When Every Moment Becomes a Shopping Moment

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Key takeaways

- Marketers are focusing more on how to meet consumers at the right place at the right time, because modern discovery happens wherever consumers are.
- AI can’t replace emotional connections, but it can reduce friction in the shopping experience without replacing what makes shopping memorable.
- Physical stores still play a strong role in shopping, and retailers tailor their stores to reflect the specific communities they reside in.

Shopping no longer starts in one place—or follows a predictable path.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions group chat co-hosted with Roundel, leaders from retail, technology, media, and consumer brands discussed how AI, creators, and omnichannel experiences are reshaping retail media as consumers move fluidly between digital and physical touchpoints.

Roundel’s Jenny Holleran

Discovery begins wherever consumers are

Where the shopping journey begins depends on the consumer. Stephanie Sandbo, chief revenue officer at LTK, argued that there is no universal starting point anymore because consumers move directly between inspiration and purchase.

“I don’t think the funnel is dead. I think it’s collapsed because now you can purchase where there’s awareness, and that is then considered conversion. It’s less about where it starts, but really about meeting that person at the right moment, when they are ready for that, with the relevant product,” Sandbo explained.

For Kristin Patterson, VP of omnichannel retail at Pinterest,

the consumer’s mindset matters more than the platform itself. She noted that discovery starts everywhere.

“It might start on Pinterest and then go deeper with Google Search to find more credible information, and then you might walk into a Target store. Being there in all those moments and having the consumer context in mind is how brands best show up,” Patterson said.

(L-R) LTK’s Stephanie Sandbo, Google’s Katie Babcock

Katie Babcock, director of retail performance solutions at Google, said consumers are discovering products now across more touchpoints than ever before.

“We’re seeing it start in all different places,” Babcock

explained. “I was getting on the plane, and somebody had a bag. I took out my phone and took a picture, which is now a search, to find the bag online. Then, I saw it in a video ad, for example, and that is now streaming, plus shopping, plus searching in a whole new way. So, it’s complex, but it’s everywhere.”

Fandom is part of the journey, too. Mahta Eghbali, VP of strategic alliances and global partnerships at Mattel.

“I think fandom begins at a very early age, but needs to be nurtured. The relationship can be easily broken these days, so we think about the fan, who is a shopper, a gifter, a child, or the millennial enjoying it in a different way,” Eghbali shared. “The funnel to me is not dead, but it definitely needs to be nurtured. It’s not as direct as it was before.”

Mattel’s Mahta Eghbali

AI is reducing friction—not replacing experiences

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in commerce, panelists agreed that its biggest role is to make shopping easier while preserving the enjoyment of discovery.

Babcock pointed to increasingly detailed searches that provide richer context for retailers. “Search queries are longer than they were in the past, and we have more context behind that query. It’s how we reduce the friction to lead you to a purchase,” she noted.

Sandbo added that consumers now search more conversationally, asking detailed questions instead of entering simple product keywords. “People are searching with a lot more specificity

than we've ever seen before," she explained. "It's about making sure that you are set up for success as it relates to a real, tangible answer vs. just scraping and indexing web pages, which is a brand's approach."

The group also emphasized that AI cannot replace emotional connections. Reflecting on creator marketing, Sandbo shared that storytelling-centered campaigns often outperform transactional messaging. "People are looking for that connection, and that's ultimately what makes it so effective, and what AI really can't quite touch," she said.

Eghbali agreed, arguing that technology can strengthen experiences without replacing what makes them memorable.

"I don't think AI is going to take away taste," said Eghbali. "I don't think it's going to take away how walking into a Target store makes you feel. I think it's going to inform it. I don't think it's going to replace it."

Pinterest’s Kristin Patterson

Physical retail continues to matter

Although digital commerce continues to evolve, panelists discussed the enduring importance of stores.

Jenny Holleran, VP of partner solutions group at Roundel, said shoppers still value the experiences that physical retail offers. “People want that physical experience to get out and have some joy,” she said.

The in-store experience includes digital discovery. Holleran noted that shoppers often use their phones while browsing—not because they’re distracted, but because they’re looking for additional information before making a purchase.

“Our guests are on their phones in the store. At first, you’re like, ‘What are they doing?’ But it’s that discovery. They’re in the store, but maybe they just want a little more information,” Holleran explained.

For Mattel, creating those in-person moments starts well before consumers reach the shelf.

“Our responsibility to the consumer and the fan is to engage them everywhere, so that when they go to Target, they’re grabbing the product,” Eghbali explained. “That means we have to engage them on socials, through short-form content, through digital games, through location-based entertainment, through experiential, and through meaningful brand partnerships.”

The conversation also explored how retailers adapt stores to reflect the communities they serve. “Target’s ambition is to be the most delightful experience in retail,” Holleran said. She added that creating that experience starts with understanding each community. “It’s really starting to think, where are we, who are our guests, and how do we create that moment in time?”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Katie Babcock, Director, Retail Performance Solutions, Google
- Mahta Eghbali, VP, Strategic Alliances and Global Partnerships, Mattel
- Jenny Holleran, VP, Partner Solutions Group, Roundel
- Ryan Joe, Editor-in-Chief, ADWEEK
- Kristin Patterson, VP, Omnichannel Retail, Pinterest
- Stephanie Sandbo, Chief Revenue Officer, LTK

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