

What's New in Retail Tech

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Food retailers are now able to reduce shrink, and improve food quality and safety by harnessing advancements in technologies such as automation, cloud-based networks, the **Internet of Things (IoT)**, and yes, robots. Schnuck Markets in Missouri **has robots** traveling the aisles three times a day to scan 1.5 million products, providing more accurate and comprehensive operational insight.

These “Tally robots” offer a more efficient tool to collect and analyze data, one of the pain points of food retail operations. According to Heather Garlich, vice president of media and public relations, Food Marketing Institute, new technologies also address food safety solutions for retailers that offer home delivery—think tote bags validated to maintain temperatures for certain amounts of time. Other technologies, such as those developed by **ReposiTrak**, provide document management tools. There are also new recall tracking and food safety inspection databases such as **Hazel Analytics**.

Retailers have traditionally relied on staff and clipboards to track product temperatures or on energy management systems to track failures in refrigeration equipment. Emerging tech from **Lizard Monitoring** monitors temperatures via wireless sensors installed throughout the store to ensure food safety and track resolution to temperature events. Managers can see trends in temperature data, employee resolution time, and predict the failure of refrigeration equipment before it happens.

What's more, Lizard's sensors monitor product versus just air temperature, meaning there are less false alerts from defrosting or door openings. Lizard also recently developed an exposure alert feature. “We can now show how long the product may have been in the danger zone where bacteria can form and replicate,” says Terry Cates, co-founder. “Operators can then create a standard operating procedure for staff to take action whether the product should be thrown out or can be kept.”

While **IBM announced the general availability of its IBM Food Trust** solution on the IBM Blockchain Platform in 2018, other tech companies are now entering the **traceability** space. **Zest Labs offers Freshness Management** tools that it says can reduce shrink by more than 50 percent. “Products become more at risk the longer they are away from harvesting,” says CEO Peter Mehring. Using IoT sensors inserted into pallets at harvest, the Zest Fresh system provides growers, shippers, and grocers with autonomous, end-to-end cold supply chain visibility.

Combined with cloud-based predictive analytics and machine learning, the sensor-equipped pallets and corresponding database improve freshness management from field to store, says Mehring. It also improves traceability in regards to food safety. “Say a grower found out their avocado crop was contaminated with **Listeria**,” says Mehring. “They would update the database in our system and every distributor and retailer where they were sent would be automatically notified. Typically, blockchain only works in reverse: If I have a product in my hand and I scan it, where did it come from? This facilitates communication in both directions.”

Food Quality & Safety - <https://www.foodqualityandsafety.com/article/whats-new-in-retail-tech/>

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