



THE AGENTIC ERA · 2026

AI Agent Trends 2026

How agentic AI is redefining business value across retail and CPG — and the local-prime operating model leaders need to capture it across the UAE, KSA and Egypt.

FIVE TRENDS

GROUNDING AGENTS

VISION 2030 READY

Local Prime. Global Power. Enterprise Outcomes.

Emerge Digital IT Solutions LLC · Dubai Mainland

◆ VISION 2030 WINDOW



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Built for leaders making the call now.

This report gives retail and CPG leaders across the MEA region a practical view of how agentic AI changes the business in 2026 — and what it takes to act on it.

Each of the five trends pairs a clear strategic shift with the operating reality of making it work: where the value lands, what has to change in the way teams work, and the proof points that show the return is real.

The figures here draw on independent industry research — including a global survey of 585 retail and CPG executives on the ROI of AI — combined with what we see delivering programs for Government, BFSI and Retail leaders across the UAE, KSA and Egypt.

HOW TO READ IT

Five trends, one through-line: value comes not from buying tools, but from grounding agents in your own enterprise context and upskilling the people who direct them. Every trend closes with where EmERGE fits.



The decisive shift for retailers and brands isn't a distant future of general intelligence — it's agentic AI, and it's already here. The winners in 2026 will be the ones who pair it with senior judgment and prove the return on a live dashboard.

Rami

Founder & CX Division Lead, EmERGE Digital

Survey figures cited throughout: *The ROI of AI in Retail & CPG, 2025* (n=585 retail & CPG executives; agentic-AI subset n=300). Skills and workforce figures: industry research, 2024–2025. EmERGE proof points are drawn from published EmERGE Digital programs.

AI agents are redefining business value in 2026.

While headlines chase the distant promise of general intelligence, the shift that actually matters for retailers and brands is here:

agentic AI — AI that moves beyond answering questions to understanding a goal, making a plan, and taking action across systems to achieve it, under human guidance and oversight.

AI has already normalised instant, personalised convenience in everyday life. That has reset what customers expect everywhere — and meeting it demands a step-change in capacity.

Agentic AI delivers that capacity by augmenting people: better recall, faster data processing, and stronger reasoning across commercial, supply chain, customer-facing and executive teams.

Capturing it takes more than new tools. It asks leaders to question old assumptions and drive the cultural change needed to thrive in an agentic operating model.

WHAT ARE AI AGENTS?

Agents are systems that combine the intelligence of advanced AI models with access to tools, so they can take actions on your behalf — under your control. The leap from **instruction-based** computing (“analyse this spreadsheet”) to **intent-based** computing (“grow margin in this category”) is what makes 2026 different.

This report focuses on retail and CPG, and explores **five AI agent trends** shaping the business in 2026 — from the individual employee, to whole workflows, to customers, security, and the people who make it all scale.

Five trends shaping retail & CPG in 2026.

- 1 Agents for every employee**
Empowering individuals to achieve peak productivity.

- 2 Agents for every workflow**
Running the business with grounded agentic systems.

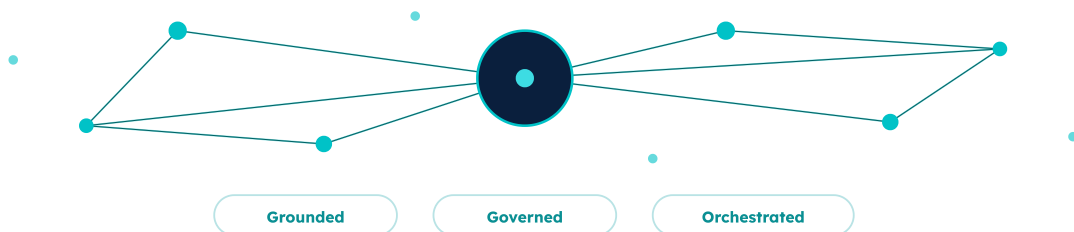
- 3 Agents for your customers**
Delighting customers with concierge-like experiences.

- 4 Agents for security**
Advancing security from alerts to action.

- 5 Agents for scale**
Upskilling talent — the ultimate driver of business value.

THE THROUGH-LINE

Unlocking these trends is less about adopting software and more about two disciplines Emerge builds into every program: **grounding** agents in your enterprise data, and **upskilling** the people who direct them.



TREND 01

Agents for every employee.

The biggest shift of 2026 isn't just efficiency — it's an employee-centric transformation that turns every individual into an engine for growth.

The change starts at the human-computer interface, moving from **instruction-based** work — analysing a spreadsheet, writing code — to **intent-based** work. Employees state the outcome they want; the system, using models and agents, determines how to deliver it.

In practice, every employee becomes a **supervisor of agents**: orchestrating a team of specialised agents grounded in the company's own systems, knowledge and customer data, rather than performing each task by hand.

51%
of retail & CPG organisations already using generative AI have agents in production — across a widening range of use cases.

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 39% Quality control | 38% Supply chain & logistics | 32% Fraud prevention |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|

WHAT IS GROUNDING IN AI?

Grounding anchors an AI model's responses to a specific, verifiable set of facts — its "ground truth." For an enterprise, that ground truth is your own internal data. Grounding is what turns a clever model into a trustworthy agent.

THE EMPLOYEE AS ORCHESTRATOR



One person directs five specialised agents — multiplying output while focusing on strategy and brand.

A new integrated working model

From entry-level analyst to senior vice president, the employee’s core function becomes providing strategic direction. The new responsibilities:

- 1 **Delegate**
Identify which mundane or repetitive tasks are best suited to an agent, and assign them.
- 2 **Set goals**
Clearly define the desired outcome the agent is working toward.
- 3 **Outline strategy**
Use human judgment to guide agents and make the nuanced calls AI can’t.
- 4 **Verify quality**
Act as the final checkpoint for accuracy, quality and tone.

HOW IT WORKS

The 10x marketing manager

A marketing manager’s day used to be a scramble of drafting posts, pulling data and watching competitors. In 2026 they orchestrate a system of specialised agents – multiplying output by focusing on brand storytelling and strategy.

DATA AGENT

Find the patterns

Sifts millions of structured and unstructured signals – from local demand to competitor pricing – to surface actionable market trends.

ANALYST AGENT

Always watching

Monitors trends, competitor moves and social sentiment 24/7, delivering a one-page brief to the manager’s inbox each morning.

CONTENT AGENT

Draft on brief

Turns a launch or campaign into copy for web, email and social in the brand voice – ready for human review.

CREATIVE AGENT

Make it visual

Given strategy and copy, generates the images and video for social posts and shares them back for sign-off.

~4x

RETURN ON AI INVESTMENT,
PROVEN ON A LIVE
DASHBOARD

+38%

CROSS-SELL CONVERSION ON
AN EMERGE CX PROGRAM

6 wks

TO MOBILISE VS. 9 MONTHS
WITH OFFSHORE VENDORS

WHERE EMERGE FITS

Through our Agentforce practice and the **Vela OS** command center, teams build and govern their own specialised agents – grounded in enterprise data, with the return tracked in one view.

TREND 02

Agents for every workflow.

An agentic system is a digital assembly line — a human-guided, multi-step workflow that orchestrates many agents to run a business process end to end.

The value in 2026 begins with augmenting individuals and teams, then compounds by making the whole business run more intelligently — 24/7, at scale.

Agents will take on complex, multi-step processes such as supply-chain management. When an influencer or event suddenly spikes demand, connected agent ecosystems handle dynamic forecasting, production, logistics and inventory orchestration in concert.

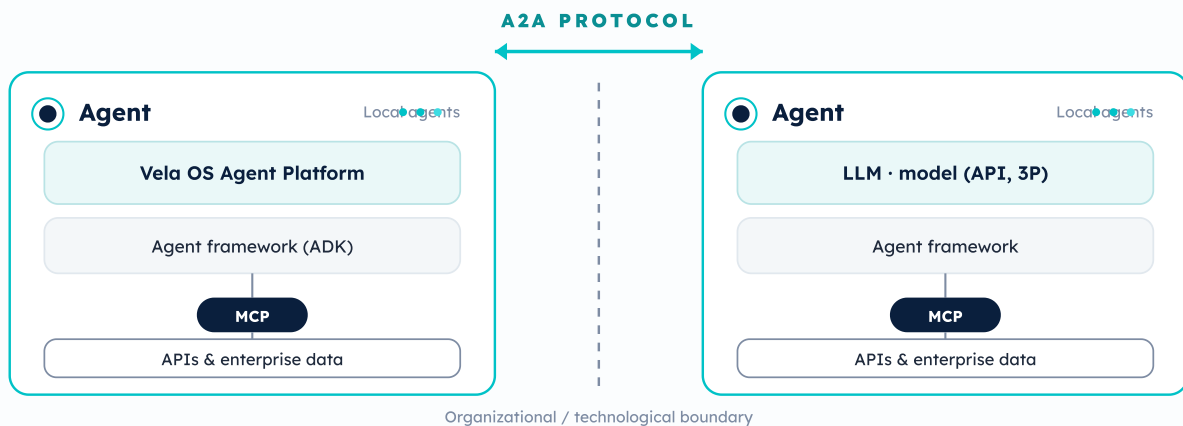
37%

of retail & CPG executives say their organisation has already deployed more than 10 AI agents in production.

TWO PROTOCOLS THAT MAKE IT WORK

Agent-to-agent (A2A) is the open standard that lets agents collaborate even when they come from different developers, frameworks or organisations. **Model Context Protocol (MCP)** gives those agents a standardised, two-way connection to live data and tools — managed databases and platforms such as BigQuery, Snowflake and your CDP — so they can act on real-time, grounded information rather than frozen training data.

THE DIGITAL ASSEMBLY LINE



Agents collaborate across organizations via **A2A**, while **MCP** grounds each in live enterprise data — orchestrated on Vela OS.

HOW IT WORKS

Agentic commerce in action

Today’s payment systems assume a human is directly initiating each purchase. Agentic commerce breaks that assumption — an agent transacts with a human’s pre-approval, raising new questions of authority, accuracy and accountability that retailers must design for deliberately.

THE SCENARIO

A shopper wants a winter jacket that’s out of stock in black. They tell their agent:

CUSTOMER → AGENT

“Buy this jacket when it’s back in black — but not if the price goes above \$100.”

The agent monitors price and availability and, with pre-approval, executes a secure purchase the moment that exact variant appears — capturing a high-intent sale that would otherwise be lost.

DESIGNING FOR TRUST

Secure, open payment frameworks let an agent prove user-given authority for a purchase, give merchants confidence a request is genuine and not a hallucination, and make accountability clear if something goes wrong.

The questions to answer: Who authorised the purchase? How does the merchant verify the agent’s request? Who is accountable for fraud or fulfilment?

41%

IMPROVEMENT IN CROSS-VERTICAL RETENTION — CAREEM CDP GO-LIVE (EMERGE)

+54%

ATTRIBUTABLE DIGITAL REVENUE — ALSAIF GALLERY ANALYTICS REBUILD (EMERGE)

WHERE EMERGE FITS

Our Data & Analytics bench grounds agentic workflows in your business data — CDP, identity and warehouse — while **Vela OS** governs the multi-agent system end to end. One accountable Dubai Mainland contract, not four vendors.

TREND 03

Agents for your customers.

For a decade, service automation meant scripted chatbots deflecting tickets. In 2026, concierge-style agents deliver genuinely one-to-one experiences.

Earlier chatbots were efficient but couldn't handle nuance. Advances in language models and agent-to-agent collaboration change that: agents now **remember preferences and past conversations**, connecting the enterprise and the customer in a continuous relationship.

The shift is also a return to natural, verbal interaction — letting customers simply speak and provide context, instead of navigating menus or repeating “operator!” to reach a human.

PERSONALIZATION AT SCALE

The difference isn't just the AI — it's the data. A concierge agent succeeds because it's grounded in enterprise context you choose to share: purchase history from the CRM, package tracking from the logistics system.

YESTERDAY'S CHATBOT

“Please enter your 12-digit order number.”

47%

of retail & CPG organisations with agents in production are already adopting them for customer service and experience.

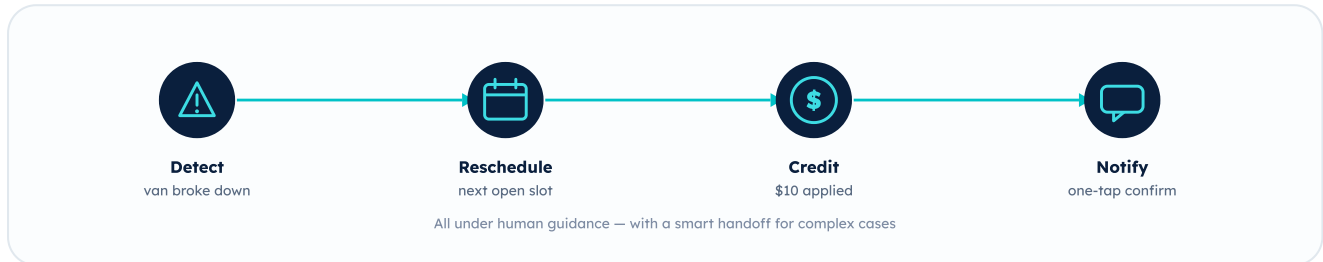
AGENTIC CONCIERGE

“Hi Elizaveta — I see you're calling about the blue sweater you bought last week. Our system shows it was just delivered. Starting a return, or an exchange?”

HOW IT WORKS

Proactive service that builds trust

An agentic concierge doesn't wait for a complaint. It monitors systems for triggers and resolves issues with real-time data — under human guidance — turning potential problems into loyalty. Imagine a logistics agent flags a delivery as “failed” at 3 PM:



For complex or emotionally charged cases, the agent executes a **smart handoff** — passing a full summary to a human who steps in with full context. The customer is never asked to start over.

“
By putting AI in the hands of our people, we free teams to focus on creativity, culture and customer connection — and let the agents handle the repetitive work.
The CX leadership view
Reflected across Emerge customer-experience programs

WHERE EMERGE FITS
Emerge's CX Division designs the concierge model and carries context across every channel — with proof points including **+22-pt CSAT** and **+38% cross-sell** on programs we've led across MEA.

TREND 04

Agents for security.

In a modern security operations center, analysts face a constant stream of alerts. Agents advance security from alerts to action.

For retailers, the volume is relentless — e-commerce payment fraud, bot activity, data theft. The result is alert fatigue, with **82%** of security leaders concerned they may be missing real threats.

Traditional automation delivers only incremental relief. Agents are different: they reason, act, observe and adjust based on new information — helping teams identify and respond to threats far more effectively, including vulnerability discovery and alert triage.

41%

of retail & CPG organisations with agents in production are adopting them for security operations and cybersecurity.

82%

of security leaders worry alert fatigue is hiding real threats.

“

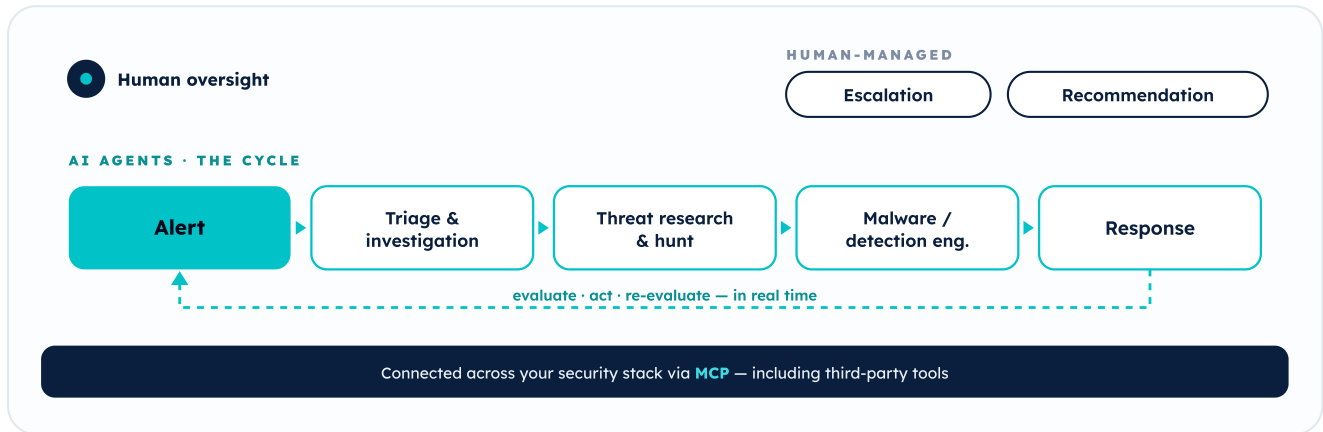
The goal is the greatest decrease of risk per dollar spent. Agents detect and respond faster — and, more importantly, they elevate analysts from tactical responders to strategic defenders.

The security operations view

A perspective Emerge brings to AI governance & trust

The semi-autonomous SOC

An agentic security operations center orchestrates a system of task-based agents, each with a defined role, toward a common outcome. After an alert arrives, the system cycles through detection and response — with humans owning escalation and final recommendations.



SHARED CONTEXT IS THE KEY

Multiple SOC agents need common enterprise context and shared security data. They communicate and adapt through A2A and MCP across the entire stack — including third-party tools — and should be continuously trained on real-world insight from security experts.

ELEVATING THE ANALYST

- **Threat hunting**
Using intuition and experience to direct the agents: “I have a hunch about this server — hunt for unusual outbound transfers.”
- **Supervising agents**
Fine-tuning their rules of engagement and reviewing automated responses.
- **Defending forward**
Architecting better defenses and anticipating the next wave, instead of chasing the last one.

WHERE EMERGE FITS

Emerge brings AI governance and trust frameworks — GCC PDPL-aligned — so agentic security scales without outpacing your compliance posture.

TREND 05

Agents for scale.

It's tempting to focus on models, platforms and prompts — but that misses the most critical element: the people.

As AI evolves, the skills gap widens. The “half-life” of a professional skill is now about **four years** — and in tech, as little as two. Closing that gap lifts hiring, promotion, productivity, innovation and revenue.

To be ready for an internal AI rollout, preparing the organisation is the most critical step. Upskill employees *and* involve them in the implementation, and adoption — and sustained results — come far faster.

82%

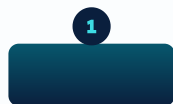
of decision-makers say learning resources help them stay ahead in AI.

71%

of organisations saw revenue rise after investing in learning.

61% of employees at organisations that have implemented AI now use it daily — yet only **29%** say AI is broadly advocated across their organisation. The appetite is there; the enablement isn't yet.

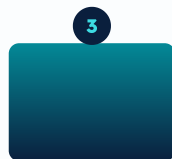
2026 will be the year every employee can move from **guessing to knowing** — but only if their organisation invests in the skills to make it possible. The path runs through five pillars:



Establish goals



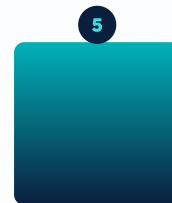
Secure sponsorship



Sustain momentum



Integrate to workflows



Prepare for risk

HOW IT WORKS

The five pillars of AI learning

Thriving takes more than buying technology — it takes an AI-ready workforce, built on a holistic strategy of five pillars.

1 Establish goals

Pick what matters and what you can measure — e.g. “use agents to cut time-to-market for new products by 20%” — and align it to the bigger organisational picture.

2 Secure sponsorship

Stand up three roles: an **executive sponsor** (funding and air cover), a **groundswell lead** (the “AI megaphone” driving grassroots momentum), and an **AI accelerator** (the technical expert turning ideas into working solutions).

3 Sustain momentum & reward innovation

Run a “digital hub” with a gamified idea exchange and leaderboard, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, and regular multichannel communication and awards.

4 Integrate AI into daily workflows

Tap collective genius through internal hackathons and practical, challenge-based field days — in person and virtual — that build real habits.

5 Prepare for risk with trusted frameworks

As agent-accelerated threats grow, security becomes everyone’s responsibility: train teams on what data can and can’t be used, and how to spot AI-driven social engineering.

WHERE EMERGE FITS

Our **Crawl-Walk-Run** engagement model builds upskilling in by design — a low-risk diagnostic, a gated transformation phase, then a long-term program with senior teams and governed AI, so capability grows alongside the technology.

THE 2026 OPPORTUNITY

A clear path to business growth.

The 2026 opportunity can look technical and the adoption curve steep — but it is fundamentally about growth.

The real value of agentic systems is delivering more helpful customer experiences that unlock new markets. Meeting that demand means building the capacity to scale with agents — making your organisation faster, smarter, and ultimately more human. Done well, access to agentic AI democratizes insight, innovation and growth, with the responsibility to keep outcomes secure, ethical and fair.



**Emerge
Digital**

Powered by FPT CX Services · Part of a global group of 80,000+

Book a Vision 2030 Readiness Briefing →

emergedigital.com/contact · Dubai Mainland

LOCAL PRIME

GLOBAL POWER

ENTERPRISE OUTCOMES

Sources: *The ROI of AI in Retail & CPG, 2025* (n=585 retail & CPG executives; agentic-AI subset n=300); workforce and skills figures from industry research, 2024–2025. EmERGE proof points from published EmERGE Digital programs (Careem, Alsaif Gallery, Perfetti van Melle). This report is an EmERGE Digital thought-leadership edition adapted for the MEA retail & CPG market.