THRIVING IN NEW-ERA GROCERY **SALES AND MARKETING**



As shopper behaviour evolves, retailers and suppliers are turning to more targeted, measurable, and data-driven strategies to deliver results from sales and marketing.

By Sam McConnell.

In Australia's highly competitive grocery retail sector, sales and marketing have become far more than functions designed to drive awareness or generate short-term demand. They are now critical levers for growth, influencing everything from shopper engagement and brand perception to category performance and long-term customer loyalty.

As retailers contend with cost-conscious consumers, changing shopping habits, and an increasingly crowded marketplace, the pressure to deliver measurable commercial outcomes has never been greater.

Against this backdrop, sales and marketing strategies are becoming more sophisticated, data-driven, and accountable. Retailers and suppliers are seeking new ways to connect with shoppers across multiple touchpoints, balancing promotional effectiveness with profitability while navigating a rapidly evolving media and technology landscape.

From retail media and shopper marketing to field sales, data analytics, and customer engagement platforms, the tools and services supporting the sector are expanding in both scope and importance.

For providers operating in this space, the challenge is no longer simply capturing attention – it's helping brands and retailers translate insight into action and investment into results. As competition intensifies and expectations rise, the ability to deliver targeted, measurable, and scalable sales and marketing solutions is becoming an increasingly important differentiator in the pursuit of sustainable retail growth.

"The grocery retail sector has changed significantly over the past five years," said Dayle Beaverson, Managing Director at outsourced sales, merchandising and field marketing specialist Saleslink Group.

"The combination of changing consumer behaviour, economic pressures, technology advancements, and the growth of retail media has reshaped how brands connect with shoppers. The biggest shift has been the move from broad-based marketing to highly targeted, data-driven activity. Brands now have access to more customer insights than ever before and can tailor communications, promotions, and product offerings with much greater precision.

"At the same time, consumers have become increasingly value conscious. While price remains important, shoppers are also looking for convenience, quality, and alignment with their personal values.

"We've also seen a growing focus on execution. In a competitive market where every sale counts, getting the fundamentals right, such as distribution, availability, shelf presence, and promotional compliance, is critical."

In 2026, sales and marketing in the sector is also being driven forward by the rapid uptake and development of AI. According to Mr Beaverson, AI has now become part of everyday business operations rather than being viewed simply as an emerging technology.

"For marketers, AI is helping analyse shopper behaviour, personalise customer communications, optimise campaigns, and improve content development," he said. "For sales teams, it's assisting with forecasting, territory planning, opportunity identification, and data analysis.

"Perhaps the most significant impact is the ability to convert large volumes of data into practical actions. Businesses can identify trends earlier, make faster decisions, and respond more effectively to changing market conditions.

"While AI will continue to improve productivity and decision-making, the importance of relationships, commercial experience, and strong execution shouldn't be underestimated. The most successful organisations will combine technology with human expertise."

One area of traditional marketing that continues to be critical and sits outside the digital sphere is in-store merchandising. Mr Beaverson says this remains as important as it's ever been.

"Despite the growth of digital engagement and online shopping," he said, "most grocery purchasing decisions are still influenced in-store. Product availability, shelf presentation, promotional execution and compliance all have a direct impact on sales performance.

"What has changed is the level of accountability and visibility around execution. Retailers and suppliers now expect real-time reporting and data-driven insights that enable issues to be identified and resolved quickly. The reality is that even the best marketing campaign cannot succeed if the product is unavailable or poorly executed at shelf.

"Great merchandising continues to be one of the most effective ways to convert shopper intent into purchase."

Bianca Velez is the founder and Director of BLANC Media & Marketing and serves on the board of Activate Group Australia, a for-purpose organisation that represents third party sales and marketing agencies within the Australian retail and FMCG sector.

She agrees that in-store merchandising remains critically important because most shopper purchase decisions are still made at the point of sale.

"While digital channels continue to grow, the physical store is where brands win or lose attention," she said.

"Effective merchandising drives visibility, availability, shopper engagement, and ultimately conversion. In an increasingly competitive environment, great merchandising is no longer just about compliance – it's about creating a seamless shopper experience, maximising category performance, and turning insights into sales. The brands that consistently execute well in-store continue to gain a significant competitive advantage."

She also agrees that AI has transformed sales and marketing in the grocery retail sector by enabling smarter, faster, and more data-driven decision-making.

"In sales, AI helps improve demand forecasting, inventory management, category planning, and retailer engagement through deeper insights and predictive analytics," Ms Velez said.

"For marketers, AI is helping analyse shopper behaviour, personalise customer communications, optimise campaigns, and improve content development." – Dayle Beaverson, Saleslink Group.

"In marketing, AI enables more personalised customer experiences, targeted promotions, and more effective media investment. It also helps automate tasks such as audience segmentation, content creation, and campaign optimisation.

"Perhaps most importantly, AI allows retailers and brands to analyse performance in near real time, making it easier to adapt to changing consumer behaviour and market conditions.

"While AI is a powerful tool, human expertise remains essential. The organisations achieving the greatest success are those combining AI-driven insights with strong strategic thinking, creativity, and relationship management. Ultimately, AI is helping grocery retailers and FMCG brands become more efficient, customer-centric, and competitive."

So, what's coming up for sales and marketing in the Australian grocery retail sector? Over the next three to five years, Ms Velez expects sales and marketing to become even more data-driven, personalised, and integrated.

"While technology will continue to evolve, the organisations that succeed will be those that combine data and automation with strong human relationships, strategic thinking, and flawless execution," she said. "Ultimately, the future belongs to businesses that can turn insights into action faster than their competitors."

Mr Beaverson agrees that data will become even more central to decision-making, enabling greater levels of media personalisation and more effective campaign measurement.

"Retail media networks will continue to mature, with suppliers demanding stronger return on investment," he said. "We also expect to see greater integration between digital and physical shopping experiences, creating a more seamless omnichannel journey for consumers.

"From a sales execution perspective, the industry will continue to focus on efficiency, flexibility, and scalability. Many suppliers are increasingly recognising the value of specialist outsourced partners that can provide national coverage, retail expertise, and cost-effective execution. Ultimately, the organisations that succeed will be those that combine technology, customer understanding, and great in-store execution.

"While technology continues to transform the industry, the fundamentals remain unchanged. Products need to be available and visible to consumers. The businesses that will thrive are those that embrace innovation while maintaining a relentless focus on execution. In an increasingly competitive market, success still comes down to understanding customers and delivering consistently at every touchpoint."