

AI makes retail more efficient, but risks turning brands into commodities

*Steven Van Belleghem shares strategic retail insights in
MediaMarkt podcast 'Let's Talk Retail'*

Strombeek, 8 april 2026

In a rapidly digitizing market, the key question for retailers is no longer whether to use AI, but how to use it to stand out. In the latest episode of the podcast 'Let's Talk Retail', Diederik Heinink (MediaMarkt Benelux) speaks with Steven Van Belleghem, internationally renowned customer experience expert and author. Their shared mission: to inspire retailers in the Benelux to look beyond transactions and regain true human relevance.



Steven Van Belleghem is a globally recognized authority who has been researching the evolution of customer experience for over 25 years. As a sought-after keynote speaker and bestselling author, he advises organizations worldwide on building future-proof customer relationships. Central to his approach is the synergy between technological innovation, such as AI, and human empathy.

The pitfall of “Erosion of Differentiation”

In the podcast, Van Belleghem shares a critical insight: the current obsession with AI-driven efficiency carries a significant risk. When every retailer uses AI solely to become faster and cheaper, an “erosion of differentiation” emerges. As a result, the market offering risks becoming entirely generic. Brands lose their unique identity as they compete only on convenience and price.

“If you focus exclusively on the transactional aspect, your brand becomes interchangeable,” says Van Belleghem. “Consumers then become loyal to the system or the algorithm, not the company. That leads to an extremely fragile form of loyalty.”

Three levels of loyalty: from transaction to belonging

When asked how retailers can differentiate themselves in this new landscape, Van Belleghem outlines three levels of loyalty, each requiring a distinct strategic approach:

- **Transactional loyalty:** This level focuses on reinventing convenience. It is a fragile form of loyalty, where customers are loyal to the system and ease of use rather than the brand itself. AI will further optimize this layer.
- **Transformational loyalty:** Here, the focus is on adding value to customers' lives. At this level, brands must redefine their relevance to maintain a meaningful role.
- **Deep loyalty:** The deepest level, where customers choose a brand based on identification. The key challenge is to create and sustain a sense of belonging.

Van Belleghem notes that many companies are currently overly focused on the transactional level. He advises using AI as a partner to shift toward greater value creation and deeper relevance.

International context

The episode also addresses the speed of technological adoption worldwide. Drawing on his recent travels to the United States and Asia, Van Belleghem shares insights on the rise of AI agents in the US and the advanced state of social commerce in Asia. He explains how the European retail sector compares within this global dynamic and where opportunities lie to elevate customer relationships.

About the podcast 'Let's Talk Retail'

In the *'Let's Talk Retail'* podcast, MediaMarkt provides a platform for industry experts to share insights and advice on the rapidly evolving retail sector. The episode featuring Steven Van Belleghem is now available on [Spotify](#) and [Youtube](#).

About MediaMarkt

MediaMarkt is Europe's largest consumer electronics retailer and has been active in the Netherlands since 1999, currently operating 54 stores. In Belgium, there are 30 stores and 2 in Luxembourg. In total, the retail chain operates around 1,000 stores across 11 European countries. At MediaMarkt, the customer is at the center. Each year, more than 100 million consumers visit MediaMarkt, either in-store or online. Through its omnichannel proposition, customers are served across multiple touchpoints and can choose how, where, and when they select, purchase, and receive electronics: via stores, the webshop, app, or Marketplace. At the Smartbar, available in every MediaMarkt store, customers receive comprehensive support, including advice and additional services such as unique TV calibration and ready-to-use setup of laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Customers can also choose from a wide range of TV and mobile subscriptions, as well as various green energy providers. With *BetterWay*, its sustainability proposition, MediaMarkt helps consumers make more sustainable product choices and adopt more sustainable behaviors. The company was founded in 1979 and is part of MediaMarktSaturn Retail Group. More information: www.mediemarkt.nl.

Note to editors, not for publication

Press contact

Corporate Communications Benelux
010 - 793 3080
persNL@mediamarkt.nl