

The Online Retail Radar

A monthly, fully anonymized read on what the online-retail market actually did: assortment, advertising, payments, fulfillment and readiness for AI shopping agents. Aggregated from continuous monitoring of thousands of stores. This edition covers September 2026 only and skews toward fashion and apparel; other verticals are represented and growing.

2,088

STORES MONITORED

September 2026

REPORTING PERIOD

812

NEW STORES SAMPLED

100%

ANONYMIZED

COMPARED WITH AUGUST

same method, both months

Only where the comparison is like-for-like

Stores that grew vs trimmed their catalog

33 vs 30

Aug: 51 vs 25

Median net products per changing store

+1

Aug: +4

New stores on .store or .shop

20.3%

Aug: 23.5%

Median products at launch

9

Aug: 10

Multilingual storefronts

28.5%

Aug: 31.2%

Top five payment methods

unchanged

same order as 31 Aug

1,018 of the 2,088 stores in this edition were first observed during September, so metrics whose population shifted with that onboarding wave are reported for September alone.

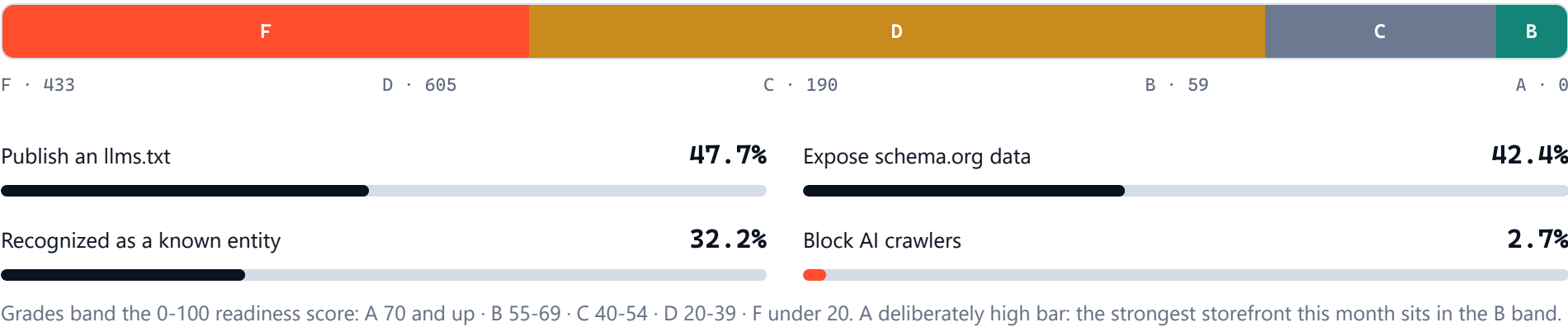
Nobody is ready for the agents

As AI shopping assistants start buying on shoppers’ behalf, the storefront is the interface. We scored every store with enough public signal on how machine-readable and agent-ready its site is. Latest score per store, calculated in the 60 days to 30 September.



zero stores earned an A-grade for AI-agent readiness. The average score was **25.4/100** (median 30.8); the best store reached just **68.8/100**.

READINESS GRADE DISTRIBUTION



Cart and checkout rails are increasingly platform-provided: 40.2% of scored stores expose an agent-commerce (MCP) endpoint, which many Shopify stores get out of the box. What stays in the brand's hands is being found, read and trusted: **47.7%** publish an llms.txt and **42.4%** expose schema.org data, yet not one store clears the A bar. That upstream gap is the opportunity.

September is the baseline for these meters. Readiness scoring was upgraded in late August and early September, so the figures are not compared with earlier editions; trends start with October.

A balanced month for catalogs

Product and category changes logged between 1 and 30 September, measured only over stores that changed each area. First captures of a new store are excluded.

Grew vs trimmed

33 vs 30

of the **64** stores whose product count changed (1 ended flat). In August 51 grew and 25 trimmed of 77.

Median net change

+1 product

per changing store (August: +4). Stores added **44.5** products on average before removals.

Categories

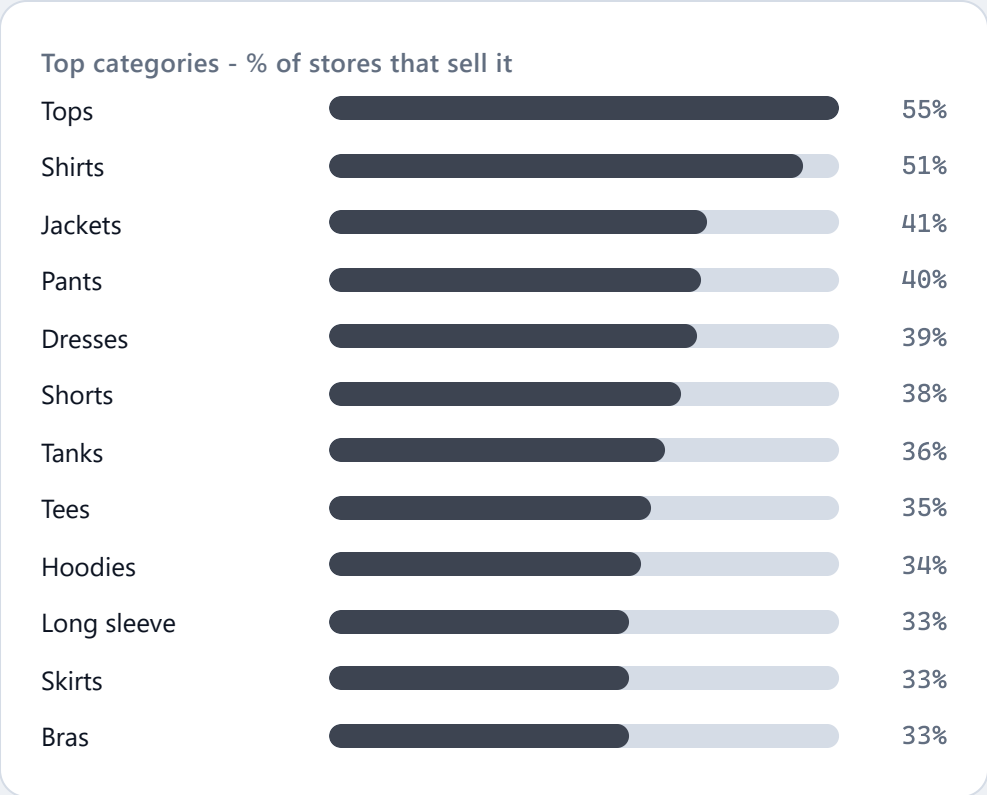
+2 median

net categories across **51** stores that changed their category count; **10.1** added on average.

Totals and the mean are not shown: two very large single-day drops (one a confirmed store or market switch) would dominate them without being market moves. The median is robust to both.

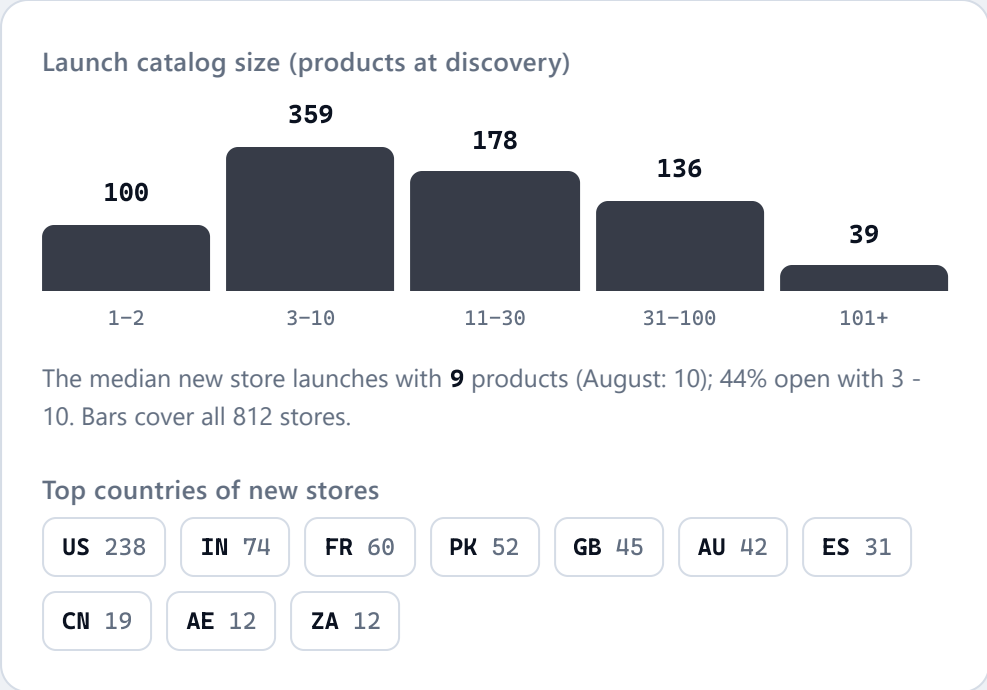
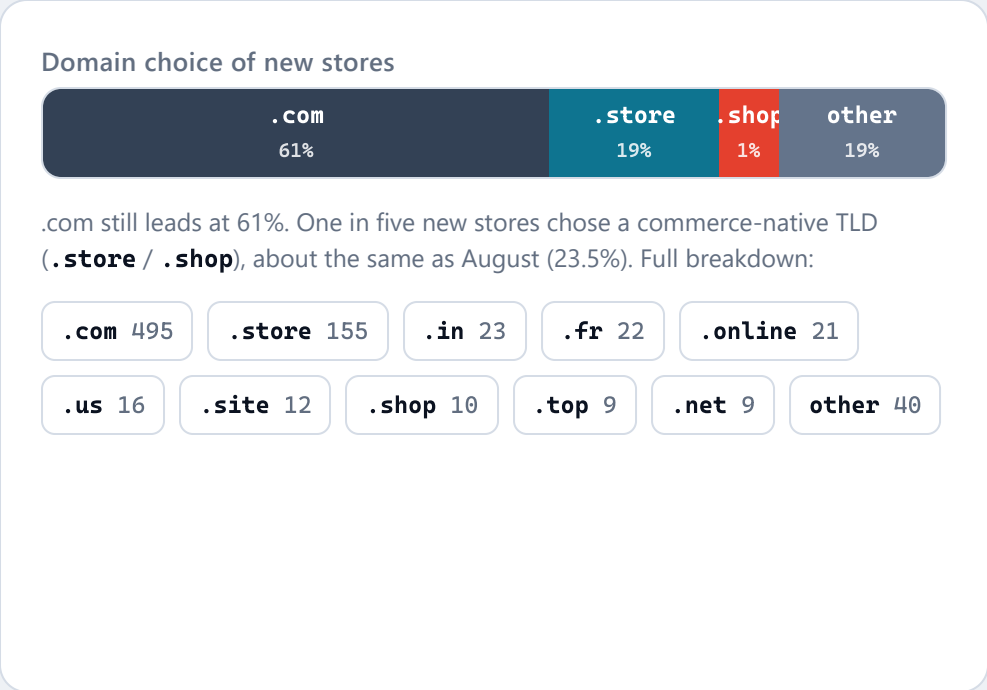
The shape of the racks

Share of tagged stores that sell each thing (a store counts once no matter how many such products it lists), from live product pages at month close. Buckets under 10 stores are suppressed.



New stores launch small

A sample of new Shopify storefronts discovered in September (product counts are captured for Shopify stores only), not every launch in the month.



Affiliate, loyalty and cashback

Programs found on store homepages, and the cashback that portals pay shoppers, at month close.

Programs on the homepage

21.4%

run an affiliate program (301)

11.4%

run a loyalty program (160)

Base: 1,409 stores with a parsed homepage, so absence means no program was found.

Cashback

8%

median cashback rate

20%

top cashback rate

Across 54 stores listed on cashback portals, shoppers earn a median 8% back (up to 20%), a proxy for the affiliate commission each brand funds.

Speaking the customer’s language

How many languages and store currencies the monitored stores operate in, at month close.

Multilingual storefronts

28.5%

serve more than one language, averaging 2.3 per store (August: 31.2% of 1,037). Base 1,265.

Most popular languages - % of 1,265

English		93%
French		24%
German		20%
Spanish		16%
Italian		14%
Japanese		7%
Portuguese		6%
Polish		6%

Primary store currency - % of 2,088 stores

USD		34%
EUR		20%
GBP		12%
AUD		3%
ILS		2%
CAD		1%

A primary currency was detected for 1,778 of 2,088 stores (85%), across 47 currencies. Detection coverage roughly doubled this month, so shares are not compared with August. Currencies under 10 stores are suppressed.

Three in four run Shopify

Ecommerce platform behind each store with a recognized platform, at month close. Platforms under 10 stores are suppressed.

Ecommerce platform - % of 952 stores

Shopify		76%
Salesforce Commerc...		13%
Magento (Adobe Co...		3%
Wix		3%
WooCommerce		3%

The takeaway

719 of 952 stores (76%) run Shopify. Salesforce Commerce Cloud is a distant second at 13%. Every other platform is on fewer than 1 in 25 stores. A platform was recognized for 952 of the 2,088 monitored stores (46%); stores not yet matched to a platform are excluded, not counted as zero.

Most brands advertise - and rotate fast

Stores whose Meta or Google ad library we checked in September, counting ads whose platform delivery window overlapped the month. Only ads from advertiser pages verified as the brand are counted.

58%

103 of 179 tracked stores ran at least one ad in September: 63 of 151 on Meta (Facebook / Instagram) and 65 of 76 on Google. 25 of the 48 stores checked on both ran on both.

Launched in September

52.2%

of the 21,247 Meta ads live in September started that month; 59 of 63 advertisers launched new ads (median 59 each).

Typical ad lifespan

6 days

median run of the 6,855 Meta ads that ended in September. Only 17.8% of live ads had run 90+ days.

Where the ads run - Meta and Google

META · % OF 21,247 ADS

Instagram		99.6%
Facebook		92.3%
Threads		68.8%
Messenger		58.4%
Audience Network		54.9%

GOOGLE · % OF 27,968 ADS WITH A DISCLOSED SURFACE

Search		94.6%
YouTube		15.8%
Shopping		8.3%
Maps		2.8%

An ad can run in several places, so shares add up to more than 100%. Google ad formats (68,292 ads): text 86.2%, image 8.8%, video 5%.

Offers in ad copy

18.4% of ads

carried an offer; 45 of 61 advertisers ran at least one. Median advertised discount 25%. This month, promotions are measured on ads: on-site promotion capture ran on only 8 of 30 days, so there is no homepage promotions section. Stores using each offer type:

Discount		38
Free shipping		18
Sale / clearance		17
Coupon code		13

Most-targeted markets in Europe - stores

Germany		44
United Kingdom		44
France		38
Netherlands		36
Spain		29
Italy		28
Belgium		20
Austria		19

56.4% of ads target a single country. Meta discloses targeting only for ads delivered in the EU and UK (19,416 ads, 58 stores), so other markets are not shown.

Ad collection covers the stores RivalSweeper customers track, not every monitored store. Ad counts come from public ad libraries; no spend data exists for commercial ads. Not compared with August: ad checks widened sharply in late September.

How shoppers pay

Most-offered wallet, express-checkout and buy-now-pay-later methods on 30 September, ranked by how many stores offer each. Card networks are excluded. The percentage is the share of the 684 stores with any detected payment method.

Most-offered wallet & express methods

1	PayPal	85%
2	Apple Pay	85%
3	Google Pay	85%
4	Shop Pay	84%
5	Amazon Pay	72%
6	Zip	2%
7	Klarna	2%
8	Afterpay	1%
9	Affirm	<1%
10	iDEAL	<1%

The takeaway

Express wallets are table stakes: PayPal, Apple Pay, Google Pay and Shop Pay each sit on more than 8 in 10 stores, with Amazon Pay on 7 in 10. Buy-now-pay-later is still niche on the storefronts we can read - the most common method, Zip, appears on fewer than 3 in 100. The top five are the same, in the same order, as at the end of August.

The August reference is the same rebuild at 31 August (n = 485). The panel in the August edition used a later pull (n = 574) that already included early-September detections.

This panel counts the payment methods each checkout shows. Our tech-stack research counts something else: which buy-now-pay-later tools are installed among stores that use one. The bases differ, so the two shares are not comparable.

Who ships the parcels

Consumer-facing shipping carriers detected on 30 September. The percentage is the share of the 195 stores with any detected carrier that use this one.

Most-used carriers

1	UPS	34%
2	DHL	25%
3	FedEx	25%
4	DPD	23%
5	Royal Mail	15%
6	Evri	15%
7	Mondial Relay	8%
8	Colissimo	7%
9	GLS	7%
10	ICS Courier	6%

The takeaway

The global integrators (UPS, DHL, FedEx, DPD) lead at a quarter to a third of stores each, then the national posts and regional networks (Royal Mail, Evri, Mondial Relay, Colissimo, GLS). Backend and cross-border logistics services are excluded. Carrier signal is sparser than payments and grows as more stores are matched.

Suspected decoy listings

How much of a competitor catalog is not real product. Suspected decoy listings are items listed but never purchasable, that price-flicker, or sit orphaned off navigation. Population: active stores with more than 10 listings whose scan ran in September. One store with more than half of its catalog flagged is excluded as a likely detection error.

Most catalogs are clean

78% at zero

225 of 289 stores had no suspected decoy listing. The median store is at 0%.

Share of all listings

0.46%

12,546 of 2,701,408 monitored listings were flagged. The average store rate is 0.87%.

It clusters in a few catalogs

61.7% from 5

stores

Decoy inventory is not spread evenly: five stores hold about 6 in 10 of every flagged listing.

Stores by decoy rate



Number of stores in each band of suspected-decoy share of their catalog.

See where your brand sits against the whole market.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Based on RivalSweeper's continuous monitoring of **2,088 ecommerce stores** throughout **September 2026**. Figures are aggregated across the market - **no individual brand is named, shown, or identifiable**. Changes are those logged between 1 and 30 September 2026; store-state figures are read at month close (the first state recorded after the month ended, 1 October 05:00 UTC); the payment and carrier rankings are the state on 30 September.

Every metric reports its own sample size (n). A brand is counted only for the subjects it had measurable data for **within the reporting period**; brands with no data for a given subject are excluded from that figure rather than counted as zero.

Compiled from **publicly available information** across dozens of data sources. RivalSweeper does not access private, gated, personal, or account-restricted information.

All figures are estimates provided "as is", without warranty of accuracy or completeness, and are for informational purposes only - not financial, legal, or investment advice.

This report includes AI-assisted analysis.

Spotted something off? We're human, and so is our data. If a figure looks wrong, tell us at support@rivalsweeper.com and we'll review it. Thanks for helping us keep this accurate.

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