

Inside e-commerce: Priorities, pain points, and possibilities

Insights from e-commerce managers on how they're driving growth through smarter discovery, more personal journeys, and first-party data.

2026



From more clicks to more value

We asked 50 e-commerce leaders to share their biggest frustrations, focus areas, and wishes for the year ahead. The results reveal a market at a turning point, where brands are rethinking how to drive growth, improve discovery, and use shopper data more intelligently.

? Where's your biggest growth opportunity for 2026?

Retailers say it's in getting more from the shoppers they already have – through smarter personalization, AI-powered discovery, and data-led loyalty.

? What's holding you back?

Many teams still face the same daily frustrations: outdated tools, manual workflows, and disconnected data that block true personalization.

? How do leading brands plan to fix it?

By closing the gap with automation, first-party data, and intelligent merchandising strategies that drive both efficiency and engagement.

Priorities

The ambition

Get more value from what we have

If the last few years were about chasing new growth, 2026 is about building loyalty and making every visit count.

When asked about their top priorities for the year ahead, e-commerce leaders focused on getting more value from existing shoppers.

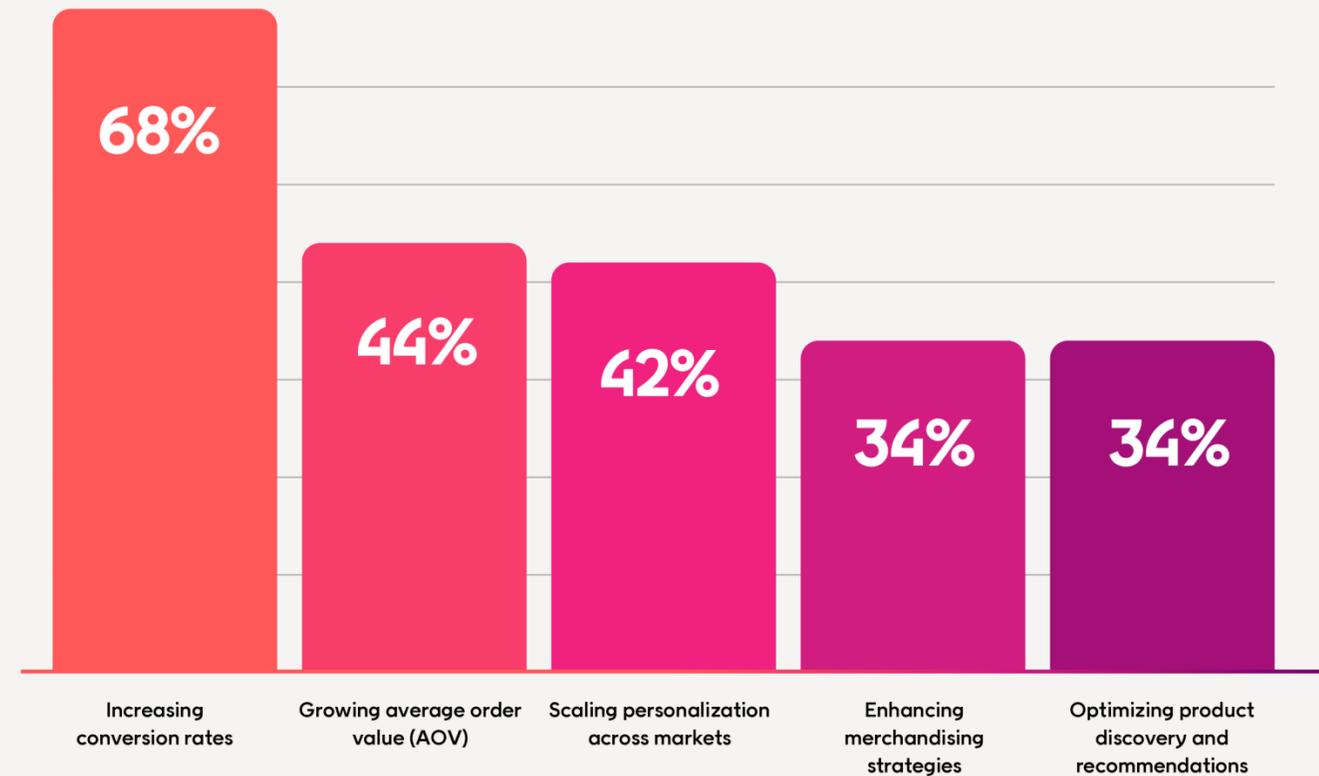
68% named increasing conversion rates as their highest priority, followed by growing average order value (44%) and scaling personalization across markets (42%).

The pattern is clear: growth isn't about finding new shoppers. It's about getting more from the ones you already have. Better merchandising, smarter discovery, and more personal experiences lead the way.

In short, 2026 growth will come from optimizing what already exists, turning better data, better discovery, and better experiences into higher revenue per shopper.

Priorities

? What will be your highest priority in e-commerce next year?



Behind the numbers

What e-commerce leaders say will drive growth in 2026



→ **Optimizing conversion & user experience**

The fastest route to topline growth is fixing leaky funnels.

Leaders talk about simpler navigation, faster checkouts, and better mobile UX to turn visitors into customers.

→ **Personalization & retention with first-party data**

Many plan to double down on first-party data to create journeys that keep shoppers coming back.

They see personalization and retention as cheaper, smarter growth levers than acquisition.

→ **AI-powered discovery, pricing & operations**

Leaders expect AI and LLM-based search to transform discovery, pricing, and even catalog setup.

The belief is clear: clean data in, better results out – and faster decisions across the business.



Improving website conversion rate, as we have grown traffic.

Anjuli,
Digital marketing and e-commerce manager



Using data, personalization, and retention to drive repeat revenue instead of chasing expensive new traffic.

Alin,
Director of e-commerce



Integration with AI mode, LLM product discovery and shopping, agentic shopping experiences.

Marty,
Senior manager, online business

What drives performance

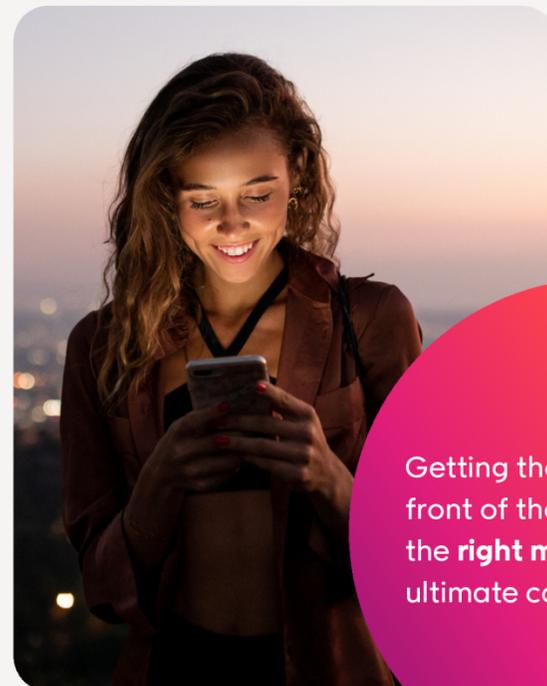
The discovery features impacting sales

Behind every growth strategy are the tools that make it happen.

We wanted to know which discovery features teams see as most critical to converting browsers into buyers.

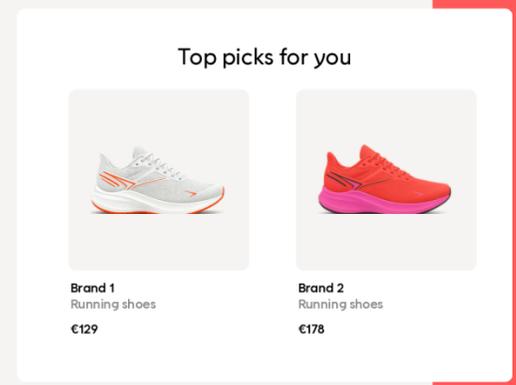
Personalized product recommendations and high-quality, relevant search results were the most frequently chosen drivers, followed by strong product content, dynamic pricing, and visual merchandising tools.

The results show that teams know exactly where value is created: At the intersection of data, intent, and experience.



Getting the **right product** in front of the **right person**, at the **right moment**, is still the ultimate conversion lever.

? Which of these product discovery features has the biggest impact on sales?



Pains

The vision for 2026 is clear. But how ready are teams to deliver on these ambitions?

The reality check

Where ambition meets execution

We know the ambition: Get more value from existing customers through smarter discovery and personalization.

But what does day-to-day life actually look like for e-commerce managers right now?

We asked them to tell us their biggest challenge with their current search and merchandising solutions, and to describe the problem in their own words.

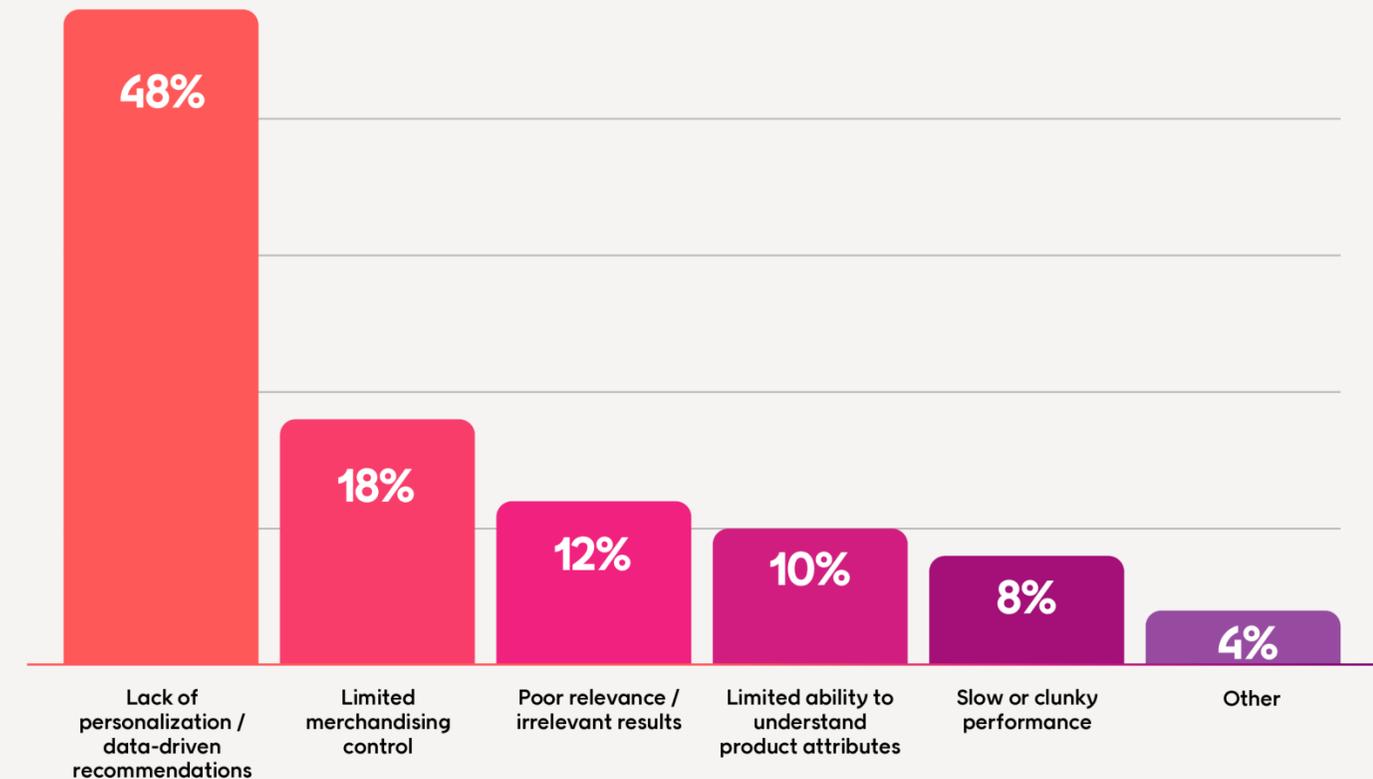
The results tell the same story from two angles: the data shows what's broken and the comments reveal why.

Behind those numbers sits a clear pattern of frustration. Many describe tools that feel outdated, rigid, and blind to shopper intent – systems built for a simpler era of e-commerce.

In short, the ambition is modern, but the tools aren't.

Challenges

? Challenges with current search and merchandising solutions



48% of e-commerce managers say their tools still lack the personalization to meet shopper expectations. Another 18% cite limited merchandising control, and 12% poor relevance.

Together, those gaps make teams slower, sites staler, and growth harder to catch.

When respondents described their challenges in their own words, the frustration deepened, revealing the real “why” behind the numbers.

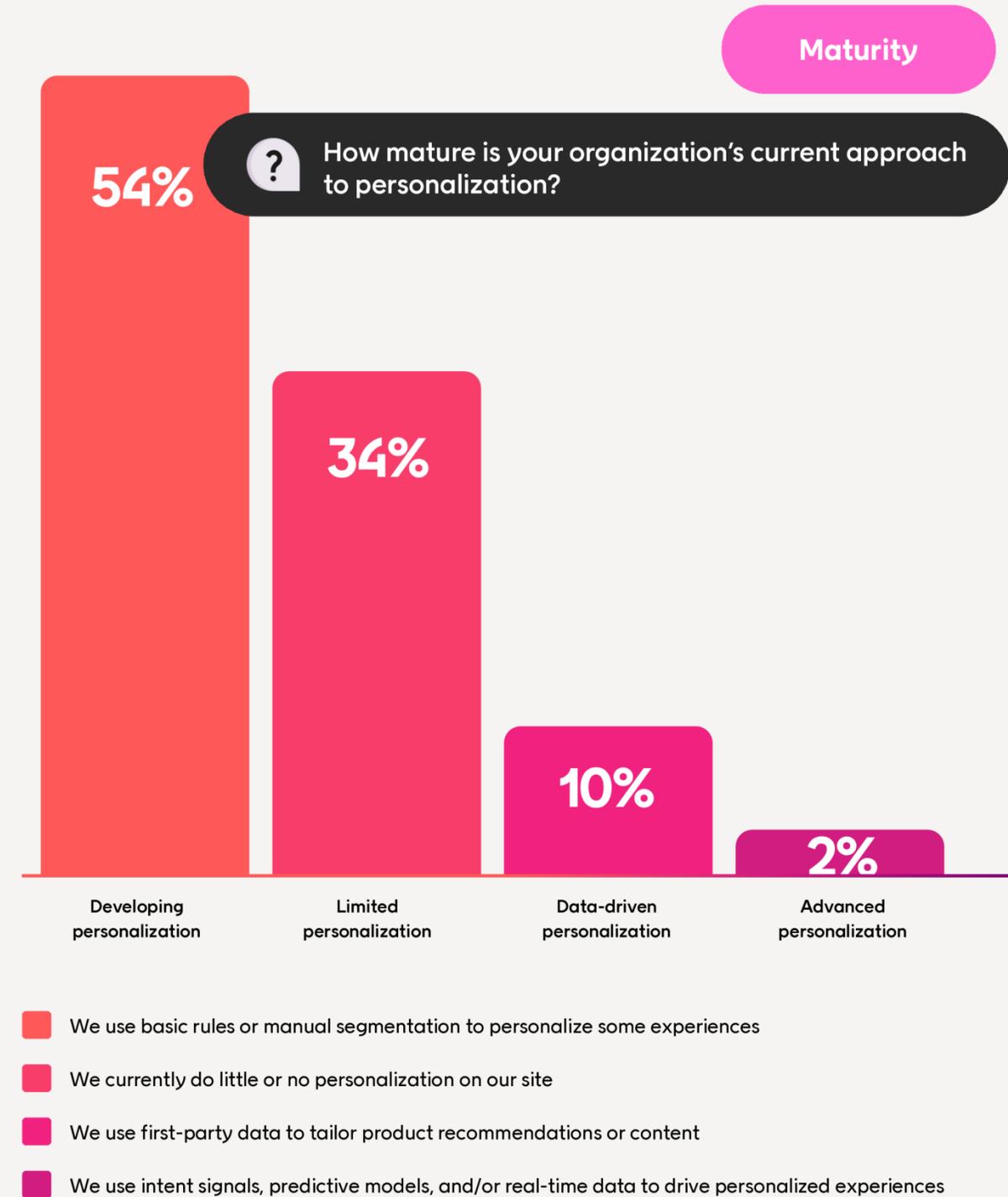
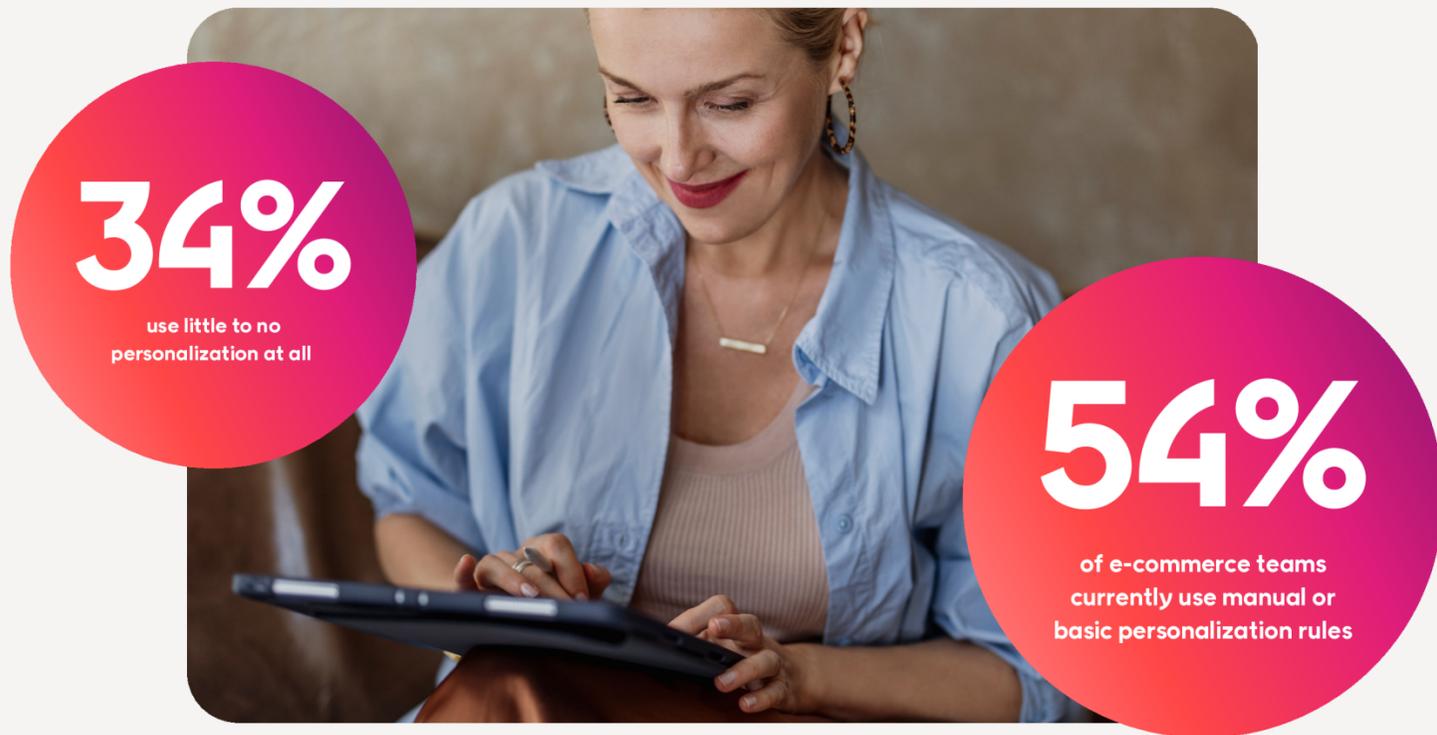


The maturity gap

Why ambitions fall short of reality

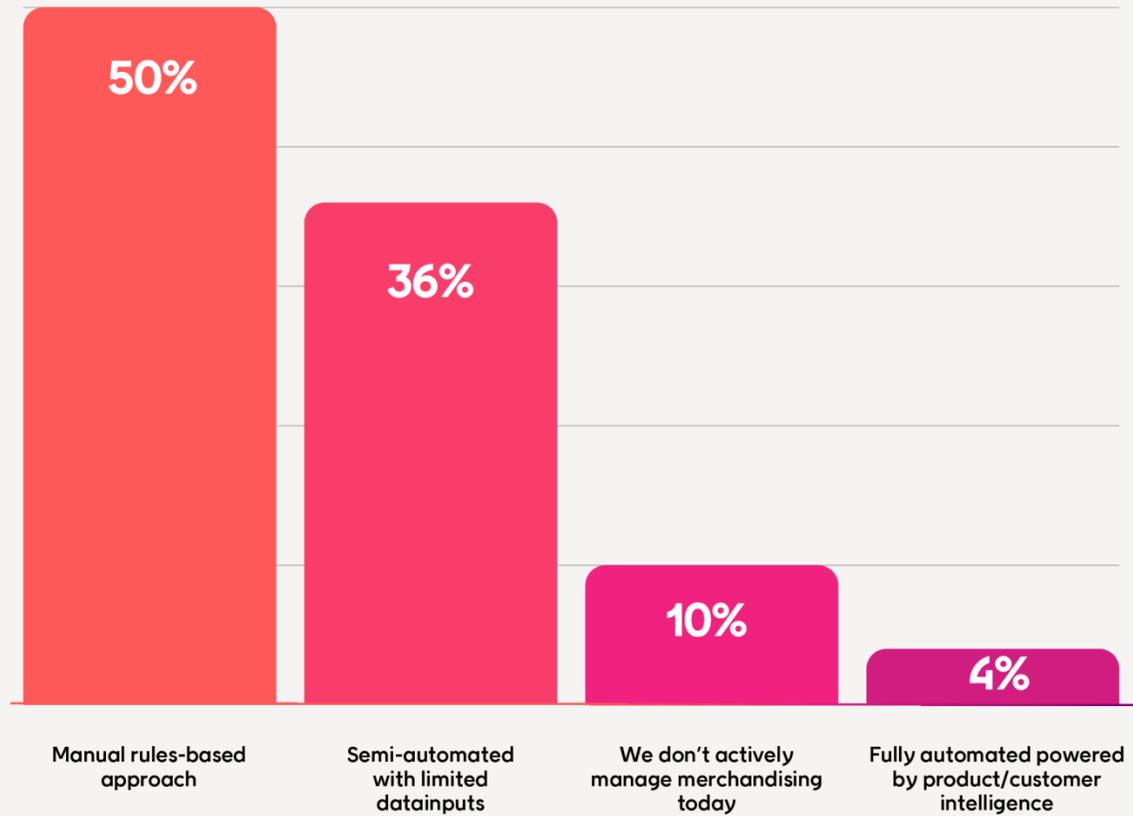
When e-commerce managers rate their own capabilities, the gap between ambition and reality becomes clear.

Most say they're still in the "Limited" or "Developing" stages of personalization maturity, with only a small share (10%) calling themselves "Data-driven", and just 2% considering their personalization "Advanced".



Setup

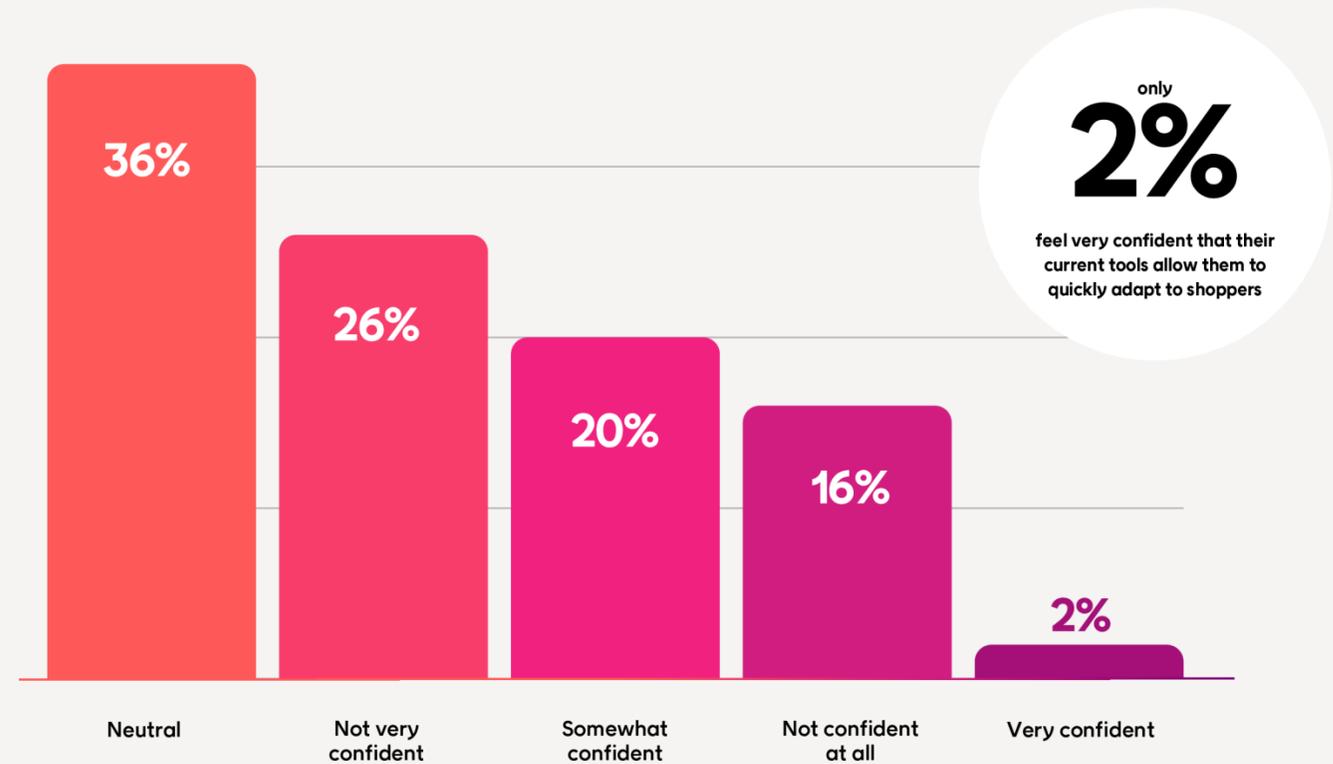
? Which of these best describes your current merchandising setup?



The story is the same for merchandising. The majority manage products manually or through semi-automated rules, while only a handful have reached true AI-driven automation.

Confidence

? How confident are you that your current tools can quickly adapt to changing product catalogs, customer behaviour shifts, and unforeseen sales trends?



Confidence mirrors this pattern. Few believe their current setups can scale personalization or keep pace with shopper expectations.

In short, the **ambition is data-driven**, but the infrastructure is **still manual**.

Possibilities

How do e-commerce teams plan to fix it? The answer starts with data and what you do with it.

The data imperative

How teams plan to close the gap

IN

After years of collecting data, e-commerce teams are finally learning how to use it.

The majority (**57%**) say **first-party data will sit at the heart of personalization and segmentation strategies in 2026.**

For many, this shift is also about independence: **22% are preparing for a future without third-party cookies**, where owned data and consent strategies give them an edge.

Others are focused on building unified data infrastructures that make insights accessible across teams. This is the essential foundation for AI-driven personalization and next-best-action tools.

The direction is clear: growth in 2026 will come from activating data, not just collecting it.

“

I find that [first-party data] will become more relevant than ever as personalization is critical to building loyalty and driving conversion.

Theresa,
E-commerce director

“

Customer data is key when talking about acquisition strategies.

We want to accomplish a single-source-of-truth.

Emil,
Head of e-commerce and paid media

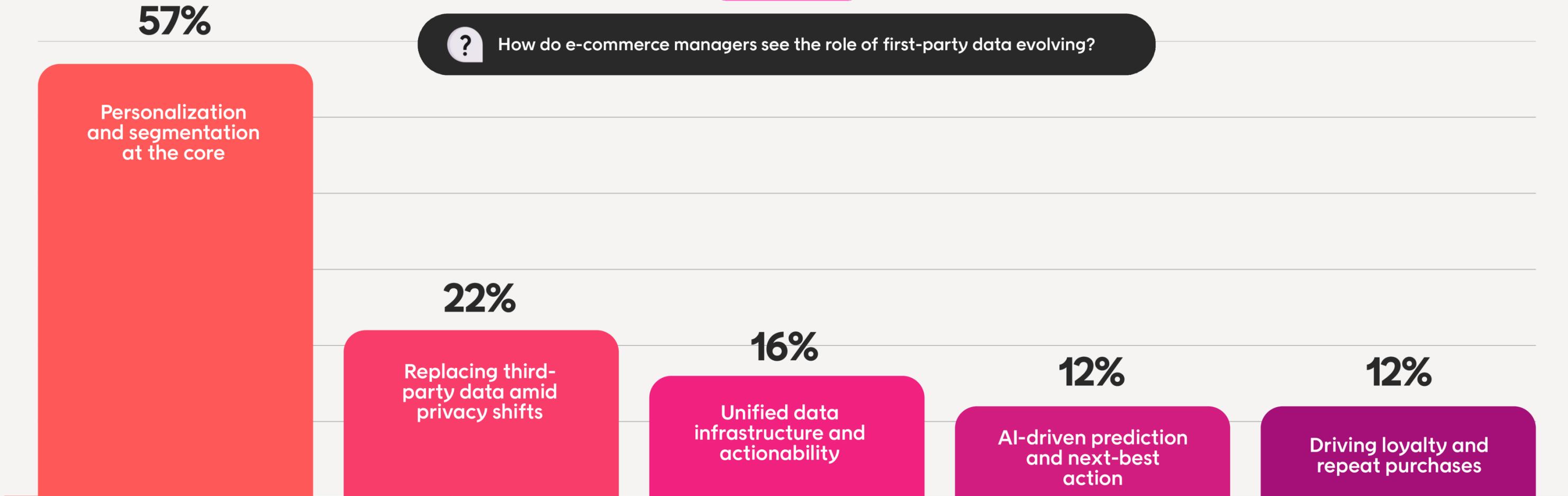
“

Using our own customer data helps us understand people better, personalize offers, and rely less on third-party tracking that's disappearing.

Sina,
Senior e-commerce manager

First-party data

? How do e-commerce managers see the role of first-party data evolving?



First-party data is moving from the background to the driver's seat. Teams use it to power smarter recommendations, tailor content, and build segments that update automatically. The goal: every shopper sees something that feels made for them and brands waste less on irrelevant offers.

With cookies disappearing and privacy laws tightening, **brands can't rely on borrowed data anymore.** Those building strong consent strategies and clear value exchanges now will protect targeting accuracy and future-proof their marketing.

Many teams are cleaning and connecting their data into one easy-to-use view. The aim is simple: give marketers and merchandisers access to insights without having to depend on IT, so they can act faster and test more.

The next step is using AI to predict what customers will want before they act. Feeding first-party data into these models helps brands forecast demand, spot intent, and automate the next best offer or message.

Growth isn't only about finding new shoppers. It's about keeping the ones you have. **Teams are using first-party data to spot high-value customers,** personalise loyalty rewards, and re-engage lapsed buyers with precision.

The opportunity ahead

From frustration to focus

When asked where they'd invest first, e-commerce managers sent a clear signal: they're ready to move from frustration to focus.

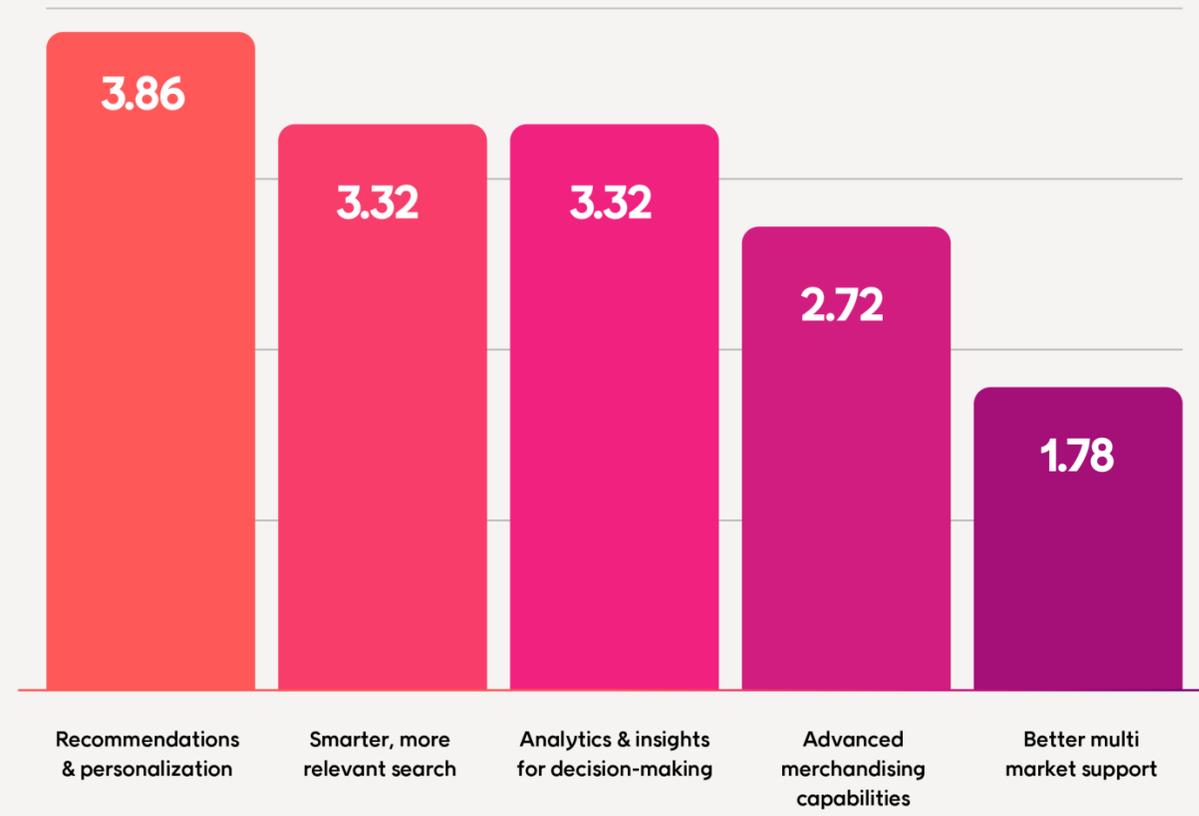
The top priorities mirror the pain points we saw earlier: personalization, better insights, and intelligent automation.

For many, this isn't about adding more tools. It's about making existing ones work harder through data and integration.

The winners in 2026 will be those who connect their customer and product data, automate decisions, and measure what matters.



? If you had budget to improve just one area, where would you invest first? (rate 1-5)



The future: Intelligent discovery starts here

The future of e-commerce belongs to brands that connect data, context, and intent to make every experience feel personal.

E-commerce has entered its intelligence era.

After years of chasing traffic, teams are now focused on connecting the dots – between customers, products, and data – to create experiences that convert on their own.

The survey results show a clear story:

- Leaders want to do more with the traffic they already have.
- They're frustrated by manual systems that can't deliver.
- They're investing in data, personalization, and automation to fix it.

Brands that can unify their data, automate relevance, and give shoppers what they want, before they even ask, will outpace everyone else.

The tools are catching up, the data is there, and the ambition is real.

Now it's about turning intelligence into impact.

About Voyado

The leading Customer Experience Suite for Retail, combining customer engagement, AI-driven product discovery, and retail media to enhance CX and increase revenue across channels.

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