



IAB EUROPE'S BITESIZE GUIDE TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN RETAIL MEDIA SERIES

FOUNDATIONS OF RETAIL MEDIA CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This guide outlines the foundational elements required for retailers to successfully evolve into modern Retail Media Networks (RMNs). It provides a strategic lens on why change is necessary, what capabilities must be built, and how organisational context shapes the journey.

Scope

The guide covers the definition of RMNs, common organisational structures, operating models, and the internal and external forces driving transformation. It is designed to support leaders responsible for retail media, digital transformation, data strategy, marketing, and commercial operations.

Audience

- Retail executives building or scaling retail media capabilities
- RMN leadership teams across commercial, product, data, and operations
- Brand and agency partners seeking alignment with retailer operating models
- Cross-functional stakeholders involved in data, technology, and customer experience

Why Change Management Matters

Retail media is not an add-on business; it is a structural shift where commerce and media converge. Successful transformation requires:

- Alignment across trade, marketing, data, product, and customer experience
- New skills and operating rhythms
- Integrated technology and interoperable data
- Clear governance and cross-team accountability

Without intentional change management, retailers risk fragmentation, slow progress, and inconsistent value delivery to brands.

RETAIL MEDIA NETWORKS: ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

What Defines a Retail Media Network

A Retail Media Network is a retailer or ad tech platform owned advertising and insights ecosystem that uses first-party shopper data to activate targeted media across onsite, offsite, and in-store channels.

IAB Europe's published definition is as follows:

Commerce Media Networks, which includes Retail Media Networks, allow brands and merchants to address shoppers with products and services throughout their buying journey on and off owned platforms. It uses commerce/retail data for planning, execution and measurement. Commerce media includes an increasing range of activations on-site, off-site and in-store environments.

RMNs are built on three pillars:



1. First-Party Data

Authenticated, consented shopper data from transactions, loyalty programs, and digital interactions.



2. Retail Media Channels

Onsite: sponsored products, display, search

Offsite: programmatic activations using retailer data

In-store: digital screens, audio, kiosks, printed assets



3. Closed-Loop Measurement

The ability to link media exposure to shopper actions and sales outcomes, enabling transparent, accountable reporting. These elements position RMNs as a central component of modern retail and digital media strategies – especially in a post-cookie environment.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES AND OPERATING MODELS

Retailers adopt different RMN structures depending on their maturity, category, and strategic ambition.

Two dominant models have emerged:

1. In-House Retail Media Network

Retail media is embedded within the retailer's existing organisation.

Strengths

- Seen as part of the core retail business
- Strong alignment with trade marketing and category teams
- Lower incremental operational costs

Challenges

- Spend often comes from trade budgets, limiting incremental revenue
- Existing teams may lack digital, ad-tech, and analytics expertise
- Requires significant upskilling and recruitment

2. Standalone Retail Media Entity

A separate business unit or agency model with its own P&L, team, and governance.

Strengths

- Attracts specialised talent in media, data, and technology
- Positions retail media as a true marketing channel, not an extension of trade
- Drives incremental revenue from brand media budgets

Challenges

- Requires clear separation of channel ownership to avoid internal conflict
- Needs strong coordination with the core retail organisation

Cross-Functional and Hybrid Models

Many retailers operate in a transitional state where e-commerce, merchandising, CRM, IT, and store operations collaborate to deliver retail media. This model is common early in the journey but can slow decision-making without clear governance.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES DRIVING CHANGE

Internal Pressures

- Legacy systems and fragmented data
- The penetration of loyalty programmes impact the scalability of an RMN
- Organisational silos and cultural resistance
- Skill gaps in digital, analytics, and ad-tech
- Multichannel operations that are not yet fully omnichannel
- Margin pressure: Retail media provides high-margin revenue as traditional retail profitability tightens.

External Forces

- **Cookie deprecation & privacy regulation:** RMNs offer a compliant alternative built on authenticated data.
- **E-commerce acceleration:** More digital shopping creates more media opportunities.
- **AI advancements:** Automation, personalisation, and measurement are rapidly evolving.
- **Brand expectations:** Advertisers expect more data-driven advertising approaches based on real shopper-behaviour insights.

These forces make retail media not just an opportunity but a strategic necessity.

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