



Industry Brief

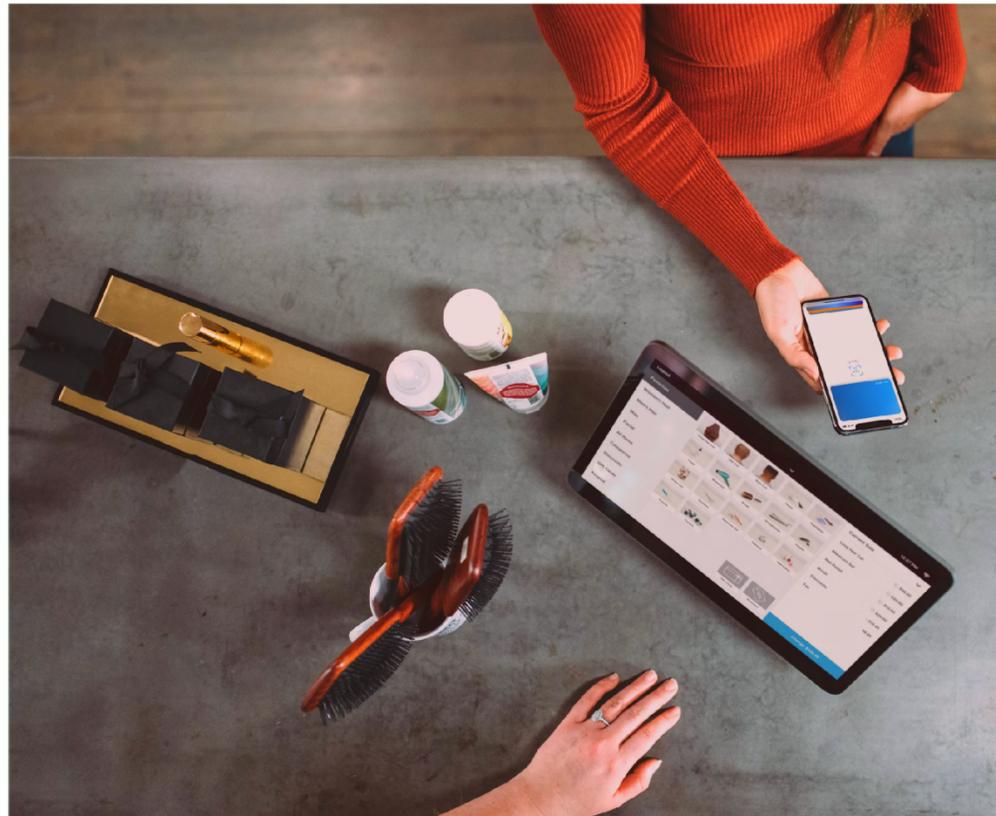
The Adaptive Store: Balancing Experience and Efficiency in Specialty Retail

In partnership with

TOSHIBA intel



What's in the report?



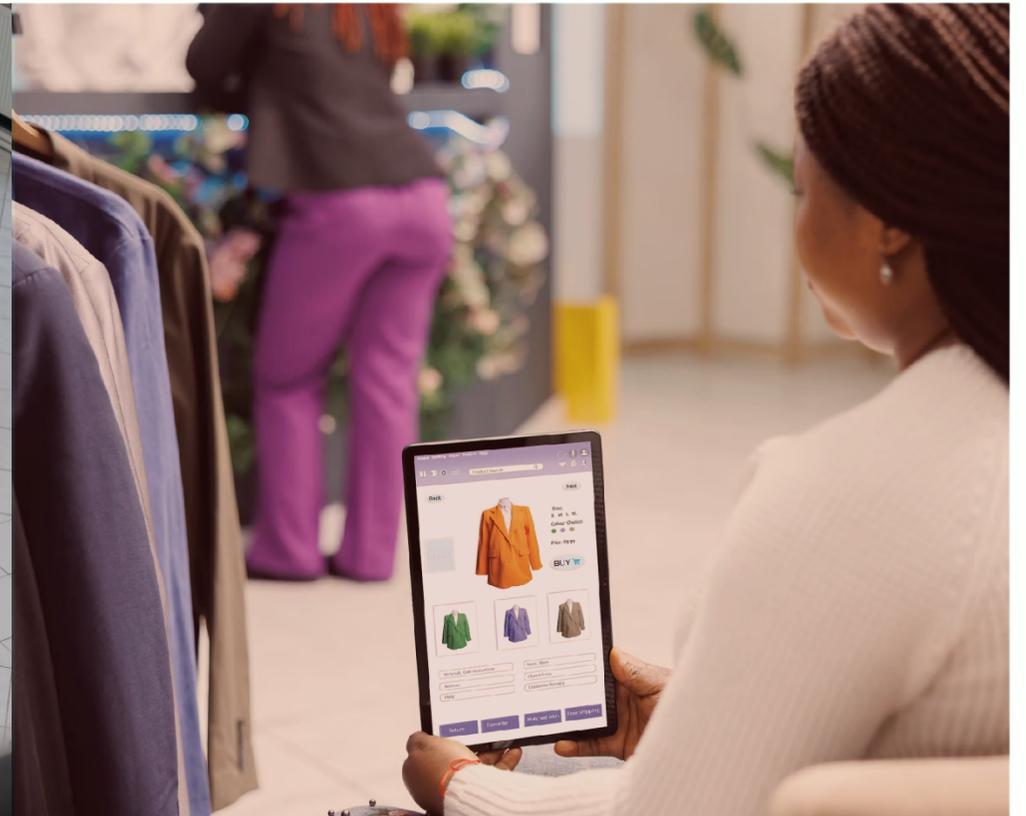
WHY ADAPTABILITY MATTERS NOW

Three macro trends reshaping Specialty Retail operations and why transformation is no longer optional.



HOW ADAPTIVE STORES RESPOND

Three strategic responses turning operational challenges into competitive advantages for adaptive store environments.



3 KEY PRIORITIES FOR BUILDING ADAPTIVE STORES

Three core priorities that set the foundation for transformation: experience, people, and infrastructure.

The expectation gap

Customers are well-informed and arrive expecting expertise and personalized attention. Many stores struggle to meet these expectations consistently.

Customers arrive already informed

Shoppers arrive having consulted online reviews and discussion threads. Their baseline knowledge is higher than ever, raising expectations for in-store expertise that goes beyond what's available online.

Expertise varies unpredictably

The quality of assistance depends on which associate is working. New hires take months to develop product knowledge while experienced staff concentrate in certain departments, making expertise availability inconsistent.

The "expert or invisible" phenomenon

When customers want help, they want substantive guidance. When they don't, they prefer minimal interruption. Adaptive stores accommodate both preferences without creating friction or frustration.



29% of consumers say they stopped using or buying from a brand due to poor customer experience, either online or in-person.

[PwC](#)

Adaptive operations turn hero moments into consistent delivery.

Every Specialty Retailer can point to exceptional moments, like the associate who spent an hour helping find the perfect gift, or the seamless journey when a shopper researched online and bought in-store. The challenge is making these the norm.

When retailers put technology to work on routine transactions, associates are freed to deliver high-value interactions. When systems work seamlessly, customer context flows across every touchpoint.

The retailers gaining share don't choose between efficiency and experience — they design for both.



84% of customers feel that experiences are as important as the actual products and services.

[Salesforce](#)

The labor reality

Labor shortages. Constrained budgets. Higher turnover. Every associate's minute matters.

Time-to-productivity challenges with new hires

High turnover means training investments disappear quickly. New associates take months to reach effectiveness. This creates persistent gaps in knowledge and service quality across shifts.

The hidden cost of register-bound associates

During peak periods, experienced associates get trapped at checkout when they're needed on the floor. Fixed transaction points prevent deployment where customers need help.

Administrative tasks compete with customer-facing time

Associates spend time on tasks that don't require human judgment, manual inventory checks, system toggling, paperwork. This time isn't available for high-value customer interactions.



45% say store employees spend too much time trying to find the answers to customer service questions.

[Jumpmind](#)

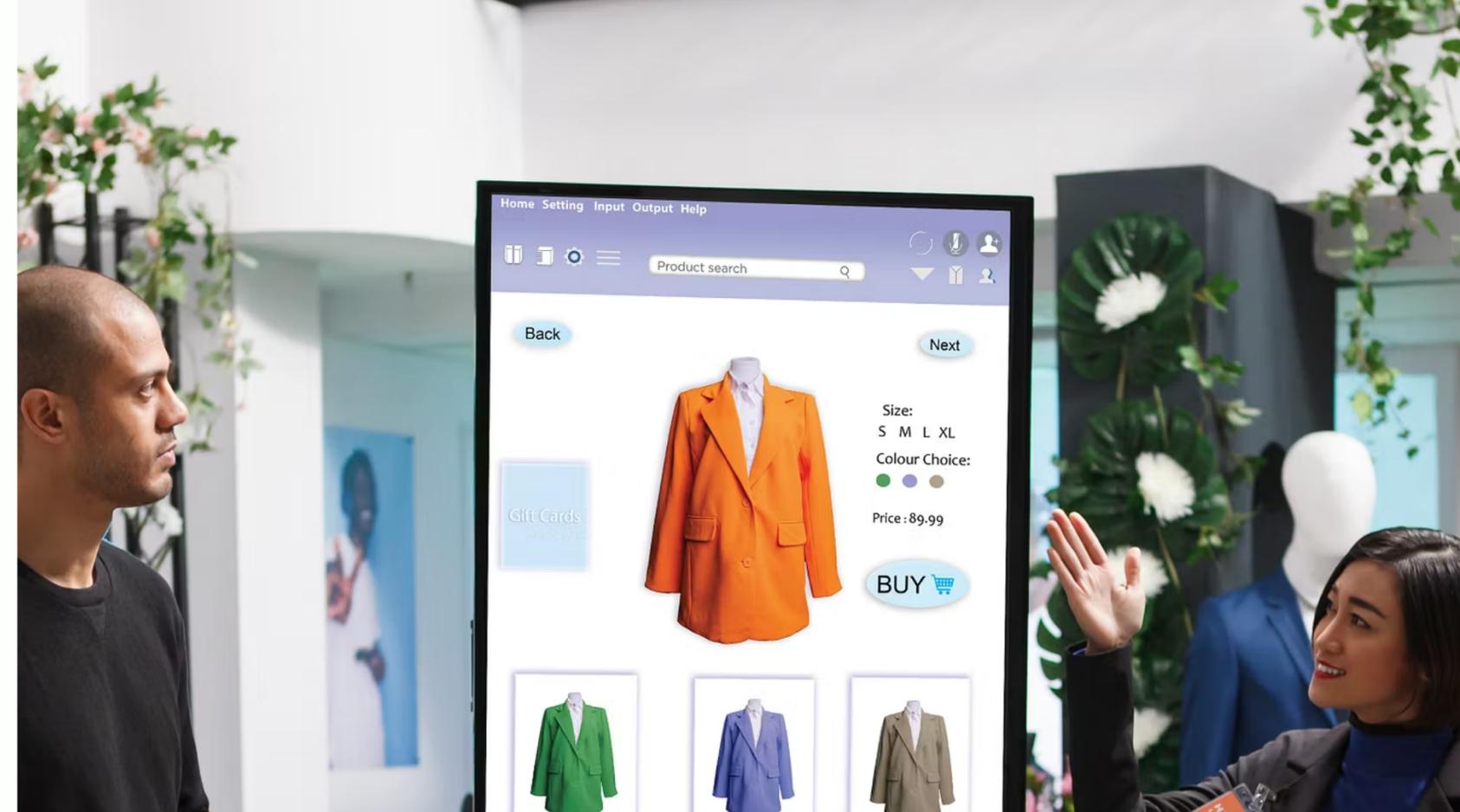
Technology that simplifies associate tasks pays dividends in retention & productivity.

The math on associate-facing technology has changed.

When turnover averages 60% annually in retail, every hour saved in training pays back quickly. When systems are intuitive, every minute freed from administrative tasks becomes available for customers.

Confidence in systems translates into more confident, engaged customer interactions, supporting experiences and shopper satisfaction.

This creates a compounding effect. Better tools reduce turnover. Lower turnover means more experienced associates and they deliver stronger experiences. Better experiences drive loyalty and sales, justifying continued investment.



46% of retail workers say automation enhances their professional skills, with 41% using AI for data analysis, 37% for admin tasks, and 29% for customer service and client interface.

[KPMG](#)

The connection gap

Disconnected systems create inconsistent customer experiences and limit associate effectiveness.

Disconnected systems prevent a true 360° customer view

Associates are forced to toggle between disconnected systems to access customer history, inventory, and product details. Fragmentation prevents the complete view needed for personalized service.

Customer-facing friction from disconnected touchpoints

When systems don't communicate in real time, gaps appear on the sales floor like POS systems that lag inventory updates, mobile devices that can't complete transactions, and fragmented customer views.

Disconnected infrastructure makes adaptability harder

Adding new capabilities requires coordination across multiple systems and vendors, extending testing cycles and complicating deployment. As a result, retailers struggle to respond quickly when business needs or customer expectations shift.



88% of retailers say unified commerce is key to achieving their goals and 25% say they can't meet objectives without it. Unified commerce brings eCommerce, point-of-sale (POS), and order management systems (OMS) onto a single cohesive platform.

[Salesforce](#)



Modular, integrated systems adapt to change without breaking under pressure.

The problem isn't multiple systems. It's operating them in isolation. Specialty Retail runs on constant change: seasonal surges, new categories, evolving store formats, and expanding fulfillment models.

Technology must flex across the business, the store, and every customer touchpoint. Modular hardware adapts as needs evolve. Integrated systems extend easily through Independent Software Vendor (ISV) ecosystems.

Retailers that get this right protect margins while delivering consistent, connected experiences.

Monolithic applications hinder agility and drive higher costs. Moving to modular, microservice-based architecture enables retailers to achieve greater flexibility and scalability.

[McKinsey](#)

Three key priorities for building adaptive stores

Building adaptive stores starts with operational fundamentals. Getting these core areas right determines how effectively you can execute broader transformation initiatives across your store environment.

Customer experience

The ability to support customers whether they want self-guided exploration or hands-on assistance, and transition smoothly between modes as needs evolve during their visit.

86% of fast responses and accurate resolutions highly influence whether they purchase a product or service from a brand.

[Zendesk](#)

Associate enablement

Equipping store teams with information, tools, and transaction flexibility at the point of need, reducing friction in their work while expanding their ability to serve customers effectively.

60% of Leaders equip associates with real-time customer insights during checkout.

[Manhattan](#)

Operational foundation

The hardware, software ecosystem, and services infrastructure that makes the above possible modular, integrated, reliable, and designed to work across your technology partners.

Retailers lose up to **\$1.7 trillion** annually due to overstock and out-of-stock situations, which could be significantly reduced with real-time inventory optimization.

[IHL services](#)

Next steps.

The three priorities detailed on page 9 form the foundation for a complete transformation framework. The question is where to start based on your business today.

Our Playbook "**Building Adaptive Specialty Retail Stores**" provides the complete framework with actionable guidance for sequencing your transformation based on your constraints, goals, and current capabilities.



 INCISIV

Playbook

Building Adaptive Specialty Retail Stores

A Transformation Framework for Experience-Driven Operations

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ABOUT INCISIV

Incisiv is a peer-to-peer executive network and industry insights firm for consumer industry executives navigating digital disruption.

Incisiv offers curated executive learning, digital maturity benchmarks and prescriptive transformation insights to clients across the consumer and technology industry spectrum.

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ABOUT TOSHIBA

Toshiba Global Commerce Solutions empowers Retail to thrive and prosper through a dynamic ecosystem of smarter, more agile solutions and services that enable Retailers to resiliently evolve with generations of consumers and adapt to market conditions. Supported by a global organization of devoted employees and partners, Retailers gain more visibility and control over operations while enjoying the flexibility to build, scale, and transform Retail experiences that anticipate and fulfill consumers' ever-changing needs.

To learn more, visit commerce.toshiba.com and engage with us on [X](#), formerly known as Twitter, [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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