

Ten Things We **Learned** About Retail in 2026

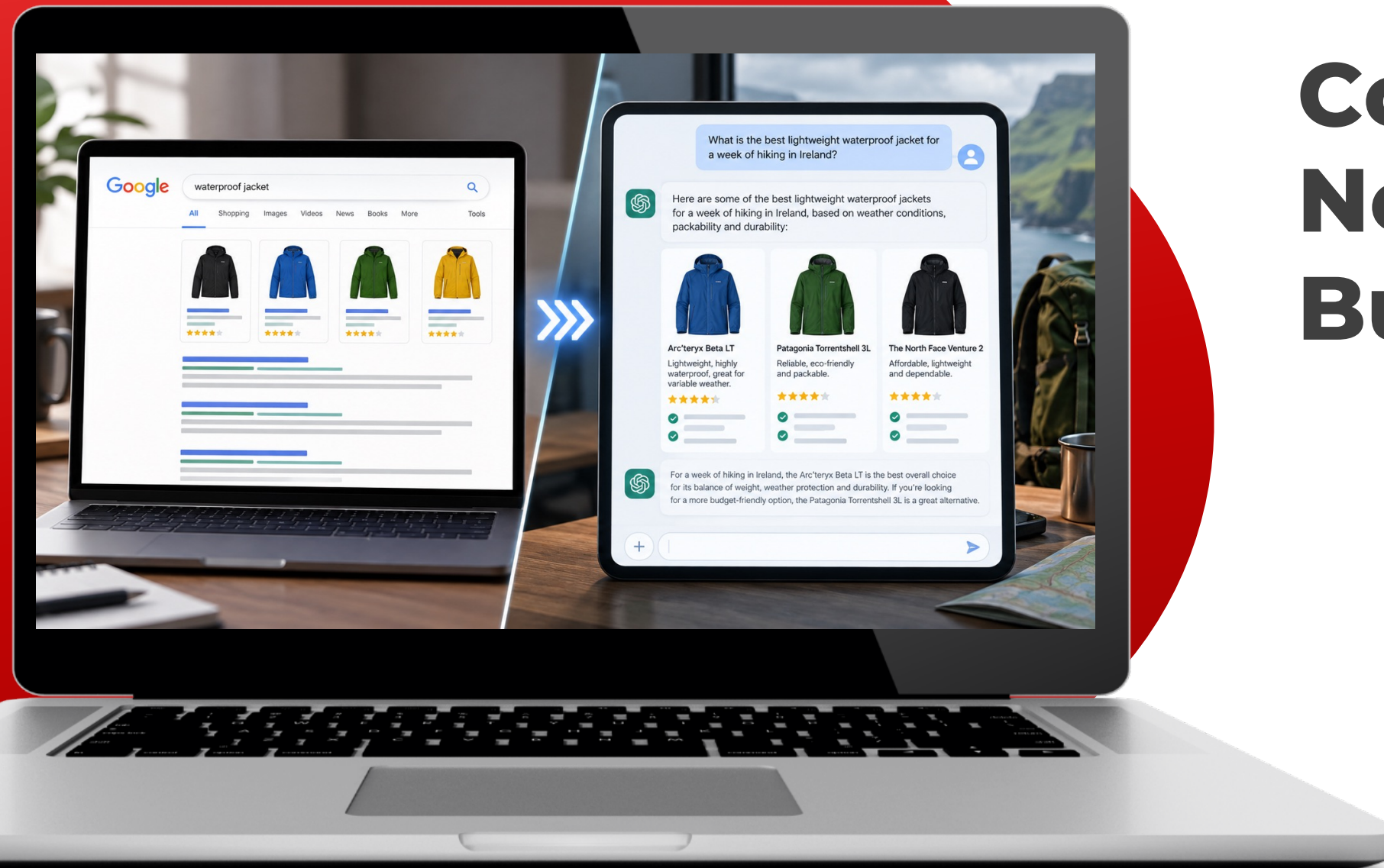


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The image is a digital composition with a dark, blue-toned background. On the left, a smartphone is shown at an angle, its screen displaying a glowing white shopping bag icon. To the right of the phone, a series of translucent cards float horizontally, each containing an image of a different product: a sneaker, a pair of headphones, a white t-shirt, a wristwatch, and a handbag. In the upper right corner, a stylized globe is depicted with a network of glowing lines and dots connecting various points across its surface. Below the globe, several brown paper shopping bags and wrapped gift boxes are stacked. The overall aesthetic is high-tech and modern, suggesting a digital or futuristic shopping environment.

Shopping in 2026
became a contest
over **attention,**
trust, tariffs, and
algorithms.



Contextual Search: Not Ubiquitous, But Coming Fast

- Conversational
- Answers Multiple Questions
- AI as Personal Shopper
- Retailers Scrambling to Be There

Getting Busy for GEO

Generative Engine Optimization

AI needs structured, reliable
information about every product

Real-time Price, Inventory,
Shipping And Product-
attribute Data.



Retailment: Customers as Audience

- Retailers once competed primarily for foot traffic.
- Now they compete for attention across physical stores, social platforms, apps, and video
- Stores increasingly function as content studios, entertainment venues, and media platforms.

“ Every company is becoming a media company.”





Gap

Cultural collaborations and experiential merchandising

Dick's Sporting Goods

Sports, events, community, and content

Walmart

Creator partnerships, shoppable media, and retail entertainment

Robots Work the Front of the Store

- Robots are moving beyond warehouses and fulfillment centers.
- Retailers are testing robots as greeters, guides, stock-checkers, delivery agents, and service assistants.

“Would you buy a used car from a robot?”





Mass Retail Gets Cool

Uncertainty Does Strange Things

- Tariffs, Tariffs, Tariffs
- Consumer Spending
- Agentic Shopping
- Inflation
- AI and Jobs





Frictionless Experiences





Shoppers Use Tools in Real Time

- AR
- Google Translate
- Enlarge Fonts
- Search Reviews
- Comparative Pricing



The Rise of the Creators and Social Commerce

Resale Becomes Retail

- Second hand and vintage
- More goods listing their sourced materials
- Refill and package-free stores
- Buy-back programs

