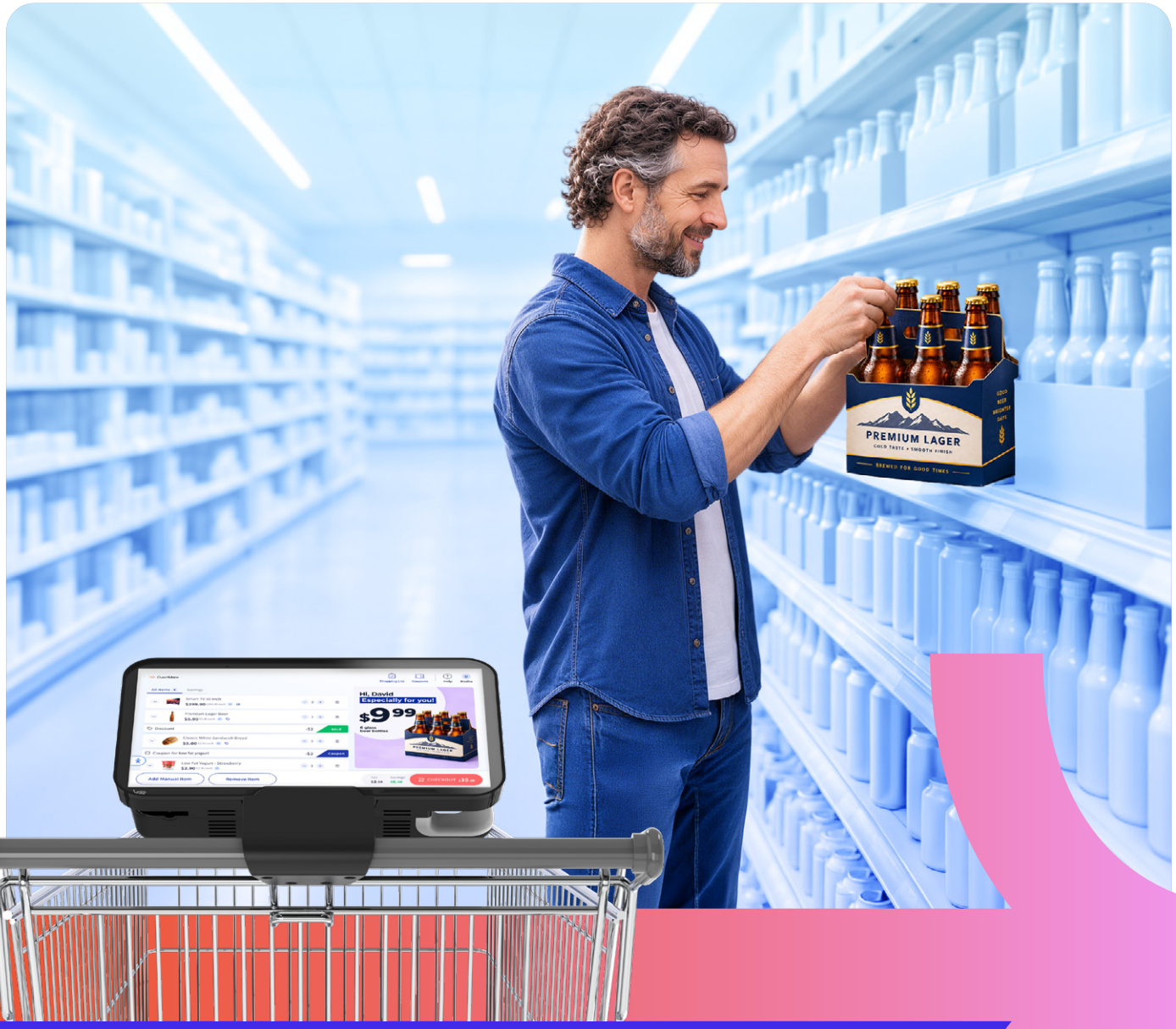
Cust²Mate
AN A2Z COMPANY



THE CONNECTED STORE: CLOSING THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE GAP

Six Shopper Expectations Driving the Next Era of Connected Retail

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E-commerce has spent decades perfecting the art of knowing the customer.

From personalized recommendations to frictionless checkout and real-time inventory, online retail has built an experience that is responsive, intelligent, and attuned to what shoppers actually want. In the face of this transformation, physical retail has yet to offer anything close to a comparable experience, despite accounting for the vast majority of shopping.

Retailers cannot afford to ignore this gap. Store visits are not mere standalone transactions; they amount to the continuation of an ongoing brand relationship between retailer and customer. And shoppers who arrive notice when intelligence does not follow them through the door.

When shelving is static, promotions are generic, and customers are treated as interchangeable, a rich relationship a brand has cultivated online evaporates at the aisle. This disconnect is physical retail's central challenge, and one this white paper contends can be overcome.

New research reinforces the urgency of this challenge. **A 2026 consumer survey conducted by A2Z Cust2Mate** among 1,600 consumers across the United States and Europe reveals a consistent gap between what shoppers consider important and what physical supermarkets currently deliver. The largest gaps emerge in seamless shopping, pricing transparency, and access to rewards. The consequences are tangible: 52% of consumers reported being unable to find a product and either abandoning the purchase or choosing an alternative, while 32% abandoned purchases because of long checkout lines.

The opportunity is not to make physical stores resemble e-commerce websites, but to bring the intelligence, connectivity, and responsiveness of digital commerce into the physical shopping journey. The ability to recognize shoppers, anticipate their needs, surface relevant information at the right moment, and reward their loyalty is no longer confined to a screen. It can, and should, live in the aisle.

To understand what this transformation requires, this paper identifies six expectations that today's connected consumers carry with them into the store:



CONTINUOUS GUIDING RELEVANT TRANSPARENT REWARDING SEAMLESS

Each of these expectations shapes a specific dimension of the shopper's journey. Together, they constitute the standard against which every shopping experience, whether online or in-store, is measured. They also form a practical model for maximizing conversion, basket value, loyalty, and margin.

Beyond improving the shopper experience, this transformation creates new opportunities for retailers and brands. Connected in-store experiences enable more relevant engagement at the point of decision, open the door to measurable retail media, generate actionable shopper insights, and support more efficient store operations. Together, these capabilities have the potential to fundamentally change not only how consumers shop, but also how physical stores create value.

The opportunity to bring digital commerce intelligence into the aisle is real, but so is the cost of ignoring it. Retailers that fail to evolve risk forfeiting significant revenue opportunities and eroding the brand relationships they have spent years building.

A STRUCTURAL SHIFT IN THE SHOPPER EXPERIENCE

Today's shoppers do not experience retail in channel, they experience it as a single, continuous process of discovery, evaluation, and purchase. This reality reflects the shopper's preference for fluid, connected ecosystems, which allow them to access options at their convenience and arrive at stores already primed to make purchasing decisions.

What has changed is less where shoppers buy and more what they expect when they arrive. Online retail has set a new baseline for transparency, personalization, and frictionless decision-making, and shoppers carry those expectations with them into the aisle. The two channels are not necessarily competing for the same transaction; they are often consecutive steps in the same journey.

Online environments shape expectations for transparency, comparison, and convenience, while physical stores remain unmatched in sensory engagement, service, and immediate gratification. This is why more than 60% of shoppers expect brands to operate both online and offline,[2] even though approximately 80% of global retail spend still occurs in physical stores7.

But because online and in-store are consecutive steps in the same journey, they are increasingly judged against the same standard. The opportunity for physical retail is not to mimic digital environments, but to bring digital intelligence into its own environment – so that the clarity and personalization shoppers experience online does not evaporate the moment they enter the store.

This disconnect is more than a theoretical challenge. A 2026 survey conducted by A2Z Cust2Mate[1] of 1,600 consumers across the United States and Europe reveals measurable gaps between what shoppers consider important and what supermarkets currently deliver. The largest gaps concern seamless shopping, pricing transparency, and access to rewards, fundamental aspects of the shopping experience that consumers have come to expect.

THE IN-STORE EXPECTATION GAP

Where shopper expectations exceed the current supermarket experience

24
percentage-point gap
SEAMLESS
Shopping convenience

20
percentage-point gap
TRANSPARENT
Pricing and savings

19
percentage-point gap
REWARDING
Promotions and loyalty

Source: A2Z Cust2Mate Research, 2026. Survey of 1,600 consumers across the United States and Europe. Gaps represent the difference between the percentage rating an expectation highly important and the percentage rating its delivery highly positive.



THE 6 EXPECTATIONS SHAPING IN-STORE RETAIL

THESE SIX EXPECTATIONS REFLECT HOW SHOPPERS NOW DEFINE VALUE AND SATISFACTION:

1. CONTINUOUS

Continuity is about ensuring the digital relationship seamlessly flows to the physical store and back across all channels. When a shopper walks through the door, the experience should feel like the next chapter of an ongoing journey. The loyalty account they signed up for online, the shopping list they built on the e-commerce website, the promotion they browsed at home, none of it should get left behind.

The same applies when they check out: shoppers may choose to buy in-store and have part of their purchase delivered directly to their home, or order online and have selected items waiting for them at the store.

For today's connected consumers, convenience means flexibility. Shoppers increasingly use digital channels to prepare for their supermarket visits. According to A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey[1], 67% search for promotions or coupons online before visiting a supermarket, while 54% build digital shopping lists.

They also expect brands to put in at least as much effort as they do: 67% expect brands to “remember them” across touchpoints and deliver a consistent, personalized experience wherever interactions take place.[1]

By achieving continuity, retailers create a seamless transition between online and offline environments, carrying the shopper's digital identity into the physical store.

A connected store makes this continuity possible by linking digital touchpoints, loyalty programs, shopping preferences, and in-store interactions. Through connected shopper interfaces, retailers can make saved lists, relevant promotions, and personalized information available throughout the physical shopping journey, creating a consistent experience across channels.

The physical experience feels like a natural continuation of the digital one, familiar, personalized, and frictionless.



2. GUIDING

Guidance is about ensuring shoppers feel informed and confident, and turning product discovery into a curated process that reduces cognitive load.

It's also about providing more detailed information on products, helping customers understand features, sources, or usage, and guiding them to where those products can be found within the store. The key is to do so without detracting from the hands-on aspect that draws shoppers to physical stores in the first place.

E-commerce excels at making a depth of information available to the shopper, including reviews, price comparisons, and alternatives, all before committing to a single item.

Shoppers are looking for this same informational depth in the physical store. 56% say they want in-store experiences to be more immersive and intelligent.

46% of shoppers who prefer shopping in-store do so because they like to touch and feel products.[3]

Yet finding the right product remains a challenge. According to A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey[1], 52% of respondents reported being unable to find a product and either abandoning the purchase or choosing an alternative.

This is more than a shopper frustration – it represents missed sales opportunities and highlights the importance of making product discovery and guidance more accessible throughout the shopping journey.

52%

OF SHOPPERS COULDN'T FIND A PRODUCT AND EITHER DIDN'T BUY IT OR CHOSE AN ALTERNATIVE

By providing guidance in the aisle, retailers give shoppers a knowledgeable companion at every step of their journey, one that surfaces the right information at the right moment, without disrupting the physical experience.



Connected in-store technologies can bring digital decision-making tools directly into the shopping journey. Through interactive shopper interfaces, retailers can help shoppers find products, access relevant information, compare alternatives, and discover complementary items. Contextual recommendations, including sponsored content, can further support product discovery when they are relevant to the shopper's immediate needs and enhance rather than interrupt the experience.

The result is a more confident in-store journey, one where the shopper is never left guessing.



3. RELEVANT

Relevancy is about more than knowing a shopper's name or past purchases. It means delivering context-aware value – offers, suggestions, and content that reflect who the shopper is, what they are trying to accomplish, where they are in the store, and what is already in their basket.

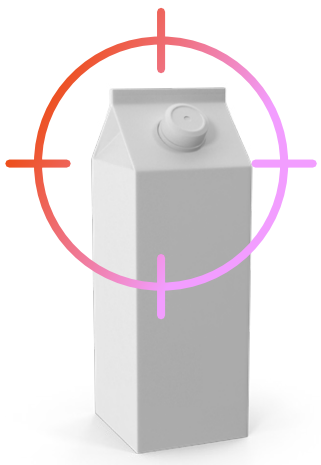
A recommendation that would be welcome at the entrance to a shop may be irrelevant by aisle five. Timing and context are everything.

65% of shoppers find personalized recommendations helpful, and 71% value personalized loyalty rewards.[2] Furthermore, 39% expect businesses to provide personalized recommendations and in-store experiences based on their shopping behavior.[3]

Yet despite these preferences, most shoppers believe that retailers are not delivering on them. The gap between what shoppers expect and what they actually experience in-store remains wide.

39%

OF SHOPPERS PURCHASED A PRODUCT BECAUSE OF A PROMOTION OR SUGGESTION RECEIVED WHILE SHOPPING



The impact of timely engagement is already evident in shopper behavior. According to A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey[1], 39% of respondents reported purchasing a product because of a promotion or suggestion received while shopping. This demonstrates the potential of reaching shoppers with relevant information and offers at the moment of decision.

Achieving relevance means truly knowing the shopper – not simply as a demographic segment, but as an individual with a specific mission, context, and set of preferences in that moment.

Connected in-store environments can support this level of relevance by bringing together real-time basket activity, shopper location, loyalty information, and shopping context. These signals can help retailers and brands deliver more relevant product information, offers, and recommendations at the point of decision.

This creates an opportunity for contextual in-store retail media. For example, a product added to the basket can trigger a relevant offer for a complementary item, while a shopper's location can inform recommendations related to nearby categories. Unlike traditional in-store advertising, connected retail media can also link shopper engagement with subsequent purchasing behavior, creating opportunities for more meaningful measurement and attribution.

By connecting relevant engagement with measurable shopping outcomes, retailers and brands can move beyond broad demographic targeting and reach shoppers when their decisions are being made.

4. TRANSPARENT

Transparency is about giving shoppers clear, real-time insight into every aspect of their purchase, building trust that fosters lasting loyalty.

Online channels have conditioned shoppers to know exactly where they stand – price comparisons are instant, promotions are flagged clearly, and a running total is always visible.

Hidden or additional costs that appear suddenly at checkout cause 23% of shoppers to abandon their purchase entirely.[6]

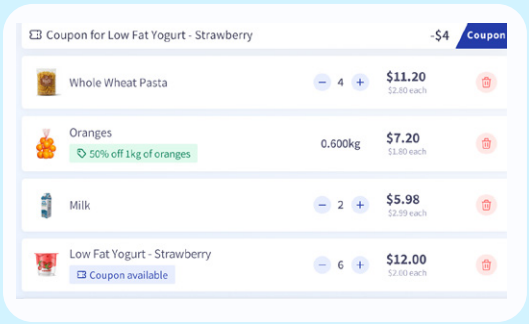
55% of shoppers prefer online shopping specifically because of price comparison.[4]

45%

OF SHOPPERS DECIDED NOT TO BUY A PRODUCT BECAUSE PRICING OR DISCOUNTS WERE UNCLEAR.



The need for clarity is no less acute in the physical store. When shoppers can see the value they are getting throughout the journey – not just when they reach the checkout – they feel in control.



This need for transparency is reinforced by A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey, which found that 45% of respondents had decided not to purchase a product because pricing or discounts were unclear.1 Pricing uncertainty is not merely a source of frustration, it can directly influence purchasing decisions and suppress sales.

Connected in-store technologies can help deliver this visibility by making prices, applicable discounts, promotional savings, and running basket totals accessible throughout the shopping journey. By giving shoppers clarity at the moment of decision, rather than only at checkout, retailers can help them make more informed purchases and maintain confidence in the value they receive.

This continuous awareness of spending and savings strengthens the sense of fairness that underpins both in-store satisfaction and longer-term brand credibility.



5. REWARDING

Reward is about more than discount, it creates psychological assurance that value is being delivered without shoppers having to chase it. When that assurance is present throughout the shopping experience rather than only revealed at checkout, it reinforces confidence in every item added to the basket.

Loyalty programs are not new, but the expectation around them has shifted. According to A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey, 46% of consumers reported missing discounts or promotions they were already eligible for.[1]

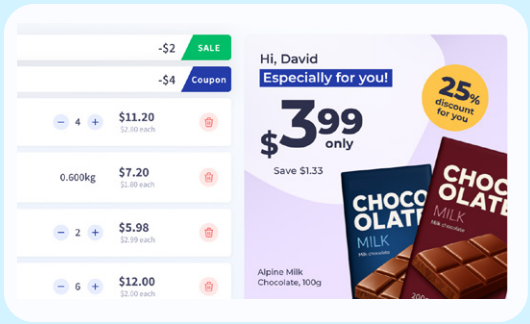
Shoppers are not just hoping for rewards; they are factoring them in. The question is whether the experience of receiving them feels effortless or like work.

46%

OF SHOPPERS MISSED PROMOTIONS THEY WERE ALREADY ELIGIBLE FOR



When savings are reliable and effortless, they strengthen loyalty to the retailer and deepen brand affinity for preferred products. Every completed basket reinforces that relationship, not just as a transaction, but as a demonstration that the retailer knows, values, and rewards the shopper.



Connected in-store experiences can make promotions and rewards a natural part of the shopping journey, helping shoppers discover relevant offers and receive eligible discounts automatically, without having to search for coupons or navigate separate loyalty applications.

For retailers and brands, this creates an opportunity to make promotional campaigns more effective by reaching shoppers while purchasing decisions are being made. Rather than relying on shoppers to discover offers independently, promotions can become an integrated part of the shopping experience, supporting engagement, conversion, and loyalty.

The result is a more rewarding shopping experience in which value is easier to discover, understand, and receive.

6. SEAMLESS

Seamlessness is about delivering a fluid, intuitive shopping experience where every step feels effortless.

Physical retail offers something e-commerce does not: tangible engagement, sensory discovery, and the immediacy of walking out with a product in hand. But friction quickly erodes that advantage.

Friction can take many forms – wasting time at checkout, waiting in long lines at service counters, struggling to find a specific product, or depending on store staff and not receiving timely assistance.

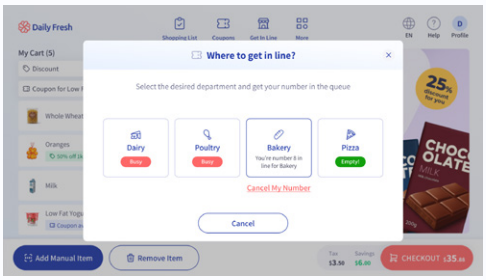
Each of these moments disrupts the simplicity and convenience shoppers expect. Research shows that 63% of consumers are excited by the prospect of physical stores without checkout lines.[2]

Yet checkout friction remains a significant challenge. According to A2Z Cust2Mate's 2026 consumer survey, 32% of consumers reported abandoning a purchase or leaving a store because of long checkout lines.[1] This demonstrates how friction at the final stage of the shopping journey can translate directly into lost sales opportunities.

40%

OF SHOPPERS WILL ABANDON A PURCHASE IF PAYMENT TAKES TOO LONG

Optimizing speed is about removing unnecessary steps from the shopper's journey and freeing them from dependencies – on queues, on staff, on processes that add time without adding value.



Creating a seamless shopping experience requires more than faster checkout. It means connecting shopping, payment, and store operations to eliminate unnecessary steps and interruptions throughout the journey. Technologies such as scan-as-you-go, integrated payment, and intelligent transaction validation can give shoppers greater autonomy while helping retailers improve checkout efficiency, manage shopper flow, and maintain control over transactions.

The challenge is to remove friction for shoppers without compromising the controls retailers need to protect against loss.

The result is a smooth, intuitive shopping rhythm that mirrors the seamless efficiency of e-commerce – without sacrificing the sensory engagement and discovery that make the in-store experience so valuable.



THE CONNECTED STORE: FROM SHOPPER EXPERIENCE TO MEASURABLE VALUE

Consistently fulfilling all six shopper expectations demands an integrated retail architecture in which systems, data, and shopper-facing interfaces operate as a unified ecosystem.

In this model, the physical store is no longer a disconnected endpoint in the customer journey but a synchronized part of the retailer's broader commerce environment, connected to digital channels, loyalty platforms, pricing systems, and shopper data.

But the opportunity extends well beyond improving the shopper experience. When the physical shopping journey becomes connected, intelligent, and measurable, it creates new sources of value for retailers and brands across three interconnected dimensions.

Shopper Experience & Engagement: By delivering relevant information, personalized offers, seamless transactions, and timely assistance throughout the journey, retailers can improve shopper satisfaction, strengthen loyalty, and create opportunities to increase conversion and basket value.

Retail Media & Monetization: Connected in-store touchpoints create opportunities for brands to engage shoppers with relevant messages at the moment of decision. By linking media exposure and engagement with shopping behavior and purchases, retailers and advertisers can move toward more measurable and accountable in-store advertising, creating new monetization opportunities.

Data & Intelligence: Every connected interaction can generate valuable insights into shopper behavior, product discovery, promotional effectiveness, and store performance. These insights can help retailers make more informed decisions about merchandising, marketing, and operations, while continuously improving the shopping experience.

Realizing this opportunity also requires addressing the operational realities of physical retail. Connected commerce must integrate with existing retail systems, support efficient store operations, maintain appropriate security and loss-prevention controls, and scale reliably across locations.

FROM SHOPPER EXPECTATIONS TO BUSINESS VALUE

SHOPPER EXPECTATION		BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY
CONTINUOUS	→	Stronger cross-channel engagement and loyalty
GUIDING	→	Improved product discovery and conversion
RELEVANT	→	More effective engagement, promotions, and retail media
TRANSPARENT	→	Greater shopper confidence and fewer abandoned purchases
REWARDING	→	Stronger loyalty and promotional effectiveness
SEAMLESS	→	Improved checkout efficiency and reduced shopping friction

Together, these outcomes demonstrate the broader potential of connected retail: transforming the physical store from a collection of disconnected interactions into an intelligent commerce environment that continuously improves the shopper experience, creates new revenue opportunities, and generates measurable business value.



CONCLUSION

Shoppers do not want stores to become websites. What they want is to be known, guided, and rewarded with the same intelligence they have come to expect online. This is achievable.
The research makes clear that these expectations are not abstract preferences. When they go unmet, shoppers abandon purchases, miss relevant offers, and lose confidence in the shopping experience. Retailers that address the six expectations outlined in this paper are not simply improving customer satisfaction — they are creating opportunities to strengthen loyalty, improve conversion, and unlock new sources of value.

The opportunity extends beyond the shopper experience. By connecting the physical shopping journey with real-time data, engagement, and store operations, retailers can create more relevant interactions, enable measurable in-store retail media, and generate actionable insights that improve business performance.

The next evolution of physical retail is not about adding more technology to the store. It is about connecting the experiences, information, and interactions that shape the shopping journey — transforming the physical store into an intelligent, measurable commerce environment that creates value for shoppers, retailers, and brands alike.

ABOUT A2Z CUST2MATE

A2Z Cust2Mate (NASDAQ: AZ) is transforming physical retail through a connected in-store commerce platform built around its advanced ShopMate smart carts.

Combining AI, real-time data, and connected shopping technologies, the platform enables retailers to deliver more seamless, personalized, and engaging shopping experiences while creating new opportunities for measurable in-store retail media and actionable shopper insights.

By connecting shoppers, brands, and store operations throughout the shopping journey, A2Z Cust2Mate helps retailers improve performance and unlock new sources of value at scale.

Learn more: www.cust2mate.com

THE FUTURE OF PHYSICAL RETAIL IS CONNECTED.

Turn shopper expectations into measurable business value.

Explore Our Platform — **cust2mate.com/platform**

Schedule a Demo — **info@cust2mate.com**



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SOURCES

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[6] Envisage Digital, Shopping Cart Abandonment Statistics in 2025.

[7] EMARKETER, Worldwide Retail Ecommerce Forecast 2025.