



Inside The Hive



What Retail Wants: Mid-Year Review 2025



Produced by The Retail Hive





eCommerce



THE HIVE: E-Commerce Sub-Hive Mid-Year Report



General Comments:

The E-commerce Sub-Hive continues to show promising signs of growing up fast in the bustling playground of digital retail. They're enthusiastic learners, eager to try out new tech gadgets (though sometimes a little tempted to spend all their pocket money on shiny Google Shopping ads before doing their homework on data.)

The team is aware that personalisation isn't just about knowing a customer's name, but about turning those logins into lasting friendships – a task that needs a bit more homework on data capture and consent. Mobile-first is their new best friend, and they're learning how to make apps and websites play nicely together across all devices.

Their SMS marketing is well-behaved (mostly), and loyalty programmes are starting to earn their gold stars, though they must be careful not to nag the class too much. They're also beginning to understand the value of community clubs and influencers to help boost subscription rates and customer engagement. Privacy remains a tricky subject; they're learning to explain the "value exchange" clearly, so no one feels like their lunch money has been nicked.

SUMMER TERM 2025

What They've Learned So Far:

- Personalisation is great, but only if you've got the right data to back it up. Getting customers logged in early is like getting them to do their reading before class.
- Mobile devices are now the default playground, so making sure apps and sites work together smoothly is top of the agenda.
- SMS marketing still gets good results but don't be the kid who keeps shouting in class; timing and tone matter!
- Juggling multiple platforms is like trying to keep all your textbooks organised, it takes patience and a bit of magic.
- Influencers and community engagement are like extra credit – they might seem optional but can really boost your final grade.
- Explaining privacy and data use clearly is key to building trust: nobody likes their secrets shared without permission.
- Combining offline and online experiences is the ultimate project to make digital shopping as sensory and human as the real thing.

SUBJECT	GRADE	Teachers Comments
Personalisation & Data Use	A-	Doing well but needs more homework on encouraging customers to log in and share their details.
Mobile & App Experience	B	Mobile is clearly the star pupil – just needs to work on smoother handovers between devices.
SMS & Loyalty Marketing	B+	Shows good manners in communication; just don't overdo the reminders or risk becoming 'that' kid.
Platform Integration & Tech	B-	Managing a complicated timetable of systems – more streamlining will help them avoid those last-minute crams.
Community & Influencer	B+	Potential superstar here if they put in a bit more elbow grease on partnerships and storytelling.
Customer Privacy & Trust	B	Respecting boundaries well – but still needs to practice explaining why sharing data benefits everyone.
Cross-Channel Experience	B	Good understanding of the big picture – turning digital into a sensory experience is a homework challenge worth tackling.

What's Top Of Mind for eCommerce?

Areas of interest

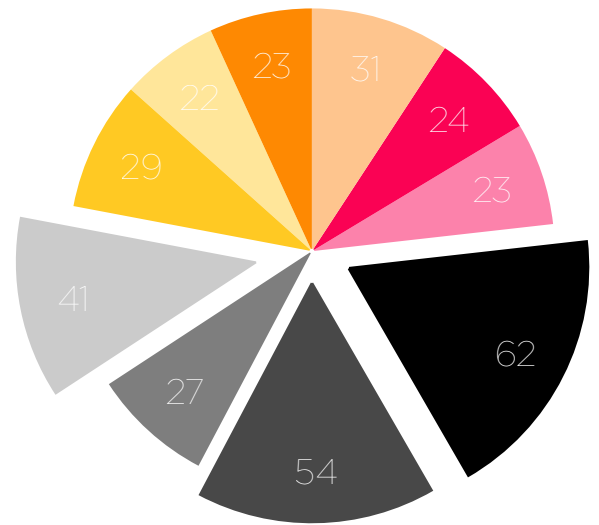
Retail leaders aren't short of priorities, but a few things are clearly rising to the top. From recent Hive poll data, *eCommerce marketing* and *platform investment* are front and centre — no surprise, really, when so many teams are still under pressure to drive growth without adding complexity. These are the areas where retailers feel they can move the needle fastest.

It's not just about selling more, though. There's a clear appetite for smarter trading — which is where *AI* comes in. More than half of data and tech leads flagged *AI innovations* and *customer intelligence* as key areas of focus. Not just in theory, either — the goal is to make day-to-day decisions quicker and better, whether it's pricing, targeting or product planning.

But making AI work means getting the basics right. That's why there's steady interest in things like *data governance*, *visualisation*, and *integration tools*. The message is clear: retailers want to trust the data behind the dashboards before they act on it.

In short, teams are investing where they see real impact — clearer insights, cleaner data, and systems that work better together.

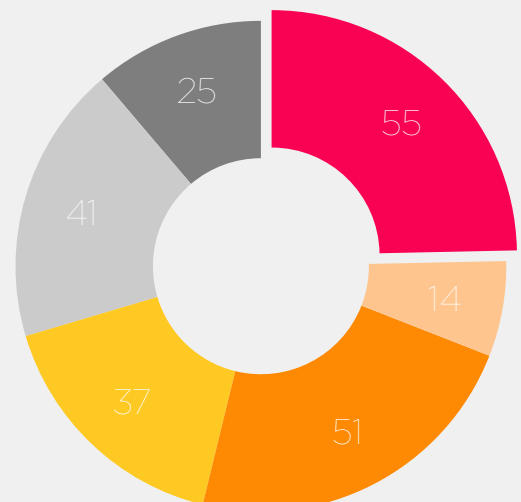
eCommerce



- 31** Affiliate Marketing & Management
- 24** Channel Partner and Local Marketing
- 23** Cross Border
- 62** eCommerce Marketing
- 54** eCommerce Platforms
- 27** Headless eCommerce
- 41** Marketplaces
- 29** Inventory and Order Management
- 22** Location & Translation
- 23** Sales Automation Enablement

Data and Data Driven Decisions

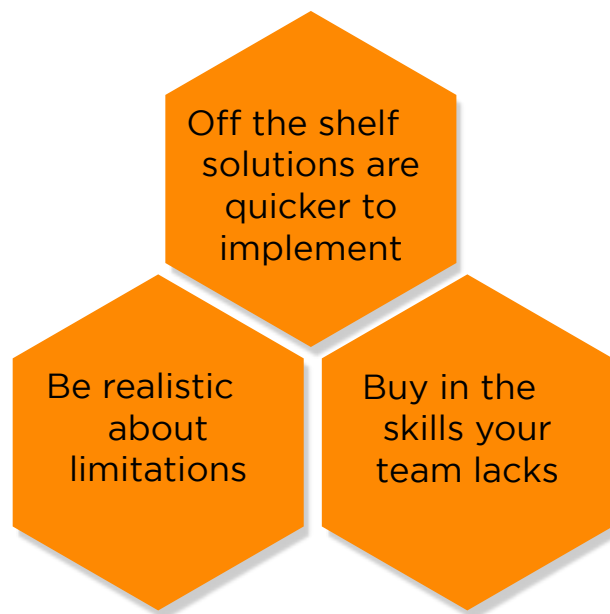
- 55** AI Innovations
- 14** Cloud Data Integration & Tag Management
- 51** Customer Intelligence & Data Science
- 37** Dashboard & Data Visualisation
- 41** Data Governance & Privacy
- 25** Data Management & Enhancement



The Hive Trends in Focus

Investing in technology is vital for ecommerce members to stay competitive and cater to changing customer expectations. Technology enhances customer experience through personalisation, which drives conversion rates and loyalty. For instance, analytics tools allow retailers to understand consumer behaviours and target marketing effectively.

As members transition from outdated systems, modern ecommerce platforms become crucial for facilitating seamless, omnichannel experiences that improve operational efficiency. Additionally, technology investments optimise internal processes, fostering better data-driven decisions.



What are the key criteria for Tech investment:

Ranking 1	To make better use of our data
Ranking 2	To enhance the overall customer experience
Ranking 3	To improve cost efficiency
Ranking 4	To drive customer loyalty
Ranking 5	To enable agile innovation

As retailers work to build a clearer picture of their customers, the question of how best to manage and activate customer data is front of mind. One of the most common debates is whether to build a bespoke Customer Data Platform (CDP) or invest in an off-the-shelf solution to achieve a single customer view (SCV).

Both approaches come with benefits and trade-offs, and the right choice often depends on internal capabilities, long-term goals, and budget considerations.

The Word From the Hive



**Quotes and
comments
from Jam**



From Buzz to Action



Enhance Data Integration: Prioritise the enhancement of customer data integration across all platforms. Implementing a Customer Data Platform (CDP) can unify customer information from various channels, allowing for better insights and personalised marketing. This integration will help in understanding customer behaviour and preferences, informing marketing strategies more effectively.



Optimise Omnichannel Experiences: Focus on creating a seamless omnichannel experience for customers. This involves integrating online and offline channels, ensuring consistency in brand messaging and customer experience. Leaders should assess their logistical capabilities to support robust online order fulfilment while enhancing the in-store experience.



Embrace AI for Predictive Analytics: Adopt AI technologies for predictive analytics to forecast customer trends and optimise inventory management. By leveraging AI-powered tools to analyse purchasing patterns, retailers can better anticipate demand and improve stock availability, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and reducing operational costs.

Read

Talk

Meet



Digital Cafe's

Check out our schedule!

In Person Meeting

30th September- 1st October 2025

The Retail Hive Exchange

Four Seasons Hampshire



In Person Meeting

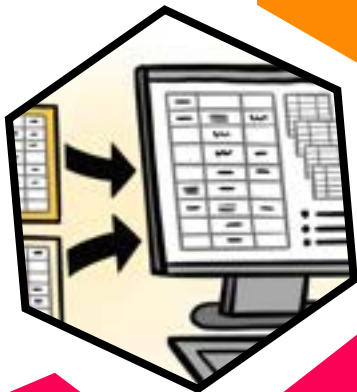
16th October 2025

Autumn Tech Leaders

116 Pall Mall London



Technology



THE HIVE: Technology Sub-Hive Mid-Year Report



*Omnia pro
Colloquio*

**SUMMER
TERM 2025**

General Comments:

The Technology Sub-Hive has made solid progress this year, showing plenty of curiosity and a good attitude towards the evolving tech landscape. You're definitely the 'tech whizzes' of the Hive — always eager to explore the latest gadgets and trends, and resisting being distracted by the shiny new "AI toy" on the playground. The challenge now is to channel that enthusiasm into cross-functional collaboration, so your innovations don't just dazzle, but actually score top marks in business impact.

Remember, the best teams aren't just about the smartest kids in the class — they're the ones who know how to work together, passing notes (or data) the right way, and sharing the homework load.

What They've Learned So Far:

- AI is not a silver bullet — most are comfortably operating with using AI to assist agents or enhance tooling, while more complex AI builds remain a few years away.
- The biggest challenge with AI today isn't tech but managing data privacy and organisational buy-in—especially convincing boards that AI initiatives are commercially worthwhile.
- They're beginning to see AI's operational benefits, like automating routine workflows and smarter pricing strategies, but appreciate AI struggles with messy data and complex business realities.
- Agile project management is embraced, but its success hinges on broad organisational understanding and cultural adaptation, not just in IT teams.
- Building strong audit trails and documentation remains essential to maintain project continuity amidst team changes.
- Strategic pauses in projects aren't failures but prudent choices when stakeholder alignment is lacking.
- Cross-cultural awareness plays a big role in how tech projects roll out successfully in different markets.

SUBJECT	GRADE	Teachers Comments
Project Management & Delivery	A	Confident and pragmatic, though could sharpen focus on stakeholder alignment and scope control.
Stakeholder Communication	B	Improving at demystifying tech for wider audiences. More consistent engagement with non-tech teams needed.
AI Adoption & Strategy	B-	Cautious and considered use of AI. Good awareness of hype vs reality. Boardroom advocacy still developing.
Cross-Functional Collaboration	B	Emerging strength here. Deeper cooperation will boost project impact and help manage expectations.
Agile Methodology Adoption	B-	Agile champions in the making. Need to broaden understanding beyond core tech teams for full effect.
Documentation & Knowledge Sharing	A	Thorough and valued, embedding this as standard will safeguard continuity.
Risk and Project Management	B	Recognises the value of strategic pauses; stronger communication of rationale will aid buy-in.

What's Top of Mind for Tech Leaders?

Areas of interest

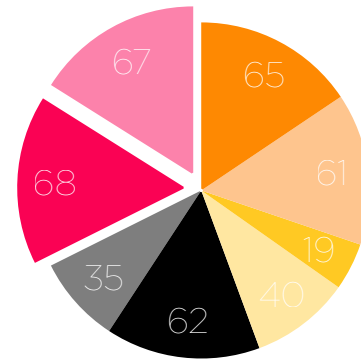
Retail tech priorities are sharpening. AI, transformation, and analytics tools are clearly in focus — with more than two-thirds of leaders backing investment in modernisation and transformation, and over 60% prioritising AI and business intelligence. The direction of travel is clear: tools that support better, faster decision-making are taking precedence.

This isn't about chasing shiny new tools — it's about making smarter moves, faster. The combination of AI, planning software, and analytics suggests a growing commitment to more intelligent, responsive trading. Retailers are investing in the systems that will help them cut through complexity, surface meaningful insights, and act with confidence.

External expertise is playing a role too. Over 60% flagged consultants as a key area of investment, pointing to a recognition that the right advice can accelerate impact. Meanwhile, interest in composable tech reflects a desire for flexibility — platforms and services that can scale and slot together as needs evolve.

Planning and forecasting tools are also getting attention, showing that control and clarity still matter. In a tight market, knowing what's happening and why is just as valuable as reacting to it.

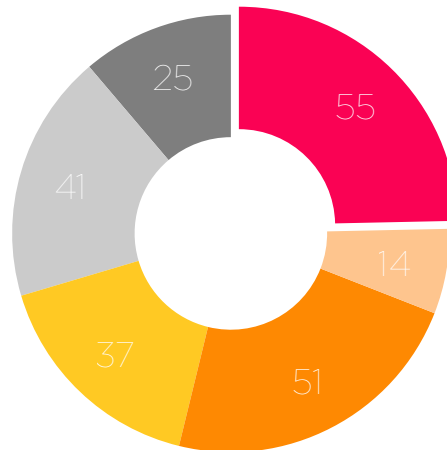
In short, investment is flowing toward technologies that make decisions easier, not harder — helping teams get clearer, move quicker, and build the kind of connected systems that drive real results.



Technology

- 65** AI
- 61** Business Intelligence / Analytics Tools
- 19** Cloud Infrastructure and Services
- 40** Composable Tech
- 62** Consultants
- 35** Planning, Budgeting, Forecasting
- 68** Tech Modernisation / Transformation
- 67** Tech Transformation

Data and Data Driven Decisions



- 55** AI Innovations
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The Hive Trends in Focus

Retailers are continuing to invest where they see clear returns: better decision-making, improved customer experiences, and future-ready infrastructure. Data remains at the core — with many businesses weighing up how to unlock a single customer view. Whether through building a bespoke Customer Data Platform (CDP) or adopting an off-the-shelf solution, the goal is the same: make insight actionable and improve personalisation at scale.

As ecommerce teams move away from legacy platforms, modern systems are being prioritised not just for efficiency, but for the ability to support omnichannel experiences and unlock value across operations. But the shift isn't just about upgrading — it's also about **unbundling**. Composable architecture is gaining traction, allowing teams to scale specific capabilities without ripping out entire systems. The appeal lies in flexibility, speed of change, and the ability to respond to evolving customer needs.

What are the main challenges in implementing composable architecture?

Ranking = 1	Lack of internal expertise
Ranking = 1	Integration challenges with legacy systems
Ranking 2	Uncertainty around ROI
Ranking = 3	High initial costs
Ranking = 3	Difficulty in managing multiple vendors

Main barriers:

Ranking 1	Budget Constraints
Ranking 2	Reliance on legacy systems
Ranking 3	Skills gap

There are still barriers. Budget limitations, legacy system constraints, and internal skills gaps all rank highly. Integration challenges and uncertainty around ROI continue to hold some businesses back from fully embracing composable models.

The thread running through all of this is control — over data, systems, and the customer journey. Tech investments are being judged not by novelty, but by how clearly they help teams act faster, plan better, and build for change.

The Word From the Hive



When I consider what separates the great projects from the good ones, those which transform not just what the business does, but how it thinks, one consistent theme stands out. And it's not the complexity or technical elegance of the solutions, rather how we aligned on the needs and interpreted the outputs from the start, exploring the problem and engineering the solution with the business, for the business."

Robert Bates
Head of Decision Sciences,
Currys



Quotes and
comments
from Jam

"The challenge is less about technology and more about aligning the business around it. Deciding between centralisation and decentralisation is difficult, and it's all about communicating effectively across the organisation. You need clear buy-in, a well-understood budget, and the ability to deliver quickly to sustain momentum."

Simon Pakenham-Walsh
CIO,
River Island



"There are four broad levels in how teams are engaging with AI. Level 1 is agents and chat - using tools like ChatGPT to do the jobs we already do, just faster. Level 2 is where it starts to shape our tooling - figuring out where AI slots into what we already use. Level 3 is where the deep tech starts: fine-tuning large language models with extra data. Level 4 is building your own. We're very much in levels 1 and 2 for now. Honestly, rolling out ChatGPT was about embracing what people were already doing and adding a layer of control. As for level 2, a lot of it just feels like a regular system upgrade - useful, but not revolutionary yet."

Director of Technology and Portfolio,
Fast Growth Brand



From Buzz to Action



Pilot AI in a Low-Risk Use Case. Start small with AI. Use it to support a specific decision — like product recommendations or stock forecasting — where success is measurable. A fast, tangible win will help build internal confidence and unlock further investment.



Build a Business Case for Composable Tech. If composable architecture is on your radar, quantify its potential by mapping current vendor limitations and flexibility needs. Identify one workflow where modular tech could reduce cost or boost speed — then test and scale from there.



Run a CDP Readiness Assessment. Before choosing a CDP solution (custom or off-the-shelf), audit your internal data landscape, team skills, and existing martech stack. Map your current gaps — especially around integration and governance — to avoid expensive false starts.

Read

Talk

Meet



Digital Cafe

9th October 2025

Getting buy-in to tech investments

In Person Meeting

16th October 2025

Autumn Tech Leaders

116 Pall Mall London



In Person Meeting

March 2026

Spring Tech Leaders

London



Customer Experience



THE HIVE: Customer Experience (CX) Sub-Hive Mid-Year Report



Omnia pro Colloquio

SUMMER TERM 2025

General Comments:

The CX Sub-Hive continues to be a thoughtful, emotionally literate bunch—more likely than most to remember there are real people at the end of all this digital cleverness. Group discussions are often grounded, sincere, and full of practical wisdom (and occasionally a heartfelt sigh about tools that don't talk to each other).

They've shown excellent effort in grasping the shifting role of AI, especially in service environments—and are refreshingly honest about its limits. Still, some hesitation remains about going "all in" on tech, which may hold them back slightly as things scale.

Would benefit from a confidence boost around experimentation and sharing results beyond their own teams—there's more good practice here than they give themselves credit for.

What They've Learned So Far:

- That AI isn't here to replace humans, but it can be very handy for the boring bits (ticket summaries, simple queries, finding things fast).
- That trust is built through small, human acts, whether that's a named bot, a real agent at the right moment, or free bread given to a charity at closing time.
- That the best CX doesn't always come from HQ—it's what local teams are empowered to do day after day.
- That data is only useful if it's clean, joined up, and used to actually fix things.
- That community engagement doesn't start with PR. It starts with conversations, legwork, and a willingness to stay after hours with the Samaritans.

SUBJECT	GRADE	Teachers Comments
Customer Journey Design	B+	Thoughtful work and a clear grasp of emotional beats. Could add more rigour in closing the loop post-interaction.
Tech Integration in CX	C+	Still a little cautious. Lots of pilot projects, not always followed through. Needs a nudge to go beyond "AI-curious".
Data & Insight Application	B	Knows what good looks like but occasionally overwhelmed by complexity. Promising work on root cause analysis.
Community & Human Engagement	A	A natural strength. Clear sense of purpose and brilliant examples of real-world connection. Inspiring.
CX Measurement & Feedback Loops	C	Progressing slowly. Sometimes struggles to connect insight to tangible change. Would benefit from stronger feedback-to-action frameworks.
Channel Strategy & Support Design	B	Solid across the board. Strong instinct for customer needs, though still ironing out multi-channel consistency.
Cross-Functional Collaboration	A	Plays well with others. A good balance of vision and humility—often the ones asking the right, difficult questions.

What's Top of Mind for CX?

Areas of interest

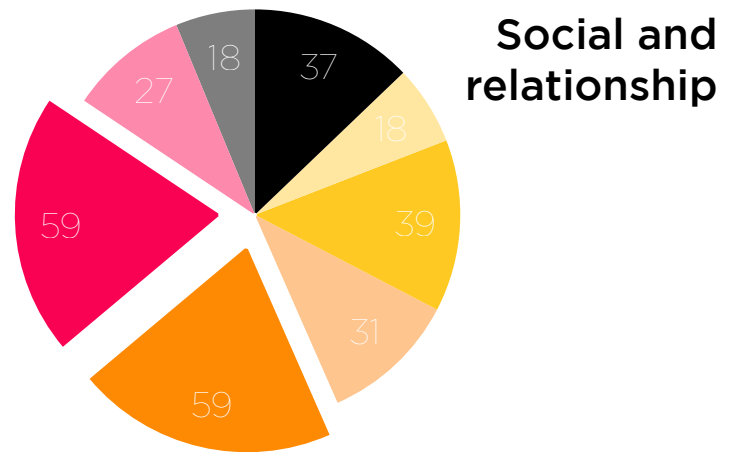
Retail customer experience leaders are increasingly focused on building trust, loyalty, and long-term value through smarter service and deeper insight. While flashy technologies often grab headlines, what's rising to the top of the CX agenda is the less glamorous but more foundational work: ensuring customers feel supported, understood, and connected.

Customer service and experience operations are taking centre stage. Teams are investing in tools and processes that not only resolve issues but foster advocacy and strengthen emotional loyalty—whether through proactive service models, personalised outreach, or well-managed community engagement. The emphasis on relationship-building signals a shift from transactional interactions to more meaningful, sustained engagement.

At the same time, data is becoming the lifeblood of customer strategy. From AI innovations to customer intelligence and data science, there's a strong drive to better understand shopper behaviour and use those insights to inform product, service, and communication decisions. That's being underpinned by growing awareness of data privacy, governance, and ethical use—crucial in an era of growing consumer scrutiny.

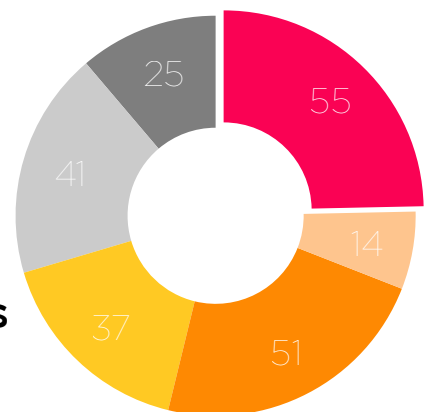
Interestingly, while emerging technologies like GenAI are generating buzz, their practical implementation in service channels remains limited. This suggests retailers are still laying the groundwork: aligning teams, cleaning data, and refining the tech stack before diving into next-gen automation.

For CX leaders, the priorities are clear: deliver value through experience, not gimmicks; build trust through relevance and reliability; and create a data foundation that turns insight into meaningful action.



- 37** Advocacy loyalty and referrals
- 18** Call analytics and management
- 39** Community & Reviews
- 31** CRM
- 59** Customer Experience Service & Success
- 59** Influencers
- 27** Live chat & Chatbots
- 18** Social Media marketing and monitoring

Data and Data Driven Decisions



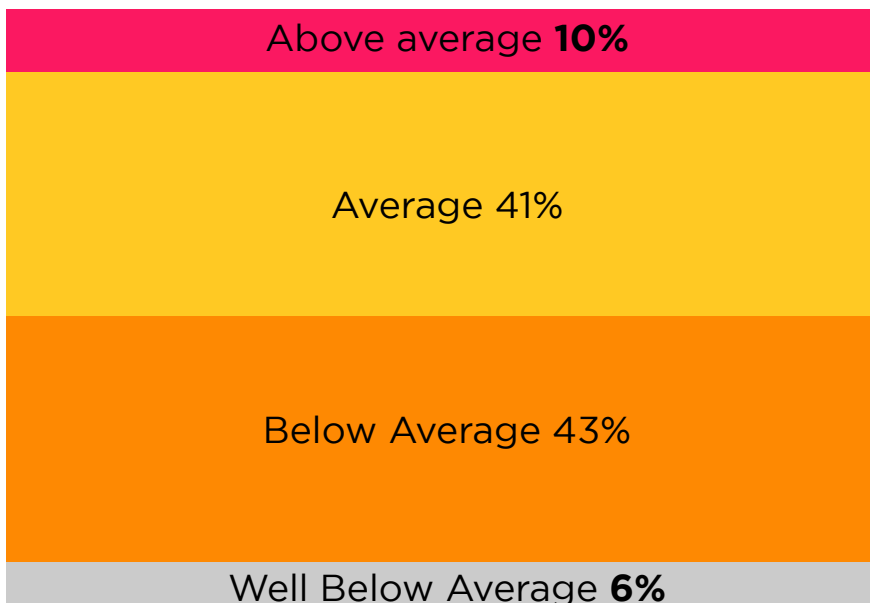
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The Hive Trends in Focus

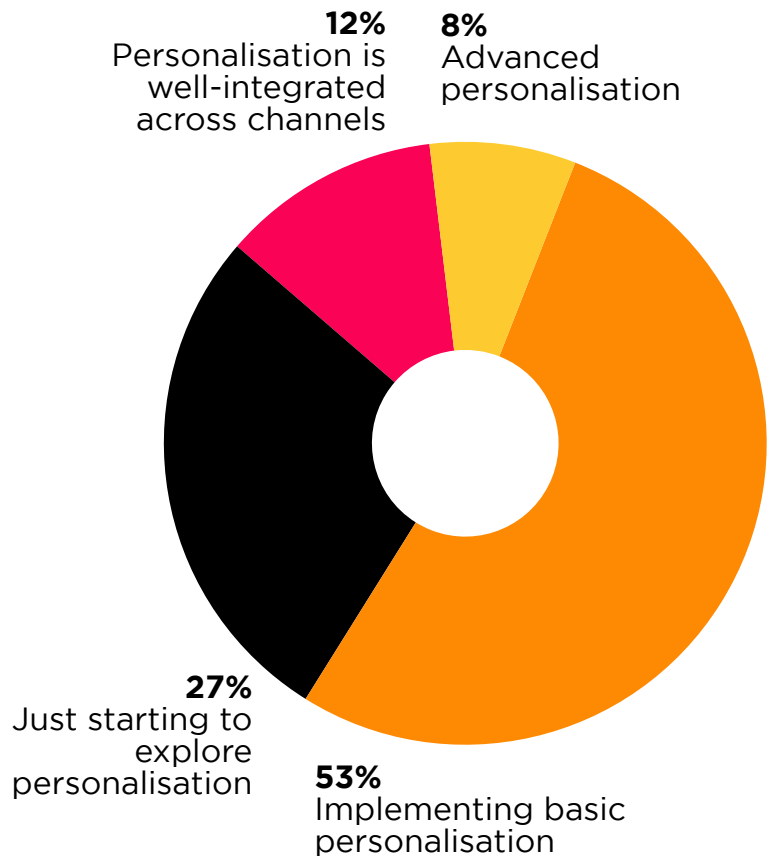
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As ecommerce teams move away from legacy platforms, modern systems are being prioritised not just for efficiency, but for the ability to support omnichannel experiences and unlock value across operations. But the shift isn't just about upgrading — it's also about **unbundling**. Composable architecture is gaining traction, allowing teams to scale specific capabilities without ripping out entire systems. The appeal lies in flexibility, speed of change, and the ability to respond to evolving customer needs.

If you had to score your current personalisation against the 'Industry Standard'. Would you say you are:



At what stage is your organisation in terms of personalisation efforts?



There are still barriers. Budget limitations, legacy system constraints, and internal skills gaps all rank highly. Integration challenges and uncertainty around ROI continue to hold some businesses back from fully embracing composable models.

The thread running through all of this is control — over data, systems, and the customer journey. Tech investments are being judged not by novelty, but by how clearly they help teams act faster, plan better, and build for change.

The Word From the Hive



"We've dipped our toes into things like quizzes and video chats, and they work—great engagement and high conversion rates. The next step is figuring out how AI can take this further, answering specific questions and offering tailored recommendations seamlessly."

Claire Russell
Digital Director EMEA,
Bugaboo



**Quotes and
comments
from Jam**

"We've begun folding in customer intelligence from social — spotlighting what's trending on Instagram and showing how many units sold in the past few days. It's less about tailoring a page to a single visitor and more about giving shoppers a sense that they're part of a wider community."

Head of Digital Product Development,
Major UK Retailer



"We're moving toward intent-led personalisation, ensuring the customer journey feels seamless whether it's online or offline. It's not just about showing products—it's about surfacing content or solutions that match their intent, like recognising when someone is shopping for a gift rather than themselves."

Martin Bell
Digital Director,
Hotel Chocolat



From Buzz to Action



Rethink service as a relationship builder, not just a problem solver.

Shift your CX model toward proactive, emotionally intelligent service that earns trust and loyalty—think outreach, not just resolution.



Turn customer data into decisions, not dashboards.

Build a clear feedback loop between insights and action across product, marketing and service—focus on small, high-impact wins to prove value fast.



Lay the groundwork before chasing GenAI.

Clean your data, align your teams, and fix your stack. Next-gen tech won't work without rock-solid foundations and shared goals.

Read

Talk

Meet



Digital Cafe

6th November 2025

Let's be real:
Organic, authentic
social

In Person Meeting

30th September- 1st
October 2025

The Retail Hive
Exchange

Four Seasons
Hampshire



Digital Marketing



THE HIVE: Digital Marketing Sub-Hive Mid-Year Report



Omnia pro Colloquio

SUMMER TERM 2025

General Comments:

The Digital Marketing Sub-Hive has shown admirable enthusiasm this year, with particularly strong participation during group discussion time (even if a few voices do tend to dominate). There is a clear appetite for improvement and experimentation, and a willingness to admit when things are still a bit "in progress"—which, frankly, they usually are in digital.

There's been some excellent peer-to-peer learning and a growing confidence in tackling the messier parts of marketing life (like attribution, personalisation, and anything involving acronyms). However, a tendency to over-promise what tech can do versus the reality of team capacity remains something to watch.

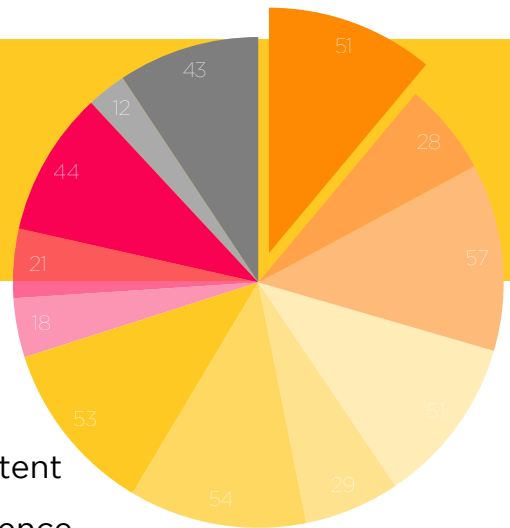
I would encourage the Sub-Hive to continue supporting each other, keep testing ideas in low-risk environments, and maybe, just maybe, commit to finishing a few of those ongoing optimisation projects before starting three more.

What They've Learned So Far:

- That personalisation sounds sexy in strategy decks but is deeply fiddly when only 8% of users are logged in.
- That SMS, when done well, is not dead—just misunderstood (and a bit expensive).
- That not everything needs a data clean room and AI—sometimes a homepage remembering what someone clicked last week is magic enough.
- That in-store teams are still better at gathering useful customer insights than half of the digital stack.
- That everyone, everywhere, is secretly still wrestling with cookie banners, broken attribution, and whether Pinterest is worth it.

SUBJECT	GRADE	Teachers Comments
Personalisation & Data Use	B-	Some lovely effort but must try harder to clean up data and win customer trust. Still learning the difference between correlation and causation.
Channel Mix & Targeting	B	Getting braver—Pinterest and SMS making surprise comebacks. Still spending most of their pocket money on Google.
Experimentation & Testing	B+	Shows curiosity and some use of AB testing. Needs to remember it's not enough to test—one must also act on results.
Customer Journey Thinking	B-	A bit muddled in places. Often starts strong on journey mapping but gets distracted by shiny martech.
Content & Creative Strategy	A-	Thoughtful and emotionally intelligent. Increasing use of social proof, lifestyle-led content, and smart nudges. Keep going.
Measurement & ROI Clarity	C	A persistent blind spot. Must stop handing in homework with "it depends" in the margin. See me after class.
Collaborative Spirit	A	A delight to teach. Generous with insights, self-aware, and genuinely supportive of peers. Top of the class for attitude.

What's Top of Mind for Digital Marketing?



Areas of interest

Digital marketing leaders are sharpening their focus on performance, relevance, and return. While brand-building still has a role to play, investment is increasingly skewed toward the channels that drive measurable results—especially in a climate where budgets are being watched more closely than ever.

The data tells the story clearly: search and social advertising dominates, with nearly 60% of respondents prioritising it—highlighting its enduring power to convert and scale. Video advertising is also rising, reflecting its role in storytelling and engagement, while native/content advertising continues to prove its worth in building trust and educating audiences. Traditional channels like print and PR trail behind, with many marketers now reserving them for niche audiences or brand moments.

Interestingly, while display, programmatic, and mobile marketing still attract steady investment, they're no longer seen as standout performers—perhaps a sign of fatigue or fragmentation in those spaces. Marketers are becoming more selective, more strategic, and more outcome-driven across the board.

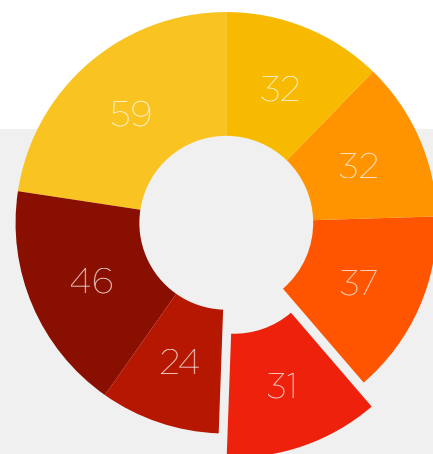
With that shift comes a growing emphasis on integration: ensuring campaigns don't just run across multiple platforms, but actually work together to build momentum. The goal now is to deliver visibility, value, and emotional connection—without losing sight of the spreadsheet.

Content and experience

- 51** AI Generated Content
- 28** CMS/Web Experience
- 57** Content Marketing
- 43** SEO
- 51** Email Marketing
- 29** Interactive Content
- 54** Marketing Analytics Performance & Attribution
- 53** Marketing Automation/Campaign Lead Management
- 18** Marketing Resource Management
- 21** Mobile and Web Analytics
- 12** Mobile Apps
- 44** Optimisation, Personalisation & Testing

Advertising and promotion

- 31** PR
- 24** Print
- 46** Video Advertising
- 59** Search & Social Advertising/Marketing
- 32** Display & Programmatic
- 32** Mobile Marketing
- 37** Native/Content Advertising



The Hive Trends in Focus

What are the key objectives for your department?



Marketing

Customer Experience
Optimisation

Customer Retention
& Loyalty

New Business
Acquisition

Innovation
& Agility

ROI
(Return on Investment)

We asked marketing leaders what their priorities were and they told us that Customer Experience was their Number One, particularly when it came to looking at how technology could help them.

Marketing teams, are driven by the business demands to be focused on the short- to mid-term levers of growth: customer retention, brand engagement, and new business acquisition - drivers which can bring them into conflict with Tech, who tend to zoom out and focus more on the bigger picture in terms of martech stack.

UGC

UGC is cementing its place as a game-changer for brands aiming to build trust, deepen engagement, and drive sales in 2025's competitive market. It's no longer just about cutting content creation costs—it's about empowering your customers to tell your story authentically. For brands grappling with resource constraints, UGC offers a smart, scalable solution, particularly in nurturing customers through the consideration stage. By tapping into genuine, relatable content from real people, brands can seamlessly bridge the gap between awareness and conversion. However, the focus isn't on creating more content—it's on crafting the right content, precisely tailored to meet your audience's evolving needs.

Know Your Audience:

Spend time understanding what they need. Align your UGC strategy to address specific pain points.

AI Integration:

Use AI to ensure UGC aligns with your brand's tone, voice, and purpose without compromising quality or speed.

Test, Test, Test:

Content that worked before may not work now —continuous testing is key to staying relevant.

The Word From the Hive



“The key has been leaning into personality and fun, without losing focus on quality or business goals. We’ve proven there’s space for joy and storytelling in food categories people don’t usually think about. And if you can surprise people and make them smile - even better.”

Udhi Silva
Co-founder,
Snaffling Pig



**Quotes and
comments
from Jam**

“Working across multiple tools, platforms, and disconnected systems was a real challenge. By shifting to an integrated tool, with unified data, we transformed the way we work, the efforts needed, and the results we got. In retail, speed is everything — we can now execute at scale, deliver quickly, and consistently hit our KPIs.”

Beth Goulburn
Head of Email Marketing,
The Very Group



“You have to get your basics right. Brand fit is so important: know who you are and what you stand for as a brand and pick the influencers who represent that.

Do you know your influencer’s audience: gender split, age ranges, locations and other key data? Having millions of followers doesn’t mean a thing if they don’t reach the markets relevant to you. Look at what other brands they’ve worked with and whether they have a similar brand proposition. Most importantly, be clear on expectations from the offset.”

Josie Soei
Head of Marketing & Communications,
Deichmann



From Buzz to Action



Double down on proven performance channels. Search and social remain the powerhouse so prioritise investment in these channels to drive scale and conversion, while using video and content to deepen engagement.



Make outcomes your north star. Cut through the noise by focusing on what delivers. Track ROI rigorously, retire underperformers and stay strategic about where and how you show up.



Shift from multichannel to truly integrated campaigns. Stop treating platforms in isolation. Design campaigns that build narrative and momentum across touchpoints, reinforcing message and value at every stage of the journey.

Read

Talk

Meet



Digital Cafe

6th November 2025

Let's be real:
Organic, authentic
social

In Person Meeting

30th September- 1st
October 2025

The Retail Hive
Exchange

Four Seasons
Hampshire



Supply Chain Leaders



THE HIVE: Supply Chain Sub-Hive Mid-Year Report



*Omnia pro
Colloquio*

General Comments:

The Supply Chain Sub-Hive continues to be the sensible shoes of the Hive community — quietly dependable, rarely flashy, but absolutely essential. This year's cohort has faced a particularly chaotic timetable, with pop tests cropping up with little warning.

Despite this, they've stayed impressively calm under pressure — though there are signs of fatigue setting in, especially when demand planning now feels more like fortune-telling with a blindfold on. Still, resilience is strong, collaboration is increasing, and there's a growing willingness to speak up when the rest of the class forgets how much strain the logistics team is under.

There's also growing interest in automation and AI — not as shiny toys, but as tools that might actually help if applied thoughtfully (and not just handed over to the intern to "sort something out in ChatGPT").

The Sub-Hive continues to ask big questions about sustainability, returns, and cross-border growth — even when the answers are messy, expensive, or make them deeply unpopular in leadership meetings. Gold stars for bravery.

SUMMER TERM 2025

What They've Learned So Far:

- That "accurate demand planning" is increasingly a fantasy genre — especially when no one knows what's happening with shipping lanes or TikTok trends.
- That resilience isn't about never breaking — it's about having backup suppliers, plans B through E, and the phone number of someone who knows someone in customs.
- That growing cross-border comes with hidden costs — not just tariffs, but teams spending all day filling out forms that make little sense to anyone.
- That 3PLs can make or break you — and picking the cheapest is often the most expensive mistake.
- That taking responsibility for sustainability when no one else is stepping up is frustrating, thankless, and still the right thing to do.
- That returns aren't going away, and no one's found a magic fix. But some are starting to ask smarter questions about why people return — and design better upstream to reduce the pain.
- That automation isn't a silver bullet — but used well, it can reduce friction, speed things up, and take some of the grunt work off very tired human hands.

SUBJECT	GRADE	Teachers Comments
Demand Planning & Forecasting	B	Doing their best in impossible conditions. A few shining stars using clever tools and tighter cross-functional links — but generally still one supply delay away from a breakdown.
Resilience & Risk Management	A	Quietly impressive. Backups in place, better internal visibility, and cool heads. Needs more board-level support to really shine.
Cross-Border Operations	B	Navigating murky waters. Understanding of regulatory issues and local friction points growing — but tariffs and unpredictability remain a drag.
Sustainability Strategy	B-	Deep thinkers, big hearts. Often taking the lead when others stay quiet. Needs stronger internal alignment and practical targets to move faster.
Returns Management	C+	Knows it's a problem. Hasn't quite figured out whether it's an ops issue, a product issue, or a customer mindset issue. Possibly all three.
3PL/Vendor Selection	B	Starting to think more strategically — not just "who can ship it fastest" but "who will actually help us grow." Early signs of progress here.
Automation & AI Use	B-	Some clever pilots and promising use cases — but often lacks the time or skills to scale. Needs more realistic expectations from above.
Collaborative Spirit	A	Always shows up. Listens well, shares real-life pain points, and helps connect dots for peers across CX, tech and ops. An underrated MVP.

What's Top of Mind for Supply Chain Leaders?

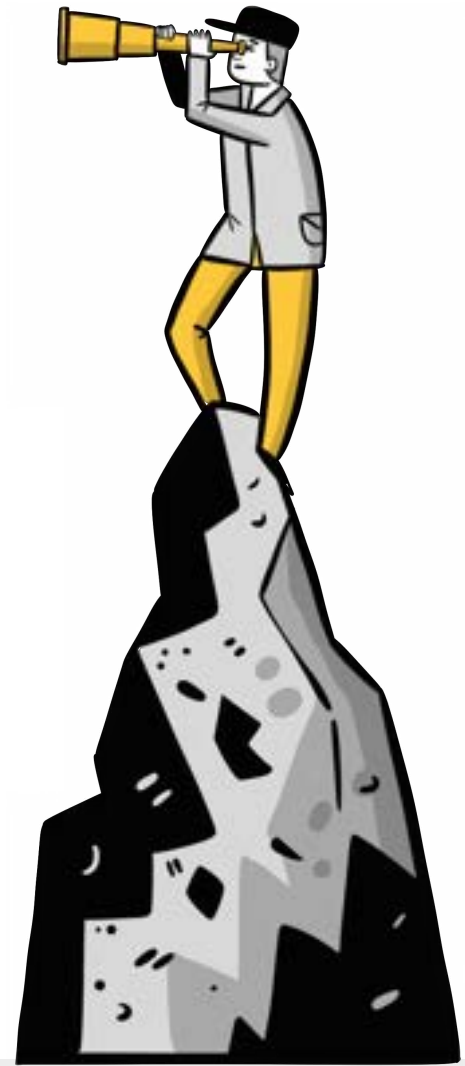
Supply chain leaders are navigating a perfect storm of disruption, expansion, and rising expectations. While resilience remains essential, the focus is shifting toward smarter systems, better data, and more strategic vendor choices.

When it comes to demand planning, integrated supply chain management systems are the top investment priority—beating standalone forecasting tools and analytics platforms. This reflects a move toward end-to-end visibility and coordinated decision-making, rather than more siloed solutions. There's also growing interest in collaborative planning and real-time sensing, as leaders look for ways to become more responsive in unpredictable conditions.

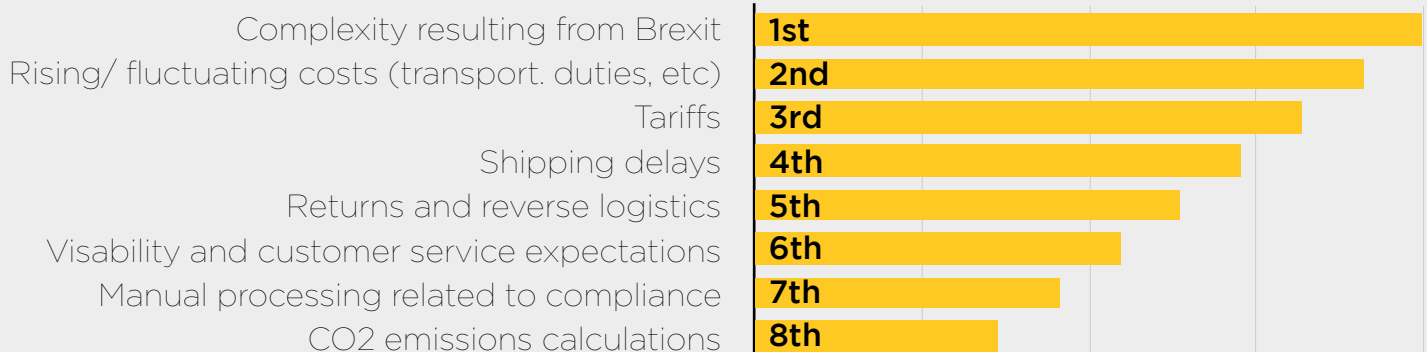
Cross-border complexity is a persistent challenge. Brexit, tariffs, and fluctuating transport costs continue to dominate concerns, but leaders are equally frustrated by compliance admin, shipping delays, and reverse logistics. Growth across borders remains a priority—but it's becoming harder to do well.

Sustainability efforts are progressing, often without much external incentive. Many supply chain teams are leading the charge—rethinking returns, choosing greener 3PLs, and building for the long term. AI and automation are gaining traction too, though most teams are still focused on getting the basics right before scaling up.

The priority now is clear: build supply chains that are not just faster, but smarter, fairer, and more adaptable.



When thinking about cross border operations, what is your biggest current challenge



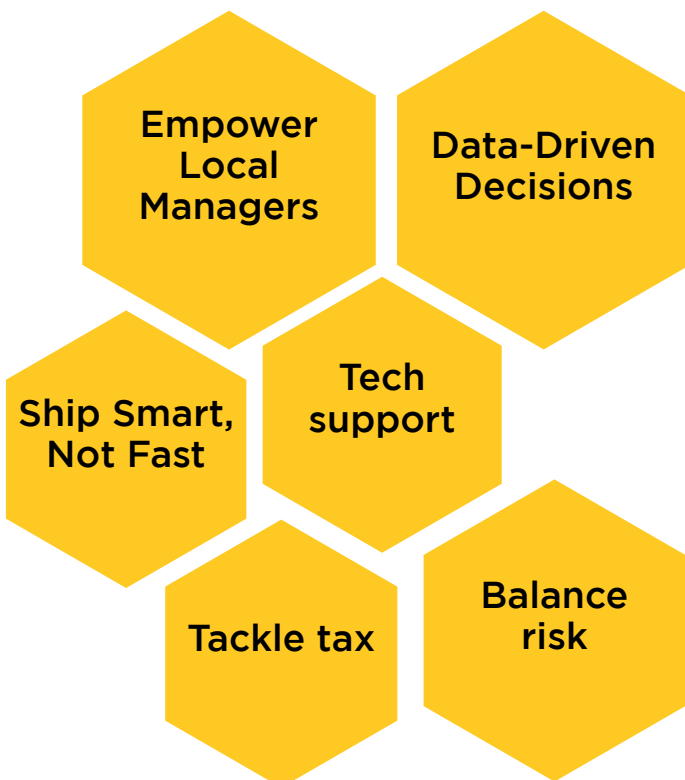
The Hive Trends in Focus

Retail supply chain leaders are facing a landscape that's anything but steady. Sustainability is now firmly on the agenda — not just as a values piece, but as a performance question. The challenge isn't just about choosing the right initiatives, it's about making them work commercially, and avoiding the reputational sting of greenwashing in the process.

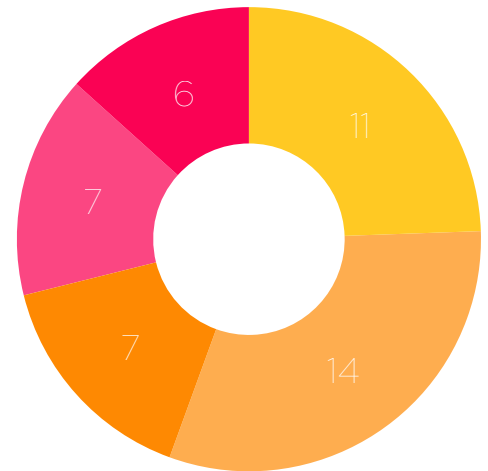
Alongside that, data is becoming the real differentiator. Demand planning is getting sharper thanks to AI and advanced analytics, with smarter forecasting helping teams make better calls in real time — especially as shopper habits shift and markets become more unpredictable.

Automation continues to be a powerful lever, but no one's rushing in blindly. While robotics and tech investment in warehousing and logistics can drive efficiency, most teams are staying pragmatic, focusing on the areas where automation actually moves the needle.

Cross border implementation tips



Which type of demand planning solutions are you most likely to invest in?



- 11** Standalone demand forecasting software
- 14** Integrated supply chain management systems
- 7** Data analytics and BI tools
- 7** Collaborative planning platforms
- 6** Real-time demand sensing and predictive analytics

Brexit may have fallen off the front pages, but it's just one of many cross border challenges now. Tariffs, shipping challenges, customs complexity and longer lead times continue to create headaches. Many retailers are rethinking their logistics footprints and exploring new routes to stay agile.

What cuts across all of this is a renewed focus on supply chain as a strategic function. The goal isn't just to keep things moving — it's to build a supply chain that's faster, cleaner, and more resilient, with demand data and operational insight driving smarter decisions at every stage.

The Word From the Hive



"Last year, I created a "gut-feel" demand plan based on current sales trends and achieved over 95% forecast accuracy. Sometimes the data can overcomplicate things, and gut instincts play a crucial role.

AI and machine learning provide powerful tools for demand planning, but they are not a substitute for human expertise. Combining the strengths of technology with the insights of experienced planners allows us to create forecasts that are both accurate and actionable."

Nesh Patel
Head of Process Innovation and Reporting,
Sky



**Quotes and
comments
from Jam**



"Designing products for circularity (with less/alternative materials, in a modular way, for durability etc) is a key step to enable services such as repairs. Customers want repairs to be fast and easy and we want high satisfaction. We're also testing resale: At Screwfix, our refurbished product range has sold over 100,000 units. Demand isn't the problem - supply is.

We focus on being agile and testing and learning - last year, we ran a design thinking workshop across departments - I was nervous, but it was phenomenal. That kind of cross-functional creativity unlocked new ideas, and we've now got two or three projects running because of it."

Dorothee D'Herde
Director of Responsible Business,
Kingfisher



"Trust the locals! They'll know a lot more about the intricacies and up and downs of their markets than you do. You know your business, so focus on that and don't try to second guess a new market. Listen, go in open minded and hire great local talent along the way"

Lucie Parry
Head of Operations,
EMEA, TravisMathew

From Buzz to Action



Invest in end-to-end visibility. Prioritise integrated supply chain systems that connect forecasting, inventory and fulfilment, enabling coordinated decisions and faster responses across the chain.



Build adaptability into cross-border operations. Plan for ongoing disruption by simplifying compliance, diversifying logistics partners, and stress-testing reverse logistics (especially when scaling internationally.)

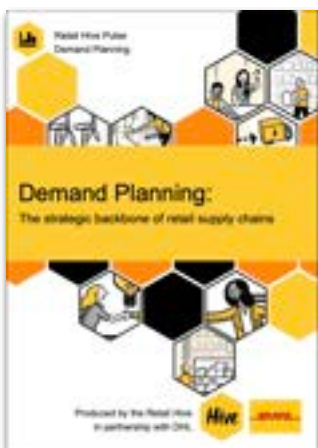


Lead on sustainability by design. Don't wait for regulation. Embed greener practices now, from low-impact carriers to circular returns models, and prepare your data for when sustainability becomes a business imperative.

Read

Talk

Meet



Digital Cafe's
Check out our
schedule!

**In Person Event 18th
September 2025**
Focus on Fulfilment
Knebworth House
& Barns

**In Person Meeting
13th-15th May 2026**
Supply Chain Leaders



Retail Hive Pulse



www.thehive-network.com



www.linkedin.com/company/the-retail-hive/



www.instagram.com/theretailhive/



lorna@thehive-network.com



About The Retail Hive

The Retail Hive brings senior retailers together to soundboard, ask questions, benchmark and collaborate as a collective. They do this by providing safe, co-owned and curated environments for retailers and partners to build meaningful relationships, give one another value, identify solutions, and promote best practice.

