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*January 2026*

## JANUARY EDITION

# *The Year Ahead: Automation, Immigration & Canada's Economic Recalibration*

Business Link
Media Group

# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dear Business Link Readers,

As we begin the new year, this January edition of Business Link Digital brings you a curated collection of articles exploring the evolving business landscape in Niagara, across Canada, and beyond. This month's issue looks ahead to the trends, ideas, and innovations shaping the year to come.

In this edition, we explore how organizations are adapting to change at every level. From the City of Niagara Falls' redesigned website and the growing importance of digital-first public services, to Leadership in Action: Building Niagara's Next Generation of Community Leaders, which highlights how Leadership Niagara is fostering collaboration, civic engagement, and future-focused leadership across the region, we examine how local initiatives are strengthening Niagara's long-term resilience. We also explore evolving marketing strategies and the increasing role of automation in helping mid-sized logistics companies remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy.

We take a closer look at Canada's 2026 housing outlook, including the effects of tariffs, immigration shifts, and ongoing condo market softness, alongside an analysis of how more selective immigration policies may impact employers, workforce planning, and communities. This issue also explores how major investments in artificial intelligence and robotics — from Disney's $1 billion investment in AI-driven storytelling to Hyundai's vision of humanoid robots working alongside humans in manufacturing — highlight how quickly innovation is moving from concept to reality.

Complementing these themes, this issue features insights on the future of customer service from trusted advisor Jeff Mowatt, as well as an overview of what will stay, what will change, and what may no longer work in marketing as businesses plan for 2026.

At Business Link, our mission is to provide a thoughtful mix of original insights and curated perspectives that connect local leadership with national and global trends — helping you start the year informed, prepared, and forward-looking as we navigate the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Yours in Business
Marilyn Tian, M.B.A
President & Co-Publisher
Business Link Media Group

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**www.businesslinkmedia.com**

# CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS UNVEILS REDESIGNED WEBSITE

## TO BETTER SERVE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS

The City of Niagara Falls has officially launched a redesigned version of its municipal website, marking a significant step forward in how residents, businesses, and visitors access city services and information online. The new niagarafalls.ca platform reflects a broader shift toward user-centred digital services, with a focus on simplicity, accessibility, and mobile-friendly design.

City officials say the updated website was built to better match how people actually search for information today. Navigation has been streamlined to reduce clutter and help users quickly find frequently requested services, including bylaws, permits, property information, recreation programs, and city news. Improved search functionality and a clearer layout aim to reduce frustration and make everyday interactions with the municipality more efficient.

A key feature of the new website is the At Your Service Niagara Falls portal, which allows residents to submit service requests, report issues, and track responses in real time. Whether reporting a pothole, requesting information from a city department, or following up on a concern, the portal is designed to improve transparency and responsiveness while creating a more direct connection between residents and city staff.

Accessibility was also a central priority in the redesign. The website has been built to meet modern accessibility standards, ensuring a more inclusive experience for users of all abilities across desktops, tablets, and smartphones. Consistent performance across devices reflects the city's recognition that many users now rely primarily on mobile access for essential services.

City leaders note that the website will continue to evolve, with ongoing updates and refinements based on public feedback. Residents are encouraged to explore the new platform and share their experience to help guide future improvements.
The launch of the redesigned website represents a meaningful investment in digital infrastructure and customer service, reinforcing Niagara Falls' commitment to modern, accessible, and responsive local government.

Read more here: https://www.newsday.com/travel/niagara-falls-winter-viumoap6

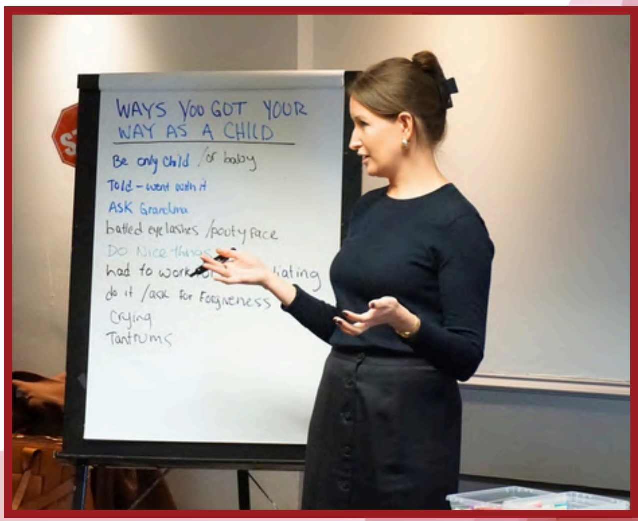
# LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: BUILDING NIAGARA'S NEXT GENERATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

Leadership Niagara's **Community Leadership Development Program (CLDP)** exists for one reason: to strengthen Niagara by developing people who are ready to lead with intention, courage, and community at the centre.

Since its launch in 2007, CLDP has been Leadership Niagara's flagship initiative—bringing together emerging and established leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors who are deeply invested in the future of this region. These are individuals who don't just care about Niagara, but who want to actively shape what comes next.

Running annually from **November through June**, the program immerses participants in the real issues facing Niagara today—economic development, housing, social systems, governance, equity, and collaboration across sectors. Through **seven full learning days**, participants engage directly with local decision-makers, sector leaders, and changemakers, while building the skills required to lead themselves, their organizations, and their communities more effectively.

What sets CLDP apart is its **experiential and applied approach**. Learning doesn't happen in isolation. Participants work collaboratively on **community projects**, partnering with local non-profits to tackle real challenges and contribute meaningful outcomes—strengthening both leadership capacity and community impact at the same time.




**Momentum from the Current Cohort**

This year's cohort has already demonstrated the power of bringing diverse perspectives into one room. Participants represent a cross-section of Niagara's talent—from employers, public institutions, and community organizations—each bringing their lived experience, curiosity, and commitment to the table.
The result is not only stronger individual leaders—but a more connected, informed, and resilient Niagara.

**Why Get Involved Now**

Whether you're an individual looking to grow as a leader, an employer seeking to invest in talent development, or a non-profit organization looking for strategic community partnerships, CLDP offers multiple ways to engage.

- **Future Participants:** If you know you want to deepen your leadership skills and expand your regional network, applications for upcoming cohorts are competitive—and planning ahead matters.
- **Employers & Sponsors:** CLDP provides direct exposure to emerging leaders and decision-makers from organizations across Niagara, including employers such as *Fallsview Casino, the Town of Fort Erie, Niagara Realtors Association, Niagara College*, and more.
- **Non-Profit Community Partners:** Each cohort works closely with community organizations, offering fresh perspectives, capacity-building, and project-based support.

**Take the Next Step**

- **Learn more about the program** http://leadershipniagara.ca
- **Join the waitlist for the next cohort** https://leadershipniagara.ca/leadership-niagara-contact
- **Submit an application now** if you already know CLDP is right for you. https://leadershipniagara.ca/leadership-niagara-community-leadership-development-program-application

For organizations interested in becoming a **non-profit community partner for the 2026–2027 program**, or to explore **sponsorship opportunities** that connect you with Niagara's future leaders and employers, contact:
**eamaro@leadershipniagara.ca**

Leadership Niagara is not just developing leaders—it's strengthening the systems, relationships, and communities that make Niagara thrive. If leadership matters to you, this is where it starts.

JANUARY 16 – FEBRUARY 15

# EVENTS

## *3rd Annual Pow Wow at Brock University*

**Friday, Jan 16, 2026**

**Ian Beddis Gymnasium, Brock University, St. Catharines**

Event: experiencebu.brocku.ca

## *Niagara-on-the-Lake Icewine Village*

**Jan 17–18 & Jan 24–25, 2026**

**Queen Street Heritage District, Niagara-on-the-Lake**

Event: niagarafallstourism.com

## *Cool as Ice Gala*

**Saturday, Jan 31, 2026**

**Niagara Parks Power Station, Niagara Falls**

Event:niagarawinefestival.com/cool-as-ice-gala

## *Black Histories, Black Futures (Exhibition Opening)*

**Monday, February 2, 2026**

**St. Catharines City Hall & FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre**

Tickets: www.stcatharines.ca/en/arts-culture-and-events

## *Discovering Niagara's Freedom Trail*

**Wednesday, Feb 4, 2026**

**Various Heritage Sites (Check FirstOntario PAC for meeting point)**

Event: firstontariopac.ca



# WHAT CANADA'S BUSINESS LANDSCAPE COULD LOOK LIKE IN 2026

NOTL LOCAL

As Canada moves into 2026, businesses are preparing for a year defined by economic recalibration rather than rapid growth. Analysts suggest the coming months will be shaped by selective opportunities, cautious investment, and ongoing global and geopolitical uncertainty, requiring companies to remain agile and strategically focused.

Trade and tariff uncertainty continues to weigh heavily on business confidence, particularly in relation to Canada's largest trading partner, the United States. Ongoing discussions surrounding the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), combined with the potential for renewed tariff pressures, are influencing investment and manufacturing decisions. Trade issues dominated headlines in 2025 and are expected to remain front of mind in 2026 as governments navigate market access, supply chains, and protectionist pressures.

Despite these challenges, Canada's capital markets are showing signs of renewed momentum. TMX Group, operator of the Toronto Stock Exchange, has forecast a stronger pipeline of initial public offerings heading into 2026, signalling improved investor confidence in select sectors. While broader economic growth is expected to remain modest, market analysts suggest stock indices may still reach new highs, though gains are likely to be more measured than in 2025 as valuation concerns persist.

Infrastructure and nation-building initiatives are also expected to influence the business landscape. Federal investment priorities increasingly focus on transportation, critical minerals, energy, and regional development, creating new opportunities for companies involved in construction, natural resources, and related industries.

Internally, productivity and innovation remain top priorities for Canadian businesses. With slower GDP growth projected, many organizations are investing in operational efficiency, cost control, and technology—including artificial intelligence—to remain competitive. Labour market dynamics may also tighten, particularly in skilled trades and knowledge-based sectors, as immigration levels adjust following post-pandemic peaks.

Overall, Canada's business outlook for 2026 points toward steady adaptation rather than dramatic transformation, with trade policy, infrastructure investment, market confidence, and productivity shaping the year ahead.

Read more here:
https://www.notllocal.com/ontario-news/five-things-to-watch-in-canadian-business-for-2026-11683946

# CANADA'S 2026 HOUSING OUTLOOK

## Tariffs, Immigration Shifts and Condo Weakness

CTV NEWS

Canada's housing market is entering 2026 in a state of cautious transition, shaped by shifting immigration patterns, trade uncertainty, and persistent weakness in the condominium market. According to Phil Soper, president and CEO of Royal LePage, these forces are combining to create a housing outlook that emphasizes stability over speculation—but not without key headwinds and localized variation.

One of the major factors influencing the market is changes in immigration policy and flows. With Canada adjusting its immigration targets and the number of temporary residents expected to decline in 2026 compared with 2025, pressure on housing demand is changing shape. While historically strong immigration has fuelled demand for housing, especially in major urban centres, this shift may ease some of that demand pressure, even as it alters where people settle and how quickly markets tighten or soften.

Another key influence is tariff policy and broader economic uncertainty. Trade tariffs and global economic pressures have had ripple effects on consumer confidence and investment decisions, particularly when combined with stubbornly high borrowing costs recently. These factors have made buyers more cautious and slowed some of the dramatic price accelerations seen earlier in the decade.

Among the most notable trends is continued softness in Canada's condominium market. Condo prices have struggled to recover, particularly in major regions such as the Greater Toronto Area, where units remain over-supplied relative to demand. This softness reflects both changing buyer preferences — some opting for more space in suburban or secondary markets — and affordability challenges unique to the condo segment.

Despite these headwinds, Royal LePage's broader 2026 forecast suggests a moderate overall reset rather than a dramatic downturn. The national average price of homes is expected to trend slightly higher over the course of the year, supported by improved affordability, steady demand among first-time buyers, and sustained interest in regional markets like Quebec City, which is forecast to see stronger price gains than many others.

That said, the picture is not uniform across the country. While single-family detached homes in some areas may experience modest price growth, condominiums are expected to lag and, in some regions, continue to see price declines. This divergence highlights how demographic trends, interest rate expectations, and local supply conditions will be key determinants of housing outcomes in 2026.

For buyers and sellers alike, the coming year is likely to be defined by pragmatism and patience — a market where opportunities exist, but timing and local context matter more than broad headlines.

Read more here:
https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/article/tariffs-immigration-shifts-condo-softness-shape-canadas-housing-outlook-for-2026-royal-lepage-ceo/


# GENERATION STALLED

## THE GROWING ECONOMIC STRUGGLE OF YOUNG CANADIANS

By Ryan Li

Despite the holiday season, not all is festive for young Canadians. Amid worsening economic conditions, many Gen Zers are losing hope in a K-shaped economy where older generations see asset prices soar, while younger cohorts struggle to cover even the most basic necessities and feel unsure about what's to come.

This past year, youth unemployment hit 15%, double the national average. Even those who do have jobs are suffering, with households under 35 seeing the slowest income growth out of any age group, amid a cost of living crisis that, 67% of Canadians report, is the worst it has ever been, with 89% of respondents agreeing that the country is currently experiencing such an issue.

Rent is continuing to rise, increasing by 5% this past year, and over half of young Canadians are spending over 50% of their income on housing—an unsustainable level that leaves Gen Zers vulnerable to economic shocks.

Just under one half of Canadians (48%) report that they can no longer maintain their standard of living, and 55% categorize themselves as financially paralyzed. 48% believe that they will never be able to get ahead financially, and 18% feel as if they are already over the edge financially.

This gloom is mainly concentrated within the younger ranks of the population, with the seeming inability to get a job compounded with the common belief that today's youth will never be able to afford a home. For instance, in 1976, the average price of a home in Canada was about $57,000, roughly 3.5x the median household income. 50 years later, the average price has risen to over $750,000, while median incomes have stagnated, leading that ratio to be more than 8x median household income.

Young Canadians are making their depressing economic prospects clear with their holiday shopping. While overall forecasts project a 4.4% increase in holiday spending levels this year, this merely hides the economic conditions of the young. The industry expectation is that Gen Z's Christmas spending will decrease by 34%, while 60% of shoppers plan on using credit, such as "buy now pay later" schemes, to afford gifts for loved ones. For Gen Z Canadians, 22% report dipping into emergency savings to buy holiday gifts this year, compared to five per cent of baby boomers.


Diverging Christmas spending plans are merely the tip of the iceberg for Canada's growing wealth inequality problem, predominantly split along age lines. While housing prices soar, allowing boomers who bought their houses for relatively cheap to become millionaires, the price increases in food and shelter, coupled by limited prospects for mobility, simultaneously choke out younger generations.

This year, Canada's Gini coefficient, measuring wealth inequality, hit an all-time high, and food bank usage has doubled since 2019, with over 1 million Ontarioans relying on them for support in 2025. This past year, food bank usage has increased by a further 5.2%, marking the ninth year in a row that food bank usage has risen in Canada.

Politically, this has created a clear split between the haves and have-nots, with the Conservatives polling six points ahead of the Liberals amongst the 62% of Canadians who say that cost of living is a top issue for them, while only 41% of the aforementioned population approves of the Carney government's performance, likely due to economic frustration.

Interestingly enough, this financial dissatisfaction is a large driver of young voters' rightward shift, as many of them hold the Liberal government responsible for 10 years of economic downturn. While most democracies around the world see the younger ranks of their electorate sway to the left of the general population, Canada's youth tended to vote more Conservative in the 2025 general election, suggesting that young people want a change in leadership to spark a change in their economic fortunes.

Taken together, these statistics paint a stark picture: high unemployment, stagnant wages, soaring rents, growing debt, and declining financial confidence are structural challenges that define the economic reality for Gen Z. Unless policies address this growing divide, the K-shaped economy will continue to entrench inequality, leaving young Canadians not just struggling financially, but questioning their ability to achieve economic security and upward mobility in the years ahead.

So the next time you ask your niece or nephew what they want for Christmas, chances are their wish is for a job or hope for the future—two things that remain desperately out of reach for many young Canadians.

*Ryan Li is a second-year student at Georgetown University double majoring in Public Policy and Economics, with a minor in Statistics. He is originally from Vancouver, BC*

# Canada's 2026 Immigration Shift

## Fewer Arrivals, More Selectivity

CTV NEWS

As Canada enters 2026, the federal government has signalled a major shift in its immigration strategy — moving away from the record-high intake of recent years toward a smaller, more selective system designed to ease pressure on housing, infrastructure and labour markets. This recalibration reflects both political priorities and broader economic considerations.

The most visible change is in the number of new permanent residents the country plans to accept. After unprecedented growth in immigration through 2023 and 2024, Ottawa is targeting around 380,000 permanent residents in 2026, down from the roughly 395,000 admitted in 2025 and far below earlier targets that approached nearly half a million newcomers annually. This level is also expected to remain in place through 2028 under current policy guidance.

More significant still are cuts to temporary resident categories, including international students and temporary workers. New student visas are expected to be sharply reduced compared with recent years, a move intended to curb the rapid expansion of the temporary population and its impact on housing and services. Some reports suggest that student admissions may be cut by more than half compared with 2025 levels.

The government has framed these changes as part of a broader effort to rebalance immigration toward economic priorities. Skilled workers with experience and qualifications that align closely with Canadian labour needs — such as healthcare, trades, technology and STEM fields — are likely to be prioritized through systems like Express Entry and other economic immigration streams. At the same time, there is a stated emphasis on French-speaking newcomers to support demographic and linguistic goals outside Quebec.


> "Canada is shifting from record-high immigration to a smaller, more selective system in 2026."

In addition to numbers, rules around work permits and family reunification are also being tightened, with tighter eligibility criteria for some open work permits and lower intake caps for family-sponsored immigration. These changes signal a move toward quality and integration outcomes rather than sheer growth.

Critics argue that the cuts don't go far enough to address housing affordability or unemployment concerns — particularly in parts of the service sector that depend on temporary workers. Others warn that a slower pace of immigration could exacerbate labour shortages in key industries over the long term, given Canada's aging population and historically low birth rates.

At the same time, groups advocating for reduced immigration have gained more attention, reflecting rising public debate over the pace and scale of population growth in Canada.

For Canadians and prospective immigrants alike, 2026 marks a transition to smaller, more targeted admissions, with policymakers betting that a leaner system will balance economic needs with social pressures.

Read more here:
https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/article/2026-will-see-canada-slash-immigration-targets-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-year-ahead/

# How a Venezuelan Regime Change Could Ripple Through Canada's Oil Sector

THE CONVERSATION

Recent political upheaval in Venezuela's oil-rich landscape has raised new concerns about how shifts there might affect Canada's oil industry in 2026 and beyond. Analysts and energy experts warn that changes in Venezuela — especially a regime shift — could have significant consequences for global oil markets and Canadian producers due to overlapping dynamics in heavy crude supply and investment flows.

Venezuela holds some of the largest proven oil reserves in the world, particularly heavy crude grades that closely resemble the type of oil produced in Canada's oil sands. Historically, Venezuela's oil output has been hampered by underinvestment, corruption, and years of economic stagnation. Production, which once exceeded 3 million barrels per day, has collapsed to under one million barrels daily as infrastructure deteriorated and exports were restricted.

A regime change — especially one backed by outside forces — could reopen Venezuelan crude production in a major way. If sanctions are eased and foreign capital flows back into the industry, Venezuela's heavy crude could eventually return to global markets, potentially competing with Canadian exports. This is particularly relevant since much of Canada's heavy oil is exported to U.S. Gulf Coast refineries, where Venezuelan grades would likewise be suitable.

"If sanctions are eased and foreign capital flows back into the industry, Venezuela's heavy crude could eventually return to global markets, potentially competing with Canadian exports."

The market response to these geopolitical developments has already been noticeable. Canadian energy equities saw sharp volatility, as investors weighed the structural risk of increased Venezuelan supply. Stocks of major Canadian producers briefly dipped as markets digested the possibility of renewed supply competition, even though analysts caution that rebuilding Venezuela's oil sector would take years and require tens of billions of dollars in investment.

These dynamics have also influenced currency markets and investment sentiment. For example, the Canadian dollar underperformed other G10 currencies amid uncertainty over Venezuela's future output, as traders factored in potential shifts in crude supply and global energy demand balances.



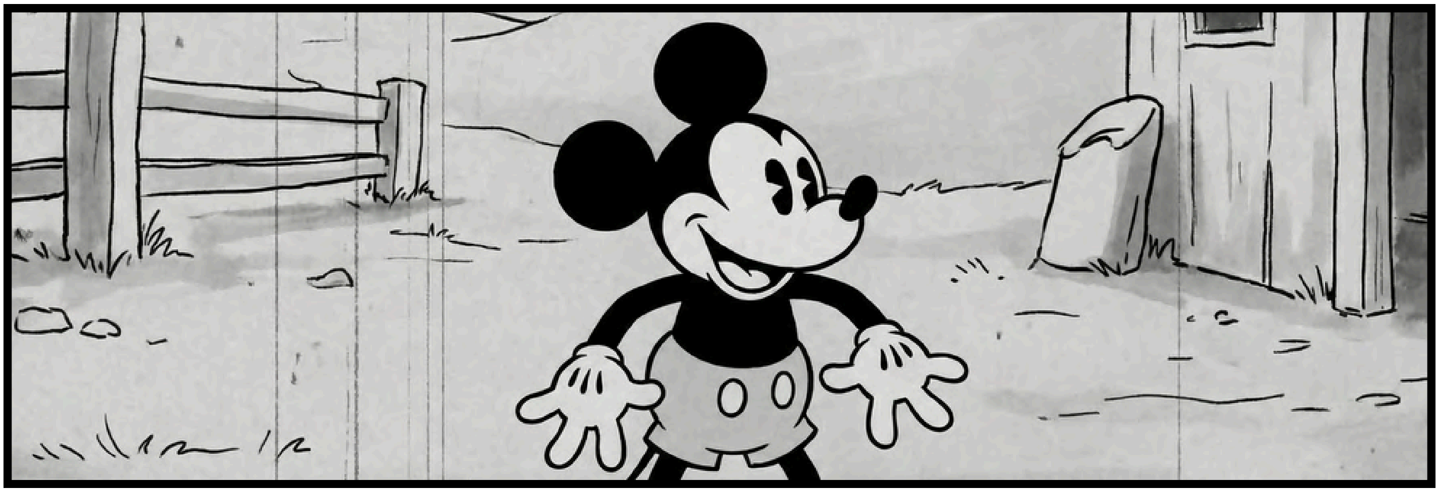
At the political level, responses vary. Some Canadian officials have emphasized the need for diversification of export markets and energy investment strategies to reduce reliance on a single foreign market and insulate domestic producers from geopolitical tremors. Others argue that Canada's stable governance and improving energy infrastructure — including carbon capture initiatives — will help maintain its competitiveness even if Venezuelan supply expands.

Ultimately, while a regime change in Venezuela could offer long-term shifts in global oil distribution, the impact on Canada's oil sector will likely unfold over years rather than weeks. The interplay between geopolitics, investment incentives, and infrastructure rebuilding capacity will determine how deeply Venezuelan developments influence Canadian producers. For now, market participants are watching closely, mindful that energy markets are deeply interconnected and sensitive to political change.


Read more here: https://theconversation.com/a-regime-change-in-venezuela-could-have-grim-consequences-for-canadas-oil-sector-272694

# Disney's $1B Bet on AI

## From Mickey Mouse to Sora-Generated Videos



EDITION CNN

In a move that could redefine how audiences interact with entertainment IP, The Walt Disney Company has entered a landmark partnership with OpenAI, bringing its iconic characters into the rapidly evolving world of generative artificial intelligence. Announced in December 2025, the agreement marks the first time Disney has officially licensed its characters for a text-to-video platform, specifically OpenAI's Sora. Through this three-year licensing deal, Sora will be able to generate short videos based on user prompts featuring more than 200 characters from across Disney Animation, Pixar, Marvel, and Star Wars, opening the door for fan-generated clips that include cultural icons such as Mickey Mouse, Ariel, Black Panther, and Luke Skywalker.

The partnership extends well beyond character licensing. As part of the agreement, Disney is making a $1 billion equity investment in OpenAI, positioning itself not only as a content partner but as a strategic stakeholder in the future of generative video technology. The deal also includes warrants for potential future equity, signalling Disney's long-term confidence in AI-powered creative tools. Disney CEO Bob Iger has framed the collaboration as a responsible way to expand the reach of Disney's storytelling while preserving creator rights, maintaining brand integrity, and prioritizing user safety. Both companies say they are committed to shaping how generative tools evolve, ensuring innovation does not come at the expense of artistic standards.

Beyond fan content, Disney plans to integrate OpenAI technologies — including ChatGPT — into internal workflows and potential new consumer experiences tied to Disney+. Selected Sora-generated clips will even be curated and showcased on Disney's streaming platforms, bringing user creativity into the official Disney ecosystem. While concerns remain around copyright, misinformation, deepfakes, and the ethical use of AI-generated media, Disney's proactive approach may set a precedent for how major studios collaborate with AI companies rather than resist them.

With the first fan-powered Sora videos expected to appear in early 2026, the partnership signals a shift toward more interactive, user-driven storytelling and a new frontier for intellectual property in the age of generative AI.

Read more here: https://edition.cnn.com/2025/12/11/tech/disney-openai-sora-google

# HYUNDAI’S CES 2026 REVEAL:
## HUMANOID ROBOTS BECOMING REAL FACTORY CO-WORKERS

INTEREST ENGINEERING

At CES 2026 in Las Vegas, Hyundai Motor Group and its robotics subsidiary Boston Dynamics delivered one of the event’s most compelling announcements: a production-ready humanoid robot designed for real industrial work, with deployment targeted for 2028. Known as Atlas, the humanoid is no longer a futuristic concept. Hyundai showcased the robot live on stage, where it stood, walked, and gestured — a symbolic milestone signaling robotics’ shift from research labs into real-world workplaces.

Hyundai’s ambitions extend well beyond demonstration. The company plans to begin deploying Atlas at its electric vehicle manufacturing facility in Savannah, Georgia, where the robots will initially assist with parts sequencing and other repetitive manufacturing tasks. To support large-scale adoption, Hyundai also intends to build a robotics manufacturing facility capable of producing up to 30,000 humanoid robots annually by 2028, underscoring its intent to move quickly from experimentation to industrial integration.


Designed for close collaboration with humans, Atlas features advanced mobility, tactile sensors, and multiple articulated joints that allow it to operate safely alongside workers. In factory environments, this could include lifting heavy components, executing precise assembly steps, and performing repetitive or ergonomically challenging tasks that often lead to worker fatigue or injury. Hyundai has emphasized a “human-centered AI robotics” strategy, positioning Atlas as a collaborative partner rather than a replacement for human labor, with people continuing to focus on supervision, training, and quality control.

The company also highlighted partnerships with leading AI firms, including Google DeepMind and NVIDIA, to enhance the robots’ intelligence and adaptability. These collaborations suggest Atlas will not only perform physical tasks, but also learn and improve over time. While the announcement renews debate around automation’s impact on labor and the need for workforce reskilling, Hyundai’s CES reveal marks a turning point — one where humanoid robots move decisively from spectacle to practical co-workers on the factory floor.

Read more here: https://interestingengineering.com/ces-2026/hyundai-humanoid-robot-co-workers-2028

# THE HUMAN ADVANTAGE IN AN AUTOMATED 2026

## Why People Still Matter in Manufacturing and Aerospace

ROBOTICS AND AUTOMATION NEWS

At CES 2026 in Las Vegas, Hyundai Motor Group and its robotics subsidiary Boston Dynamics unveiled one of the most consequential announcements of the show: a production-ready humanoid robot designed for real industrial work, with deployment targeted for 2028. Known as Atlas, the humanoid is no longer a distant concept or lab experiment. Hyundai demonstrated the robot live on stage, where it stood, walked, and gestured—a symbolic moment that underscored the transition of humanoid robotics from research environments into practical, real-world workplaces.

Hyundai's vision extends well beyond spectacle. The company has outlined plans to begin deploying Atlas at its electric vehicle manufacturing facility in Savannah, Georgia, where the robots will initially support tasks such as parts sequencing and other repetitive manufacturing activities. To enable this transition at scale, Hyundai also intends to build a dedicated robotics manufacturing facility capable of producing up to 30,000 humanoid robots annually by 2028. This level of investment signals a clear shift from experimentation to industrial integration, positioning humanoid robots as a core component of future manufacturing operations rather than a niche innovation.

Designed to work safely alongside humans, Atlas features advanced mobility, tactile sensors, and multiple articulated joints that allow it to navigate complex environments and perform precise physical tasks. In factory settings, this could include lifting heavy components, executing detailed assembly steps, and handling repetitive or ergonomically demanding work that often leads to worker fatigue or injury. Hyundai has emphasized a "human-centered AI robotics" approach, framing Atlas as a collaborative partner rather than a replacement for human workers, with people continuing to focus on higher-value responsibilities such as supervision, training, and quality control.

Hyundai also highlighted strategic partnerships with leading AI companies, including Google DeepMind and NVIDIA, to enhance the robots' intelligence and adaptability over time. While the announcement renews debate around automation's impact on labor and the need for workforce reskilling, Hyundai's CES reveal marks a pivotal moment for industrial robotics. By 2028, humanoid robots like Atlas may become a common sight on factory floors, signaling the next phase of human-robot collaboration in manufacturing.

Read more here: https://roboticsandautomationnews.com/2025/12/30/opinion-the-human-advantage-in-the-age-of-automation-a-2026-blueprint-for-manufacturing-and-aerospace/97948/

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# THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

BY JEFF MOWATT, TRUSTED ADVISOR COSTUMER SERVICE
WWW.JEFFMOWATT.COM

## *3 trends that will change the way you serve customers*

You have no doubt noticed that technology is changing the ‘face’ of customer service. Traditional ways we used to interact with customers, win their trust, and keep them coming back are becoming irrelevant. Here are three of the most significant trends in customer service, and how you can position your business to capitalize rather than capsize in response.

1

**Trend #1 – Self Serve Slavery**
What apparently started with self-serve gas stations has now become the norm. Customers are now booking their own travel, doing their own banking, and even scanning their own groceries at self-serve checkouts. There are pluses and minuses for customers, but with the impending labor shortages, companies are likely to continue cutting back on staffing and opt for customers serving themselves.


**Your Move –**
**Shift from Order Taker to Trusted Advisor**
In most organizations, there is virtually no role remaining for employees who merely act as order takers. When customers have done their homework on Google and have decided exactly what they want, then with today’s technology there’s no longer any need for employees to process simple transactions. The place where companies need employees is with more complex purchases. The role of staff here is not to provide customers with lots of information. Information is free on the internet – and free is perceived as worthless. The role of staff with complex purchases is to analyze the possible options that are available, then interpret which ones might be the most suited to that customer’s unique needs, and finally, advise the customer on up to three options that will solve the customer’s problem. Companies will prosper by replacing five clerks with several self serve checkouts and one Trusted Advisor.

**Trend #2 – Driven to Distraction**

It used to be that good customer service would generate positive word of mouth advertising. That's no longer the case. Today's customers are too busy at work, in traffic, running errands, working out, and chauffeuring kids to pay attention to service. When we do have a moment to spare, we are plugged into wireless devices; effectively insulating ourselves from our immediate surroundings. What that means is that good customer service is no longer talked about – it isn't even noticed! Good customer service has become wallpaper.

**Your Move – Become Remark-ably Different**

In my seminars I suggest to managers, 'Don't be better, be different.' In other words rather than trying to beat your competition, try to change your service so that you become REMARK-able. Fortunately this is easier than most people think. In most cases, this means equipping employees with a few customer communication tips and strategies that get noticed. For example, when a customer asks an employee to do something, the average response might be 'Sure' or 'OK.' We suggest that instead employees respond with, 'I'll take care of it'. That response indicates that not only is the employee going to get it done, but they'll do it literally  with care. Your service gets noticed not because you're working harder, faster, or cheaper, but because you learn to convey greater value.

**Trend #3 – The Amplification of Anger**

Social media has become the new form of "word-of-mouth". Traditionally, if your organization's service wasn't great, you might upset a few customers, but organizations learned to live with it. Now however, through social media and sites dedicated to customer reviews, disgruntled customers have a public platform to amplify their outrage. Keep in mind that a comment that's *spoken* may be forgotten; but a remark written in cyberspace may last forever. Add the human tendency to take the written word more seriously than a spoken comment. Mix in the sheer volume of people connected through social media, and you have a formula for a perfect storm where a single unhappy customer can inflict serious brand damage.

**Your Move – Become a Recovery Master**

When mistakes happen, and your product or service falls short of expectation, you'd of course give them a refund or exchange. But that's not enough. On top of the exchange or refund, *give the customer something for their inconvenience*. Any gesture or token of appreciation that addresses the customer's hassle-factor can transform an upset customer into a tweeting trumpeter of your virtues. That's the kind of viral marketing we'd all love.

Bottom line – these trends in technology show no signs of slowing. Customer service is no longer about processing a transaction. It's about being a Trusted Advisor to ensure people are buying the right items and they know how to use them. And it means ensuring that every customer is genuinely satisfied with their choice. When you think about it, those strategies have always been smart. Now they're critical.

Read more here:
https://jeffmowatt.com/article/the-future-of-customer-service/

# Marketing in 2026:
## What Stays, What Changes, What Breaks

BBC

As we enter 2026, the marketing landscape is being shaped by rapid technological change, shifting consumer behaviour, and evolving cultural expectations. While core principles such as strong storytelling and brand trust remain essential, new forces are redefining how brands capture attention and build long-term value. Success increasingly depends on balancing innovation with authenticity in an environment where audiences are more selective than ever.

A key theme emerging from industry forecasts is the growing importance of creative boldness and differentiation. As digital noise intensifies, standardised and templated campaigns are losing impact. Brands that invest in original, culturally relevant ideas are seeing stronger engagement, particularly on social platforms where conversation and community matter more than polished perfection. In 2026, creativity is less about volume and more about resonance—producing work that feels distinctive, human, and worth paying attention to.

Another notable shift challenges the long-held belief that maximum convenience always wins. Research suggests there is a tipping point where intentional friction — such as limited releases, exclusive access, or curated experiences — can actually increase desire and loyalty. By introducing moments of scarcity or anticipation, brands are designing experiences that feel meaningful rather than purely transactional, strengthening emotional connection with audiences.

Artificial intelligence continues to dominate marketing strategy in 2026. With more than a billion people engaging with AI tools each month, the way consumers discover brands and interact with content is fundamentally changing. AI has moved beyond simple automation into more advanced systems, including agentic workflows where autonomous AI agents assist users with research and purchasing decisions. At the same time, visibility on AI-powered platforms is becoming more competitive, pushing marketers beyond traditional SEO toward **Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO)** — content designed to surface within conversational and recommendation-based AI experiences.

In highly connected regions such as Southeast Asia, digital adoption is nearing saturation, making social and video platforms the primary battlegrounds for discovery, especially among younger audiences. Meanwhile, access to advanced AI tools is levelling the playing field for smaller organisations. As first-party data becomes critical for personalisation and AI performance, brands that unify data ethically and strategically will hold a clear advantage in 2026's evolving marketplace.

> ***In 2026, creativity is less about volume and more about resonance.***
> 
> ”

Read more here:
https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/cwyvy8xgpllo

# *Automation Is Redefining Survival for Mid-Sized Logistics Companies in 2026*

FORBES

In 2026, automation is no longer a forward-looking advantage for mid-sized logistics companies — it has become a requirement for survival. Rising customer expectations around speed, accuracy, and transparency are forcing logistics operators to rethink how work gets done. Caught between large enterprises with deep resources and small, digital-native startups, mid-sized firms face unique pressure to modernize. Automation is increasingly the lever that allows them to remain competitive, scalable, and resilient in a market defined by constant disruption.

Across warehouses and distribution networks, automation is transforming operations that were once heavily reliant on manual labour. Robotics, artificial intelligence, and intelligent warehouse systems are streamlining picking, packing, inventory management, and order fulfillment, helping companies reduce errors while responding faster to shifts in demand. Autonomous mobile robots, AI-driven forecasting tools, and smart routing systems are also helping mid-sized logistics providers manage labour shortages and rising operating costs, while improving consistency and service levels. Importantly, this shift is less about replacing workers and more about augmenting human effort in increasingly complex supply chains

A major factor accelerating adoption is the growing accessibility of automation. Flexible models such as Robotics-as-a-Service and modular automation platforms have lowered financial barriers, allowing companies to deploy advanced technologies without massive upfront investment. This approach enables logistics firms to scale automation incrementally, adapting systems as volumes fluctuate and business needs evolve. At the same time, software platforms are becoming the backbone of modern logistics operations, connecting robots, sensors, and enterprise systems into unified digital ecosystems. These tools provide real-time visibility and data-driven insights that allow leaders to optimize workflows and make faster, more informed decisions.

Ultimately, automation in 2026 is not about efficiency alone — it is about long-term resilience. Mid-sized logistics companies that treat automation as a strategic foundation rather than a tactical upgrade are better positioned to grow, adapt, and withstand future disruptions. Those that delay risk falling behind in an industry where speed, precision, and adaptability increasingly define survival.

Read more here:
https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2026/01/09/how-automation-is-redefining-survival-for-mid-sized-logistics/

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