

Shoplifting

Shoplifting is defined as the theft of items from a retail store with no intention of paying for them. Whilst many simply see shoplifting as a theft from the store owners, it has an impact on all as the loss has to be covered by higher prices, reducing profits. This loss can also effect staff wages and bonuses (the lower the profit, the less money that will be available).

For the store affected by shoplifting there is an additional risk that if not addressed, it will quickly gain a reputation for easy pickings.

Why People Shoplift

Research generally identifies six motives for shoplifting:

- **Social Influences:** Such as peer pressure or even as a "dare." This motive is prevalent amongst teenager and adolescents.
- **Criminal Gain:** To steal items in order to sell them.
- **To Feed an Addiction:** To pay for a drink or drug habit.
- **Socio-economic:** Due to a low income or wanting to gain social status by having expensive items.
- **Family Pressure:** Either pressure to shoplift for monetary gain, or by an individual seeking attention.
- **Psychological Disorders:** Depression, personality disorders, kleptomania.

Spotting the Shoplifter

There is no typical profile of a shoplifter, they come in all ages, sexes, ethnic and social backgrounds. However, there are some behavioural signs that should raise a red flag:

- People who are wearing heavy clothes in summer to disguise what they're hiding.
- Have no coat in winter (they plan to steal one).
- Wearing very worn clothing - which they then switch for stolen clothes.
- After going into a changing room, reappear wearing different clothes, or their clothing appears bulky (hiding stolen clothing or other items).
- When they enter the store walk normally, but when they leave appear to walk awkwardly (items hidden under clothes).
- People wearing hooded tops, hats or helmets, or keeping their heads lowered (to avoid being recognised on CCTV).
- Shoppers with open topped bags. Some may use metal boxes or foil bags to defeat DFID tag readers.
- Some shoplifters may also use pushchairs or even wheelchairs to hide stolen goods.

Shoplifting Tactics

Common tactics used by shoplifters are:

- When people come into the shop in pairs, they then separate, and while one distracts you, the other roams around, steals goods, and then leaves.
- Groups of people who come into the shop and then split up (a tactic known as swamping), the aim being to overwhelm the ability of the store staff to effectively monitor them.
- A shopper comes into the premises, walks around glancing around the shop, avoiding any eye contact with staff. This is known as "scoping". They are looking for security measures such as CCTV, mirrors and RFID tags and the location of staff.
- When greeted or asked if they need help, they seem disinterested.
- Shoppers seem nervous, seem flushed or dry lipped, or are sweating when it isn't hot.
- Hold quick conversations with other people who are also acting suspiciously.
- Shoppers who don't seem to know what they want and interchange articles frequently.
- Shoppers who are shopping right after opening or right before closing.

Deterring Shoplifters

Most of the time shoplifting can be deterred a store employee approaching a would-be shoplifter and asking them "can I help you?" But, whatever your suspicions stay calm and act in a non-confrontational, polite manner. Most of the time the would-be shoplifter will simply walk out of the store.

If an employee is concerned for his or her safety, they should seek a manager's assistance. Likewise, if an employee sees someone take something, it's time to get a manager involved. It's never wise for store personnel to try to chase someone out of a store suspected of theft. That's the time to get the police involved.

Other approaches include:

- Displaying high-value, easy to conceal small items close to where staff can view them, or behind counters.
- Using mirrors so that hidden areas can be observed.
- Use of RFID tags.
- Using CCTV to cover entrances/exits, and high value items (having a monitor screen in view of the customers can act as a further deterrent).
- Using "town-watch" radio systems so that reports of suspicious people, or the movements of known shoplifters can be shared.

Further Advice

Whilst this advice is suitable for most homes, if you have high-value items, or consider yourself at especial risk, Doran Risk Consulting can provide expert practical advice.

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