

Theft From Shops



Reducing crime through partnership and prevention



Shoplifting is the theft of goods from open retail establishments. Typically this is by concealing items on their person, in pockets, under clothes or in a bag and leaving the store without paying.

Shoplifters range from amateurs acting impulsively to career criminals and organised crime groups. Individuals who are vulnerable may also be coerced by others into stealing.

Shops owners should look at ways to reduce the opportunity for theft from their premises, to protect their livelihoods.

What's in this guide

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

TOP TIPS

- Proactive customer service shows staff are observant and is an effective deterrent to thieves.
- Keep high value products covered by CCTV if possible and away from entrances and exits.
- Ensure there is good natural surveillance in all areas of the premises. Avoid blocking sight lines or CCTV cameras angles.
- Ban known offenders from your premises. Inform colleagues and partners that a ban has been issued.
- Work with partners such as police and business crime reduction partnerships to stay alert to potential offenders.

Theft From Shops



Who Is Stealing From Your Shop?

Shoplifters come from all areas of society. Although financial gain is usually the main motivating factor, peer pressure and even threats from others may motivate offenders. Due to the current cost of living crisis, there are a number of first-time offenders, who are stealing in order to survive. It is important that whilst businesses recognise they may be able to identify regular shoplifters.

There are some common behaviours, that may help to identify a shoplifter.



People who spend more time watching staff, looking for CCTV cameras and other customers, than shopping.



Repeatedly refusing offers of help.



Foil lined bags are often used to conceal goods with security tags. Obviously not a sign in its own right, but certainly worth monitoring.



Frequently entering the store, but not buying anything.



Wearing clothing inappropriate for the weather such as heavy coats, to conceal items.



May enter in a group, with one or two members causing a scene to distract the staff, whilst others conceal goods unnoticed.



Appearing nervous, even sweating or shaking, apparently checking a watch or bag and picking items up without showing any genuine interest.



Theft From Shops



Common Shoplifting Techniques

Whilst each shoplifter will have their own preferred method of stealing items, there are some common techniques to look out for.

The techniques will vary according to many factors including the size/value of the item, the layout of the store, the motivation of the offender and security measures in place.



Concealment

Most shoplifters will seek to conceal items and then leave the store without generating attention. They may use bags or coats, pushchairs, or other items to help conceal stolen property. Changing rooms are particularly attractive as items can be concealed in privacy, without drawing attention.



Distraction

Lone offenders may ask staff to check for stock and then take items whilst the shop floor is empty. Sometimes offenders work in groups where one will steal, whilst others cause a distraction. This could be a false medical emergency, making a complaint or asking for directions or assistance.



Grab & Go

Some offenders will favour the brazen approach, relying on the element of surprise and slow reactions of staff. This is particularly effective in stores with large quantities of desirable items close to the exits or where display cartons are used meaning bulk amounts can be stolen easily.



Fraud

Shoplifters will change price tags or take items from the store and try to seek a refund, even though they have not paid for it.

Shoplifters will look for opportunities to steal when they are less likely to be caught. Key times include:



When staff are busy serving other customers.



During a shift change when there may be less staff on duty.



When deliveries are being unloaded.



Theft From Shops



How to Deter Shoplifting

When you are planning your business, it is likely, to be your potential customers who are at the forefront of your mind. However, the most effective security will be based on seeing the business through the eyes of a shoplifter. Think about factors that would make stealing easier – privacy, lack of supervision and easily accessible items are likely to be high on the list. Don't rely on one measure alone – the most effective protection is always to have several layers of security.



Deter

Do you have a policy to meet and greet people as they enter the store and ask if they need any help as they shop, for example offering customers shopping basket? Making eye contact can also show you have acknowledged their presence.

Genuine customers will enjoy that level of service and it may be enough to deter a shoplifter, so having alert attentive staff who engage with customers will send out a strong message that they are more likely to notice and react.

Most shoplifters will not pose a risk to staff, but those with mental health issues, under the influence of alcohol or drugs or simply determined thieves may do so. Make staff aware of how to identify risk factors and what the company policy is on dealing with shoplifters.

Identify areas in your store that are more vulnerable to theft or concealment and advise staff to regularly visit those areas when they are on the shop floor.



Banning Offenders

You are within your rights to ban anyone from your shop if you believe they have stolen, or pose a risk of stealing from your premises.

You can ban anyone who persistently causes a nuisance. Ideally, hand them a letter to show them they are banned and let all staff know to ensure everyone enforces the ban. If you are part of a watch scheme, inform other businesses.

Embed a security culture within the business. Efficient security personnel provide a deterrent to prolific offenders whom they will recognise and can ask to leave the shop. The priority for security staff, as with all staff, is to deter and disrupt thefts rather than wait until a theft has occurred.



Watch Schemes

Are you a member of a BID, BCRP or watch scheme? This is where shops work together, share information and may even use a radio link. If there isn't a scheme, set one up yourself. Search for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Business Crime reduction Partnerships (BCRPs) in your area.



CCTV

Good quality CCTV that covers the whole store can be a valuable deterrent to potential thieves. Regularly check to ensure images are not obscured by changing store layouts and ensure there are no blind-spots. Train staff to download the images and to be able to share them with the police.

Theft From Shops



Store Layout

Your store layout can play a big part in crime prevention. Never store high value goods close to the doors. These are the items most likely to be taken and it is too easy for shoplifters to walk in, grab items and run out before staff have even noticed their presence.



Visibility

Make sure your staff on the shop floor have a good view around the store; high shelves, narrow aisles and dead ends all make it easier for shoplifters to work undetected. Can your staff see into and out of the store to spot anyone loitering outside?



Tills

Tills should be positioned close to the doors so that staff can monitor people entering and exiting the store. Consider using convex mirrors on the walls to maximise opportunities for surveillance.



External Areas

Review what goes on outside your premises too. For example, a passageway beside your premises may facilitate concealment or an escape route. Investigate if you can install gates to any passageways or consider CCTV.



Fitting Rooms

If you are unable to always have a member of staff in the fitting rooms, consider locking the room and advise customers that staff will be happy to assist if they require the changing rooms. If you have an attendant at the changing room door, they should monitor the items being taken in and out and be wary of shoplifters either wearing shop items when they leave or attempting to conceal non-clothing items in the changing rooms. A prenumbered tagging system will prevent disputes over the number of items that have been taken into the room.

Remote control entry lock systems can assist in deterring unwanted customers. It will also allow you to position your CCTV cameras to capture the best possible facial image of all customers.



Theft From Shops



Display of Goods



High Value Items

The way you display goods plays a big part in your crime prevention layout. Place high value and desirable items in areas of maximum surveillance by staff. This could even be behind the till area.



Dummy Stock

Consider using empty boxes and locked cabinets for display purposes. Laminated glass will increase the protection for valuable items and keys should be limited to specific staff.



Slow thieves down

Thieves want to be in and out of your business quickly. Make it difficult for a thief to grab items. This could be something as simple as hanging clothes with the hangers pointing in alternating directions, or clear plastic shelf risers to prevent stock easily being pushed into bags. Securing display arms to frames can also prevent bulk theft of items.



Theft From Shops



Rule Setting



Signage

Use signs to let potential shoplifters know that you have a policy on theft and make sure you enforce it. Make use of civil recovery options and simply ask people if they can pay for the item and then ban them from the store.



Refunds

Ensure that every purchase has a receipt and that your policy requiring the receipt for a refund is clearly displayed. Offenders will know which businesses adhere to their policies. Ensure that any discarded receipts are disposed of securely.



CCTV

If you have CCTV in store you must display signs to let everyone in the premises know it is present.

If you are part of a watch scheme with other premises, display notices advertising that you are a member. If you have an agreement that offenders banned from one store will be banned from all others in the scheme, promote that as well. Train staff in how to use radios if you have one.



Site Access/Exits

Ensure that stock rooms, offices, staff rest areas and anywhere else that is private is secure. Make sure that fire exits are alarmed, and that staff respond to any alarm activations. Insecure exits will be taken advantage of as escape routes or to conceal goods.



Theft From Shops



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

If you are part of a Business Crime Reduction Partnership also report incidents to them. Offenders targeting your store will also be targeting other businesses. A joined up intelligence picture from the business community will help identify hotspots and repeat offenders and allow the BCRP to work with police and partners to reduce crime.

