

Points of View: Business Intelligence

DoorDash + Instacart: The Commerce Intelligence Inflection Point

What the Acquisition Means for Advertisers

A WPP Media Business Intelligence Point of View — October 29, 2026

1. The Deal at a Glance

On October 29, 2026 — the same day the FTC issued "surveillance pricing" compulsory orders to both companies — DoorDash announced a definitive agreement to acquire Instacart for approximately \$17 billion, or \$65.00 per share. Management guides to a close in late 2027 or the first half of 2028, pending shareholder and regulatory approval. DoorDash has indicated it intends to retain Instacart's brand, app, and enterprise technology products.

The deal is not yet a sure thing. The FTC 6(b) orders, issued the day prior, signal that regulators are already scrutinizing both companies' use of consumer purchase data for personalized pricing. A combined entity with an estimated 23% of all online grocery sales and 60% - 80% share of third-party grocery delivery sales in the United States should expect antitrust review to be substantive rather than procedural¹.

The deal can be viewed in part as a direct response to a structural imperative that WPP's June 2026 TYNV identified clearly: retail media — having surpassed total television advertising revenue in 2025 — is entering a consolidation phase in which platforms that cannot reach scale on data, distribution, and closed-loop measurement are increasingly likely to cede share to those that can. DoorDash, generating approximately \$4.61 billion in Q3 2026 revenue across 993 million orders, had the commerce infrastructure. Instacart, generating \$331 million in advertising revenue in Q3 2026 (up 23% year-over-year), had the CPG advertiser network and the grocery data. But advertising is only one part of the rationale. The deal also deepens DoorDash's grocery footprint, adds Instacart's retailer partnerships and enterprise tech, and creates logistics synergies. There is clear commercial logic for combining them.

¹ Bernstein

2. Why the Timing Was Opportune for DoorDash

Retail media at the consolidation inflection. TYN Y June 2026 forecast global retail media advertising revenue of \$194.7 billion in 2026, growing 9.2% to \$212.6 billion in 2027, with the U.S. accounting for nearly 40% (\$80 billion). The report explicitly flagged that growth is slowing in the most mature markets, and that specialist networks unable to reach scale on data, distribution, and measurement are likely to consolidate or cede share to larger competitors. A standalone DoorDash — generating meaningful but subscale advertising revenue at an estimated \$900 million by year end relative to Amazon (~\$74.5 billion) and Walmart Connect (\$8.6 billion)— was approaching precisely that threshold. The acquisition is, in this reading, a defensive necessity as much as a growth play. For advertisers, the deal may be welcome: clients face mounting pressure to concentrate spend with Amazon and Walmart given their share of sales, and a scaled Instacart + DoorDash entity could offer a meaningful and much-needed counterweight. That gives brands both a credible alternative for diversifying investment and added leverage in their negotiations with the two dominant players.

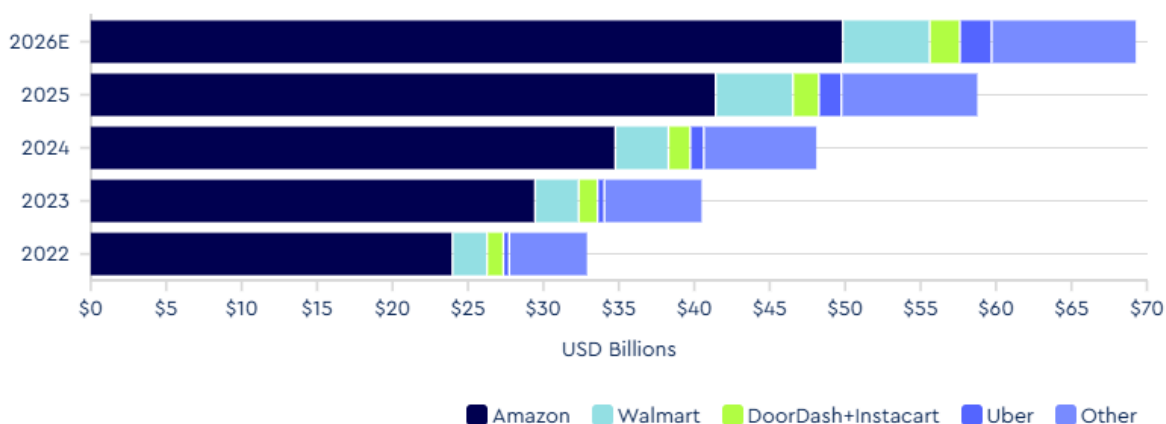
Agentic commerce is reordering discovery. TYN Y June 2026 noted the dissolving line between Intelligence and Commerce: unified agentic checkouts and AI-mediated product discovery are making the interface the new point of sale. A DoorDash without Instacart's CPG data and enterprise retailer relationships could find itself on the wrong side of that transition — a strong fulfillment rail without the purchase-intent data that AI commerce agents are increasingly trained to surface. The combined entity has a more credible claim to being the default local commerce layer for a meaningful share of household spending, which is the asset an AI agent is most likely to surface in a grocery or restaurant context.

DoorDash's advertising run rate will get a step-change. Adding Instacart's advertising revenue (approximately \$1.3 billion annualized based on Q3 2026 rates) to DoorDash's existing base creates a combined entity with a credible claim to more than \$2 billion in annual advertising revenue — still far from Amazon's scale, but sufficient to be a meaningful line item in a major CPG advertiser's planning conversation.

U.S. Retail Media Advertising Revenue

WPP Media

While DoorDash boasts a high share of grocery delivery, it remains a challenger in retail media revenue



Source: WPP Media, Company Filings

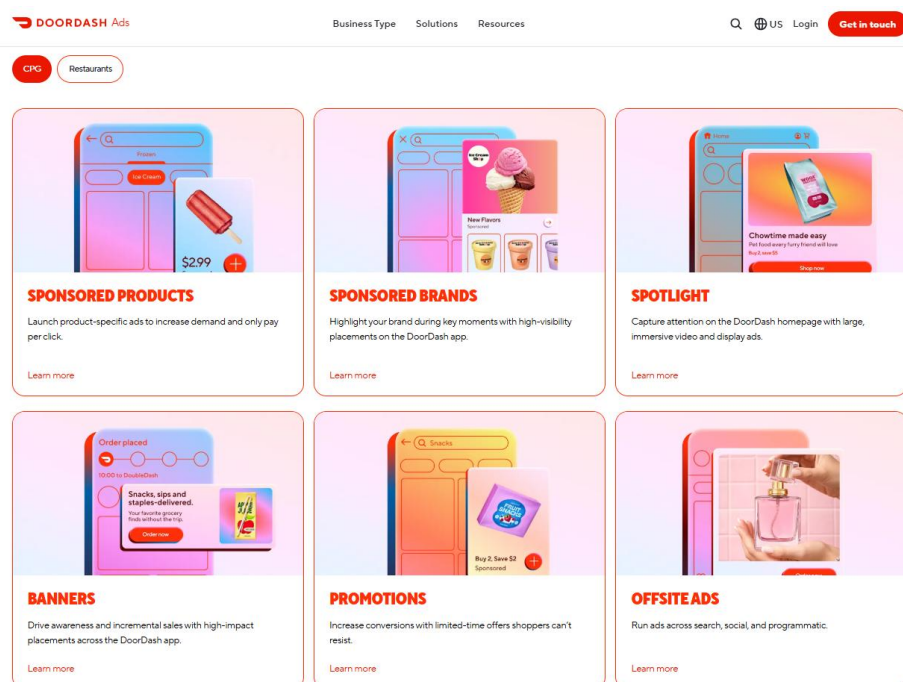
3. Platform Ad Offerings

The commercial logic that made this deal opportune — DoorDash's distribution scale without sufficient CPG data depth, Instacart's data richness without sufficient reach — maps directly onto the two advertising products the combined entity now controls. They were, until this announcement, competing for portions of the same CPG advertiser budget from different angles. Together, they could cover the full household purchase arc from weekly grocery to on-demand delivery, with closed-loop measurement running across both.

3.1 DoorDash Ads

DoorDash Ads arrived at this deal as a fast-growing but still-maturing retail media platform. Its core strengths are on the demand side: a scaled, first-party, privacy-resilient system built on 993 million quarterly orders, spanning restaurant, convenience, grocery, and retail. The platform has moved beyond sponsored listings into display, video (Spotlight), offsite (Symbiosys, acquired for approximately \$175 million), and advanced measurement through incrementality and clean rooms. With [more than 400,000 advertisers](#) and an ad run rate crossing \$1 billion annually, the commercial foundation is real — but the advertiser base has remained concentrated in restaurants and local commerce, and format diversity and automation maturity still trail Amazon, Google, and Meta.

Instacart's CPG advertiser network and grocery data help DoorDash Ads move faster from a local commerce ad platform to a scaled enterprise retail media proposition. The question post-close is whether the two systems integrate smoothly enough to offer CPG brands a genuinely unified planning and measurement experience across both surfaces.



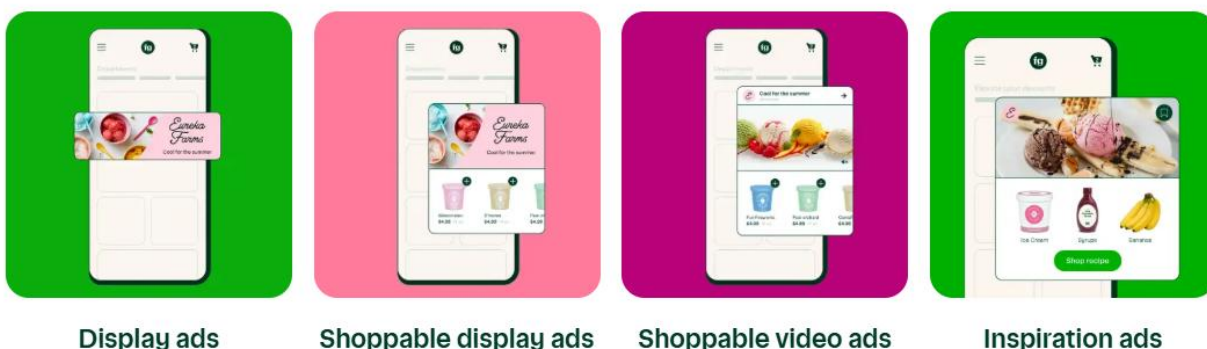
3.2 Instacart Carrot Ads

Where DoorDash Ads brought scale and distribution, Carrot Ads brings depth and enterprise credibility. Built on grocery purchase data across 310-plus retailer partners and demand from more than 9,000 CPG brands, Carrot Ads is a mature platform — with AI-powered campaign management, off-platform extensions across Meta, YouTube, TikTok, and Uber Eats and a Data Hub clean room infrastructure. Instacart's Q3 2026 advertising revenue of \$331 million — up 23% year-over-year — reflects a platform that has earned a durable place in CPG media plans.

The risk to monitor is retailer partner confidence. Several of Carrot Ads' 310-plus retail network partners compete directly with Instacart's own delivery business. Under DoorDash ownership, the question of whether those partners continue to treat Carrot Ads as a genuinely independent media platform — or begin to view it as a competitive data liability — could shape the combined entity's retail media revenue trajectory.



✓ Instacart Ads boosted brand visibility by up to **40%**.



4. The Advertising Intelligence Case: What Changes for Advertisers

To assess where this combination lands in the broader competitive landscape, WPP Media has applied its Future of Advertising Intelligence Framework — a 180-point scoring model that evaluates advertising platforms across five dimensions: Data Assets, AI/Technical Capability, Distribution, Transaction/Commerce, and Content/Media. The framework scores platforms on proven, shipped capability only; roadmap items and unverified integration claims are not credited. Three independent model applications produced the following averaged results, with all post-acquisition scores treated as pro-forma pending deal close.

Category (max)	Pre-Acquisition	Post-Acquisition	Δ
Data Assets (40)	22.7	26.3	+3.6
AI / Technical (40)	22.0	25.3	+3.3
Distribution (40)	17.0	19.7	+2.7
Transaction / Commerce (30)	20.7	23.3	+2.6
Content / Media (30)	6.3	7.0	+0.7
TOTAL (180)	88.7	101.7	+13.0

A pre-acquisition score of 88.7 places standalone DoorDash marginally below peer vertical-commerce specialists Uber (94) and Walmart (92) in the WPP analysis. The post-acquisition average of 101.7 lifts the combined entity into the established middle tier of commerce-intelligence platforms, driven by gains in data depth and retail media capability. The deal does not resolve the structural gaps that cap its ceiling: no frontier AI model or custom silicon, no consumer OS or device layer, and effectively no entertainment content surface.

Data Assets (+3.6) — the primary dividend. The largest absolute gain across the five categories. Instacart bolsters DoorDash SKU-level grocery purchase data across roughly 100,000 store locations, household replenishment cycles, CPG brand-switching signals, and retailer loyalty integrations solidifying DoorDash's evolution beyond a restaurant-delivery signal into a fuller household commerce profile. For CPG advertisers, the combined data estate is materially closer to a true household purchase graph — a genuine differentiator in a retail media market where Amazon and Walmart remain the default first-party data benchmarks.

AI / Technical (+3.3) — capability without control. The most meaningful gain within this category is in Advertising AI and Advertiser Adoption, which reflects Instacart's Carrot Ads enterprise tooling, AI-powered campaign management, and off-platform activation capabilities. The combined decisioning engine — spanning logistics optimization, grocery recommendation, CPG retail media, and Ghost Ads incrementality measurement — is materially stronger than either company alone.

Distribution (+2.7) — broader reach, same trust constraint. Adding Instacart's U.S. grocery audience to DoorDash broadens the combined user base and increases purchase-mission frequency. The single most significant figure in this category is Trust, which holds flat pre and post. The FTC surveillance-pricing probe, an estimated 60-80% combined third-party grocery delivery share, and ongoing data-practice litigation cap any trust uplift.

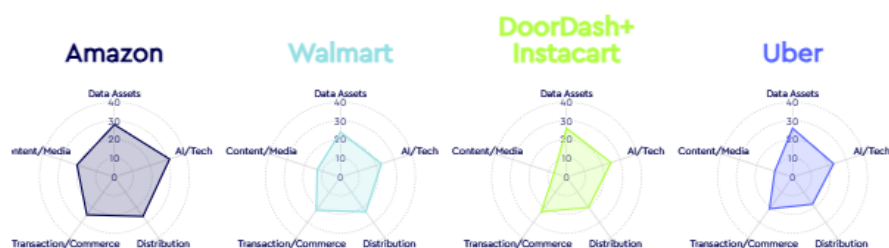
Transaction / Commerce (+2.6) — the clearest strategic synergy. The Advertising Systems subsegment accounts for the majority of the gain here, as Instacart's Carrot Ads brings 310-plus retailer partners, demand from more than 9,000 CPG brands, and in-store Caper Cart ad surfaces to a combined platform that already counted more than 400,000 advertisers. TNY June 2026 noted

that excelling at both commerce infrastructure and advertising systems simultaneously is "exceptionally rare"; the DoorDash-Instacart combination could represent the most credible non-Amazon, non-Walmart answer to that observation in the U.S. market. Commerce Infrastructure was already the combined entity's strongest individual subsegment pre-acquisition, moving only modestly post-close — reflecting the reality that DoorDash's last-mile stack was already among the best outside Amazon before any deal.

Content / Media (+0.7) — no real gain. A post-acquisition average of 7.0/30 is the lowest category score by a significant margin. The combined entity remains a transactional commerce utility without entertainment surfaces, creator networks, or exclusive IP. In a 2030 environment where TNY June 2026 forecasts that agent-mediated commerce could eliminate the moment of human attention entirely, the absence of content surfaces may prove a more consequential constraint than the score delta alone suggests.

ADVERTISING INTELLIGENCE FRAMEWORK

Captains of Commerce



Source: WPP Media • Totals may not match due to rounding

5. Competitive Analysis: The Landscape After the Deal

Amazon's position remains distinct. TNY June 2026 identified Amazon's dual advantage — Alexa+ embedded across hundreds of millions of devices as an agentic commerce front end, plus the Amazon DSP as the connective tissue between retailer purchase signals and premium streaming TV supply — as the most defensible position in the retail media ecosystem. A stronger DoorDash-Instacart entity challenges Amazon in grocery and CPG, but does not replicate Amazon's hardware layer, fulfillment ownership, or streaming video surface. Amazon is probably the most comfortable with this deal of any major competitor.

Walmart Connect faces the most direct competitive pressure. Walmart's grocery data, store network, and Sparky AI agent are in direct competition with what the combined DoorDash-Instacart entity offers CPG advertisers. The key distinction remains: Walmart owns its inventory and supply chain; DoorDash-Instacart orchestrates commerce on behalf of others. That difference matters for the depth and reliability of purchase-signal data, and for the credibility of the closed-loop measurement claim.

Uber Eats is in a meaningfully weaker competitive position in the U.S. food and grocery delivery market. Uber Advertising — a direct competitor to DoorDash Ads in restaurant and local commerce — faces a better-resourced opponent with deeper CPG relationships after the Instacart

combination. Instacart's Carrot Ads off-platform extensions have historically included Uber Eats as a distribution channel; the future of that arrangement post-acquisition is worth monitoring closely.

Grocery retailer media networks — Kroger Precision Marketing, Albertsons Media Collective, and similar — face a more complicated competitive environment. Instacart currently powers retail media for 310-plus retailer partners, several of whom compete directly with Instacart's owned grocery delivery business. Whether those partners continue to trust a DoorDash-owned Carrot Ads as a genuinely independent platform — or begin to view it as a competitive data risk — could be a material headwind to the combined entity's retail media network growth, and deserves close tracking through the regulatory review period.

7. What Questions Remain Open

The scoring models converge on three key structural gaps that the acquisition does not address. A fourth — the lack of owned AI models or infrastructure — is less consequential as the quality of open source models rises and the cost of running those models falls.

No consumer OS or personal device footprint. In a 2030 environment where AI agents mediate product discovery, the platforms best positioned are those with ambient hardware presence — Amazon's Alexa+, Google's Android ecosystem, Apple's device layer. DoorDash-Instacart operates through iOS and Android at another party's discretion. DoorDash has deliberately chosen to focus on 'winning the battle for atoms' (the physical logistics of moving goods) rather than bits (purely digital products).

Trust is flat to pressured. The FTC 6(b) surveillance-pricing probe names both DoorDash and Instacart. A combined entity raises the antitrust and data-power profile rather than resolving it. The commercial thesis depends explicitly on deploying richer household commerce data for advertising personalization — precisely the practice under regulatory scrutiny.

Commerce orchestration, not ownership. Post-acquisition, DoorDash does not own the grocery supply chain or retailer inventory. Amazon and Walmart's structural advantage — owning the shelf, the data, and the fulfillment — remains intact and, in the agentic commerce scenario, is likely to compound.

8. Implications for Advertisers: Three Practical Takeaways

For CPG and grocery advertisers: The combined DoorDash-Instacart entity is likely to become a more credible third option in retail media planning by 2028, assuming the deal closes and Carrot Ads integration proceeds without major retailer defections. Brands currently under-invested in Instacart's CPG measurement and clean room infrastructure should review that position now — the platform's advertiser value proposition could strengthen materially, while its independence from Amazon and Walmart makes it structurally attractive for brands seeking to diversify retail media concentration.

For restaurant and local commerce brands: The deal's immediate implication is a more capable and better-resourced DoorDash Ads platform with access to Instacart's enterprise ad technology, off-platform extensions, and measurement tools. Brands currently using DoorDash Ads in performance-only mode should assess whether the expanded capability — particularly offsite activation through Symbiosis and Carrot Ads' retailer networks — warrants broader budget consideration.

For all advertisers planning against the 2030 agentic commerce environment: TNY June 2026 identified the key unresolved question in retail media as who owns the customer relationship when the purchase journey begins outside the retailer's own surfaces. The DoorDash-Instacart combination creates one of the more credible non-Amazon, non-Walmart answers to that question in the U.S. market. Brands should be building the dual investment posture the report recommends — retailer-owned search alongside being citable and transactable inside general-purpose AI models — while tracking how the regulatory environment shapes what data the combined entity is permitted to deploy.

The content of this document is not financial advice. For questions, please email:
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