Two thirds of UK retailers only react to problems after they’ve hit commercial performance

Survey of retail leaders finds despite widespread AI adoption, almost half (47%) are still waiting to see measurable business value

UiPath logo

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, July 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- More than two thirds (69%) of UK retailers only react to operational issues after those issues have already affected commercial performance, highlighting an industry pattern of making decisions based on hindsight rather than real-time insight. That’s according to new research from UiPath ahead of this year's Golden Quarter.

The survey of 500 UK retail leaders also found that although almost every UK retailer (97%) has now implemented artificial intelligence in some form, nearly half (47%) say they are still waiting to see measurable commercial impact.

The findings suggest that AI investment alone has not solved retailers' biggest operational challenge: turning data into decisions quickly enough to influence commercial outcomes. Despite widespread adoption, many organisations still lack the visibility, connected processes and orchestration needed to act before problems affect revenue, which is a particular concern in the lead up to the Black Friday and Christmas period.

Retailers are still operating with hindsight

Almost all (97%) say they are confident of achieving their commercial targets during the 2026 Golden Quarter. However, beneath that confidence, operational challenges remain widespread, as retailers continue to face the operational barriers that prevent them from coordinating decisions across teams and systems in real time. Delayed decision-making (43%) and poor data visibility (42%) are the two biggest barriers limiting agility during peak trading, while inventory inaccuracies (35%) and legacy technology (35%) continue to slow organisations down.

The commercial risks of delayed decision-making are clear. More than a quarter (26%) identify margin protection as their biggest commercial risk during the Golden Quarter, ahead of pricing and promotion strategy (21%) and inventory visibility (20%). Combined, almost half (46%) say either protecting margins or pricing and promotions represent their greatest commercial challenge.

The real problem isn't external disruption

Retailers often focus on external market conditions, yet the survey suggests the biggest risks originate inside their own operations. When asked what is most likely to cause underperformance during peak trading, stock visibility failures (40%) ranked highest, narrowly ahead of operational bottlenecks (39%).

The research also found that retailers remain heavily dependent on people rather than automation during their busiest trading periods. Nearly eight in ten (79%) say that most, almost all or all key operational decisions still require manual intervention. This reliance on manual processes reflects a wider pattern of reactive decision-making, which is already affecting commercial performance.

Catherine Frame, Retail Director at UiPath, said: “Retailers don't have an AI problem, they have a decision-making problem. Too many organisations still discover issues after they've already affected sales because critical data, systems and teams remain disconnected. AI only delivers value when it helps retailers spot problems early enough to change the outcome.

“With Black Friday and the Golden Quarter fast approaching, the retailers that perform best will be the ones with the visibility to spot issues early, the confidence to act quickly, and the orchestration to quickly turn insight into action across pricing, inventory and operations. Too often, businesses blame supply chain disruption when the real problem is that they’re making decisions with incomplete or outdated information. AI-powered decision-making can make the difference between reacting to disruption and staying ahead of it.”

Looking ahead, retailers believe competitive advantage will increasingly come from operational excellence rather than simply expanding AI adoption. End-to-end orchestration (37%) was identified as the defining characteristic of future peak trading success, followed by faster execution (35%) and AI-driven decision-making (33%).

Download the report here.

END

About UiPath

UiPath (NYSE: PATH) is a leader in business orchestration and automation, trusted by organizations worldwide to transform enterprise complexity into intelligent, secure operations where AI agents reason, robots act, and people lead. Built for the modern enterprise and the world's most regulated industries, UiPath integrates automation, orchestration, AI, and testing into governed, scalable workflows—unlocking innovation at the speed of business while delivering the controls and compliance enterprise leaders demand. Visit www.uipath.com for more information.

Leah Jones
CommsCo
+ +44 7876117760
email us here
