Shaking up the codes: what French category managers learned in 2026



A sold-out audience at Lesieur's headquarters, 15 October 2026.

Paris, 15 October 2026 — Institut du Commerce, ECR France

More than 110 category managers from 67 retailers, manufacturers and solution providers filled Lesieur's auditorium for Institut du Commerce's annual Category Management conference. Its theme, "Shake up the codes. Invent what's next!", asked a pointed question: how do stores and brands stay relevant as shoppers drift elsewhere?

A wake-up call for hypermarkets. Circana research shows French grocery stores are growing again (+2.1% in value in H1 2026), yet 30 to 40% of shoppers now partly turn to specialists, discounters and pharmacies. Their complaint is not too much choice, but choice that is hard to read and rarely renewed. Winning categories share clearer shelves, constant renewal and high visibility.

Collaboration pays. Advantage Group's global study across 40+ countries finds that the manufacturers retailers rate best outperform the rest by 27%. France still sits in the "mutual dissatisfaction" quadrant, notably on innovation. The keys: start from the retailer's strategy, bring objective data, and commit over time.

New narratives under new rules. With the EU EmpCo directive now banning vague green claims, brands must move from promises to proof. Six "Shake up your category" workshops in 2026, from refills to plant-based drinks, showed that sustainable solutions already exist; the challenge is making them visible and desirable.

From theory to shelf. Testimonies from Lesieur (shared sell-out data), Nutrition & Santé (category management for healthier eating) and 900.care (bringing a disruptive refill brand into retail) converged on three success factors: shared data, a clear mandate from leadership, and constant presence in stores.

As it turns ten in 2027, Institut du Commerce will pursue this work through new workshops and programmes on healthier food, ageing consumers and the circular economy.

Speakers' presentations and the full summary (ECR France / Institut du Commerce members only): institutducommerce.org