



By Carl Collen

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Ahold Delhaize expands into robotics

Retailer partners with Delft University of Technology for research and robotics development



Frans Muller

Ahold Delhaize has announced that it is partnering with Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) in the Netherlands to expand the company's Artificial Intelligence for Retail (AIR) Lab.

According to the retailer, the expansion comprises a robotics research programme and test site for developing state-of-the-art innovations in the retail industry.

This is the first expansion of Ahold Delhaize's AIRLab, an industry-academic collaboration set up to conduct research into AI.

By expanding its focus to robotics, AIRLab Delft is designed to drive innovations for daily business while building more knowledge of the intersection among retail, AI and robotics.

Based in RoboValley, a robotics research center developed by TU Delft Robotics Institute, a team of international researchers will explore robotic solutions that can be applied throughout the retail supply chain, from warehouses and stores to customers. T

To ensure these explorations result in tangible solutions, Ahold Delhaize will open a test site where researchers can work with partners, students and start-ups, supported by the technology incubator of TU Delft to build and test prototypes of robotic solutions.

At the test site, which will be operational in early 2019, they will explore how robotics can be deployed in a retail setting, how robotic grippers can handle delicate items such as fruits and vegetables, or how to improve image-recognition of products and packaging.

"The rapid advancements in AI and robotics provide us with significant opportunities to make everyday shopping even easier for our customers and develop new solutions for our warehouses and last-mile delivery," said Frans Muller, president and CEO of Ahold Delhaize. "Working together with academic partners such as TU Delft will enable Ahold Delhaize and AIRLab to shape a technology-driven world in a responsible way. It helps us become a frontrunner in AI research and development for retail and ultimately build capabilities that are scalable for the group."