

Holiday Shopping 2026

Shoppers are ready to hand AI the gift list

This holiday season, shoppers are on a mission. Fueled by the desire to make every gift count and every dollar stretch, they are turning to AI to find the most meaningful gifts at the best value and help preserve the festive spirit. And this may be the last season before fully autonomous agents arrive. Next year, the agent could be doing the shopping for them.

Why shoppers are turning to AI this season

Financial caution is raising the stakes on every decision, and gifting has become the season's most difficult problem to solve.

53% of shoppers expecting to spend more cite rising costs as the key driver

28% wish it was easier to know what people want

26% say meaningful gifts are harder to find than before

2 in 5 shoppers will use gen AI for holiday shopping in 2026, up from one in three last year

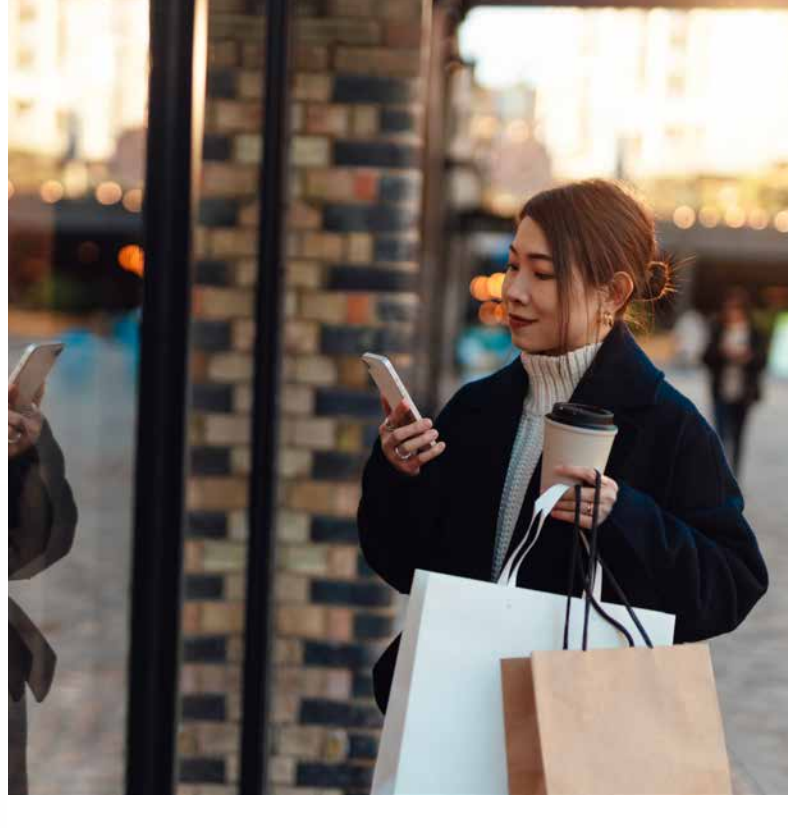
What shoppers are asking AI to do

Shoppers are turning to AI with a situation, not a search term. The brief is clear: help me find the right gift, for the right person, at the right price.

39% will use AI to find and apply the best available deals

27% would ask an agent to shop for someone difficult to buy for or find a gift that requires deep knowledge of the recipient's tastes

21% will use it to handle returns, refunds and service issues



How far shoppers will let AI act

The delegation dial has moved. US shoppers are ready to hand the agent real authority and real money.

73% are open to collaborating with an agent to find the best option

58% will allow an agent to execute specific tasks on request

22% will allow the agent to decide what to buy, confirming payment themselves

8% will allow the agent to purchase fully autonomously within the guardrails they set

High trust, higher standards



Active gen AI users hold gen AI to a higher standard than non-users. They are more alert to its limitations and more exacting about what a good recommendation looks like.

3 in 10 US shoppers trust a personal AI agent more than themselves for holiday shopping decisions. This figure rises to **1 in 2** among active gen AI users

45% of active gen AI users say they are more questioning of AI output than a year ago

Retailers' checkout lead is closing fast

Shoppers have long preferred completing purchases on the retailer's own site or app. However, as agents take on more of the shopping journey, they are increasingly determining where the transaction ends.

28% of shoppers want to complete a purchase on the retailer's own site or app after AI-assisted discovery

15% will go wherever the agent recommends; this is the swing segment that will determine the transaction endpoint as adoption scales

Yet shoppers are not abandoning retailers. They are inviting them in, but on their own terms.

2 in 5 US shoppers prefer retailer or brand-specific AI tools over publicly available platforms

3 in 4 want agents to buy only from preferred or familiar brands, even when alternatives fit better

Three priorities for retailers this season

- 1 Understand the shopper's intent, not just the product query
- 2 Demonstrate value at every agent touchpoint
- 3 Build an experience shoppers want to return to



To learn more about the 2026 holiday shopping findings, visit <https://www.accenture.com/holidayshopping2026>