

IFA 2026:

Six signals shaping the next generation of physical retail

AI. Connected ecosystems. Experiential technology. Faster product cycles. IFA is where the consumer technology industry gives us a glimpse of what's next. But beyond the latest launches, there is another story emerging.

How are brands changing the way they bring technology to life?



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Introduction

The Future Of Retail Is Being Shaped On The Show Floor

IFA brings together some of the world's biggest consumer technology brands, alongside emerging businesses and new technology companies.

Across this year's show, AI, connected homes, health technology, robotics and increasingly integrated ecosystems were impossible to ignore.

But beneath the technology itself, we saw some broader signals about where consumer expectations and physical retail are heading.

The way technology is being demonstrated is changing. Products are increasingly presented through experiences, environments and real life scenarios rather than simply through specifications.

And that matters for retail.

As technology becomes more connected, more intelligent and more experiential, the physical environments in which consumers discover and buy it need to evolve too.



Image credit: Bottom two images IFA Berlin

Six Signals To Watch

Six themes stood out to us as particularly relevant to the future of physical retail.

01 | From Product to Ecosystem

02 | From Explaining Technology to Demonstrating Outcomes

03 | From Static Display to Programmable Brand Space

04 | From Demonstration to Participation

05 | From Individual Devices to the Intelligent Home

06 | From Store to Content Platform



Signal 01 : From Product To Ecosystem

The products are becoming connected. Retail needs to catch up.

One of the clearest signals from IFA was the move away from individual products towards wider ecosystems.

Brands are increasingly showing how phones, TVs, appliances, wearables, mobility and smart home technology can work together.

Xiaomi's **Human x Car x Home** proposition is a strong example, bringing different technology categories together as one connected experience. The result is a different way of thinking about the consumer proposition.

It's no longer simply: **Which product should I buy?**
It's increasingly: **How can these products work together to make my life easier?**

Why It Matters For Retail

Consumers don't experience their technology in product categories. They experience it as part of their everyday lives.

That creates an opportunity for retail environments to tell a wider story.

A connected kitchen.
An intelligent living room.
A healthy home.
An energy smart household.

What This Could Mean For Brands

If your products work together, does your retail environment show how?



Signal 02 : From Explaining Technology To Demonstrating Outcomes

AI is everywhere. The benefit is what matters.

AI was everywhere at IFA. But increasingly, it was the outcome rather than the technology itself that took centre stage.

As AI becomes increasingly commonplace, simply saying "**AI powered**" is becoming less meaningful.

The interesting question is what that technology actually does for the consumer.

Does it save time? Reduce energy use? Improve cleaning? Make entertainment more personal? Help someone sleep better? Make a connected home easier to manage?

LG brought this idea to life through its AI Home experience, showing how AI can work across everyday scenarios rather than simply presenting it as a product feature.

The technology may be complicated. **The benefit shouldn't be.**

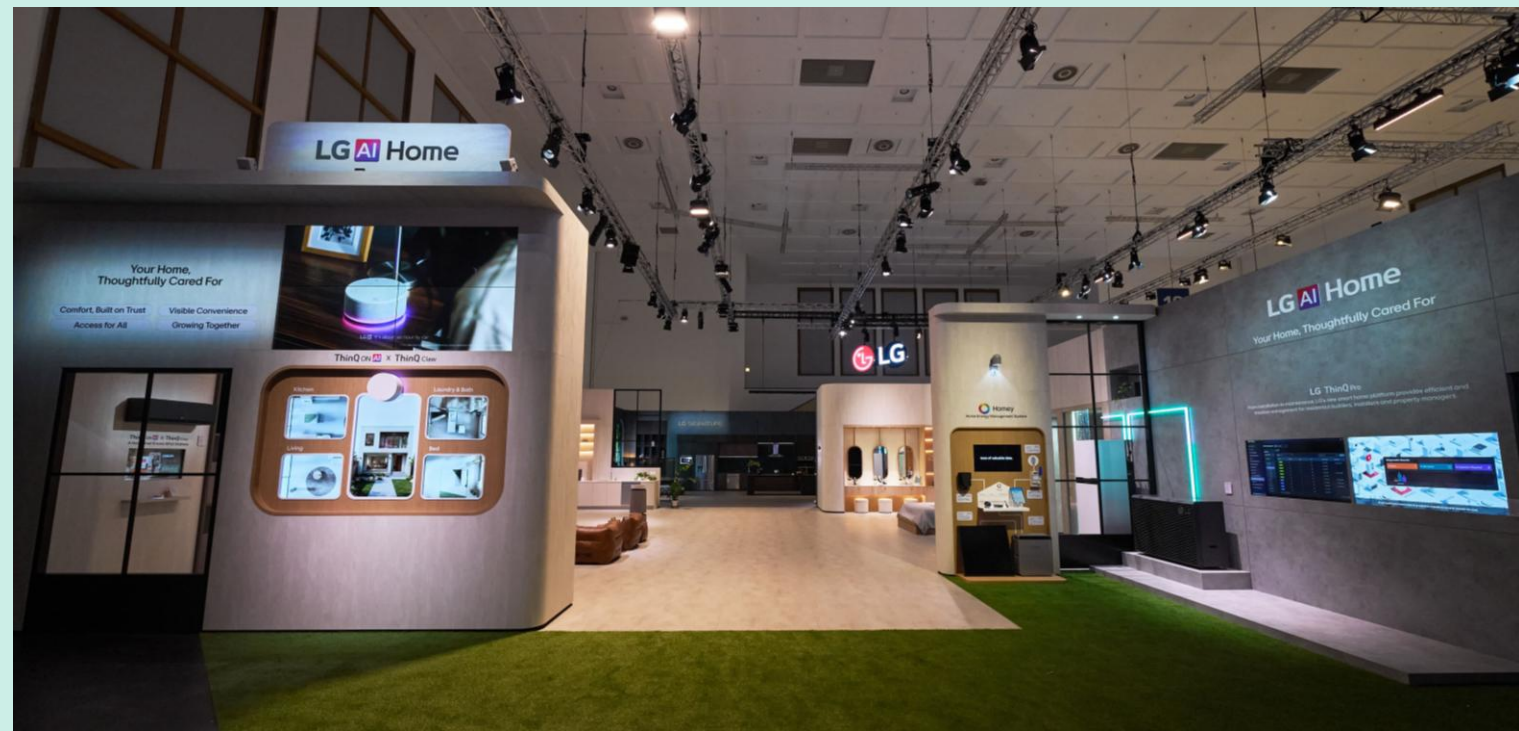
Why It Matters For Retail

Static displays can struggle to communicate technology whose value comes from what happens over time or through interaction.

The opportunity is to make the outcome visible. Instead of explaining what the technology is, **show what it changes.**

What This Could Mean For Brands

Can a shopper understand the benefit of your technology without reading the specification sheet?



Signal 03 : From Static Display To Programmable Brand Space

Retail needs to move at the same pace as the products it sells.

Technology moves quickly. Physical retail often doesn't.

A new product launches. A proposition changes. A campaign ends. Yet the physical environment can remain unchanged.

IFA offered a glimpse of what happens when physical environments become more responsive, adaptable and connected.

Aqara's IFA experience demonstrated this through a fully constructed living space where lighting, sensors and connected devices responded to people, routines and environmental triggers.

The opportunity isn't simply to replace print with screens. It's to think about **adaptability from the beginning**.

Why It Matters For Retail

A more adaptable environment can help brands respond faster while extending the life of the physical investment.

That could mean modular structures, replaceable elements, dynamic content, updateable graphics and reusable materials.

The result is a retail environment that can evolve rather than simply expire.

What This Could Mean For Brands

How much of your next retail investment could be designed to change rather than be replaced?



Image credit : <https://www.aqara.com>

Signal 04 : From Demonstration To Participation

Don't just show the technology. Let people experience it.

Across IFA, we saw a growing emphasis on participation rather than passive viewing.

The IFA Beauty Hub is a particularly good example. Rather than traditional product displays, the space was built around **live demonstrations, treatments and opportunities for visitors to try products for themselves**. Prinker, for example, turned digital tattoo technology into a live experience through its Tattoo Kiosk and interactive activation.

The product wasn't simply being demonstrated. Visitors became part of the demonstration.

The lesson is simple: **Experience creates understanding.**

Why It Matters For Retail

Some technology is difficult to explain through a static display.

A shopper may not understand the benefit until they have tried it, compared it, seen it in action or experienced the result.

This creates opportunities for more purposeful demonstration zones and interactive experiences.

What This Could Mean For Brands

What could a shopper experience in 30 seconds that would make them understand your product?



Image credits: Top two images from Prinkers, bottom two images from <https://www.ifa-berlin.com/>

Signal 05 : From Individual Devices To The Intelligent Home

Show the life, not just the product.

Across TVs, appliances, wearables and smart home technology, the idea of connected living was increasingly brought to life through everyday scenarios.

The TV can become a home hub.
The wearable can provide information that influences the wider experience.
Appliances can communicate with each other.
Energy, entertainment, security and comfort can increasingly sit within the same ecosystem.

TCL's Inspiration Habitat brought this idea to life, connecting displays, mobile technology, appliances and smart home technology within an environment designed around everyday living.

The technology is complex. The consumer experience can be remarkably simple. **Wake up. Cook. Work. Relax. Sleep.**

Why It Matters For Retail

Consumers don't live in product categories. They live in kitchens, bedrooms, living rooms and connected homes.

That creates an opportunity to move from individual product displays towards **real life environments and scenarios**.

Instead of showing a collection of smart products, show what happens when they work together.

What This Could Mean For Brands

Are you showing the product, or are you showing the life it enables?

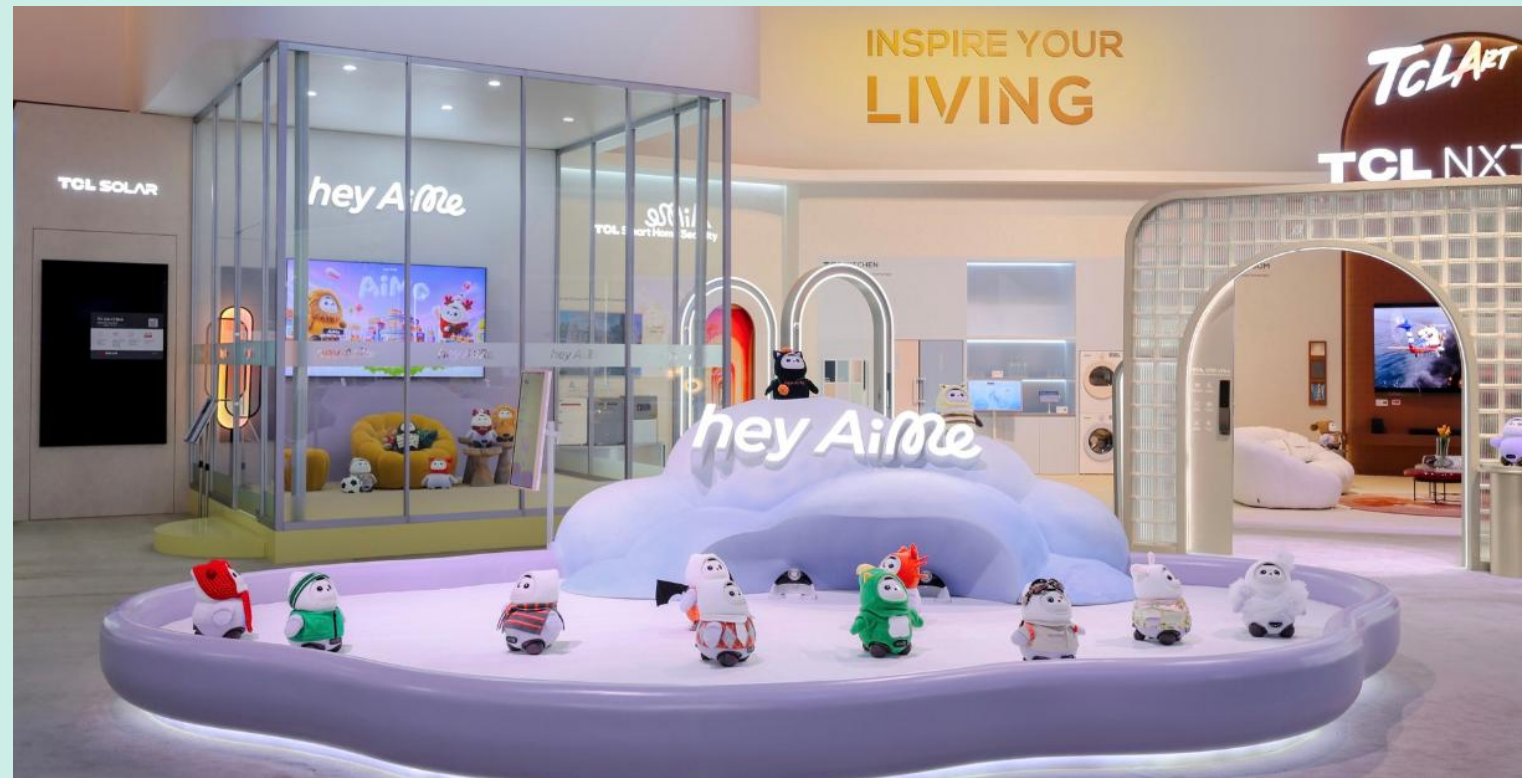


Image credits: Top two images from TCL , bottom two images from Reporter Jaemin Song FOR <https://en.edaily.co.kr/news>

Signal 06 : From Store To Content Platform

The customer journey doesn't start when they walk into the store.

IFA reinforced just how fragmented the modern customer journey has become. Discovery can happen on social, research through AI, experience in store and purchase somewhere else entirely. The role of physical retail is therefore changing.

Samsung took an interesting approach at IFA 2026, creating its main Samsung CONNECT experience at Humboldt Carré in central Berlin while maintaining a presence at the main show through the IFA Creator Hub.

The move shows how the physical experience itself can become a destination, rather than simply a place to display products. The store can provide something digital cannot always deliver: **confidence through experience.**

It allows consumers to see products at full scale, touch them, try them, compare them and ask questions. At the same time, the experience itself can become part of the wider digital journey.

Why It Matters For Retail

The physical environment increasingly needs to work alongside digital content rather than separately from it. A good display can be a demonstration, a content opportunity, a confidence builder, a route to further information and a route to purchase.

What This Could Mean For Brands

Does your physical retail experience connect with the digital journey consumers are already on?



Key Takeaways For Brands.

So, what do we take from IFA 2026? The show floor gives us plenty to look at. But for us, the more interesting question is what these signals could mean for the future of physical retail.

1

Make The Benefit Visible

As technology becomes more complicated, the retail story needs to become simpler.

Show consumers what changes in their lives, not just what's inside the product.

2

Build Around Experience

If the benefit needs to be experienced, the display needs to enable that experience.

Give people a reason to stop, interact and understand.

3

Design For Change

If the benefit needs to be experienced, the display needs to enable that experience.

Physical retail needs to be flexible enough to move with them.

Technology Doesn't Stand Still. Retail Shouldn't Either.

IFA 2026 gives us a glimpse of a consumer technology landscape that is becoming more connected, more intelligent and more experiential.

The signals are clear: the role of physical retail is changing too.

The opportunity for brands is to create environments that can demonstrate technology, connect experiences and adapt as quickly as the products and expectations they represent.

The next generation of retail display won't just show consumers **what's new. It will show them what's possible.**

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