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GLOBAL CONVENIENCE
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THE RETAIL MARKETEERS

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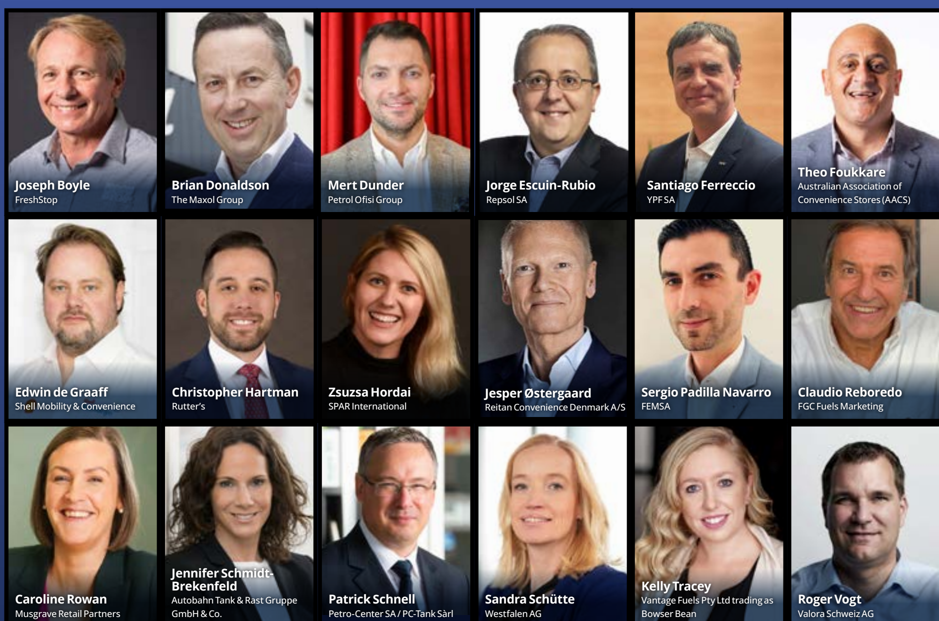

VISION GROUP NETWORK CO-FOUNDERS

Everyday AI: Practical AI Applications in Convenience Retailing

GCVG VISION REPORT NO. 3
AUGUST 2025

FACILITATOR

Christian Warning
Founder and Managing Partner,
The Retail Marketeers

FEATURED SPEAKER

Joerg Heilingbrunner
CEO, Scheidt & Bachmann

VISION GROUP NETWORK sharing today to shape tomorrow

We are Global Convenience Vision Group (GCVG), a group of invited leaders of the global convenience industry who have volunteered our time to help our fellow retailers, solution providers and product suppliers. The only reason we gather is to discuss, debate and share our experiences and ideas. Each of us is offering our personal opinions. We are not looking for "group think" — we are promoting problem solving and looking to the future. We make our conversations available to everyone in the industry through GCVG Vision Reports. These reports will help you better understand current challenges, solutions, and opportunities while giving you access to different opinions and perspectives, regardless of the size of your business or operating market.

Global Convenience Vision Group is part of the Vision Group Network, whose mission is to gather the best minds in the industry, put them in a virtual room, and let the ideas and opinions develop.

This **GCVG Vision Report** is comprised of multiple parts:

GCVG Views is a summary of the conversation with additional resources.

The **full meeting transcript** and the **presentation recording** and **slides** are online and searchable by topics. We include the full transcript so that you can be in the room with us, rather than only having access to selected quotes and paraphrasing.

The main topics in this GCVG Vision Report:

AI's Real-World Focus

AI Strategy: What Works, What's Next

- **AI, Privacy, and the Path to Responsible Use**
- **AI in Action: Fighting Theft, Boosting Efficiency**
- **AI in Marketing and Customer Experience**
- **Workforce Shifts in the Age of AI**

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GCVG VIEWS

A GLOBAL CONVENIENCE VISION GROUP DISCUSSION

This meeting of the Global Convenience Vision Group (GCVG) focused on the power and application of AI in convenience and mobility retail and aimed to move beyond AI as a mere "buzzword" and discuss real, applied use cases within the industry.

The GCVG quarterly virtual meeting was facilitated by **Christian Warning**, founder and managing partner of The Retail Marketeers on July 22, 2025. The meeting featured guest speaker **Joerg Heilingbrunner**, CEO of Scheidt & Bachmann, with his presentation "The Power of AI in Energy Retail," which discussed generative AI with a focus on real, applied use cases within the industry.

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AI's Real-World Focus

Warning introduced Heilingbrunner by first acknowledging that AI has been a significant buzzword at many conferences in recent years. He noted the rapid advancements and the prevalence of presentations showcasing "the newest tool" or demonstrating how to transform a still picture into a video. However, Warning's intent for this meeting was different. He explained that he had invited Heilingbrunner to present on generative AI with a specific focus on real, applied use cases within the retail energy industry, emphasizing his desire for Heilingbrunner to discuss practical AI applications that are already being used, as well as what might be coming next. Warning shared that this presentation had received positive feedback when it was presented at a webinar for the German Handelsblatt, which he described as the German equivalent of the *Financial Times or The Wall Street Journal.*

Beyond the Buzz: Making AI Work

Heilingbrunner, representing a family-owned business and a leading European back-office solutions provider operating in about fifty countries, emphasized the importance of moving beyond AI buzzwords to focus on practical, valuable use cases. Drawing on his 20 years of industry experience spanning corporate roles, consulting, and entrepreneurship, he expressed a strong curiosity about emerging trends and a clear belief that AI is a daily business ally. He stressed that AI's application must be driven by real business value and sound use cases, not just technology for technology's sake. His core message was straightforward: AI is an everyday problem solver that can be applied broadly to meet diverse business needs.

For effective and sustainable AI implementation, Heilingbrunner outlined three fundamental principles essential for successful AI implementation. First, he emphasized the importance of data quality. While many companies possess large amounts of data, it is often unclean, unstructured,

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and inaccessible, making data cleansing a necessary initial step to unlock AI's full potential. Second, he highlighted the need for staff involvement, acknowledging that a major challenge is overcoming fears of job redundancy by demonstrating how AI can ease workloads and make jobs more engaging by automating repetitive tasks. Lastly, Heilingbrunner stressed the importance of measuring AI's impact, noting that any investment must result in increased efficiency, added revenue, or the creation of new business models to ensure sustainable, valuable outcomes.

> "Retailers need to fundamentally rethink how AI can be applied within their organization.
>
> ***Joerg Heilingbrunner,*** *CEO, Scheidt & Bachmann*

Heilingbrunner emphasized repeatedly that AI is fundamentally an everyday problem solver, sharing several practical use cases his company has developed and implemented with various customers. He stressed that the purpose of AI is not the technology itself, but the genuine business advantage it delivers.

He began by describing how AI can accelerate software development through a tool called TuringBot, an artificial agent or system designed to perform tasks, make decisions, or engage in conversation in a way that mimics or approximates human intelligence, typically evaluated by its ability to pass as human in behavior or output. This improvement boosts efficiency and competitiveness for all involved, pointing out that AI significantly enhances software quality by reducing repetitive cycles and catching bugs earlier, leading to faster and more reliable deployments.

Turning to business intelligence and reporting, Warning noted how overwhelming data can be for clients and asked how AI helps make sense of it. Heilingbrunner detailed how AI helps structure and analyze large volumes of data, enabling faster, more accurate decision-making via intuitive dashboards. Users can simply request specific reports or data visualizations conversationally, which improves access to insights and operational agility.

Addressing the customer journey and AI's role in enhancing consumer experience at retail sites, Heilingbrunner described an AI-driven tool that predicts EV charger availability by analyzing usage patterns and grid data. With limited charger availability and high peak demand, this tool helps customers anticipate wait times and plan accordingly. The result is a smoother, more transparent charging experience that reduces frustration and boosts satisfaction. For EV charging locations, this not only improves operational efficiency but also strengthens customer loyalty, encouraging return visits and increased use of on-site facilities.

As labor shortages and rising wages continue to push retailers toward automation, AI is playing a critical role in making self-checkout a viable option, even in fuel retail where adoption has traditionally lagged. One solution integrates AI-powered cameras into self-checkout systems to identify suspicious behavior and reduce theft, helping retailers protect margins while improving operational efficiency.

AI is also being leveraged to enhance the utility of existing CCTV infrastructure. By integrating AI with camera systems already in place, retailers, particularly at unmanned locations, can enable real-time visual

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> Many of us have lots of data in our companies, but most of the time the data is not clean, it's not structured, and it's not really accessible. So that's the first thing that needs to be done. You really have to clean your data in order to get the most benefit out of it.
>
> ***Joerg Heilingbrunner,*** *CEO, Scheidt & Bachmann*

asset monitoring. This helps detect issues like POS failures that would otherwise go unnoticed, allowing for proactive maintenance and quicker incident response to prevent customer frustration and lost revenue.

When it comes to fuel theft, or "drive-offs," AI-powered systems analyze video feeds and behavioral cues from drivers and vehicles to flag potentially high-risk customers. This preventative approach is especially valuable at sites lacking pre-authorization protocols, helping reduce fraud without relying solely on traditional payment barriers.

Shifting to retail media networks as a growing revenue source and how AI fuels this model, Heilingbrunner explained that AI leverages multiple data streams—weather, local events, historical sales—to optimize visitor flow and ad targeting. This boosts campaign effectiveness and margins, mirroring successes seen with large retailers like Walmart.

Geofencing and connected car data were also featured in the discussion. Heilingbrunner confirmed that connected vehicles generate rich data allowing early-stage customer engagement, extending marketing beyond the store to the vehicle itself, and improving convenience and personalization throughout the customer journey.

Loyalty programs were another key topic. Warning noted industry debates on whether loyalty systems actually reduce margins or improve customer service. Heilingbrunner argued that sophisticated, AI-driven loyalty programs are critical to retain customers in a competitive landscape. Personalized couponing and targeted promotions powered by AI insights can significantly increase customer retention and brand loyalty.

Heilingbrunner summarized the key learnings and future directions for AI in retail by emphasizing four essentials: first, securing employee buy-in by demonstrating how AI eases their workload and supports business growth; second, identifying and structuring the right data to unlock AI's potential; third, defining authentic, customer-centric use cases and piloting them without hesitation; and fourth, ensuring all AI efforts comply with legal and ethical standards to maintain trust and corporate integrity.

He urged retailers to embrace a proactive, iterative approach: getting people involved, leveraging data thoughtfully, focusing on real-world applications, and adhering to compliance in order to unlock AI's transformative power sustainably.

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AI Strategy:
What Works, What's Next

The meeting's Q&A discussion centered on the multifaceted implications of AI and advanced technologies within the retail landscape, moving beyond theoretical discussions to explore practical applications and significant challenges.

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AI, Privacy, and the Path to Responsible Use

A foundational concern raised by **Roy Strasburger**, CEO of StrasGlobal, president of Compliance Safe, and Vision Group Network co-founder, centered on data privacy and security, particularly when employing AI and large language models. He asked Heilingbrunner if companies create "a ring-fenced data pool that is not accessible to other companies" or if they use public AI programs for learning modules. Heilingbrunner, whose company operates under Germany's strict data privacy regulations, affirmed its commitment to security, stating, "No, we use what I'll call a private cloud. So we're not allowing others to use our data." He further clarified that data must be anonymized, and agreements are required with all data providers. **Zsuzsa Hordai**, head of strategic projects at SPAR International, also highlighted the ethical use of AI, particularly the enormous energy consumption of large language models, posing a critical question about aligning AI's energy demands with corporate sustainability goals. She also noted the importance of educating staff to prevent proprietary data from being used to train public large language models.

AI in Action: Fighting Theft, Boosting Efficiency

The discussion extensively covered the application of AI in combatting theft and enhancing operational efficiency, especially concerning self-checkouts. **Caroline Rowan**, head of retail operations at Musgrave Retail Partners, shared the challenges Irish operators face with fuel self-checkouts due to drive-offs and asked rhetorically if AI could manage shrink problems but also maintain a better customer experience. She also

> "One concern…is the ethical use of AI. That is really on the top of the agenda, especially on the C-level teams. What are we going to do with AI, because it takes an enormous amount of energy to run, especially if you're learning large language-model-based solutions?
>
> ***Zsuzsa Hordai**, Head of Strategic Projects, SPAR International.*

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> My concern with AI, for a small company like us, is I can't afford it. I just can't afford the cost of this, particularly when I have to watch overhead costs that are killing us.
>
> ***Claudio Reboredo,*** *Partner/Owner, FGC Fuels Marketing*

pointed out that in smaller stores, self-checkouts often function more as a customer service proposition than a significant labor-saving tool due to authorization needs.

Joe Boyle, CEO of FreshStop, recounted union resistance to self-checkouts due to high unemployment. Instead, his company has embraced AI for theft and credit card fraud detection, explaining, "We do have a few car drive-offs, as well, but we're using facial recognition, body movements, those types of things, to recognize people. We use AI in that way in South Africa."

Warning acknowledged the concerns raised by unions but emphasized that the shift toward self-order terminals primarily involves reallocating staff within the store rather than reducing jobs. He pointed to trends in Europe where installing self-order terminals has become a key indicator of a convenience store's commitment to its foodservice offerings. "Having a self-order terminal is a big check mark," he said, noting that customers associate these terminals with quality and efficiency since every quick-service restaurant (QSR) uses them. For consumers, seeing self-order terminals signals that the store's foodservice is on par with established QSR brands, elevating their expectations and perception.

Later, the conversation moved to how far AI can go in managing theft beyond just identifying suspicious behavior. **Sergio Padilla Navarro**, global networks director at FEMSA, asked whether AI could be used to automatically charge a known customer's credit card after detecting theft, assuming the customer and their payment info are on file. Heilingbrunner responded by pointing to delivery companies that already use AI to analyze behavior and limit access for high-risk customers, noting that with known customers, it's possible to send a "friendly reminder" asking them to pay or face a fine, though always within the bounds of data privacy laws.

Warning expanded the scenario, asking if AI tools like Amazon's Just Walk Out technology could immediately charge loyalty customers who steal. Heilingbrunner said communication is key. If the customer is known, AI enables smoother resolution.

Strasburger brought the conversation back to Heilingbrunner's earlier comments on the use of computer vision in AI applications, particularly in retail settings. He noted that while larger companies are adopting these technologies, smaller operators often find the costs prohibitive. "Is AI providing a different way of using computer vision," he asked, "as opposed to what maybe was the standard two or three years ago to make it either less expensive to use or more accessible?" The group also discussed how AI-powered cameras are becoming more cost-effective and useful, not only for theft prevention but also for tasks like ensuring retail planogram compliance, making them worthwhile investments across multiple business functions.

Claudio Reboredo, partner/owner of FGC Fuels Marketing, offered a different perspective, acknowledging limited AI adoption in Argentina. His company prioritizes emotional intelligence and uses centralized video cameras for customer service monitoring rather than theft prevention, admitting that his "concern with AI, for a small company like us, is I can't afford it." He did, however, note success with self-ordering kiosks in their QSR business, where about 50% of customers prefer the totem [kiosk], leading to cost savings and improved order accuracy.

On the accessibility issue, Heilingbrunner acknowledged the challenge but noted progress. Many

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businesses already have cameras installed, and AI can now be used to "leverage them" rather than requiring costly new infrastructure. The key, he explained, lies in compatibility. Newer systems with standardized APIs are much easier and cheaper to integrate, whereas older or customized setups tend to drive up costs. While not yet a perfect solution, Heilingbrunner emphasized that AI is making it easier for smaller operators to adopt these technologies by working with existing hardware and streamlining use cases.

Strasburger also wanted to know where AI processes are being hosted, whether locally in-store, centrally, or in the cloud. Heilingbrunner explained that retailers typically store AI functions in secure cloud environments, whether private or public, with safeguards to protect sensitive data.

Adding to the discussion, **Robert Hampton**, VGN's director of strategic growth and initiatives, shared insights from his time work with Conexxus, the U.S.-based non-profit organization focused on developing and promoting technology standards for the convenience and fuel retailing industry. He explained that a major factor driving cost is where the video data is processed. "You don't want to send all that video up to the cloud," he said, especially in larger stores with dozens of cameras. Instead, most of the processing needs to happen "on the edge" (directly within or near the cameras), requiring investment in edge computing infrastructure. While this adds initial cost, he agreed with Strasburger that prices are coming down. For example, high-quality 4K cameras, once expensive, are now more affordable and sufficient for most analytics tasks.

Hampton also highlighted an underused but potentially lucrative application of computer vision: monetizing "reach-in" behavior. Retailers can track when customers interact with specific endcaps or shelf spaces, gathering data on which displays generate the most attention. "CPGs will pay to have their products on that endcap," he noted, pointing to a new revenue stream powered by AI and computer vision.

> "I think the challenge is, is it a true loyalty program or is it just a discount program? And when I ask that question, I think a lot of so-called loyalty programs today in retailing are basically discounting programs. It doesn't really, really create increased loyalty from your consumers.
>
> ***Jesper Østergaard,*** *CEO of Reitan Convenience Denmark A/S*

AI, in Marketing and Customer Experience

Warning asked **Jesper Østergaard**, CEO of Reitan Convenience Denmark A/S, about the evolution of loyalty programs, especially in the digitally advanced Nordic market. Østergaard reflected that while he was highly enthusiastic about loyalty programs seven or eight years ago, his excitement has since tempered. His company still maintains a program, currently developing a new version for their Swedish company for a 2026 launch. But he emphasized the importance of ensuring it's profitable and truly builds loyalty, not just offers discounts. "A lot of so-called loyalty programs today in retailing are basically discounting programs," he noted, adding that such efforts can be a waste if they don't foster real customer connection. Østergaard estimated that about 75% of their current program does build genuine loyalty. He also cited a UK expert who warned that even a retailer's "most loyal" customer might only spend 50% of their category budget with them. Østergaard praised Starbucks as a global leader in loyalty strategy and execution.

Chris Hartman, vice president of fuels, advertising, and development at Rutter's, detailed its venture into retail media networks, leveraging AI to monetize advertising space within their stores to promote in-store products rather than external advertisers. He described how they use AI to "interrupt" in its bar lounge area TV

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commercials, to "basically put the commercials we want on when the sporting program is not playing."

Hordai presented compelling examples of AI-generated content, sharing that in one operating country, they launched a TV ad made purely by AI. No real video was taken, and the cost was a fraction of a real ad, resulting in a 92% cost saving. Her company also uses AI-generated in-store music to avoid royalties and enhance the customer experience.

Eva Strasburger, president of StrasGlobal, CEO of Compliance Safe, and Vision Group Network co-founder, raised a point about the cost-saving potential of AI-generated ads, noting a shift in markets like Korea and Japan where companies are replacing traditional influencers (with their contracts, branding constraints, and travel costs) with AI-generated ambassadors who offer "a huge amount of freedom" at "almost zero costs" and can still attract millions of followers. Curious about real-world adoption, she asked if anyone in the group was using AI brand ambassadors. Hordai shared that her company had experimented with one in a specific market but ultimately discontinued the effort due to "negative customer feedback," explaining that "people just wanted to see real people." The campaign ran on social media the previous year.

Workforce Shifts in the Age of AI

The discussion extensively covered the practicalities and challenges of AI adoption. Padilla Navarro explained his organization's preference for a "pull" approach to AI adoption, where business units drive the demand for solutions because "the business unit needs to make the pull because they own the result, they own the P&L, and they have to own the business case for each application." Warning asked Heilingbrunner if there is an AI tool that controls what AI projects are going on within a large corporation. Heilingbrunner said that his company uses Jira as a project-management tool to align its different projects; however, the management tool a company uses really depends on its AI usage. "There are so many different AI tools, as we've heard, for creativity or loyalty, a wide range, and there are many new ones coming up every day," he said.

Hordai highlighted a key takeaway from Heilingbrunner's presentation, which was seeing AI as "an everyday problem solver." Curious to gauge adoption, she asked those in the meeting how many were actively using AI tools in their day-to-day work, and most raised their hands. Warning followed up, asking whether AI use was structured through formal workshops or more informal exchanges like "water cooler"

AI has been a topic of many Vision Group Network meetings since 2022. Here are some of this year's Vision Reports that may be of interest.

GCVG Do You Want Chips With That?, April 2025

CLVG Lead the Future: Transformative AI Strategies, March 2025

CTVG Cybersecurity Evolving Trends and Pitfalls, January 2025

CxVG Envisioning Technology Innovation in the Convenience Store Future, January 2025

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> Without the usage of AI, I think the companies not using it will not be competitive in the next five or maybe 10 years. I don't know, I don't want to make a prediction, but I think it's essential. As one of you mentioned, in terms of replacing people on the workforce, that's not the case, because what you do is you add benefit to the customer journey.
>
> ***Joerg Heilingbrunner,***
> *CEO, Scheidt & Bachmann*

chats. Hordai shared that her organization began formal efforts this year, offering educational sessions to guide staff on safe, effective AI use, especially emphasizing data privacy, and encouraging employees to use AI to improve efficiency in office roles.

Adding to the conversation, **Mert Dunder**, head of operational technology at Petro Ofisi Group, described its robust AI strategy. He explained how AI and automation are central to the company's goals, from demand forecasting and price optimization to enhancing customer service through chatbots and improving safety with visual recognition tools. "Our goal," he said, "is to become not only a more efficient organization through these technologies, but also smarter, faster, and more sustainable," stressing that innovation at Petro Ofisi is deeply integrated into both their culture and collaborative ecosystem.

Eva Strasburger reflected on how the rise of AI is reshaping both hiring practices and employee roles in retail. She noted that many retailers are now seeking store employees with more technical aptitudes, something that wasn't traditionally required. As a result, some companies are identifying tech-savvy individuals already on staff, such as those frequently seen on their phones playing games, and repositioning them as in-store tech leads. "Come to us with ideas, share what you're seeing out there," they're told, inviting them to channel their interest in technology into real contributions. This approach, Strasburger said, has proven effective in boosting engagement and attracting new talent.

She also pointed to a broader employment concern: a recent study in the U.S. showed a 30% decrease in entry-level jobs, which has become a growing issue for university graduates. To address this, she mentioned the role of initiatives like hackathons, which give students a platform to develop and showcase industry-relevant solutions. By participating, students can demonstrate their capabilities and, in some cases, bypass traditional entry-level positions, entering fields like the convenience store industry at a higher level. This, she explained, marks a notable shift in how young professionals are entering the workforce.

Patrick Schnell, general manager of Petro-Center SA/PC-Tank Sàrl, said his company has not engaged deeply with AI yet, largely due to their unique position of continuous growth. "Our shops and activities are growing and growing," he explained, noting that while Heilingbrunner's presentation was compelling—particularly for larger EV companies—they haven't adopted any AI use cases so far. Warning responded by pointing out that Schnell's situation reflects a broader dilemma many retailers face: when business is already thriving, any investment in AI or digitalization must clearly enhance the bottom line. "That's what our retail business is about," Warning concluded, emphasizing that AI needs to deliver measurable value, not just serve as a trend.

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Bowser Bean Australia

Kelly Tracey, general manager at Bowser Bean, was originally scheduled to present a case study on a new, innovative site. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, she was unable to present as planned. Check out this video to see how Bowser Bean Echuca is redefining convenience in regional Australia. Opened in January 2022, this standout location caters to everyone, from truck drivers and tourists to school kids and locals with a full dine-in menu, drive-thru service, shower and caravan facilities, and Melbourne-inspired café seating. With its renowned food and coffee, digital promotions, and thoughtful forecourt design, Bowser Bean Echuca has quickly become the area's favorite coffee stop. Don't miss the behind-the-scenes look at what makes this site a true destination.

Final Reflection

AI in retail is moving beyond the buzz, stepping into a pivotal moment where it must deliver real business value, boosting efficiency, enabling smarter operations, and solving everyday problems like theft, equipment failures, and inconsistent customer experiences. The true promise of AI lies in its ability to work with existing systems, uncover hidden insights, and drive decisions that improve performance on the ground. For retailers ready to experiment and implement thoughtfully, AI offers not just innovation, but meaningful, measurable impact. AI has transformative potential, balanced with a pragmatic understanding of its costs, ethical considerations, and the critical importance of human integration, to bring positive and efficient change to the industry.

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NOTABLE AND QUOTABLE

"My message is very simple today: AI is an everyday problem solver. You can use it for everything.
***Joerg Heilingbrunner**, CEO, Scheidt & Bachmann*

"One of the things that we love about being retailers is that opportunities are all over the place, and prioritizing the opportunities we tackle is I think a big part of the game.
***Sergio Padilla Navarro**, Global Networks Director, FEMSA*

"We have a loyalty program and if we should continue developing that, we need to make sure that first of all, it's profitable. Secondly, that it sticks out because everybodydoes something.
***Jesper Østergaard**, CEO, Reitan Convenience Denmark*

"When you claim to be a sustainable company and yet you're running these gigantic algorithms in the background, how much energy are you using up versus how your sustainability goals are proceeding, and how do you align those?
***Zsuzsa Hordai,** Head of Strategic Projects, SPAR International*

"And our approach to innovation isn't limited to purchasing technology. It's built on integrating it into our company's business models, culture and customer-centered structure. Therefore, we work not only with our own internal innovation teams. We also work with stakeholders across the ecosystem such as startups, universities, technology partners, and continuously nurturing innovative ideas.
***Mert Dunder**, Head of Operational Technology, Petrol Ofisi Group*

"In this part of the world, we haven't had a lot of artificial intelligence. We probably go to emotional intelligence more than that.
***Claudio Reboredo,** Partner/Owner, FGC Fuels Marketing*

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TRANSCRIPT AND PRESENTATIONS

Transcript

The full meeting transcript is online and can be searched by keyword so that you can be “in the room” with us, rather than only having access to selected quotes and paraphrasing

Meeting Presentations and Demonstration Videos

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The Global Convenience Vision Group (GCVG) brings together retailers and solution providers from around the globe. GCVG participants are leaders in their national markets and often operate in multiple countries. The group addresses new product introductions, marketing channels and social media, innovations in retail technology, sustainability, cost efficiency and margin improvement, consumer trends, and proposed legislation. The group is committed to sharing its views and perspectives to advance convenience retailing. GCVG operates under the Vision Group Network, which gathers the collective knowledge and ideas of its members to create a legacy of sharing within the retail community. For more information and to sign up for future Vision Reports, visit our website: **vgnsharing.com/vision-report-library**.

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VGN Vision Report Library

The VGN Vision Reports will not only provide you with insight into the issues that leading retailers are concerned about but will give you a vantage point to “listen” to their conversations.

Learn about the specific solutions or programs that VGN members are utilizing – and the ones that didn’t work. VGN wants to provide real world solutions for real world issues.

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