BUSINESS NEWS LESSONS

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Meet Your New Personal Shopper: Your AI Chatbot

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions. Give details.

- What factors most strongly influence your decision on which online platform or physical shop to get a product from?

- Which do you consider more reliable — search engines or responses generated by an AI chatbot?

- To what extent would you feel comfortable giving an AI system the ability to buy you products independently of your control?

2 Reading for gist

a. Read the article quickly and choose the statement that best summarises the main idea.

1. AI technology is deciding how search engines present and prioritise shopping results.

2. AI-driven chatbots are creating products based on information from consumer purchasing behaviour.

3. The growing integration of AI is transforming both the buying habits of consumers and sales strategies of corporations.

3 Key words

a. Read the definitions and find the key words in the article that match them. The section number is given in brackets to help you. Check your answers and understanding of the words by using them to complete the example sentences immediately after each definition. You may have to change the form of the words. Then read the complete article to see how the key words are used in context.

1. a type of artificial intelligence that can create new things, like text (Paragraph 1)

   _____

   The store uses _____ to create realistic product images.

2. completely changing something in a very big or important way (Paragraph 1)

   _____

   Companies predicted that mobile payments would _____ how we shop on the internet.

3. to compare different choices before making a decision (Paragraph 2)

    _____

    Before buying a new phone online, I had to _____ the prices from three websites.

4. a meeting between important people to talk about big ideas or problems (Paragraph 2)

    _____

    At the online shopping _____, business leaders discussed how AI is changing customer behaviour.

5. to move down a web page on a screen to see more content (Paragraph 3)

    _____

    I had to _____ to the bottom of the website to see more details.

6. put parts together to make something complete (Paragraph 4) _____

    I bought a desk online that was easy to _____ after it arrived.

7. small mistakes or accidents (Paragraph 5) _____

    There was a(n) _____ with my online order, and the wrong shoes were delivered.

8. made something better or more effective (Paragraph 6) _____

    Good photos _____ the online shopping experience and help people decide what to buy.

9. making a small change to improve something (Paragraph 7) _____

    The company should _____ its website design to make it easier for customers to check out.

10. to collect data or information automatically from websites (Paragraph 7)

    _____

    Some companies _____ information online stores to compare prices.

11. to process and analyse a lot of information quickly (Paragraph 7) _____

    The AI system can _____ hundreds of product reviews to find the best-rated items.

12. to rise quickly and suddenly (Paragraph 8) _____

   The price of computer games might _____ during the holiday sales.

13. to make it possible for something to happen (Paragraph 9) _____

   Mobile phones _____ people to shop online easily.

14. collecting or gathering more and more of something over time (Paragraph 10)

   _____

   Online stores _____ data about what customers buy to offer

   better suggestions.

15. expecting something to happen and preparing for it (Paragraph 10) _____

   Many online stores _____ higher sales during the holiday season.

16. computer programs that can think or act like a person to help with tasks (Paragraph 11)

   _____

   The website uses a(n) _____ to help customers ind the right

   product faster.

17. a new area of discovery or progress (Paragraph 13) _____

   AI shopping assistants are the new _____ in online retail technology.

18. doing something for someone else or representing them (Paragraph 13)

   _____

   I bought the shoes on _____ of my friend because she didn't have

   an account.

I've seen the future of shopping — and I'm sold on AI

BUYING WITH THE HELP OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS LIKE HAVING A PERSONAL SHOPPER WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT I WANT

BY CLAER BARRETT

1 Whether we're shopping for fashion, food or furniture, more consumers are asking generative artificial intelligence for help and inspiration as they decide what to buy — and it's revolutionising the way we shop online.

2 If you're using GenAI apps like ChatGPT, Perplexity or Google Gemini to help you navigate modern life, then the chances are you've already used them to weigh up purchasing decisions. This trend was the talk of the FT's Future of Retail summit this week. Adobe, the software company, reckons more than half of US shoppers will be using GenAI in some form by the end of this year.

3 Having tried it myself recently to buy a bookcase, I am a convert. Type "white bookcase" into a search engine, and the top hits are Ikea and Argos (thanks, but no thanks). Scroll down, and better options emerge, but I soon have dozens of tabs open trying to compare them.

4 So, instead, I just speak into my phone app and tell it exactly what I want, describing the ideal size, design, my budget and desire for adjustable shelf heights, specifying that I hate DIY and want it delivered fully assembled.

5 Within seconds, I have a summary of UK retailers offering products that meet my description, plus a comparison table of prices and delivery lead times — very helpful. Tempted by one of the recommendations, I ask my AI assistant: "What's their customer service like?" Many retailers are outsourcing this to AI-powered chatbots, but a summary of hundreds of Trustpilot reviews concludes: "Delivery mishaps are rare."

6 Whether we're asking about a decor refresh, a special gift or what to cook at a dinner party, an important part of the answer is where we can buy it. To capitalise on this, retailers are shifting their focus from search engine optimisation (SEO), reflecting the keywords shoppers are most likely to type into Google, to enhanced content though generative experience optimisation (GXO). Brands want to ensure their products are inserted into the conversation when we say what we're looking for and why.

7 The Cotswold Company, which came up among my bookcase suggestions, says it has spent the past six months tweaking the GXO on its website to reach more customers searching via large language models. User-generated content on social media is another important source of what's trending for apps to scrape and crunch down. To do this, brands are not solely relying on influencers to tell stories about their products so they are made more discoverable; Estée Lauder has an internal creator network making content about its huge portfolio of beauty brands.

8 The pace of change is accelerating. In the US, the number of shoppers directed to retailers' websites from GenAI browsers and chat services shot up by 4,700 per cent in the year to July, Adobe says.

9 There are huge commercial opportunities as "agentic commerce" enters the next phase — direct transactions. Last month, Shopify signed a partnership with OpenAI that will enable its merchants to sell directly through ChatGPT conversations, rather than customers being redirected to a retailer's website.

10 As we chat away to these apps, they're accumulating a wealth of data on every aspect of our lives and can tailor recommendations with greater accuracy; a personal shopper who knows exactly what we like. The next phase will be anticipating our needs and suggesting purchases: "It's going to be chilly next week. Would you like to see a selection of cashmere knitwear that's trending this season?"

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11 All this sent shivers down the spines of retail executives at the conference — if consumers' purchasing decisions rely on the influence of AI-powered shopping agents, what becomes of brand loyalty?

12 Retailers will have to invest in AI-powered technology to benefit, but the reward could be selling us more. One in-store example already being used in US grocery stores is Instacart's Caper Cart — a smart trolley with a digital screen and sensors powered by Nvidia chips. This can link up with loyalty schemes, flashing up personalised deals, discounts and suggestions as you shop. The result? AI helps shoppers spend more money. But if it could help us find the eggs (put in the most bizarre places by supermarkets) then I'm in.

13 The next frontier for agentic commerce? Ordering what we need autonomously. You'd never run out of toilet paper, but would you really trust AI to spend money on your behalf? As someone who really enjoys shopping, I'm not sure that I'm ready to outsource this pleasure just yet. But if my personal shopping agent could check my bank balance and arrange delivery on a day I'm going to be working from home, I might change my mind.

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4 **Understanding the article**

a. **Are these sentences True or False according to the information in the article? Tick (✓) the true sentences and rewrite the false ones.**

1. More people are using generative AI to find inspiration for purchases in areas like fashion and furniture. ☐

2. Adobe predicts that nearly all U.S. shoppers will stop using GenAI by the end of the year. ☐

3. The writer preferred the results from a normal search engine over using an AI assistant to find a bookcase. ☐

4. The AI assistant gave the writer a summary of suitable retailers, prices, and delivery times. ☐

5. Retailers are now focusing more on SEO because people are using AI chatbots less. ☐

6. The Cotswold Company changed its website to improve how it appears in large language model searches. ☐

7. Estée Lauder depends entirely on outside influencers for its online content. ☐

8. Shopify's partnership with OpenAI allows merchants to sell directly through ChatGPT. ☐

9. The Instacart Caper Cart only helps shoppers navigate store aisles; it does not use AI. ☐

10. The article suggests that one day, AI might automatically order household items like toilet paper for us. ☐

5 **Business language – Language of retail and marketing**

a. **Find the words in the wordpool in the article. Work with a partner and try to define what each of these words mean. Then complete the definitions below.**

retailer	influencer	search engine optimisation
brand loyalty	loyalty scheme	generative experience optimisation
customer service	personalised deal	
direct transaction	consumer	

1. _____: a marketing method that uses AI to improve how products appear and are recommended in online conversations

2. _____ : a person on social media who can affect what people buy because of their popularity or opinions

3. _____ : a person who buys and uses goods or services

4. _____ : when customers continue to buy from the same brand because they trust or like it

5. _____ : the help and support a company gives to its customers before or after they buy something

6. _____ : a purchase made directly between a buyer and the platform, without a third-party website

7. _____ : a business that sells products directly to the public

8. _____ : the process of improving a website so that it appears higher in search engine results

9. _____ : a way of giving regular customers rewards, discounts, or points for shopping often

10. _____ : a special offer or discount designed for one specific customer based on their preferences or past shopping

b. **Fill in each sentence with the appropriate word or phrase from task a in the correct form.**

1. Many _____ now use AI chatbots to help customers find products faster.

2. I joined the supermarket's _____ to get special offers every week.

3. My online store sent me a(n) _____ for trainers because I often buy sportswear.

4. Many shoppers show _____ by always buying the same phone or coffee brand.

5. The store's _____ team answered my questions about delivery and returns.

6. AI apps now allow _____, so customers can buy products without leaving the chat.

7. _____ are using AI tools to help them decide what to buy online.

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8. The company invested in _____ to make its website easier to find on Google.

9. Retailers use _____ to make sure their products are mentioned in AI searches.

10. The _____ shared a video about her favourite skincare brand, and thousands of people bought it.

c. **Work with a partner. Write sentences about your shopping habits using the vocabulary from task a and b.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6 Discussion

a. **Look at these quotes from the article describing the different phases of AI shopping. Which phases seem like normal practice to you? How far do you think AI shopping will go? Discuss in pairs or groups.**

1. "More consumers are asking generative artificial intelligence for help and inspiration as they decide what to buy ... "

2. "The next phase — direct transactions ... "

3. "The next phase will be anticipating our needs and suggesting purchases: ... "

4. "The next frontier for agentic commerce? Ordering what we need autonomously ... "

7 Wider business theme – recommending online sales strategies

a. **You are a consultant that has been brought in to help a company improve its online sales. Below are some potential questions that you could ask the board of directors to find out about their current approach to online shopping.**

1. Two questions are unrelated to online shopping. Identify which two.

    1. What strategies are currently in place to strengthen brand loyalty among returning online customers?

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2. How do you collect and analyse consumer data to better understand online shopping behaviour and preferences?

3. How satisfied are employees with the company's internal communication tools?

4. What role does digital customer service play in your online sales process, and how do you measure its effectiveness?

5. Are you exploring direct transaction options — such as AI chatbots or in-app purchasing — to reduce steps between browsing and buying?

6. How is your marketing team using Generative Experience Optimisation to ensure your products appear in AI-driven shopping searches?

7. What are the board's long-term goals for expanding into new international markets?

8. What criteria do you use when selecting an influencer to represent your brand online, and how do you measure return on investment?

9. How effective is your current loyalty scheme at encouraging repeat purchases, and what digital tools support it?

10. To what extent do you use data analytics or AI to offer personalised deals to individual shoppers?

11. As a retailer, how do you differentiate your online shopping experience from competitors offering similar products?

12. 1How much of your marketing budget is allocated to Search Engine Optimisation, and how do you see this changing as AI-driven search becomes more common?

2. Decide on some possible strategies that a company could use to improve its online sales and create a set of recommendations.

2. Work in a group and present your recommendations to your group.

Useful language
These suggestions are based on online sales …
One recommendation is investing more in influencer marketing …
It's essential that we focus on Generative Experience Optimisation …
A top priority should be a strong loyalty scheme …
By doing this, the company could improve customer service …
To sum up, these recommendations aim to build brand loyalty …

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