

Agentic commerce: from brand loyalty to bot logic

How retail's next disruption might not come
from a retailer at all

August 2025

KEARNEY



Executive summary



- 1 Agentic commerce will be the most disruptive retail shift since e-commerce.
- 2 60% of consumers expect to use AI agents for shopping within the next 12 months.
- 3 The real threat comes from cross-platform “super agents” that sit between retailers and consumers.
- 4 For unprepared retailers, the risk is up to 500 bps EBIT erosion from margin compression, traffic dispersion, and brand commoditization.
- 5 Winning means becoming “agent-preferred”—the retailer that algorithms consistently select first.
- 6 Retailers must act now to retool data, fulfillment, loyalty, and product strategy to remain relevant.
- 7 Kearney can help quantify impact, diagnose readiness, and build a 100-day road map to protect margins and capture opportunity.

A new era of shopping is here where consumers don't shop; their agents do

What is agentic commerce?

- AI systems that act on behalf of users to make purchases
- Can anticipate needs, compare options, and execute transactions
- Operate autonomously (or semi-autonomously) based on consumers' prompts, with limited human interaction or oversight
- Agents don't browse products or content like a human would. They extract structured data to make parameter-based decisions.



Source: Kearney's US Consumer Study, July 2025 (n = 750)

Example: managing the surprise fever

“

Last night, my son spiked a fever at 10:00 p.m. Of course, we had no children's Tylenol in the house. **I literally whispered to my agent, 'I need kids' acetaminophen right now.'**

Within a minute, it told me CVS could have it ready for curbside pickup in 12 minutes, or a local delivery service could drop it in 35 minutes for \$4 more. I hit 'deliver' and kept rocking my son while the order was processed. A notification popped up tracking the driver. At 10:40 p.m., a bag was at my front door.

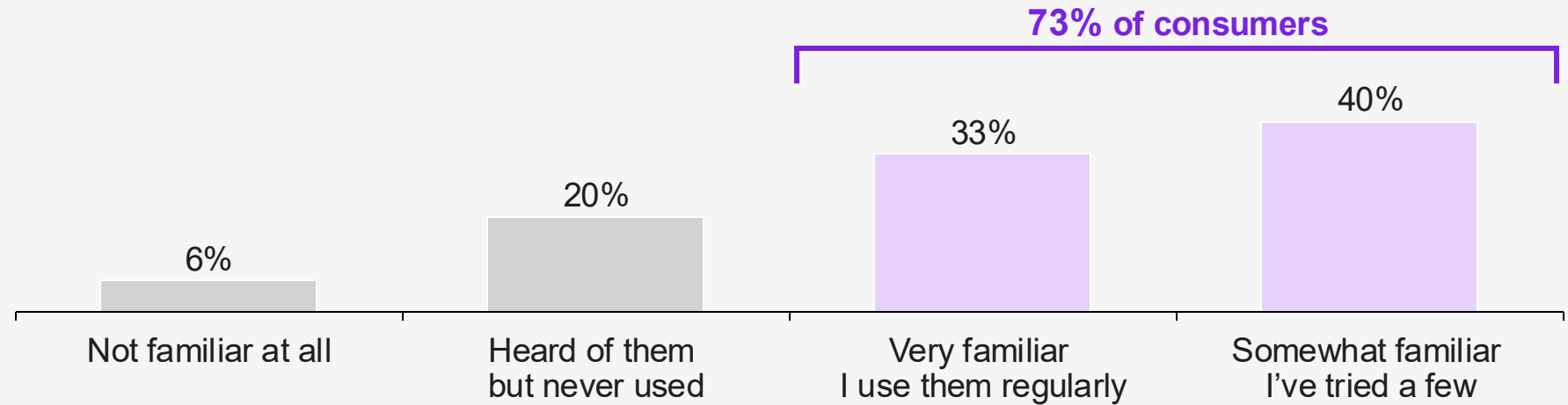
I didn't scroll through product listings, worry about brands, or drive anywhere in the middle of the night. The agent just handled it.

”

Most consumers say they plan to use AI agents for shopping in the next 12 months

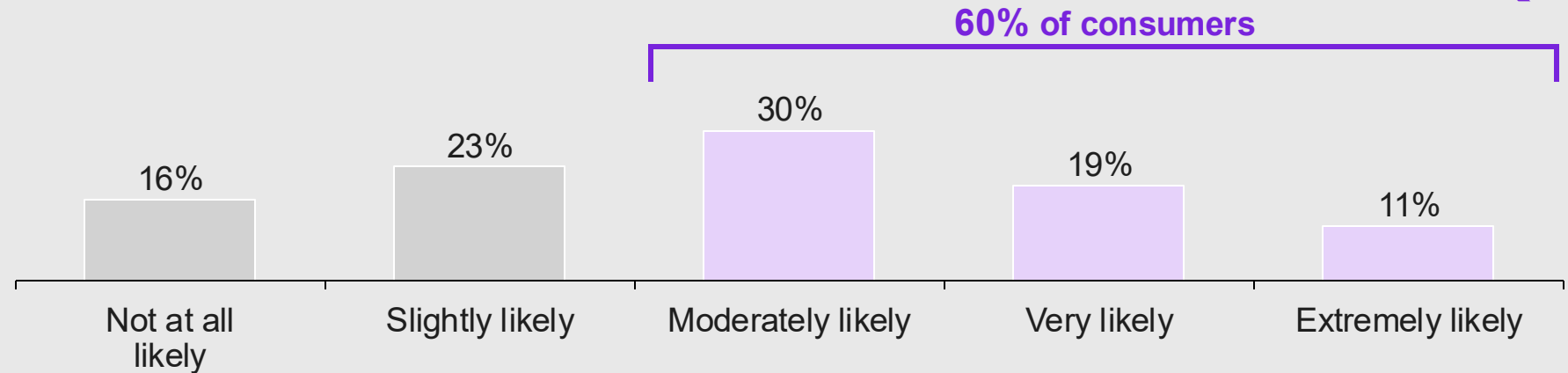
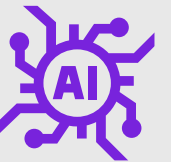
Consumers' familiarity with AI

How familiar are you with AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot, or Alexa?



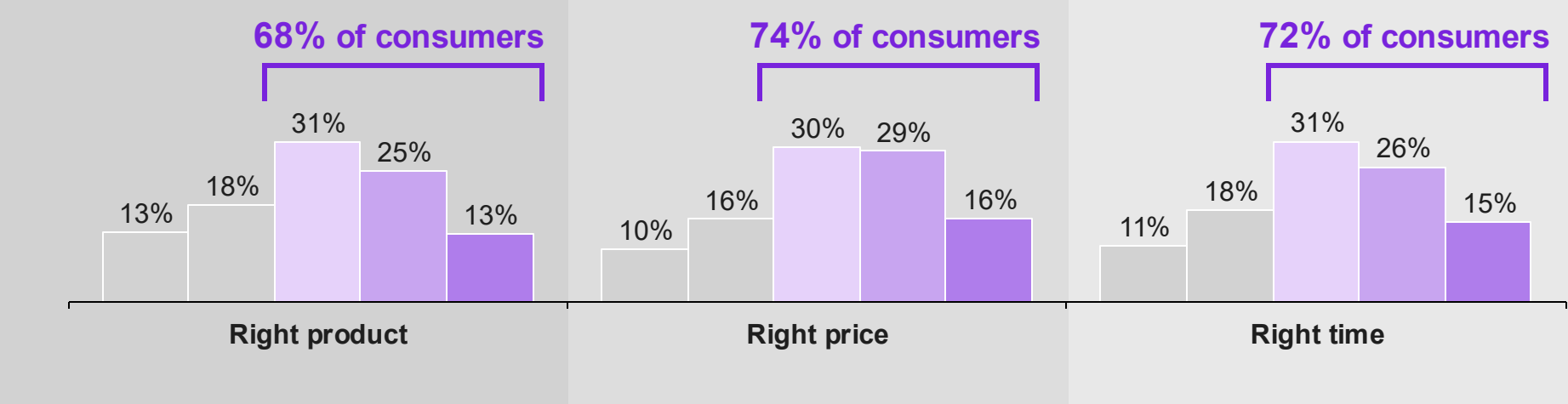
Expected use of AI-assisted shopping

How likely are you to try an AI agent to assist with shopping in the next 12 months?



Consumers don't just want help shopping; they want agents that save time, money, and hassle

High consumer expectations for agentic commerce
How effective do you think an AI agent that does your shopping for you would be to help you with ...?



Right product
Survey response options:



Right price
Survey response options:



Right time
Survey response options:
















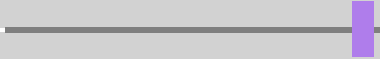
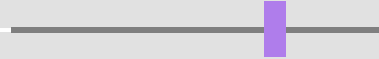
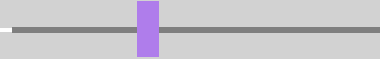
- Discovering and trying new products and services
- Finding new products that help me meet my goals
- Introducing the right amount of variety into my diet and lifestyle

- Finding the best deals
- Staying in budget
- Knowing that I am getting the best deals

- Saving time doing routine tasks
- Making life easy
- Always having the items I need at home when I need them

- Not at all effective
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Consumers are embracing agentic AI to varying degrees

Persona	Tech-forward early adopters	Price-sensitive pragmatists	Privacy-conscious skeptics	Routine-loyal traditionalists
Who they are	 <p>Focused on automating routine tasks to free up time using leading-edge tech features</p> <p>Less concerned with data privacy and controls or savings</p>	 <p>Most responsive to price comparisons, discounts, and savings guarantees</p> <p>Want to know exactly how much they save and retain ability to control spend</p>	 <p>Will adopt AI but need to retain control of decision-making and data, want assurance that mistakes will be corrected</p> <p>Time and price savings alone will not persuade this group</p>	 <p>Prefer familiar brands and products, even when others are more convenient or better priced</p> <p>Highly value data security, and most prefer human interaction</p>
Size of market	~15% of market	~35% of market	~30% of market	~20% of market
Tech fluency	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Relative importance of ...				
Data privacy and control				
Convenience				
Price				

Agentic commerce is already in the market but largely confined to companies embedding AI functionality into their core offering

Amazon Alexa Voice Shopping allows users to make purchases using voice commands—reordering frequently purchased items, suggesting alternatives, and tracking deliveries.

Google Shopping with Gemini helps users search for, compare, and purchase products through conversational interfaces—anticipating needs and preferences.

Shopify's AI-Powered Sidekick (B2B) supports merchants to manage stores—including inventory, promotions, and customer inquiries—autonomously.

Klarna's AI Shopping Assistant curates product suggestions, compares prices, and facilitates checkouts for users across partner stores.

Instacart's AI Cart Builder predicts grocery needs based on past behavior and current events (e.g., holidays, weather) to automatically populate a cart that users can approve or modify.

Non-exhaustive

Google Duplex makes phone calls on behalf of users to book appointments or make reservations and acts as an autonomous agent handling commerce-related interactions.

Capital One's Eno AI Assistant monitors spending, pays bills, flags suspicious charges, and offers financial advice—a financial agent that interacts with bank accounts and credit cards.

Expedia's AI Travel Assistant (Romie) plans trips, suggests itineraries, books flights and hotels, and reschedules trips—all using conversational AI.

DoNotPay's Legal and Refund Agent helps users contest traffic tickets, request refunds, cancel subscriptions—acting on users' behalf to do administrative tasks.

Tesla auto-orders services and charges cars automatically, ordering software updates, scheduling service, and finding superchargers based on driving patterns and location.

Source: Kearney analysis

The real disruption will come from AI “super agents”—not retailers that sit between you and your customer

Features consumers are looking for from agentic commerce

How likely would you be to try shopping through an AI agent that can provide the following benefits?

Most important
for consumers



Least important
for consumers

	Highest capability potential (not exhaustive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– It compares pricing across various platforms to give me the best deal.– It is clear that any mistakes or issues will be taken care of for me.– It tells me how much I save.	Cross-retailer platforms ChatGPT Perplexity Shopify Instacart Gemini Apple Intelligence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– It can optimize my spending within a budget.– I can limit the amount of money the AI agent can spend.– The AI agent can shop without access to my banking accounts.	Financial institutions Visa Klarna Mstercard PayPal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– I have an assurance that my data is safe, and I know how it is being used.	High trust institutions Visa Apple Mastercard
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– I can design it to shop the way I want for what is important to me.– The set-up is quick and easy.– The AI agent is part of a platform that I recognize and trust.– I can have the items delivered or picked up at a store.– I get a savings guarantee on my shopping trip.	Traditional retailers Walmart Amazon Target Kroger

“Super agents”
will decide what
consumers
buy based on
data, not loyalty,
logos, or
perception with
big implications
for some missions

Relevance of AI for different shopping needs

How comfortable would you be using a personal AI assistant to help with the following? (“somewhat comfortable” and “very comfortable”)

Top-impacted
retail sectors



58% Reordering household basics

Mass
Big box
Dollar
Drug

55% Buying a meal or ingredient

Grocery

51% Shopping for a gift, specific need, occasion

Specialty
Apparel

50% Shopping for a weekly grocery order

Grocery
Mass

47% Buying a fill-in item between larger shopping trips

Drug
Convenience

43% Selecting clothing or accessories

Apparel
Specialty

For retailers, the consequences could be severe: margin erosion, commoditization and up to 500 bps EBIT at risk

Expected impact



–5% to –15%

Revenue

- Price compression (Agents optimize for lowest price.)
- Fragmentation of baskets drives down average selling price and weakens cross-sell.
- Order frequency is higher in some models, but value per basket falls.



–3 to –8 pts

Gross margin

- Transparency erodes markup.
- Agents extract fees (3–5% take rate).
- Retail media networks and data monetization dollars move upstream to agent platforms.
- Reduced promotional halo



+5% to +15%
per order

Fulfillment and ops cost

- Smaller baskets increase per-order costs (picking, packing, and last mile).
- Retailers need to invest in automation/logistics to offset.



–200 to –500+ bps

EBIT margin




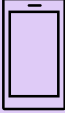
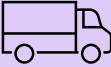
- Net effect of revenue squeeze + higher distribution + agent commissions
- Efficiency levers (scale, automation, exclusive product) determine survivability.

Core assumptions

- **Adoption:** 60% of customers shift to agentic platforms.
- **Basket shape:** For adopting customers, order frequency **+30%**, but units per order **–40%** (Amazon-like dispersion).
- **Price compression:** Average selling price declines **~8%** due to price transparency.
- **Agent fees:** Platforms extract a **4% take rate** on agentic orders (net of reduced direct marketing).
- **Gross margin:** Held constant at baseline %, but erosion modeled through lower ASP and agent fees
- **Fulfillment cost scaling:** Smaller baskets increase per-order fulfillment costs by **+10–15%**.

Imagine half of
your sales filtered
by AI tomorrow

How often would
your brand be
chosen?

Core characteristics to be “agent preferred” (not exhaustive)	
 Price and promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Low price leader– Dynamic pricing– Transparent promotions that algorithms reward
 Assortment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Strong private-label portfolio– Broad, differentiated assortment– Clearly-articulated product benefits readable by agents
 Shopping experience and intangibles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Trust and transparent data use– Loyalty integration readable by agents
 E-commerce infrastructure and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Structured, agent-ready data– Rich product catalogs, pricing, logistics and return policies exposed via APIs
 Supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Fulfillment speed and reliability– Real-time inventory visibility– Trusted on-time delivery metrics– Short delivery windows

To win, you must become “agent-preferred”—the retailer that algorithms consistently select first

Source: Kearney

Source: Kearney analysis

Now is the time to test scenarios, prepare responses, and secure advantage

Kearney offers a complimentary, customized workshop for board and executive teams to understand the risks and opportunities for agentic commerce.

Strategic questions to answer now

Are we prepared for a world where 50% of shopping trips are mediated by AI agents?



What must we invest in during the next 12 months to avoid commoditization and margin erosion?



What will make us “agent-preferred”—lowest price, exclusive products, data transparency, or fulfillment speed?



How do reshape our P&L to adapt?



How Kearney can help

1

Quantify the impact

Tailored P&L scenarios by category and business model

2

Identify your mitigation strategies

What levers do you pull now to mitigate risk in the future?

3

Chart the path forward

100-day road map + strategic options for agentic partnerships

4




Develop playbooks

Clear capability and operating model playbooks including the signals to monitor to accelerate transitions

Agentic commerce will reshape your economics sooner than you think.

Source: Kearney analysis

Attributes of AI “super agents”

	Attribute	Why it matters to consumers	What it looks like <i>(non-exhaustive)</i>
<div>Tech functionality</div> <div></div>	Privacy and data security	Builds foundational trust by protecting users’ data and privacy	Differential privacy for personalization without data leakage
	Transparency	Ensures accountability , confidence in agents’ transactions	Tokenized payment , verifiable credentials to secure transactions
	Autonomy and adaptability	Enables intelligent (semi-)autonomous execution of tasks	Proactive task management – while adapting to dynamic context
	Integration	Simplifies the shopping experience for the consumer	Connectivity across retail tech stacks (e.g., catalogs, CRMs, ...)
<div>Consumer-facing functionality</div> <div></div>	User controls	Balances user oversight with AI autonomy	Flexible control settings to enable full control to full delegation
	Personalization	Aligns agents’ decisions with consumer preferences	Multimodal inputs to tailor agent’s selections and recommendations
	Price optimization	Delivers clear, tangible value to consumers	Price guarantees – incl. real-time price comparisons, explanations
	Cross-retailer access	Maximizes assortment options ; reinforces price guarantee	Visibility to local stores, national chains, marketplaces , etc.
<div>Post-purchase support</div> <div></div>	Last-mile delivery	Enables convenient receipt of purchased product	Optimization for delivery reliability, speed, and cost
	Customer service	Ensures recourse, remediation if AI agent underdelivers	Agent resolution through seller’s support path or via API integration
	Product returns	Lowers risk by ensuring agent’s decisions are reversible	Preference for flexible return policy or access to reverse logistics

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Source: Kearney analysis

Example: food shopping without an app



This morning, my daughter told me she wants to cook tacos tonight. I barely had time to think about it between meetings.

I just told my agent, 'Add ingredients for chicken tacos for four people tonight.'

It instantly pulled a recipe I've used before, compared prices for all the ingredients—chicken, tortillas, salsa, lettuce, cheese—across three grocers. **It built a list and figured out which store had the best combined price and could deliver by 5:00 p.m.**

By the time I left for pickup, I got a notification: 'All items confirmed. Driver arriving at 4:45 p.m.' **The whole thing took me maybe 20 seconds. I didn't open a single app.**



Example: household shopping outsourced



I don't even think about laundry detergent anymore – my agent does.

It notices when I'm getting low because it's connected to the smart dispenser on my washing machine. Yesterday it pinged me: 'You're down to two loads left, do you want me to reorder?'

I didn't open my phone – I just said 'yes' while making lunches for the kids. Two seconds later, the agent had found the lowest price across all the stores that deliver to me and scheduled it to arrive with the groceries tomorrow.

No scrolling, no coupons, no remembering.

The box just showed up on my porch.



Thank you

Katherine Black
Partner
New York
914-598-3431

Natalie Shield
Principal
Toronto
416-708-3877

Brent Smolinski
Partner
Atlanta
404-984-5694

Miguel Paredes
Partner
San Francisco
415-490-3977

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