

Commercial Burglary



Reducing crime through partnership and prevention



Businesses are an attractive target for burglars because, depending on the type of business, they tend to be far less secure than homes.

Whether it is offices, shops or street vendors, none are immune to the crime.

Commercial burglaries are lucrative for criminals and are becoming more common. The only thing keeping the burglar out is the security measures taken by the business, which is why they hold so much importance and should be a top priority.

What's in this guide

Click on the items in the interactive menu below to jump to that section.

TOP TIPS

- Train your staff to spot and report suspicious activity.
- When you are closed, protect stock and cash by removing items from window displays. Leave empty tills open and reduce the amount of stock in storerooms.
- Physically protect your premises with grilles and shutters, hardened glass in displays and using safes/ cages where suitable.
- Deter intruders with alarms, CCTV, dusk to dawn lighting and controlling vehicle access to delivery areas.

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Types of Retail Burglary

Smash and grab



This type of burglary is characterised by the level of force used to gain entry. Burglars will use a number of different items to get in to the premises, from something as simple as using a brick to smash a window, to using cutting equipment, or driving a stolen vehicle through doors and windows to gain entry. In some cases, they may only take goods in the window display, but often they take high value stock on the shop floor. The amount of damage caused in each incident also makes repairs particularly expensive.

Opportunistic



These burglaries lack obvious planning. Burglars usually enter through the most vulnerable points, roof-lights, windows, easy accessible doors. Sometimes they will smash a window and steal from the display. Opportunistic burglars rarely try to overcome alarm systems, although they may go to lengths to avoid setting it off. Typically, they only take what they can easily carry. Targets who do not carry high value stock and do not go to great lengths to protect their shops are often the most vulnerable.

Sophisticated



Is where burglars overcome alarm systems. They may cut wires off alarm systems, fill alarm bells with foam to stop them sounding, and smash strobe lights. In some cases, burglars avoid alarms, either because of careful observation or through inside information. A common ploy is to set the alarm off repeatedly and wait until police and key holders stop responding to it. With the alarm disabled, burglars have more time to act and will usually enter unobtrusively, forcing side or back doors and windows. Usual targets are high value stock and sometimes safes, which are often removed entirely. Once they have the run of the building, burglars have been known to open up loading bays and bring in large vehicles, in which to remove stolen property.



Slowing criminals down

Time is a key factor in most burglaries. Burglars will put themselves at risk of being caught, for as little time as possible. The risks are highest when they are most conspicuous to passers-by, or in the short time they have to complete the burglary after an alarm has gone off. In order to effectively prevent burglaries, you should introduce layers to delay burglars for as long as possible, in order to make the risk seem unacceptable to them.

The best way to do this is to put your resources into more than one of the types or levels of physical protection advised in this guide. Ultimately, the more barriers you create, the more you will slow them down.

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Train Your Staff

You need full support from your staff. Teach them about the measures you have taken, and the correct use of equipment you have installed.



Reporting suspicious circumstances

Explain to staff the importance, for example, of keeping an eye out for suspicious people or vehicles to prevent people 'casing' your premises.



Get them involved

You can develop staff commitment to crime prevention by asking their opinions about the measures you are taking, or propose to take.



Key security

Above all, you should build key security into staff training. Ensure that only specially selected staff have access to certain keys or combination lock, and that keys to secure areas are not left within the shop. Selected staff or managers must thoroughly understand their responsibilities for locking and securing fastenings on windows and doors, cabinets, internal offices where cash is held, safes, roof lights and any other exits.

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Protect Stock and Cash



Remove high value goods from window displays

You can protect high value goods such as jewellery or cameras by removing them from display windows overnight and locking them in a safe, a secure room, or a cage. You should be aware of the extra workload on you and your staff, and the likelihood that empty windows will attract less window shopping.



Hiding stock

Burglars will be less likely to break into your stock room if you hide what is in it. Consider boarding, or whitewashing windows to detract interest in the room.



Leave the till open

By leaving the till visible, open and clearly empty, burglars seeking cash are likely to lose interest.



Reducing stock

The less you have in stock to attract a thief, the less they can take. Coordinate with suppliers to introduce 'just in time' deliveries, use catalogue deliveries or home deliveries to reduce stock levels.



Bank your cash

If you do not leave cash in the store overnight it cannot be stolen in a burglary. Night safe facilities are available after opening hours. If you do not use a specialist cash collection agency, be sure to vary the route to the bank and the times you leave the shop.



Dummy goods

Using dummy goods, (such as coloured water in wine bottles in off-licence displays) will deter some opportunistic burglars who only seek display goods, you have to make it clear that the goods are fake. This approach will not deter burglars seeking high value stock from inside the shop.



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Physically Protect the Target



Strengthening potential entrances

Use high quality hardwood doors and frames. Use steel reinforcing and anti-thrust bolts on vulnerable doors and bars on vulnerable windows. Glass panels in doors are vulnerable to attack and should be avoided or boarded up. Use products that comply with BS8220 for the construction industry as a minimum standard. Door locks should be five-lever mortice lock and conform to BS3621.



Grilles and shutters

Are an excellent way of deterring burglars, externally fitted varieties need planning permission.

There are three main types:

- Internal grilles, usually a thin lattice mesh that is lowered just behind the window.
- External metal grilles are usually of the 'tube and link' design.
- External roller shutters, can have windows so that shoppers can still see the window display.



Fit grilles inside

Protect high value goods in the shop floor area by securing high-risk display cabinets, such as for tobacco displays, with protective grilles and shutters.



Glass 'film'

A reasonably cheap way of improving the strength of glass windows against smash and grab attacks is by applying a plastic film, available in various grades, to the rear of the window. This is a good deterrent but filmed glass windows are slightly less clear than non-filmed windows. Mirror-finished film on rear windows will both increase the strength of the glass and fully restrict a burglar's view into rear storage areas.

If toughened glass with retro fitted film is attacked, it will not have much effect unless the film has been fitted and secured under the retaining beading. It would be useful to have the glazing reviewed and identified, to then find the best upgrade.



Laminated glass

This is very difficult to break through in a 'smash and grab' attack because it is made by bonding a layer of tough plastic between sheets of glass, and this will hold the window together even after the glass has broken. However, to be effective you must ensure that window frames and fixings are equally strong, and bear in mind that you will often have to pay to replace the glass, even if the burglars were not able to take your stock.

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Safes

A good quality safe will protect cash and valuable items overnight but you should take the added precaution of bolting it in place and positioning it discreetly. If you have, a burglar alarm, you can include sensors inside the safe that will set the alarm off if the safe is opened. Be aware that buying a fire safe does not necessarily protect against theft, and vice versa. Insurers can help you choose a suitable safe and suggest minimum standards of specification.



Secure cages

Cages in the stock room can provide additional security for high value stock. They can be constructed using expanded metal sections or created by increasing the protection within an existing internal room.



Vehicle traps

Fixing bollards into the ground around your premises will protect against ram raiders, but you will need to consult your local planning authority and your landlord. Some designs of bollard can be removed during trading hours. Large concrete plant containers can be used as an alternative to bollards. 'Road blocker' devices can be used to close off vehicle entrance overnight. Much depends on your location and circumstances.



The overall design

The Secured by Design scheme has been developed over the last 30 years to establish the "police preferred specification" and promote security products. Secured by Design members have products that have been independently tested by a 3rd party test house to recognised UK security standards.

Consider consulting your local police service Design Out Crime Officer (DOCO), a specialist policing role, and a free service, which will provide security advice and administer Secured by Design.



If you are burgled

Remember that if you have been unfortunate enough to have been burgled, statistics show that the risk of being burgled again is much higher. Use the advice in this guide to upgrade your defences and not merely put things back the way they were before the burglary.

Obviously if an attack takes place you will have very little time to liaise with planning authorities, the police and so on – so make contingency plans now, and arrange what you will do if the worst happens.

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Deterring Intruders



Intruder alarms

Burglars may be deterred if you display evidence that you have an alarm. Others may be scared off if they hear an alarm whilst breaking in. In addition to alarms consider smoke cloak devices and DNA marking.



Video surveillance

CCTV cameras are a deterrent and can help police to detect burglars. Codes of practice for the use of CCTV need to be followed, including ensuring the date and time are incorporated into the recording, before video evidence can be used in a prosecution. When choosing CCTV, consider cloud based or local storage. If you intend to use local storage, it will need to be protected. It is of no use if the storage is stolen as well.



Controlling vehicle access

If a burglar cannot get a vehicle close to your premises because access is blocked, you stop the ram raider and become less attractive to burglars who depend on vehicles to drive stock away.



Locking escape routes

Commercial burglars often plan to use exit routes that are different from the entry point. You need to make it as difficult to get out, as it is to get in. Make sure windows, doors, panic escape bars and internal doors are locked overnight and shut off power supplies to loading bay shutters.



Lighting

Installing lights that activate when someone approaches your building, you may deter potential burglars. If your shop is overlooked by passers-by, you will increase the chances of an intruder being noticed if you simply increase the level of lighting both inside and outside the building. Consider the use of dusk to dawn lighting. Good lighting in conjunction with CCTV can be very effective.

Think of ways in which further layers of security could be introduced to your premises, starting at the external perimeter and working in towards high value goods or equipment. Your local policing team can provide crime prevention advice.

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Always Report Crimes to the Police

Always report crime to police. This allows police to capture the data and understand the full scale of the crime, which in turn informs their resources and tactics to tackle it.



When a crime is taking place, dial 999 in an emergency.



You can also report to the Police on 101 or alternatively, you can report online at www.police.uk



Helpful resources

Police recommended security products can be found at www.securedbydesign.com

