



A brand is, at its core, a promise made to a customer. In an era driven by quarterly earnings, shortened supply chain cycles, and an endless stream of social media messages, the focus on what a brand actually stands for has often become murky at best. For those of the latchkey kid generation, you might remember some of these iconic brand promises:

REMEMBER THIS?



Avis, we're number two, so we try harder.

Choosy mothers choose Jif.

FedEx. When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.

Move to today, and ask what does the last store you visited (whether online or in person) actually stand for? What is their brand promise? As we embrace the undeniable benefits of AI, it's tempting to believe that algorithms alone will distinguish your brand. Because technology rapidly evolves, tech alone can't substantively differentiate a great brand from a forgettable one. That distinction begins with brand purpose. Most retailers (and most organizations for that matter) aren't clear on what they stand for or fail to consistently deliver on their stated brand promise. My upcoming presentation at the UT Dallas RISE Conference on September 10 will underscore why brand promise remains the foundation of the strongest retail brands and how technology should serve that mission, not replace it.

Retail 3.0 is about curating experiences (both large and small) that reflect a brand's values and resonate emotionally. Whether it's Trader Joe's sense of discovery, Kith's cultural storytelling, or Patagonia's environmental ethos, the most compelling retailers are those that know who they are and show up consistently across every touchpoint. Put simply, winning retail brands weave a thread of authenticity across all they do. At the conference, I'll share a framework for how retailers can clarify their purpose, align their desired customer experience, and build trust in a world where attention is fleeting and loyalty is earned daily.

Rapid advances in generative AI and agentic platforms offer powerful tools to personalize engagement, streamline operations, and deepen customer insight. But they're no substitute for the soul of a retailer. Technology, when used intentionally, can underscore the very best of what a retailer stands for by ensuring each moment of human interaction is exceptional. I believe the smartest retailers will use AI not simply to reduce costs or improve automation but to establish a differentiated level of brand authenticity at scale.

If you're passionate about the future of retail, brand strategy, or customer experience, I invite you to join us on September 10. With an amazing cadre of retail industry leaders and

attendees, this year's conference promises to be a day of bold ideas, compelling use cases, and inspiring, collaborative energy. Let's reimagine what it means to lead in the age of Retail 3.0. I look forward to seeing you on campus!