, then suddenly all at once.

**Related: 4 Steps Entrepreneurs Can Take to Ensure AI Is Being Used Ethically Within Their Companies**

## The core responsibilities

An AI Specialist acts as a bridge between strategy and execution, identifying the right use cases, connecting systems and ensuring AI tools produce results instead of noise. They need to understand business logic, data structure and change management because, beyond deploying technology, this person will be helping transform how people fundamentally work.

They make AI part of your company's DNA through responsible experimentation, measurement and teaching others to leverage it every day.

## Who should you hire?

Look for someone who's actually shipped real automations or AI

assistants inside a business and can show you the before-and-after. They should explain AI concepts in plain English and be able to whiteboard how it fits into your systems.

The biggest red flag to watch for is anyone who acts like AI is magic, because if they can’t talk about data governance, model limitations and adoption strategy, they’ll create more mess than momentum.

The right person is curious, practical and relentlessly focused on results. They’ve failed, learned and succeeded. They understand that this work centers on business impact, not just the technology itself.

## Addressing the myths

I hear the same misconceptions over and over. The first is that AI Specialists are just prompt people, which is not even close. They’re builders, translators and risk reducers wiring complex systems together.

The second is that waiting will make things clearer or safer. It won’t. The technology is already embedded in the tools your teams use every day, so the question becomes whether it’s governed or rogue.

The third fear is that AI replaces people, but the companies doing this well use AI to amplify their people, not eliminate them.

## The borderless advantage

The AI Specialist role aligns perfectly with my broader vision of the future of work because it was built for a distributed world. The best AI work happens when people across countries and time zones collaborate asynchronously, connecting knowledge, systems and context in ways that don’t require being in the same room.

We've proven this by building a global lab model where teams in Colombia, the Philippines and the U.S. all contribute to shared AI initiatives. That's the future: global talent solving global problems with shared tools and playbooks.

**Related: Before You Hire International Employees, Run This 5-Point Audit (It Could Save Your Company)**

## How to start now

If you're not ready to hire a full-time AI Specialist yet, start preparing now. Pick one or two real business problems — maybe reducing support tickets or improving cash flow forecasting — and assign an owner to experiment responsibly.

Get your data house in order before adding AI on top, and use the AI already in your existing platforms before chasing new tools. Measure everything with intention: Track time saved, quality improvements and user adoption rates. Celebrate wins, learn from failures, and keep iterating. You need momentum.

By 2026, AI Specialists won't be a luxury. They'll be as essential as your CFO or Chief Operating Officer, and the companies that move fastest will have created an unbridgeable gap between themselves and the ones still figuring out where to start. The time to act is now.

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# The Growth Strategy Most Entrepreneurs Overlook — and How to Leverage It Today

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## Key Takeaways

- Your existing customers are the real key to sustainable

growth. Renewal sales create predictable revenue, stabilize cash flow and reduce the high costs of new customer acquisition.

- Be proactive with renewals. Don’t assume that if a client hasn’t complained, they’ll automatically renew. Maintain regular check-in cadences with clients and start renewal conversations early.
- Start retention the day you close the sale, stay in tune with your clients’ changing needs, talk about value (not price), recover quickly when things go off track, and be sure to measure and celebrate retention.

When entrepreneurs think about growth, most focus on acquiring new customers, including chasing fresh leads, launching campaigns or expanding into new markets. But the real key to sustainable growth often lies much closer to home: your existing customers.

In fact, 73% of CSOs are prioritizing growth from existing customers for 2025, according to a survey by Gartner, Inc. Renewal sales are one of the most profitable and reliable ways to scale your business without dramatically increasing your workload or marketing spend.

For solopreneurs, creative agencies and small business owners, renewal sales are the lifeblood of stability. Yet many treat renewals as an afterthought — something that happens automatically if the client is happy. The truth? Loyalty must be earned again and again, and the renewal process is where that loyalty is put to the test.

Here’s why focusing on renewals pays off, and how to turn this often-overlooked moment into a growth engine for your business.

**Related: 3 Bulletproof Strategies For Boosting Sales With Existing Customers**

# Why renewal sales matter more than you think

Renewal sales are a direct reflection of how well you've delivered value. They show whether your customers see your product or service as a must-have or a nice-to-have. From a financial standpoint, renewals create predictable revenue, stabilize cash flow and reduce the high costs of new customer acquisition. Research by SimplicityDX shows that customer acquisition costs have increased by 222% in only eight years (2013 to 2022).

From the customer experience side, renewals reinforce trust and confidence. A seamless renewal conversation signals that you understand the customer's evolving needs, not just the initial problem you solved. It's an opportunity to demonstrate partnership, not just make another sale.

When handled thoughtfully, renewals do three things:

- **Reinforce your value:** They remind customers of the measurable outcomes you've helped them achieve.
- **Build loyalty:** They show that you're invested in their long-term success.
- **Open the door to expansion:** A strong renewal process often uncovers opportunities to realize your revenue potential by upselling, cross-selling or through deeper collaboration.

# The cost of treating renewals as routine

Many small business owners assume that if a client hasn't complained, they'll automatically renew. But silence doesn't

equal satisfaction.

Without proactive engagement, you may miss early warning signs: a drop in usage, a change in decision-makers or shifting business priorities. Waiting until the contract end date to check in is like showing up to the finish line without training for the race.

The most successful entrepreneurs maintain regular check-in cadences with clients and start renewal conversations early — ideally at least 90 days before renewal. This gives you time to assess account health, revisit goals and identify risks before they become cancellations.

As I often tell our Growist clients: *Renewal sales are not an administrative step. They're a strategic one.*

**Related: No Sales Experience? No Problem. Here's How to Confidently Turn Conversations Into Revenue**

# How to strengthen your renewal process

Here are a few steps any entrepreneur or small business can take to turn renewals into a competitive advantage.

### 1. Start retention the day you close the sale

Customer retention doesn't start at renewal. It starts the moment a new customer says yes. Every interaction from onboarding to delivery shapes their perception of value.

Set clear expectations early, follow through on commitments, and ensure the customer knows exactly how success will be measured. Regularly review progress against those goals. This builds trust and eliminates surprises when renewal time comes.

### 2. Stay in tune with their changing needs

Your customer’s world doesn’t stand still. Market conditions shift, budgets tighten, and leadership changes. By maintaining regular communication, not just quarterly check-ins, you stay aligned with what matters most to them now.

Ask questions like:

These questions help you position your solution as relevant and valuable over time.

### 3. Make the renewal conversation about value, not price

When clients hesitate to renew, it’s often because they’ve lost sight of the results you deliver. Use the renewal conversation to revisit outcomes: what goals have been achieved, what challenges you’ve helped them overcome and what opportunities lie ahead.

Be ready with concrete examples or data points. For instance: “Since implementing this process six months ago, you’ve seen a 15% reduction in project turnaround time.” When customers see tangible impact, price becomes less of a sticking point.

### 4. Recover quickly when things go off track

Even with the best intentions, expectations sometimes aren’t met. When that happens, acknowledge the issue quickly and work collaboratively to fix it. Regaining trust can turn a frustrated customer into a loyal advocate.

Apologize sincerely, take ownership, and communicate your plan to resolve the issue. Renewal decisions often come down to how problems were handled, not just whether they occurred.

### 5. Measure and celebrate retention

Include customer retention and renewal rates as key performance indicators and objectives for your team. Share those wins internally – especially if your small team has recently navigated challenges and changes to their processes –

where each renewal reinforces stability and progress.

When you celebrate renewals, you remind yourself and your customers that ongoing relationships are just as valuable as new ones.

**Related: 3 Essentials for Building a Loyal Customer Base**

## Renewals are about relationships, not transactions

At its core, renewal sales are about recognizing that the customer chose you once, and now you are earning the right for them to choose you again.

The best entrepreneurs know that retention is proactive. It's rooted in empathy, curiosity and consistent communication. And when you approach renewals with that mindset, they become a source of momentum, not anxiety. Make no mistake: It's consistency and momentum that turn customers into advocates and small businesses into sustainable, thriving companies.

## Key Takeaways

- Your existing customers are the real key to sustainable growth. Renewal sales create predictable revenue, stabilize cash flow and reduce the high costs of new customer acquisition.
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# How to Extend Your Brick-and-Mortar Holiday Sales Beyond the Holidays

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## Key Takeaways

- Many small businesses rely on a good holiday season to support them through the entire year, but this is a

risky model.

- The smarter alternative is to leverage the holiday season to grow your business throughout the year. This means using the holiday season to collect data.
- Use loyalty apps, hold events to draw customers into your store, send newsletters, and ask customers for their email or phone number so you can request opt-ins.

The holiday sales projections are coming, and unfortunately, they're not great.

An S&P Global Ratings report expects holiday sales (November-December) will grow 4% in 2025 from 2024, but thanks to weaker consumer confidence on the "uncertain macroeconomic outlook," those researchers say it'll be because of increased prices to make up for tariffs, not volume.

Consulting giant Deloitte is projecting that holiday retail sales will grow between 2.9% and 3.4% in 2025. But this is well below the 4.2% from last year's growth and below the 10-year average of 5.2%. And the National Retail Federation admits that holiday sales will increase between 3.7% and 4.2% compared to last year. Unfortunately, their forecast is below the 4.3% growth achieved from 2023 to 2024.

**Related: 5 Underrated Tips for Brands to Boost Holiday Sales**

Many small businesses – particularly merchants – rely on a good holiday season to support them through the entire year. A recent Constant Contact study found that as much as 50% of a small company's sales can come from between Thanksgiving and Christmas. But does it really have to be that way? I don't think so.

Having your livelihood tied to just one season in the year is a risky model. If things don't go right during the holidays, a small business owner could find themselves significantly challenged to show a profit for the year. Being so dependent on this time of year is a concern.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. How many stores have you browsed but didn’t purchase anything? You liked the products, you may be interested in buying, but not just now. Do you remember that store? Maybe. But what if that store kept in contact with you throughout the year? What if you received interesting deals or an enticing offer in June rather than December? Would you remember that store? Maybe go out of your way to buy there? For me, that would be likely. And I know I’m not alone.

The holidays aren’t just for holiday sales. If you’re like some of my smartest clients, you’ll use the holiday season as a way to grow your business throughout the year.

How? It’s all the data. And it’s all about using the holiday season to collect data.

## Use loyalty apps

For starters, make sure your store has a good loyalty system. You can Google or ask your AI Assistant to recommend a few good mobile apps where small merchants can offer discounts and other incentives to shoppers who frequent their store. Make sure your staff is trained to encourage anyone who enters your store – regardless if they buy something – to sign up for your loyalty perks.

## Do events

Hold at least one – hopefully two – events during the season. It can be anything to draw customers into your store. Demonstrations of products. Educational sessions. An expert from the industry. An open mic night for singers or comedians. Serve food and a little wine. But make sure there’s a guest list. Everyone who comes needs to be registered, either in advance or at the door.

## Send newsletters

Create a newsletter and ask for signups at checkout. Tell your customers that not only will they get great tips and insights for using the products you sell, but there will be special coupons only for subscribers. Consider extending the newsletter to include other like-minded shops on your street and ask them to do the same. Collect those names.

**Related: 3 Tactics to Turn One-Time Holiday Shoppers Into Year-Round Buyers**

## Ask

Finally, can you better track the people who actually buy from you? Asking them for their email or mobile number to send a receipt opens up the opportunity to message them separately and request an opt-in for your newsletters and loyalty programs after they've left. Matching these opt-in acceptances with the sales dollars spent at your store allows you to target bigger or more frequent customers to come back for even more deals and discounts.

I do not want to sugar-coat these strategies. They all come with a cost. Loyalty apps will require you to offer money back to customers who keep coming back. Your event will require you to buy food or hire an entertainer. Your newsletter will require you to sell certain products at a discount. People want stuff for free. Or at least at a discount. They want a deal. You're going to have to give something away in order to entice those prospective customers into your shop.

**Related: Don't Bank on Holiday Sales to Save Your Bottom Line — Here's How to Engage the Discount-Driven Customer Year-Round**

## Get a CRM system

All of this information goes into your customer relationship management (CRM) system. Don’t have one? Just Google or ask your AI Assistant. There are very affordable offerings for small merchants from a number of mainstream platforms. Your point-of-sale provider probably has these capabilities. Take some time to learn about these applications. Why?

Because as you gather your data – contact information – during the holidays, you’ll build your database for after the holidays. You are doing this because after the holidays, that’s where the selling really starts.

Because these visitors have opted in, you now have permission to send email and – yes, physically mail – offers and announcements throughout the year. You know that the traffic through your store will be greater in December than at any other time of the year. People enjoy seeing what you sell. But if they don’t buy now, you can be doing more to entice them to buy something later.

The holiday season is a very important sales season. But it’s also a very important data collection season. Half of your annual sales shouldn’t come from just this time of year. With the right amount of hooks, you can get the information you need from both buyers and potential buyers to continue to drive more sales throughout the year.

## Key Takeaways

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# This Is the Invisible Force That’s Quietly Rewriting the Rules of Success

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## Key Takeaways

- Emotional intelligence is the unmeasured metric of

success, driving consumer loyalty and competitive advantage in business.
- Future-proofing your business involves operationalizing empathy, valuing authenticity and learning how to scale without losing your brand's soul.

In an age where artificial intelligence writes emails, predicts consumer behavior and even paints portraits, the one advantage still exclusively human is emotional intelligence. Yet most businesses still treat it as a soft skill — when, in truth, it has become the most powerful form of competitive intelligence.

## The invisible metric of success

Every company today measures what can be seen: sales, engagement, conversion rates and retention to name a few. But very few measure what can be felt. Emotion drives every purchase, partnership and loyalty loop, yet it remains the most ignored metric in boardrooms.

When my company scaled from a small perfume shop to a multi-million-dollar distribution business, we didn't just optimize logistics. We optimized empathy. Every client, every team member, every partner had to feel remembered. That emotional infrastructure became our most valuable asset — invisible, but irreplaceable.

**Related:** **The 5 Emotions That Drive Customer Loyalty**

## The rise of the empathic founder

Modern entrepreneurs often mistake data for direction. But the future will favor those who can interpret emotion as fluently as analytics.

We're entering an era where customers will choose sincerity over scale — where brands that stand for meaning, not

marketing, will dominate. You can see this shift everywhere: from purpose-driven beauty brands to cultural institutions redefining luxury as preservation, not consumption.

To lead in this era, founders must do more than innovate. They must emote.

## The beauty of consistency

Nowhere is emotional intelligence more visible than in the world of beauty – an industry that sells not necessity, but identity.

Take Chanel. Decades after Gabrielle Chanel's passing, the brand still communicates restraint, mystery and precision. Every bottle of No. 5 or every black-and-gold compact speaks the same visual and emotional language introduced nearly a century ago. Chanel scaled across continents without diluting its soul – because its decisions were guided by emotion, not trend.

Or look at Aesop, a brand built entirely on sensory minimalism. In an era of noise, it chose quiet – amber glass, unisex fragrances, literary storytelling. The brand's growth was never about advertising volume but about *emotional frequency.* Each store feels like a calm conversation between design and scent. That restraint, that emotional discipline, became its signature power.

Even Dior, despite its global dominance, has preserved the tenderness of its origin – "the couture of dreams." Its perfumery and fashion arms still mirror the founder's fascination with joy and femininity. By protecting its emotional core, Dior scaled without becoming mechanical.

And then there is Guerlain, perhaps the greatest example of emotional heritage turned into institutional memory. Founded in 1828, Guerlain has remained a house of feeling – each

perfume, from *Jicky* to *Shalimar*, carries not just a scent, but a soul. Through wars, world fairs and generational change, Guerlain never abandoned its founding spirit of craftsmanship. Even when it became part of the LVMH group, it resisted the erosion of its identity by doubling down on artistry — preserving its in-house perfumer lineage for nearly two centuries. Its endurance lies in its reverence for ritual: Formulas are still written by hand, and ingredients are still chosen for emotion, not economy. Guerlain teaches modern founders that true innovation lies not in disruption, but in devotion.

These houses remind us that cultural growth is not achieved through expansion alone, but through emotional continuity. They scaled outward while staying inwardly constant — proof that authenticity is not the opposite of growth; it is its guardian.

**Related: 6 Positive Changes That Come When You Start Showing Authenticity in Your Business**

## How emotional intelligence scales a brand

Emotional intelligence is not abstract philosophy; it's an operational advantage. Here's how founders can apply it:

1. **Design for memory, not attention.**
   Every touchpoint — packaging, language, scent, sound — should leave a trace. Attention fades, but memory compounds.

2. **Preserve ritual inside growth.**
   As teams expand, ensure that emotional habits scale, too — gratitude, storytelling, small acts of care. These are the invisible threads that hold culture together.

3. **Lead through feeling.**

> Ask not only what your customers want but how you want them to feel. Emotion is the first and last frontier of brand loyalty.

When founders learn to operationalize empathy, their companies stop being just efficient. They become alive.

## The new definition of scale

The entrepreneurs of tomorrow won't be those who scaled the fastest. They'll be those who scaled without losing their soul.

Scaling doesn't have to mean diluting. It can mean deepening — creating emotional density as you expand. Because culture, once preserved, multiplies its own value.

At Facticerie Museum, we call this the art of invisible permanence — the belief that what lasts in business is what moves people at the level of memory. The fragrance that stays after the room is empty. The emotion that remains when the metrics fade.

## The human algorithm

Technology will continue to evolve. Markets will fluctuate. Trends will come and go. But empathy, authenticity and cultural memory — these are constants. They are not outdated; they are undefeated.

If you want to future-proof your business, start training your emotional algorithm. Make empathy your KPI. Treat sincerity as a strategy. And remember: the most advanced form of intelligence is still the human kind.

**Related: Why Empathy-Driven Leadership is the Cornerstone of Every Successful Startup**

# The final note: Beauty as leadership

In the end, business and beauty share the same truth – both are acts of persuasion. But only one kind of persuasion endures: the emotional one. The brands that will define the next century will not be those that shout the loudest, but those that listen the deepest.

The leaders who understand this – who treat their customers like audiences, their teams like artisans and their products like messages – will build not just profit, but permanence.

Because leadership, like perfume, is invisible yet unforgettable.

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# Entrepreneurs Can Invest Smarter With This AI Stock Picking Tool

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Is there still risk in investing? Sure. But you can make more informed investments with this lifetime subscription to Sterling Stock Picker for just $55.19 (reg. $486).

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# HP Says It’s Cutting Thousands of Jobs Due to AI — and Will Save $1 Billion

# Key Takeaways

- HP is planning to lay off between 4,000 and 6,000 employees by the end of its fiscal year 2028.
- The move is part of a broader push to incorporate AI into the company's operations.
- According to an HP earnings presentation, the company's strategy is to drive "artificial intelligence adoption and enablement" while reducing costs through "workforce reductions."

HP plans to cut between 4,000 and 6,000 jobs by the end of its fiscal year 2028 as part of a broader push to implement AI in its operations. HP CEO Enrique Lores said the cuts will affect teams working on product development, customer support and internal operations.

The computer and printer maker employed 58,000 people as of October 2024, according to Stock Analysis, which means the layoffs could represent around 10% of its workforce.

HP estimates that it will save approximately $1 billion by 2028 as it puts the job cuts into effect. The company says it will shoulder $650 million in restructuring costs, with about $250 million of the expense taking place in fiscal year 2026.

Shares of HP fell nearly 6% in extended trading on Tuesday following the news. The stock was down over 2.5% on Wednesday.

**Related: Apple Conducted Rare Layoffs Focused on One Specific Team**

Lores said that the cuts are not just about reducing costs, but about "disciplined execution."

"As we accelerate innovation across AI-powered devices to drive productivity, security and flexibility for our customers, our focus for FY26 is on disciplined execution," Lores said in a statement. "We are committed to driving

measurable results — ensuring that our plans translate into long-term value for our shareholders.”

HP CEO Enrique Lores. Photographer: Annabelle Chih/Bloomberg via Getty Images

The layoff announcement arrived alongside HP’s financial results for the fiscal year 2025. Annual revenue was up 3.2% year-over-year, hitting $55.3 billion. Fourth quarter net revenue was $14.6 billion, up 4.2% and marking HP’s sixth consecutive quarter of revenue growth.

HP laid off 1,000 to 2,000 workers in February as part of a separate restructuring plan.

According to an earnings presentation viewed by Fox Business, HP’s strategy is to drive “artificial intelligence adoption and enablement” while reducing costs, partly through “workforce reductions.”

**Related: AI and Cost-Cutting Lead to the Worst October Layoffs in 22 Years**

Reuters reported that during a media briefing call this week, Lores said HP started rolling out AI pilots two years ago to drive productivity and customer service.

“What we have learned is that we need to start from redesigning the process, and once we know how the process could be redone using AI, using agentic AI, it can really have a very significant impact,” Lores said on the call.

Agentic AI is AI that can act with little to no human intervention to make decisions, carry out plans and take action. Companies are already using it to get work done faster. Services firm Capita announced earlier this year that it has used agentic AI on more than 200 recruitment tasks to accelerate hiring.

A McKinsey report released on Tuesday found that AI can already automate 57% of all U.S. work hours, but this represents the automation of tasks, not the elimination of jobs. AI can take over repetitive tasks, but human skills like judgment and emotional intelligence will remain crucial to the future of work, according to the researchers.

## Key Takeaways

- HP is planning to lay off between 4,000 and 6,000 employees by the end of its fiscal year 2028.
- The move is part of a broader push to incorporate AI into the company's operations.
- According to an HP earnings presentation, the company's strategy is to drive "artificial intelligence adoption and enablement" while reducing costs through "workforce reductions."

HP plans to cut between 4,000 and 6,000 jobs by the end of its fiscal year 2028 as part of a broader push to implement AI in its operations. HP CEO Enrique Lores said the cuts will affect teams working on product development, customer support and internal operations.

The computer and printer maker employed 58,000 people as of October 2024, according to Stock Analysis, which means the layoffs could represent around 10% of its workforce.

The rest of this article is locked.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/hp-is-cutting-up-to-10-of-its-workforce-due-to-ai/500136

# Apple Reclaims the Top Phone Seller Crown After 14 Years

## Key Takeaways

- Apple is poised to overtake Samsung as the global leader in smartphone shipments this year.
- Market research from Counterpoint shows that the iPhone 17 lineup has been a hit in the U.S. and China.
- Counterpoint analysts expect Apple to remain the top phone seller in the world through 2029.

Apple is set to overtake Samsung as the leading smartphone maker in the world in 2025, claiming the top spot for the first time in over a decade, following the successful release of the iPhone 17 series.

According to market research from Counterpoint released Wednesday, the iPhone 17 lineup Apple debuted in September has been a hit in the company's two key markets: the U.S. and China. More people are upgrading their phones than last year, sparking double-digit sales growth in both markets this year compared to 2024.

Overall, the smartphone market is expected to grow by 3.3% in 2025, per Counterpoint. The research firm projects that Apple will capture 19.4% of global market share in smartphone shipments in 2025, surpassing Samsung's expected 18.7% share for the year.

Counterpoint told CNBC on Wednesday that Apple is expected to ship around 243 million iPhones this year, compared to Samsung's 235 million shipments. Apple shipments are projected to grow 10% this year, compared to Samsung's 4.6%, per the research firm. The last time Apple led in shipment volume was

in 2011; Samsung has held the top spot since then.

**Related: These Are the Most Popular AI Features on Apple and Samsung Smartphones That You Probably Aren't Using Yet**

"Beyond the highly positive market reception for the iPhone 17 series, the key driver behind the upgraded shipment outlook lies in the replacement cycle reaching its inflection point," Counterpoint analyst Yang Wang said in a statement. "Consumers who purchased smartphones during the Covid-19 boom are now entering their upgrade phase. Furthermore, 358 million secondhand iPhones were sold between 2023 and Q2 2025. These users are also likely to upgrade to a new iPhone in the coming years."

iPhone 17 phones. Photo by HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP via Getty Images

Wang sees Apple continuing to dominate sales in the future. The company is expected to release a foldable iPhone in 2026 and implement a major iPhone design overhaul in 2027.

Considering those developments, Counterpoint expects that Apple will remain the top smartphone seller in the world through 2029.

**Related: Why the CEO of $2.5 Billion Smart Ring Startup Oura Says Apple Won't Make Its Own Version**

Apple said earlier this month that it expects holiday quarter revenue growth of 10% to 12%, or about $137 billion to $139 billion in sales, marking its biggest quarter to date for total revenue and iPhone sales. The company could hit record revenue as high as $140 billion for the quarter, Bloomberg reports.

More iPhones could be on their way. Apple is expected to launch the budget iPhone 17e in the spring at a price point

starting at $599. The company released the iPhone 16e at the same price in February.

Apple has delayed the arrival of a more personalized AI Siri to 2026, but Counterpoint notes that the delay “has not been a detriment to iPhone sales” and will likely drive more upgrades when introduced next year.

## Key Takeaways

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# Ask 3 Questions Before Using Any AI Tool to Grow Your Business

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

## Key Takeaways

- Everyone wants to use AI to move faster. But speed alone doesn’t create results. What really matters is clarity.
- When AI starts making decisions faster than people can keep up, it’s not the technology that causes problems. It’s the lack of clear leadership systems to keep people aligned.

Not too long ago, I worked with a leadership team that had just launched a new AI dashboard. It was truly state-of-the-art and was designed to shorten meetings and speed up decisions. Instead, it caused massive amounts of confusion.

One reason for that was that different departments analyzed the same data through their own lenses. The result was that meetings actually became longer, instead of shorter, and no one could say who made the “final call.”

The truth of the matter was that their real problem wasn’t AI at all. It was the total absence of clarity.

This isn’t rare, by the way, because every day, more companies face the same problem where leaders think faster tools will

produce faster results.

The truth is different.

AI systems don’t fix leadership issues. They reveal them. Without clear ownership, priorities and accountability in the first place, AI simply exposes what’s missing.

AI can’t solve problems that come from weak leadership structures, but it can — and does — shine a light on them.

**Related: Why Clear Leadership Beats Cutting-Edge Tools Every Single Time**

## The speed trap

Many leaders fall into what I call the “speed trap.”

By this, I mean that they believe the faster their team moves, the better they perform. Sadly, speed without clarity creates mistakes.

Imagine a team using AI to automate reports and analyze data. On the surface, it sounds like progress; however, within weeks, the team has more dashboards, more alerts and more confusion.

In these situations, three things usually happen.

When you chase speed without a defined structure, you don’t move forward — you just move faster in circles.

## What’s the real cost of confusion?

Confusion doesn’t just waste time; it also erodes trust.

I worked with a regional team that used AI tools to forecast results across several countries. The data itself was accurate, but every region interpreted it differently.

Unsurprisingly, instead of one plan, they ended up with three competing ones.

The real issue wasn't technology, but leadership. No one (in leadership) had defined who made the final call.

When your team doesn't know who decides, execution breaks down, and AI can't fix that. It can only speed up the breakdown that already exists.

## What AI is really testing

Sometimes it's easy to think that AI is testing how smart your team is. It isn't. What it's testing is how organized your leadership is.

I've discovered that AI does a great job at:

- Highlighting whether your systems are strong enough to handle faster decisions
- Exposing gaps in communication
- Exposing gaps in ownership
- Exposing gaps in accountability

If those systems are missing, then AI becomes a stress test. People will hesitate, projects stall, and decisions pile up.

And it's not about technical capabilities either. Leaders who succeed with AI aren't actually the most technical. They're the ones who stay clear about who decides what and, more importantly, why.

**Related: What Leaders Must Understand About Decision-Making in the Age of AI**

# The new job of a leader

AI fundamentally changes what leadership means.

The good news is that you don’t need to be an expert in machine learning or Large Language Models (LLM), but you do need to help your team stay clear about purpose and direction.

In a nutshell, your job is to **translate speed into focus,** and here’s how to start — by asking the following three simple questions:

1. **Who** owns this decision?
2. **What** information actually matters?
3. **Where** does human judgment begin and end?

These questions sound simple, but they keep teams grounded when everything else is moving fast.

To be a strong leader, you need to intentionally slow down to define ownership before you speed up execution. You shouldn’t let AI run the show; instead, you should use it to support a system that already works.

# How to catch up

Feel like your team is falling behind? If you do, you probably don’t need more AI tools. You need more clarity, and here are three steps for how to get it.

1. **Start by mapping your key decisions:** To do this, write down who owns them and who gives input. As you do this, you’ll often find overlaps or missing names. Cleaning that up will save you hours every week.
2. **Next, make decision rights explicit:** Who approves, who acts and who reviews? People move faster when they know

exactly where they fit.

3. **Finally, make priorities visible:** AI gives data, but clarity gives meaning. Everyone should know what matters most and, more importantly, why it matters.

When people see the same priorities in the same order, execution becomes easier.

**Related: How to Effectively Integrate AI into Your Organizational Strategy – A Leadership Playbook for Digital Transformation**

## What winning looks like

Winning with AI isn't about replacing people but about equipping them to make better decisions, faster.

When your team knows who owns decisions and why they matter, a number of things will happen.

I've seen teams improve project delivery by simply creating a shared decision map. Once they knew who decided what, the arguments immediately stopped, and progress accelerated.

Nothing about their AI changed. Their clarity did.

That's the difference between moving fast and moving forward.

AI will keep getting faster, but clarity will always decide who stays in control.

- When you **define how decisions happen**, your team can follow.
- When you **teach people what matters**, your team can scale.
- When you **lead with clarity**, AI becomes your ally instead of your obstacle.

## Key Takeaways

- Everyone wants to use AI to move faster. But speed alone doesn’t create results. What really matters is clarity.
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# This is the One Thing Every Franchise Needs to Scale Successfully

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

## Key Takeaways

- Develop your team through tailored growth programs, empowering them to evolve alongside your expanding franchise.
- Retain employees by fostering recognition, collaboration and a supportive culture that values contributions and loyalty.

They say there's no "I" in team, and while there may technically be one in "franchising," success is never a solo endeavor. Franchising is built on systems, but it is *sustained* by people. It would not thrive without the people "behind the curtains" who maintain a seamless brand vision and are employed in each branded location.

As the CEO of an early educational childcare franchise, Lightbridge Academy, I recognize that our journey from a single center to over 150 locations nationwide wouldn't have been possible without first investing in the right people. Growing a franchise network requires more than just strategy and scale; it means building a core team that you can trust, empower and grow alongside. Whether you're just beginning your franchise journey or expanding across new markets, attracting, developing and retaining top talent is the cornerstone for growth.

## Making your business "attractive" to incoming talent

When attracting top talent, we often focus on offering the best compensation, benefits or job titles. However, the most talented individuals thrive in their fields, not only due to their hard skills, but because they are passionate about the

work they are doing.

Applicants look for meaning, somewhere where they can belong and be proud of their work. Before you can attract the right people, you have to be the kind of business they want to be part of. In franchise systems, franchisees are responsible for hiring their staff and overseeing all employment-related decisions at their centers. Quality franchisors provide the structure and consistency that shape the employee experience. A strong franchisor delivers comprehensive training programs, tools and resources that empower franchisees to develop their teams and uphold brand standards locally. Prospective employees want to know: What do you stand for? What are you building together? Why does it matter?

A mission statement isn't just a paragraph in your employee handbook, it's the guiding beacon for your culture, your decisions and the day-to-day experience of your team. In a franchise system, where your values must scale across dozens (or even hundreds) of locations, that beacon matters more than ever. After all, if you don't truly believe in your mission statement, how can you expect others to preserve it?

Your core team is not only looking for their next job, but they are also searching for a community in which they can grow, feel valued and be part of something meaningful. Clarity is attractive. It empowers people to do their best work, knowing they're working toward shared goals.

**Related: You Can't Complain About Retention If You Don't Mentor Your People**

## Developing talents to fit your growing vision

While building your core team, it is important to remember: this isn't a fairytale. Finding the "perfect" candidate may

feel like discovering your own knight in franchise armor, but even the most qualified candidate won’t stay perfect unless they grow alongside the brand. As your business evolves, your people need to evolve with it.

In franchising, every new location, every new team and every shift in scale adds complexity, and your success depends on whether your team can keep pace. If team members remain stagnant while the business moves forward, you create gaps that will ultimately limit growth. It’s not enough to have a few overachievers; you need a consistently capable team across all roles and regions.

One of the most effective ways to develop talent is through creating advanced learning programs that are unique to their individual career growth can demonstrate your commitment to supporting your people, not just your bottom line.

Nurturing raw talent and allowing team members to play to their strengths will create a more unified and stronger core team. When team members feel supported and their growth potential is leveraged, they not only perform better, but they stay longer. Developing talent isn’t just about filling today’s gaps, it prepares your people for what’s next. By developing your team’s talent, you are setting up your business for longevity and to withstand any challenges that may come.

## Creating community and retaining talent

Retaining your core team is about more than just offering competitive pay or perks; it’s about creating a true sense of community and growth within your organization. When you recognize team members for their hard work and creativity, they’re far more likely to stay and thrive. This can be done even through the smallest of actions, like a “thank you” or an

“I see you”. Actively communicating how you see them growing alongside the company builds motivation and loyalty.

When it comes to feedback, I believe in creating a two-way system between your team. Just as you feel empowered to provide constructive feedback to help your team grow, you should actively seek their input on your leadership and how the system could work better. Making space for their voices not only creates trust and community but will also, in turn, make you a stronger leader.

Additionally, the greatest leaders aren’t distant rulers; they’re collaborators and inspirations. Be the kind of leader your team wants to learn from and lean on. Show up as a teammate, not a dictator. When you engage alongside your people by celebrating wins, problem-solving challenges and sharing the load, you build loyalty and foster a positive, resilient community.

## What does it mean?

I believe the most fulfilling aspect of growing a business is not the profits, but the opportunity to create a supportive group that is passionate about seeing your vision come to fruition. Your core team should never feel stagnant. They’re the living, breathing guide that cultivates your community through each decision made and campaign led.

Your team isn’t just supporting your growth; they are your growth. What you pour into them, they’ll pour that same energy, care and commitment back into your business. So build with intention. When your team feels part of the journey, they will do more than help you grow your brand. They’ll help you protect it, strengthen it and bring it to life in ways you could never do alone.

**Related: Big Four Firm PwC Is Struggling to Find ‘Hundreds of Engineers’ to Hire**

## Key Takeaways

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# Your Complete Guide to Which Stores Are Open — and Closed — on Thanksgiving 2025

## Key Takeaways

- Hours vary by location, and holiday schedules often change last minute.
- Pharmacies may have different hours from the main store.
- Expect heavy crowds Friday morning, especially at stores reopening for Black Friday.

As families across the U.S. prepare for Thanksgiving on Thursday, many shoppers are likely trying to determine if they can grab last-minute ingredients or pick up essentials before the festivities. With more major retailers giving employees the day off, Thanksgiving store hours have become less predictable than they once were.

To help you plan, here's a complete, updated guide to which grocery stores, pharmacies, convenience stores and major retailers are open — and which will remain closed on Thanksgiving Day 2025.

# Stores open on Thanksgiving 2025

Although far fewer stores open on Thanksgiving than in years past, several grocery chains, convenience stores and niche retailers will keep their doors open – often with reduced holiday hours.

# Grocery stores open

Shoppers looking for ingredients, desserts or extra sides may still find options in many regions.

- **Kroger and Kroger-owned banners** (Ralphs, Smith's, King Soopers, Fry's): Most locations are open with limited holiday hours.
- **Whole Foods Market**: Stores are typically open in the morning through early afternoon.
- **Food Lion**: Most stores will open early and close mid-afternoon.
- **Sprouts Farmers Market**: The stores are open with reduced hours, generally mornings only.
- **Albertsons / Safeway (select markets)**: Some stores are open depending on local management.

*Quick tip: Even if grocery stores are open, in-store pharmacies may be closed or operate on a separate schedule.*

**Related:** **Want Happier Employees? Try These 7 Thanksgiving Appreciation Ideas to Show Gratitude**

# Convenience & discount stores open

These chains are your best bet if you're looking for quick snacks, drinks or household items.

- **Dollar General**: Most locations are open, often until early evening.
- **Family Dollar**: Many stores are open; hours vary by region.
- **Big Lots**: Historically stores are open on Thanksgiving with holiday hours.
- **7-Eleven, Circle K, Wawa, Sheetz, QuikTrip**: Nearly all remain open — many 24/7 as usual.

## Pharmacies open

- **CVS:** Most standalone stores are open; pharmacy counters may operate reduced hours.
- **Walgreens:** Many 24-hour locations are open; pharmacies vary.
- **Rite Aid:** Hours depend heavily on region.

**Related: 8 Things Entrepreneurs Can Be Thankful For This Thanksgiving**

## Stores closed on Thanksgiving 2025

Most major retailers continue the trend of closing on Thanksgiving to allow employees time with their families. Expect all in-store Black Friday shopping to begin early Friday morning instead.

## Big-box retailers closed

These major chains will not open at all on Thanksgiving Day:

- **Walmart**

- **Target**
- **Best Buy**
- **Home Depot**
- **Lowe’s**
- **IKEA**
- **Costco**

Many will reopen on Black Friday at 5 or 6 a.m. with doorbuster sales.

## Department stores & apparel retailers closed

Holiday shoppers will have to wait until Friday for these stores to reopen:

**Related: Holiday Cheer or Clever Marketing? REI Not So Suddenly Opts Out of Black Friday**

## Grocery stores closed

Several chains consistently close every Thanksgiving:

## Pharmacies closed

- Most grocery-store-based pharmacies (Kroger, Ralphs, Safeway, etc.) close entirely for the holiday even if the store itself is open.

## What shoppers should know before heading out

- Hours vary by location, and holiday schedules often change last minute.
- Pharmacies may have different hours from the main store.
- Online shopping remains available, even from retailers closed in person.
- Expect heavy crowds Friday morning, especially at stores reopening for Black Friday.
- Many grocery stores offer same-day pickup and delivery, but slots fill up quickly during the holidays.

## Why do store hours keep changing?

In recent years, major retailers have shifted away from Thanksgiving Day openings. The trend began as an employee-wellness measure and has become widely embraced as families increasingly rely on online Black Friday deals, which now start earlier in the week.

Consumers doing last-minute grocery runs are the main driver of Thanksgiving Day shopping – which is why grocery and convenience chains remain the most likely to stay open.

## Bottom line

If you need food, beverages or basic essentials on Thanksgiving Day 2025, your best bets are Kroger-family stores, Whole Foods, Food Lion, Sprouts and almost all convenience stores. For everything else – from electronics to apparel to big-box retail – you'll have to wait until Black Friday.

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