AI IMPACT REPORT NO. 144 · REVISED 5 OCTOBER 2026 · 250 ROLES COVERED

Retail Assistants

AI augmenting customer service, inventory, and personalization.

EXPOSURE	WINDOW	ADOPTION TODAY	READING
61 High exposure	0–4 yrs until change lands	Medium	Substantial automation of routine work. Exposure is the share of today's work AI can plausibly take on within the window.

§ 01 WHAT IS HAPPENING

What is happening to retail assistants

Impact

AI is being used for chatbots answering customer queries online, personalized recommendations, self-checkout systems, inventory management, and staff scheduling. For in-store assistants, AI provides tools to enhance product knowledge and customer interaction.

Risk

Workflow augmentation; focus on enhanced customer experience and specialized knowledge.

The Retail Assistant role will be augmented by AI tools that handle routine inquiries and transactions. Human assistants will increasingly focus on providing exceptional in-person customer experiences, offering specialized product knowledge, handling complex issues, and facilitating a seamless omni-channel journey.

Sector readiness

Progressive Integration, Varies by Retail Segment

Large retailers are actively implementing AI for e-commerce, supply chain, and in-store analytics. Smaller retailers are adopting more accessible AI tools for customer service and marketing. Self-checkout and inventory AI are becoming common.

§ 02 POSITION

Where you stand

i The Retail Assistant role is being augmented by AI, particularly in areas like inventory, online customer service, and personalized recommendations.

ii AI will handle more routine transactional and informational tasks, allowing human assistants to focus on creating positive in-person experiences, providing expert advice, and handling complex customer needs.

iii Success will depend on excellent interpersonal skills, deep product knowledge, and the ability to use AI-powered tools to enhance the customer journey, not replace human connection.

§ 03 ACTIONS 15 POINTS

What this means for you

Concrete changes to how the work gets done, in the order you are likely to meet them.

01 **AI-Powered Product Recommendation Engines.** Use in-store tablets or devices that leverage AI to provide customers (or yourself) with personalized product recommendations based on their preferences or purchase history.

02 **Intelligent Inventory Lookup & Management.** Access AI-driven systems to quickly check stock levels across stores or warehouses, locate items, and get insights on popular products or reordering needs.

03 **Enhanced Clienteling with AI Insights.** Utilize CRM tools with AI features that provide customer history, preferences, and past interactions, enabling you to offer more personalized service.

04 **Chatbot & Virtual Assistant Support.** While AI chatbots handle many online queries, you may use AI tools internally to quickly find answers to complex customer questions or product specifications.

05 **Assisting with Self-Checkout & Automated Systems.** Guiding customers through using self-checkout kiosks or other automated in-store technologies.

06 **Focus on In-Depth Product Knowledge & Expertise.** As AI handles basic queries, your value increases with deep knowledge about products, their features, and how they meet specific customer needs.

07 **Providing an Empathetic & Human Shopping Experience.** Creating a welcoming atmosphere, understanding customer needs beyond keywords, and offering genuine assistance that AI cannot replicate.

08 **Handling Complex Returns, Exchanges, & Complaints.** Managing situations that require nuanced problem-solving, empathy, and decision-making beyond the scope of automated systems.

09 **Facilitating Omni-Channel Experiences.** Helping customers navigate between online and in-store experiences (e.g., buy online, pick up in-store; in-store ordering for online delivery).

10 **Visual Merchandising & Store Layout (with AI insights).** AI might analyze sales data and foot traffic to suggest optimal product placement, and you would implement these.

11 **Upskilling in Using New Retail Technologies.** Continuously learning to use new POS systems, inventory tools, and customer interaction platforms that incorporate AI.

12 **Personal Shopping & Styling Assistance.** For some retail segments, leveraging AI tools for initial suggestions but then providing human expertise in styling and personalized advice.

13 **Loss Prevention Assistance.** AI-powered video analytics might flag suspicious behavior, requiring staff to be aware and respond appropriately.

14 **Gathering Customer Feedback for AI Improvement.** Your observations about customer interactions and AI tool performance can be valuable for refining systems.

15 **Community Building & In-Store Events.** Focusing on creating in-store experiences and community that drive foot traffic and loyalty, which are inherently human-centric.

§ 04 CAUSES 10 DRIVERS

What is pushing this change

01 **Rise of E-commerce & Omni-Channel Retail.** AI helps bridge the online and offline experience, providing consistent information and personalized service across channels.

02 **Customer Expectations for Personalized Experiences.** AI analyzes customer data to enable personalized product recommendations, offers, and marketing communications.

03 **Need for Efficient Inventory Management & Supply Chain Optimization.** AI can forecast demand, optimize stock levels, and reduce waste, improving profitability.

04 **Availability of AI-Powered Retail Tech Solutions.** A growing number of AI tools are available for chatbots, recommendation engines, inventory management, and in-store analytics.

05 **Labor Shortages & Need for Operational Efficiency.** AI can automate routine tasks and optimize staffing, helping retailers manage with potentially smaller teams.

06 **Big Data from Customer Interactions & Sales.** Loyalty programs, online behavior, and POS data provide rich inputs for AI models to understand customer preferences.

07 **Advancements in Computer Vision for Retail Analytics.** Used for shelf monitoring, foot traffic analysis, loss prevention, and understanding customer behavior in-store.

08 **Growth of Self-Service Technologies (e.g., Self-Checkout).** AI powers many self-checkout systems and autonomous stores, changing the role of in-store staff.

09 **Competitive Pressures on Margins.** AI can help optimize pricing, promotions, and operational costs to improve thin retail margins.

10 **Demand for Sustainable & Ethical Retail Practices.** AI can assist in tracking supply chain sustainability, promoting ethical products, or optimizing for reduced packaging.

§ 05 VARIATION 5 SECTORS

Impact by sector

The headline figure is an average. Where you work changes the picture.

Fashion & Apparel Retail	AI for style recommendations, virtual try-on (online/in-store kiosks), inventory for fast-moving trends. Human focus on personal styling advice.
Electronics & Tech Retail	AI for product feature comparison, technical support chatbots. Human staff needed for in-depth technical explanations and complex troubleshooting.
Grocery & Supermarkets	High adoption of self-checkout, AI for stock replenishment, personalized offers via loyalty apps. Staff focus on fresh produce, customer service, and managing exceptions.
Luxury Retail	AI for high-end clienteling and personalized pre-shopping. Human assistants provide bespoke service, brand storytelling, and relationship building.
General Merchandise / Department Stores	AI for inventory management across diverse product categories, personalized promotions, and optimizing store layouts. Staff provide general assistance and product location.

§ 06 PREPARATION 8 SKILLS

Skills to build

The skills that keep the human part of this work valuable as the routine part is automated.

01 **Customer Service & Interpersonal Skills.** Creating a positive, helpful, and engaging experience for in-store shoppers, which AI cannot fully replicate.

02 **Product Knowledge.** Deep understanding of the features, benefits, and use cases of the products being sold, to answer questions beyond basic AI lookup.

03 **Empathy & Communication.** Understanding customer needs, frustrations, and preferences, and communicating effectively and patiently.

04 **Problem-Solving (for customer issues).** Handling complaints, complex returns, or unique customer requests that automated systems cannot manage.

05 **Digital Literacy & AI Tool Familiarity.** Comfort using POS systems with AI features, inventory lookup tools, clienteling apps, and assisting customers with self-service tech.

06 **Sales & Persuasion Skills (Ethical).** Ability to understand customer needs and ethically recommend products or services that meet those needs.

07 **Adaptability & Willingness to Learn.** Adapting to new retail technologies, changing store processes, and evolving customer expectations.

08 **Teamwork & Collaboration.** Working effectively with colleagues, sharing information, and ensuring a smooth customer experience across different staff interactions.

§ 07 INSTRUMENTS 11 ENTRIES

Tools in use

KINDS OF TOOL WORTH KNOWING

01 **AI-Powered POS & Inventory Management Systems.** Systems that use AI for demand forecasting, automated reordering, and providing real-time stock visibility to staff.

02 **Clienteling Apps with AI.** Mobile applications for retail staff that use AI to provide customer purchase history, preferences, and suggest personalized recommendations.

03 **In-Store Product Recommendation Kiosks/Tablets.** Interactive displays that use AI to help customers find products or receive personalized suggestions based on their input.

04 **Retail Chatbots (for online and in-store info).** AI conversational agents that can answer common customer questions about product availability, store hours, or policies.

05 **Self-Checkout Systems (often AI-assisted for item recognition).** Systems that use computer vision and AI to identify products, process payments, and reduce the need for manual cashiering.

06 **AI for Staff Scheduling Optimization.** Software that uses AI to create optimal staff schedules based on predicted foot traffic, sales data, and employee availability.

NAMED TOOLS ALREADY IN USE

Shopify POS (with AI features for inventory/recommendations)
A point-of-sale system that integrates with e-commerce and offers AI-driven features for inventory management and product recommendations.

Salesforce Commerce Cloud (with Einstein AI for personalization)
An e-commerce platform with AI capabilities for personalized shopping experiences, product recommendations, and customer service.

Scandit (for AI-powered barcode scanning and item recognition in self-checkout)
A platform using computer vision and AI for high-performance barcode scanning, object recognition (useful in self-scan/checkout).

In-store kiosks from various providers (e.g., Elo Touch) running recommendation software
Hardware for interactive displays often coupled with AI software to guide customers or provide personalized product information.

Amazon Go (Just Walk Out technology - advanced example)
Amazon's autonomous retail store concept heavily relies on AI, computer vision, and sensor fusion to enable a checkout-free experience.

§ 08 EXAMPLES 5 EXAMPLES

In practice

Ways people in this role are already using AI, and what they get from it.

Use AI Tablets for Enhanced Product Information

EXAMPLE 1

HOW When a customer has a detailed question, use an in-store tablet with AI-powered search to quickly pull up product specifications, reviews, or comparison data.

GAIN Provides customers with accurate and comprehensive information quickly, enhancing their confidence and your credibility.

Offer Personalized Recommendations with Clienteling Apps

EXAMPLE 2

HOW If your store uses a clienteling app, access a customer's purchase history and AI-generated preferences to suggest new items they might like.

GAIN Creates a more personalized and engaging shopping experience, increasing customer loyalty and average transaction value.

Quickly Check Cross-Store Inventory with AI Tools

EXAMPLE 3

HOW When an item is out of stock, use an AI-linked inventory system to instantly check availability at nearby stores or for online ordering.

GAIN Saves sales by quickly finding alternative fulfillment options, improving customer satisfaction and preventing lost revenue.

Guide Customers Through AI-Powered Self-Service

EXAMPLE 4

HOW Assist customers who are using self-checkout kiosks or new AI-driven in-store technologies, ensuring a smooth and positive experience.

GAIN Reduces customer frustration with new technologies and ensures they can complete their transactions efficiently.

Gather Insights from AI-Driven Customer Feedback Analysis

EXAMPLE 5

HOW If your company uses AI to analyze customer reviews or survey feedback, understand these insights to better address common pain points or popular requests.

GAIN Helps you understand customer needs and preferences better, allowing you to tailor your service and product recommendations.

§ 09 CONTEXT

How this role compares

Three neighbouring roles chosen to show the direction of travel.

Cashiers (Traditional, Non-Supervisory) MORE EXPOSED	AI IMPACT	High (Self-checkout kiosks, mobile payment, and autonomous stores are reducing the need for manual cashiering)
	WORK MOVES TO	Role contraction; remaining cashiers may handle more complex transactions, customer service, or oversee self-checkout areas.
E-commerce Analysts / AI Retail Tech Specialists DIFFERENT SKILLS, GROWING	AI IMPACT	Foundational (They build, manage, and analyze the AI systems used in online and physical retail)
	WORK MOVES TO	Deep skills in data analysis, AI/ML, e-commerce platforms, and understanding customer behavior online.
Visual Merchandisers (High-Concept/Boutique) COMPLEMENTARY, LESS EXPOSED	AI IMPACT	Low-Moderate Augmentation (AI for trend analysis or layout suggestions), but core creativity, brand storytelling through display, and aesthetic judgment remain highly human.
	WORK MOVES TO	Strong creative and artistic skills, understanding of brand aesthetics, and creating engaging physical store environments.

§ 10 VERDICT

Closing judgement

> For Retail Assistants, AI is a tool to elevate the customer experience. By automating routine tasks and providing rich insights, AI allows human staff to focus on what they do best: building rapport, offering expert advice, solving complex problems, and creating a memorable, human-centric shopping environment.

§ 11 BASIS REVISED 5 OCTOBER 2026

Evidence and revisions

What the exposure figure rests on, what changed when it was last revised, and the published work cited for this role.

SCORE

50 to 61

WINDOW

1-5 years to 0-4 years

The 5 October 2026 review moved the score up by 11 points.

Exposure Index v2. Inputs: task applicability 60/100 (Microsoft AI applicability score 0.30 for Retail salespersons); observed usage 43/100 (Anthropic observed exposure 0.32); official exposure tier 100/100 (BLS: very high); labour-market trajectory 51/100 (BLS projects employment to fall 0.3% over 2025–35); published adoption rating 40/100 (medium adoption). Weighted base 60.6. Final score 61. The previous figure of 50 was raised by 11 points: the earlier method kept 60% of the weight on an undocumented editorial prior and capped movement at fifteen points, so the measured evidence was only partly reflected. The change window moves from 1-5 years to 0-4 years under the one-notch-per-ten-points rule.

HOW THE FIGURE IS BUILT (EXPOSURE INDEX V2)

Task applicability — Microsoft Research, AI applicability score	60 × 35%	20.9
Observed usage — Anthropic Economic Index, observed exposure	43 × 20%	8.6
Official exposure tier — US BLS AI-exposure category	100 × 20%	20.0
Labour-market trajectory — US BLS projected employment change 2025–35	51 × 10%	5.1
Published adoption rating — This report's adoption level	40 × 15%	6.0
Weighted base		60.6
Exposure score		61

MEASURES BEHIND THE SCORE

US Bureau of Labor Statistics · *Employment Projections 2025–35 and AI Exposure Categories* (27 August 2026)

AI-exposure tier: Very high. Projected employment change 2025–35: -0.3%. Matched to Retail salespersons.

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Microsoft Research · *Working with AI: Measuring the Applicability of Generative AI to Occupations* (10 July 2025)

AI applicability score 0.30 (percentile 88 of 785 occupations) for SOC 41-2031.

PUBLISHER PDF ARCHIVED COPY

Anthropic · *Anthropic Economic Index report: Cadences* (26 June 2026)

Observed exposure 0.32 for SOC 41-2031 (percentile 93 of 756 occupations).

PUBLISHER PDF

World Economic Forum · *The Future of Jobs Report 2025* (7 January 2025)

Cashiers and ticket clerks head the WEF fastest-declining list; light-truck and delivery drivers are on the growing list.

PUBLISHER PDF

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology · *Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market* (28 January 2026)

UK context: around 70% of UK workers are in occupations with tasks AI could perform or enhance, above the US average; a one-standard-deviation rise in exposure was associated with a 3.9% fall in UK job postings.

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ALSO CITED FOR THIS ROLE

McKinsey Global Institute · *Agents, robots, and us: Skill partnerships in the age of AI* (25 November 2025)

Physical, in-person work sits mainly in the robot (not agent) share of technical potential, which McKinsey puts at roughly 13% of US hours and expects to move more slowly.

PUBLISHER

Archived copies are served only where the licence permits; otherwise the link goes to the publisher. Full research library: https://www.careerguard.ai/sources

§ 12 APPENDIX

Method and sources

Each report was written from a large body of published research. The exposure score itself is computed, not written: it is the CareerGuard Exposure Index, a weighted average of occupation-level measures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (AI-exposure classification and 2025–35 projections), Microsoft Research (AI applicability scores) and Anthropic (observed exposure), together with the adoption rating published on the report. The organisations and publications below are the standing literature behind the narrative sections. Every source, with dates, licences and archived copies where we are permitted to hold them, is catalogued in the research library.

Exposure Index v2 (October 2026). Each input is scaled to 0–100 and weighted: task applicability 35% (Microsoft AI applicability score ÷ 0.5), observed usage 20% (Anthropic observed exposure ÷ 0.75), official exposure tier 20% (BLS very high = 100, high = 70, moderate = 40, low = 10), labour-market trajectory 10% (50 2.5 × projected % employment change), published adoption rating 15% (very high = 85, high = 70, medium-high = 55, medium = 40, low-medium = 25, low = 10). Inputs not measured for an occupation are dropped and the remaining weights renormalised. An editorial adjustment of at most ±12 points is allowed only for automation channels the measures cannot see (robotics, self-service, machine vision, medical imaging, RPA/OCR, generative video) and is always logged with its reason. Scores are whole numbers, not rounded to five. The change window shifts one notch (a year at each end) per ten points of movement.

I GLOBAL AND MACROECONOMIC IMPACT OF AI ON WORK

World Economic Forum

The Future of Jobs Report series — Employer survey of expected job growth and decline, skill shifts and technology adoption (2020, 2023 and 2025 editions); Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Entry-Level Work (2026).
AI governance and transformation reports — Frameworks on ethical AI, talent strategy and industry transformation.

McKinsey Global Institute

AI, Automation and the Future of Work series — Research quantifying automation potential by task, sector and demographic, from "Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained" to "Agents, robots, and us" (2025).
Industry-specific reports — Financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and others.

PwC
Global AI Jobs Barometer — Annual analysis of job postings and productivity by AI exposure (2024–2026 editions).
Upskilling Hopes and Fears survey — Employee perceptions and readiness.

Microsoft Research and Anthropic
Working with AI (2025); Anthropic Economic Index (2025–2026) — Occupation-level usage data from Copilot and Claude conversations, the two observed-usage measures behind the 2026 revision.

Stanford Digital Economy Lab and Stanford HAI
Canaries in the Coal Mine? (2025–2026); AI Index Report (annual) — Payroll evidence on early-career employment in exposed occupations; annual measurement of AI capability, investment and adoption.

Deloitte
Human Capital Trends series — Workforce, talent and HR technology trends.
Tech Trends series — Emerging technologies and their business implications.

Accenture
Technology Vision series — Forward-looking analysis of emerging technology, with emphasis on AI.
Fjord Trends — Design, innovation and human experience in a digital world.

Boston Consulting Group
AI/ML insights and industry solutions — "The AI Revolution in the Workplace" and related research.

EY
AI and workforce reports — Adoption, talent strategy and ethics.

IBM Institute for Business Value
AI and automation studies — Business models, workforce evolution and leadership.

OECD
AI Policy Observatory — International data and policy on AI, labour markets and skills.
Employment Outlook — Labour-market trends including technological impact (2023–2026 editions).

International Labour Organization
Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure (2025) — Task-level exposure gradients for every ISCO occupation; successor to the 2023 global index.

International Monetary Fund
Staff Discussion Notes on AI and work (2024, 2026) — Complementarity framing: where AI augments and where it substitutes.

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market (2026) — UK occupational exposure and job-posting evidence.

Brookings Institution
AI and automation research — Economic and social implications, displacement and skills.

Yale Budget Lab and Goldman Sachs Research
Tracking the Impact of AI on the Labor Market; AI and the US labour market (2026) — Aggregate labour-market monitoring; macro displacement estimates.

Oxford University (Oxford Martin School)
The Future of Employment — Frey & Osborne and subsequent research on susceptibility to automation.

MIT Technology Review
AI & Work — Reporting on AI research and its implications for industries and jobs.

Gartner
Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence — Maturity and adoption of AI technologies.
Future of Work reports — Workplace models and talent strategy.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Employment Projections 2025–35; AI Exposure Categories; Occupational Outlook Handbook — Ten-year employment projections and, from the 2025 cycle, an AI-exposure tier for every detailed occupation.

Indeed Hiring Lab
AI at Work Report (2025) and posting-market updates — Skill-level transformation estimates and job-posting trends by occupation.

II CORE AI AND MACHINE-LEARNING RESEARCH

OpenAI
Research papers, blog and API documentation — Large language models, generative AI, safety and societal impact.

Google DeepMind
Research papers and blog — Reinforcement learning, AI for science, AGI and ethics.

Meta AI
Research papers and blog — Large language models, computer vision, AI for social good.

Hugging Face
Transformers library and model hub — Open-source state-of-the-art NLP models.

TensorFlow and PyTorch
Documentation and community forums — Core frameworks illustrating practical capability.

arXiv
cs.AI, cs.LG, cs.CV, cs.CL — Pre-print research.

NeurIPS and ICML
Conference proceedings — Top-tier academic research.

ACM and IEEE
Journals and proceedings — ACM Computing Surveys; IEEE Transactions on AI.

Kaggle
Datasets and competition solutions — Applied machine learning on real-world problems.

The Alan Turing Institute
Research and reports — Responsible and applied AI.

III ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE AI DEPLOYMENT

NIST
AI Risk Management Framework — Voluntary framework for managing AI risk.

European Commission
AI Act — Risk-tiered legal framework for AI.
Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI — Principles for responsible development.

Partnership on AI
Research and best practice — Responsible AI development.

AI Now Institute
Annual reports — Social implications: power, inequality, rights.

ACM FAccT
Proceedings — Fairness, accountability and transparency.

Data & Society
Publications — Social implications of data-centric technology.

WIPO

Conversation on IP and AI — Intellectual-property implications of AI.

IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of A/IS

Ethically Aligned Design — Recommendations for ethical AI design.

Center for AI and Digital Policy

Policy briefs — Accountable AI policy.