

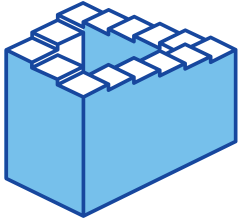


GLORY

## HUMAN ON DEMAND

Why AI Should Create More Human Moments in Retail (Not Fewer)

# The paradox at play



## Walk into any store right now and you'll see the contradiction playing out in real time.

Retailers are investing in AI, self-service, and automation to reduce friction and cope with labour pressure. But customers – even the most digitally confident – still want one very analogue thing:

### The ability to speak to someone when it matters.

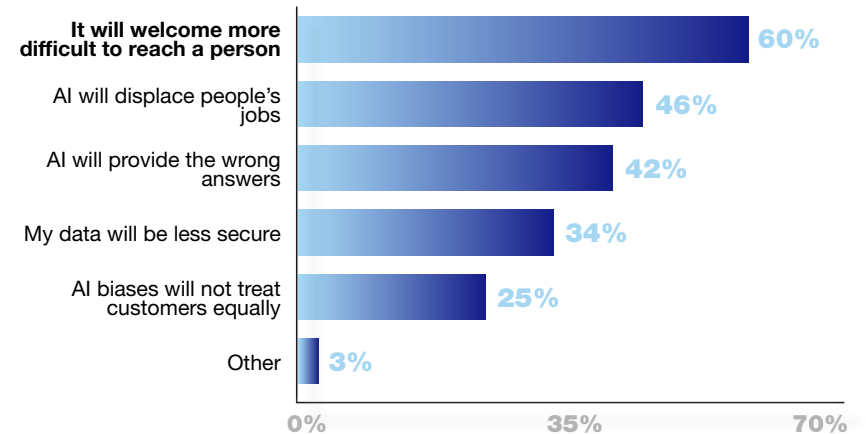
That isn't nostalgia. It's not "anti-tech". It's a signal about what customers value: confidence, reassurance, and resolution – especially when something goes wrong.

In fact, according to a survey by Gartner, **64%** of customers would prefer that companies didn't use AI in their customer service. Furthermore, **53%** of customers would consider switching to a competitor if they found out a company was going to use AI for customer service.





## But what is their biggest concern?



Source: 2024 Gartner State of the Customer Survey

**So if your AI strategy makes it harder to find a human, you don't just create friction – you create distrust.**

The smarter goal is something different:

**Human on Demand** – an operating model where AI doesn't replace people, but makes human help instantly available, precisely where it delivers the most value.

# The retail reality: customers want more, while staffing flexibility shrinks

## Retail doesn't have a "technology problem."

**It has a *deployment* problem:** too much human effort still gets consumed by repeatable tasks and avoidable exceptions.

Meanwhile, **demand doesn't arrive politely.**

It surges. It spikes. It changes with weather, events, deliveries, promotions, social trends, and supply chain disruptions. UKG's retail survey captures the operational impact:

**58%** of retailers say stores struggle to align staffing levels with fluctuating demand, and **86%** can't reduce overtime costs – often a symptom of under/over staffing.

And the long-term workforce picture makes brute-force staffing even harder: the BRC reports 364,000 fewer retail jobs in 2025 than a decade earlier.

## So the question becomes:

How do you keep service human when the operating environment is anything but stable?



# “Speak to someone” doesn’t mean “do everything for me”

When customers say they want to speak to someone, they’re rarely asking for a human to do the routine parts. They’re asking for a human to do the human parts:

- **When something feels unfair**  
(a return, a price issue, a missing item).
- **When the situation is uncertain**  
(out-of-stock, substitutions, delivery problems).
- **When they feel stuck**  
(checkout errors, payment issues, age checks, coupon validation).
- **When emotion is involved**  
(stress, embarrassment, urgency, confusion).

Self-service can be brilliant for the straightforward journey. But in the exceptions – the moments that actually shape loyalty – people want **empathy and judgment**.

That’s why “Human on Demand” matters. It’s not about removing self-service; it’s about designing the handoff so it feels immediate, seamless, and supportive.

Because when the handoff fails, customers don’t just wait. They leave.

Waitwhile’s research reported

**74%** of people would abandon a physical line before their turn.

Queue psychology research from Harvard Business School shows that perceptions (like being “stuck at the back” with no progress cues) can increase switching and abandonment – meaning experience design can reduce walkaways, not only more staff.

# Human on Demand: the model



## AI as the system behind the service

Here's the shift: AI shouldn't be thought of as "the interface customers talk to."

It should be thought of as the system that makes service possible.

In a Human on Demand model, AI helps in three practical ways:

### 1. Predict demand before customers feel the pain

AI-driven forecasting can anticipate peaks, then trigger the right response – opening additional self-service capacity, reallocating staff, or prompting remote support to be ready. UKG explicitly points to AI-powered forecasting helping retailers maintain staffing provision as demand shifts. [ukg.co.uk]

### 2. Reduce the number of exceptions that require human intervention

Automation shouldn't create more "help needed" moments. It should eliminate avoidable complexity (payment friction, cash handling bottlenecks, manual overrides, reconciliation tasks) so humans aren't constantly pulled away.

### 3. Route exceptions to the right human – fast

Not every issue needs a manager. Some need a trained colleague. Some need remote support. Some need security or compliance. AI can triage, identify intent, and route cases so the right person intervenes once, not three times.

This is when AI works best: not acting as the gatekeeper customers have to battle with to reach a human, but more like a concierge who can quickly lead them to the person or service they need.

# Why customers still want to **“speak to someone”** – and how AI makes that easier

The Gartner survey numbers are a reminder: preference for humans isn't going away. But the solution isn't “avoid self-service.” It's: **make the human option effortless.**

Practical ways to do that:

## 1. Design a visible **“human exit”** at every step

If a kiosk flow fails, the customer shouldn't hunt for help. Put “Need help now?” where they can't miss it.

## 2. Use AI to detect friction before the customer asks

Repeated scanning errors, long dwell time on one step, multiple payment attempts – these are signals. Treat them like an alert, not a failure.

## 3. Make queue transparency part of the experience

Harvard Business School research shows queue perceptions influence abandonment – which is why “what happens next” matters as much as speed. Acknowledge the wait. Show progress. Set expectations. [hbs.edu]



The in-store redesign:  
Kiosks take the functional  
journey... Humans take  
the emotional one

The simplest way to explain the strategy:



#### Functional journey

= repeatable, predictable, speed-focussed  
→ kiosks, self-checkout, assisted checkout,  
cash automation



#### Emotional journey

= uncertainty, fairness, reassurance, trust  
→ people, judgment, discretion, empathy



The mistake retailers make is treating  
the whole store like a functional journey.

But loyalty isn't built on the average moment.

It's built on the moments where something goes slightly  
wrong – **and the customer decides** whether you  
handled it well.

# A practical playbook: Implementing Human on Demand without breaking trust



## Step 1: Map “moments that matter”

- Identify the top exceptions that drive the most dissatisfaction, queue build-up, or staff time.



## Step 2: Remove avoidable work

- Automate what doesn't need judgment (especially repetitive checkout and cash-handling tasks).



## Step 3: Build the escalation layer

- Create fast routing and clear ownership: who responds, how quickly, with what tools.



## Step 4: Measure what matters

Track outcomes that reflect both experience and efficiency:

- Exception rate by journey step
- Time-to-assist
- First-time resolution at the point of service
- Queue abandonment / walkaways (especially at peak)
- Staff interruptions per hour (a hidden productivity killer)
- Customer sentiment at the handoff (not only Net Promoter Score [NPS])



## Step 5: Communicate transparently

Customers are much more comfortable with AI when it's clearly there to help them get served – not to keep them away from people. Gartner's trust findings reinforce why transparency matters.



# How Glory helps

## **Human on Demand isn't one technology.**

It's a design principle – and it is exactly where modern retail journeys are heading.

- **Hybrid checkout** supports throughput while shifting human expertise into exception-handling and care.
- **Cash automation** reduces the “staffing dependency” around cash processes during peaks, freeing people for customer-facing work.
- **Self-service and kiosks** handle the functional journey, while humans become the brand experience in the moments that count.

In other words: AI and automation don't have to make retail colder. Used well, they make it more human – on purpose – at scale.

**That's Human on Demand.**

To discover how Glory's full spectrum of smart automation solutions can help you balance AI efficiency with human service, have a chat with our team:

[info@uk.glory-global.com](mailto:info@uk.glory-global.com)



Scan or click to  
get in touch

## Glory Global Solutions

 <https://www.glory-global.com>

EBOOK-HUMAN-ON-DEMAND\_0426\_1.0

Glory Global Solutions is part of GLORY LTD. This document is for general guidance only. As the Company's products and services are continually being developed it is important for customers to check that the information contained herein includes the latest particulars. Although every precaution has been taken in preparation of this document, the Company and the publisher accept no responsibility for errors or omissions. The Company and the publisher accept no liability for loss or damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein. This document is not part of a contract or licence save insofar as may be expressly agreed. All capabilities and capacity and throughput figures are subject to note/coin size, note/coin quality and process used. GLORY and its associated graphical representation is a trademark or a registered trademark of GLORY LTD. Group of Companies in the EU, the U.S. and other countries. © Glory Global Solutions (International) Limited 2026.