

Turning One-Time Shoppers Into Lifelong Customers

Retention Tactics You Can Steal for 2026

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Turning One-Time Shoppers Into Lifelong Customers

Introduction/Key Takeaways

Recap

KEY THEME 1:
Why First-Party Data
Matters More Than Ever

KEY THEME 2:
Personalization & Retention:
A New Growth Model

KEY THEME 3:
Real-Time Personalization
Powered by AI

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Introduction

Retention Is Now the Real Growth Engine

The end-of-year rush brings in millions of new customers, but the real challenge begins after the holidays: **How do retailers turn these new shoppers into loyal, repeat customers?**

According to Puma and BlueConic, the answer lies in AI-powered personalization, real-time data, and deep first-party customer understanding. The consumer journey is more fragmented, competitive, and dynamic than ever. Shoppers aren't loyal to brands, they're loyal to experiences that meet their needs and expectations instantly, personally, and consistently.

AI and unified data are now essential for creating those experiences.

Key Takeaways

- **Consumers no longer follow linear journeys;** retailers must adapt with real-time, flexible personalization.
- **First-party data is the foundation of retention,** powering everything from segmentation to on-site recommendations.
- **AI helps retailers** identify who is at risk of churning, who is loyal, and what actions drive repeat purchases.
- **Brands must shift** from focusing on "one-time buyers" to building pathways for first, second, and third purchases.
- **Unified profiles and cross-channel data are critical** to understanding a customer holistically.



Greg Sbardella
VP of Customer Success
BlueConic



Hannah Duhaime
Lead DTC eCommerce Product Personalization, Puma



Lavina Suthenthiran
Head of Marketing, RetailWire

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Recap

Industry Voices: Insights From Puma and Blueconic

These insights come from a live RetailWire webinar featuring Hannah Duhaime, Lead DTC E-Commerce Product Personalization from Puma, and Gregg Sbardella, VP of Customer Success from BlueConic, discussing how to turn seasonal spikes into year-round retention.



“Consumers evolve really fast. You can’t set personalization and forget it. You have to act on real-time data, test constantly, and adapt to where the customer is today.” —Hannah Duhaime

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Summary of Expert Advice

- Retailers must go beyond acquisition: retention is where margin and loyalty are built.
- Consumers don’t shop by brand first; they shop by need and price, making relevance essential.
- AI and unified profiles give marketers the agility to adjust to rapidly changing customer behavior.
- Retention happens through incremental milestones, not “lifetime loyalty” all at once.
- First-party data must be actionable, accessible, and connected across channels.

Highlights

- Real-time behavioral data helps retailers avoid outdated personalization (e.g., recommending items already purchased).
- AI-enhanced experiences surface new high-value personas that traditional analytics miss.
- Always-on, evolving experiences outperform short bursts of holiday-only engagement.
- A/B testing is essential, not only to win conversions but to uncover what doesn’t resonate.
- Brands that democratize data across teams move faster and deliver more consistent personalization.

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**KEY THEME 1:**

Why First-Party Data Matters More Than Ever

Retailers now operate in a fractured digital ecosystem. Users hop between apps, devices, stores, and platforms. Brands can't rely on single-channel signals or campaign-based assumptions.

Personalization is only as strong as the data that powers it.

Solution

- Unify data across stores, site, app, and marketing channels.
- Build holistic customer stories instead of siloed snapshots.
- Use AI to act on these stories: recognizing patterns, predicting intent, and tailoring experiences.

Benefits

- Personalized homepages, product recommendations, and messaging.
- Deeper understanding of why customers convert, and why they don't.
- Data-driven segmentation that evolves in real time.
- New revenue from personas previously overlooked or misunderstood.

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“The question is: If you know X, Y, and Z about me, what do you do with that? Retailers need data that’s unified, accessible, and actionable.”

—Greg Sbardella

KEY THEME 2:

Personalization & Retention: A New Growth Model

Acquisition is expensive. Retention is profitable. But lifetime loyalty is intimidating unless retailers break it down into achievable, measurable steps.

Solution

- Treat retention as a journey, where first-time buyer leads to second-time buyer and then repeat loyalist.
- Use data to find drop-off patterns and optimize touchpoints between purchases.
- Layer real-time personalization on top of traditional marketing tactics.
- Use A/B testing to validate what improves repeat purchase likelihood.

Benefits

- More repeat purchases
- Better customer experiences
- Increased margin from reduced acquisition dependency
- Smarter segmentation and targeting across channels



“Some tests won’t move conversion immediately, but they’re puzzle pieces that build toward the bigger win. That’s the mindset shift.” —Hannah Duhaime

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KEY THEME 3:

Real-Time Personalization Powered by AI

Consumers change behaviors frequently, switching categories, buying for family one day and themselves the next. Outdated profiles lead to irrelevant experiences.

AI enables brands to adjust instantly to these shifts.

Solution

- Use real-time behavioral data to update recommendations, content, and messaging.
- Build adaptive personas instead of static ones.
- Implement conversational AI so consumers can express needs in their own words.

Benefits

- Less outdated targeting ("See this product again" after they already bought it).
- More accurate understanding of intent.
- Faster optimization cycles supported by ongoing A/B testing.
- Personalized incentives, education, and content.



"We're hearing the customer in their own words. That creates a new layer of data we can use across channels." —Hannah Duhaime

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CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES**Uncovering New High-Value Personas**

Challenge: Puma knew certain shoppers had high intent and high cart values, but lacked the behavioral insights needed to personalize effectively.

Solution: Using BlueConic Experiences, Puma gathered real-time signals that revealed an entirely new persona previously missing from marketing and on-site personalization.

Result: New segmentation unlocked fresh growth opportunities, influencing email, social, and on-site content strategies

A/B Testing as a Retention Engine

Challenge: Testing efforts historically focused on immediate conversion impact only.

Solution: Puma expanded testing beyond purchase optimization to include engagement, education, and long-term behavioral shifts.

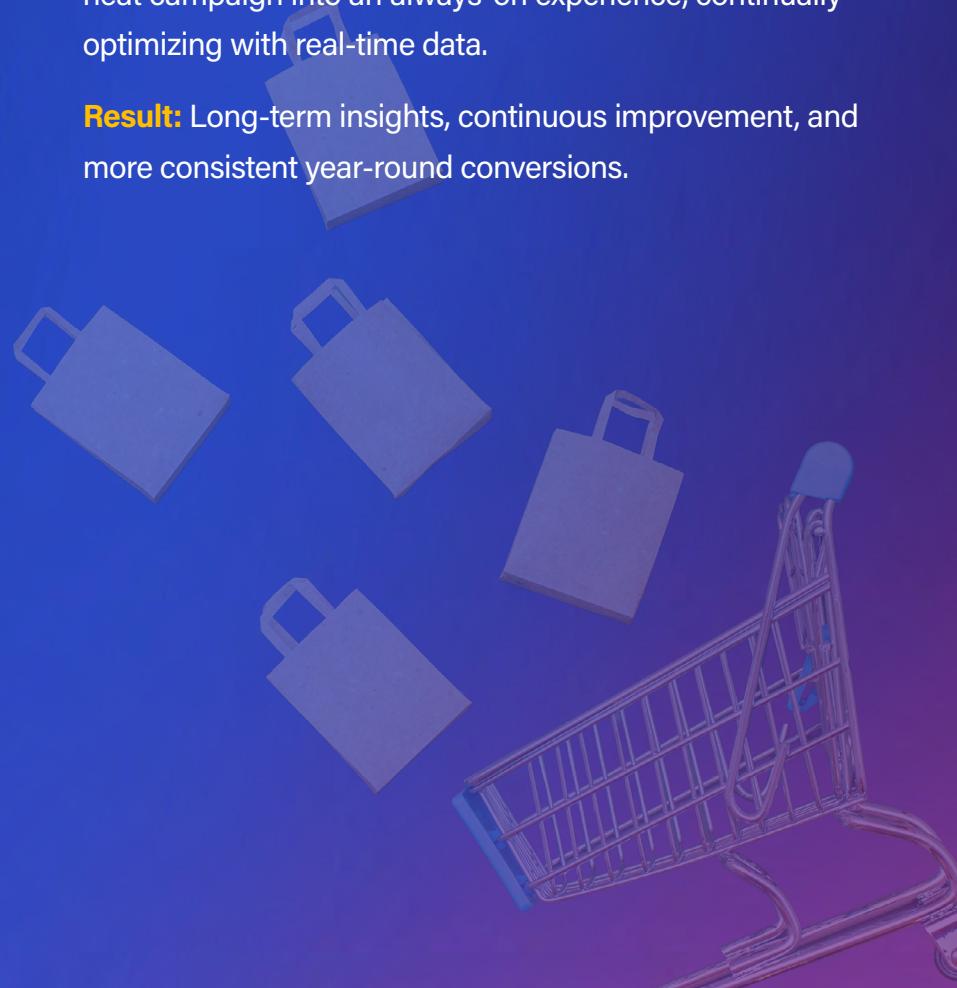
Result: A richer understanding of user motivations and significantly more effective personalization strategies across teams.

From Holiday Spike to Always-On Engagement

Challenge: Seasonal traffic surges created temporary engagement, but learnings faded once campaigns ended.

Solution: Puma turned what was launched as a single high-heat campaign into an always-on experience, continually optimizing with real-time data.

Result: Long-term insights, continuous improvement, and more consistent year-round conversions.

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AI and first-party data are redefining how retailers turn new holiday customers into year-round loyal shoppers. By embracing real-time personalization, unified profiles, and iterative testing, retailers can deepen relationships, increase repeat purchases, and build lasting brand equity



“You don’t need deep AI expertise to start. You do need unified data. Once that foundation is there, AI becomes a powerful engine for retention.” —Greg Sbardella



“Take small steps, stay curious, and test everything. Small iterations create big impact.” —Hannah Duhaime

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Retention isn't a one-time strategy; it's an always-on system powered by data, AI, and continuous optimization. The future belongs to retailers who act on this now.





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