

A woman wearing a straw hat and a light-colored top is looking at a large digital display. She is pointing at the screen with her right hand. The background is a blurred retail environment with other people and shelves. The entire image has a blue tint.

3 key IT trends shaping modern retail

Insights and inspiration for next-generation, data-driven customer experiences



Contents:

Introduction:
A guide to the future of retail

1. Providing a seamless customer experience: from hype to baseline expectations

2. The importance of real-time data: the engine of modern retail

3. From cloud to store floor: infrastructure moves closer

About GlobalConnect

A guide to the future of retail

Retail is evolving rapidly, driven by shifting customer behaviors and fast-moving technological change. From payments to real-time inventory visibility, everything is expected to just work.

But behind every frictionless customer journey lies something far more complex:



So what does it take to meet expectations, today and tomorrow?

In this guide, we explore three key shifts shaping retail right now: seamless customer experiences, the growing reliance on real-time data, and how both are redefining the digital infrastructure everything depends on.



1.

Seamless customer experiences: from hype to baseline expectation

The line between physical stores and digital commerce has effectively disappeared. A purchase journey might start on a mobile device, continue in-store, and finish wherever it's most convenient. Solutions like click-and-collect and self-checkout were considered innovative just a few years ago. Today, they are simply expected.

At the same time, the physical store has taken on a new role beyond transactions. It's where brands inspire customers and build stronger relationships through showrooms, pop-ups, and more creative store concepts.

Regardless of the channel, customer expectations remain the same: They want fast, seamless, and personalized experiences.

So what does this mean for your retail business?

Above all, it means making it easy for customers to move between digital and physical touchpoints, without ever thinking about what happens behind the scenes.



3 key trends improving customer experience today

D2C (Direct-to-Consumer) as a strategic model

More companies are bypassing intermediaries to sell directly to end customers through their own e-commerce channels and stores. This provides greater control across the entire value chain, from pricing and margins to the customer experience itself.

With the right digital infrastructure in place, businesses can also collect valuable first-party data on customer behavior and preferences.

SoftPOS: turning mobile devices into checkout systems

The easier it is to pay, the shorter the lines, and the more time store associates can spend delivering personalized service. Nordic retailers are leading the way in SoftPOS, where mobile devices function as payment terminals.

In Sweden, mobile-first payment methods have already surpassed card payments, and Norway is close behind. Trials are also underway for biometric payments using fingerprints directly on Android devices.

Unified Commerce: the next step beyond omnichannel

Seamless movement between e-commerce and physical stores requires data that is synchronized in real time across all channels. To enable this, retailers are increasingly investing in unified commerce platforms. This allows customers to browse at home, save items digitally, visit a store to experience the product, and complete the purchase, all within one connected journey.





Inspiration:

How 4 Nordic retailers are optimizing customer experience with technology



Virtual home design with IKEA

With the AI-driven concept IKEA Kreativ, customers can scan their homes in 3D using their mobile phones, remove existing furniture, and virtually furnish the space with IKEA products before making a purchase. The company has also launched a pilot project on the gaming platform Roblox to explore how users design and interact with virtual homes using IKEA products. As part of this initiative, customers can discover and scan QR codes placed throughout physical stores to unlock additional items and experiences in the game.



Real-time inventory at Lindex

Lindex has rolled out RFID across 400 stores, enabling real-time inventory visibility and faster service. The company has also introduced Lindex Copilot, an AI-powered tool trained on internal support data to provide store employees with role-specific guidance.



Smart mirrors at H&M

H&M has introduced tech-enabled store concepts in the U.S., including its flagship store in New York. Customers can use smart mirrors in fitting rooms to discover products or request different sizes without leaving the room. Store staff receive real-time notifications, making the experience smoother and more personalized.



“Endless aisle” in Varner Group stores

Norwegian retailer Varner Group has invested in automated warehousing and a cloud-based POS system across its Nordic stores. This gives staff real-time visibility into inventory across all channels and enables “endless aisle,” ensuring customers can access the full product range, either in-store or via home delivery.



2.

Real-time data as the engine of modern retail



Behind every seamless customer experience is a constant flow of data. To meet expectations, information about products, inventory, customer behavior, and purchases must be accurate and available in real time.

This need is driving the shift from omnichannel to unified commerce. Instead of connecting separate systems, retailers are moving toward a shared data foundation where sales, inventory, campaigns, and customer data are continuously synchronized across all touchpoints.

At the same time, data volumes are growing rapidly. Sensors, connected devices, and AI-driven tools in store environments are generating continuous insights into customer movement, demand, and operational performance. This opens up new opportunities to work more proactively, from optimizing assortment and staffing to delivering more relevant and personalized experiences.

New opportunities, new risks

Succeeding with a data-driven business is not about collecting as much data as possible, it's about using it effectively. Security and compliance cannot be compromised. Retail businesses handle large volumes of valuable customer and payment data, making the industry an attractive target for cybercriminals.

Without proper protection, an attack can disrupt critical systems, leading to immediate revenue loss and, in some cases, costs reaching tens of millions of dollars.

How AI, IoT, and real-time data are used in retail:

- AI-driven personalization of offers
- Push notifications based on behavior and location
- In-store wayfinding via apps and digital displays
- Customer flow analysis using sensors and cameras
- RFID for efficient inventory management
- Smart shelves with dynamic pricing
- Self-checkout and smart carts

Together, these examples show how real-time data is becoming a natural part of both customer experience and daily operations. Rather than isolated solutions,

it's about building a connected ecosystem where every data point creates value at the right moment.



3.

From cloud to store floor: infrastructure moves closer

As retail becomes more dependent on real-time data, the demands on underlying digital infrastructure continue to grow. Payments, inventory systems, personalized offers, connected devices, all must work instantly. Stability, security, and availability are no longer nice-to-haves. There is simply no room for downtime or delays.

One result of this shift is the growing adoption of edge computing in retail. Instead of sending data back and forth to centralized data centers or cloud platforms, processing capacity has moved closer to stores and distribution centers. This reduces latency and creates more resilient systems in an environment where each store operates as a connected node within a larger ecosystem.



Retail infrastructure solutions that are gaining traction

Succeeding in a data-driven business is not about collecting as much data as possible, but about using it in the right way. Above all, you should never compromise on security and compliance.

This is partly because customer trust is a valuable asset, and partly because more connected devices mean more potential attack surfaces. The availability of valuable customer and payment data makes retail an attractive target for cybercriminals. Without the right protection, a breach can lead to critical business systems being taken offline, resulting in significant revenue loss and, in some cases, costs amounting to tens of millions.

- Retail infrastructure solutions that are gaining traction
- Distributed data centers and colocation to bring data closer to operations
- High-performance fiber networks to handle increasing data volumes
- SD-WAN and converged network solutions
- IoT-ready connectivity for connected in-store devices
- Managed security services, such as SOC and DDoS protection

By combining solutions like these, retailers can maintain stable and secure operations across multiple locations, while enabling real-time insights and improved customer experiences, without relying on large in-house IT teams.



Inspiration:

How Parken delivers a seamless experience at scale

Parken, Denmark's national stadium in Copenhagen, has invested heavily in creating an interactive and accessible end-to-end experience where digital and physical elements merge. Mobile devices sit at the center. Visitors scan tickets, make contactless payments, and share their experiences in real time. At the same time, data is used to manage flows, reduce queues, and improve the overall experience from arrival to departure.

This is made possible by a stable and scalable digital infrastructure designed to handle extreme demand. During major events, tens of thousands of devices are connected simultaneously, and everything from payments to live streaming must perform flawlessly.



Solutions enabling the Parken experience:

- Full WiFi and 5G coverage throughout the venue
- High-capacity fiber with built-in redundancy
- Digital ticketing and contactless payments
- Real-time data and heatmaps for crowd flow management
- IoT solutions for operations, logistics, and energy management
- Connected retail spaces and unmanned sales points
- Networks supporting live streaming and media production
- Integrated systems for security and crowd management

These investments show how strong digital infrastructure elevates the entire experience. When everything works seamlessly in the background, the focus shifts to what truly matters: delivering a smooth and memorable experience for every visitor.

About GlobalConnect

GlobalConnect is one of Northern Europe's leading providers of digital infrastructure and data communication. Through our 250,000-kilometer fiber network across Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and Finland, we connect businesses and communities, enabling next-generation digital services. We deliver network solutions to around 30,000 business customers and fiber-based broadband to more than 900,000 households.

