



A member of
Alliance Boots

Retail Crime Partnerships

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Retail Crime Partnerships

- Retailers spent over £210 million on protecting staff, stock, and premises in 2009/10.
- This figure is equivalent to the cost of 52,000 full-time retail jobs.
- More than 18,000 retail staff reported suffering verbal or physical abuse during 2009/10.
- Up to 70% of all urban crime takes place in town centres. Increasingly retail based crime is being carried out by professional thieves, working in small units and travelling between centres.

National Perspective

Although the remainder of this brief will consider the management of crime at local level, there needs to be a clear recognition that this work will be severely hampered and restricted without central support and guidance from government. The retail community recognises;

- Business crime represents 20% of all crime, yet is not recognised as a separate category in most Home Office Statistics. We believe police would allocate more resources to tackle the problem if it was better highlighted
- Police response is limited and unreliable. A British Chambers of Commerce survey found that 36% of businesses surveyed 'might not report a crime because of lack of confidence in any police response'
- Sentencing needs to be strengthened. Current penalties for shoplifting are inadequate. Fining a shoplifter £100 for stealing £80 of goods, will not discourage habitual criminals or drug addicts
- Insufficient focus and resource is directed by the Home Office towards retail crime, and there is a lack of co-ordination between the Home Office and other government agencies and departments.

Dealing with the Problem - Retail Crime Partnerships

- Retail centres are seen as an easy touch, with retail theft often providing the source of income to finance drug habits
- The national Retail Crime Operation (RCO) was launched in 1995 following discussions between major retailers and the police. RCOs identify persistent shop thieves, and establish a process for sharing information and photographs of offenders.
- Following the 1995 Judgement (Hellewell v The Chief Constable of Derbyshire) the police can share photographs of known and convicted thieves with retailers who sign up to the policy. Individuals can then be targeted through exclusion notice schemes.
- Exclusion notices prevent persistent shop-thieves from entering designated stores, and for subsequent offences, the court can take the notice into account when sentencing. They can be particularly effective when a small number of known, local criminals are active in a town.
- Retail crime partnerships have been established in around 200 towns and cities.
- Partnerships are registered with the Information Commissioner and operate under the legal provisions of the UK Data Protection Act.
- Town centre retailing should be seen in isolation. Other retail formats and retail parks can benefit from a retail crime partnership.

Turning Strategy into Action

By their nature, no two RCIs are identical, however, some common features can be identified within the more effective partnerships:-

- Appointment of a town-wide Intelligence Manager
- Co-ordinating CCTV response
- Creating formal links with local police resource
- Sharing of information and photographs of known offenders

- Real Time information via storenet and Radio link
- Retail Crime Diversion Programme, (targeting first time juvenile offenders)
- Quick Response Team combating graffiti and fly posting
- Co-ordinated response from store detectives and security staff
- Training:
 - Radio Link
 - Shoplifting awareness
 - Credit Card Fraud
 - Personal safety for staff
- Co-ordination and co-operation with neighbouring towns
- Co-ordination with warden services to target environmental issues e.g. vandalism and rubbish
- Liaison with other Local Authority departments e.g. cleansing and highways
- Co-ordination between daytime and evening economies
- Media management. Ensuring crime and safety news is presented positively.
- Liaison with other agencies e.g. Magistrates, Crime Prevention Officers, and drink and drug rehabilitation programmes
- Improved quality and management of car parks
- Managing anti-social behaviour issues e.g. Street begging and street trading
- Exclusion Notice Scheme's banning individuals from participating member's premises
- Accreditation through the Safer Business Award managed by Action Against Business Crime

This list is not exhaustive but illustrates the potential breadth of benefits that can be derived from the creation of a crime prevention partnership.

Impact of Retail Crime Partnerships?

A lack of standardised data recording systems for businesses and partnerships

has hampered the establishment of national measures of evaluation for Retail Crime Partnerships. However, with the emergence of local co-ordinators, improved statistics are now being produced which demonstrate the effectiveness and benefits of individual schemes.

At local level it is however easier to identify the benefits of working in partnership. For instance, following the launch of a local business partnership, violence in the evening economy in Folkestone was reduced from 80 incidents between January and June 2004, to 42 incidents during the same period in 2006. Where partnerships score heavily is in the provision of advance information to enable retailers to intervene before criminals enter the store. Preventing theft and other incidents before they happen is cost-effective, reduces aggression and violence, and drives home the message to thieves that they are being observed and that their behaviour will not be tolerated.

Targeting Crime at Local Level

Whilst the impact of retail crime partnerships should not be undervalued, there are many other responses to crime prevention that need to be coordinated at local level.

Working with the Local Authority

CCTV

The development of properly funded CCTV systems, with good communications to all the key agencies (police, the control room and store detectives) is essential. Surveillance should be comprehensive (i.e. covering the town centre and monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week). Vehicle crime and on-street incidents decline perceptibly following the introduction of CCTV.

Street Design

Streetscape design can also play a role in reducing crime, and may be found in many different policies such as the phasing out of underpasses, reducing dense green planting and improving lighting schemes.

Carefully positioned bollards, attractively planted tubs, and low fencing can discourage ram raiding and other crimes. Security gates at the entrances to pedestrianised areas prevent unauthorised vehicle access.

Wardens

A Ranger or uniformed community warden service also contributes to reduced crime. If vandalism, graffiti and environmental problems are speedily dealt with, pride in the centre can be maintained.

Working with Schools

Juvenile theft is a serious problem, with as high as 46% of all offenders caught for electrical retailing theft being under the age of 18.

A co-ordinated, campaign between the retail community, the police and local schools can make a real difference.

Working with the Business Community

The Property Owners

Empty units attract posters, graffiti and vandalism, and impact negatively on the retail offer. If these units are not managed the whole centre appears uncared for.

The Evening Economy

Creating a leisure or evening Economy group enables this key sector of the local economy to contribute towards combating town centre crime. A Pub Watch scheme, linked to the town's radio-link/CCTV system, can be launched to provide a fast warning system for disorderly conduct or anti-social behaviour.

The development of a 24 hour economy leads to a greater number of people in the core area. Busy streets with lots of pedestrians tend to be perceived as safer places than quiet streets with few visitors. Conversely crime problems in the evening economy can negatively impact on the community's perception of safety in the daytime town centre environment.

Promotion

The positive promotion of reduced crime statistics increases the feel good factor and improves the perception of the retail centre amongst residents, visitors and businesses.

The development of a close working relationship with local media is also essential. Bad news sells copies but will run counter to the positive, upbeat messages the crime reduction group wants to portray of the town centre.

Reduced Stock Loss

- A co-ordinated, strategic response to retail crime will make a significant contribution to the reduction of store stock loss, and improve the customer offer.
- It is not a short-term fix and needs to be delivered consistently over a lengthy period of time.
- No single element provides the solution; instead crime needs to be tackled via a multi-agency approach and by using a range of initiatives.
- Retail centres need to evolve continually if they are to meet the fast changing demands and needs of their customers. Those towns that do not move forward and improve their attractiveness and competitiveness will lose out to neighbouring formats and centres.
- Reduction in crime levels and the perception of crime are important components in the delivery of more prosperous and attractive retailing centres.

Next Steps

- In England and Wales Action Against Business Crime (AABC) has been launched, providing guidance and support to individual retail crime partnership operations. Retailers Against Crime (RACs) provide a similar service in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Examples of Successful Partnerships Include:-

Plymouth

Plymouth Against Retail Crime (PARC) was established in 2001 by the city centre partnership, and Devon and Cornwall Police, to reduce retail crime and make Plymouth a safer place. Since its creation PARC has excluded over 130 shoplifters, and where exclusion notices are ignored the partnership work with the Police to seek ASBOs. Crime incidents reported within the city centre have fallen in the past year (2006/2007), with a 9% decrease in Anti-Social Disorder (night-time), a 22% reduction in Crime (daytime) and a 47% improvement in Public Safety (daytime). These statistics illustrate the association between those who commit retail crime, burglary, robbery, car crime, drugs and other offences. If access to crime targets can be denied, crime can be reduced across a broad spectrum of offences, making a significant contribution to the local community safety strategy.

Rainham

A gang of three were approached and one fifteen year old arrested. Following information supplied by this person, premises in the town were raided and £30,000 of stolen goods recovered.

Leicester

In Leicester, partnership membership increased from 99 in 2005 to 177 in 2007, whilst exclusion notices in the same period dropped from 138 to 52 and police arrests increased from 1522 to 1763.

Hastings

Training amongst retailers led to, 98% of all shop theft arrests leading to a successful prosecution.

Brighton

The partnership identified their most prolific offenders (the 20 most active had 920 convictions between them in a single year). These shoplifters were all engaged in substance misuse. By targeting these individuals, despite deeply entrenched behaviour, participants achieved progress in a range of different areas, including;

radically reduced drug use, and in many cases abstinence; retention in treatment; and securing improved accommodation. Results are encouraging with a 45% reduction in reported theft by these individuals, and no incidents for those engaged for a full year.

Aylesbury

In Aylesbury five regular, hard-core thieves were targeted. In period one, they were arrested twenty two times, in period two, fourteen and by period three, twice.

Maidstone

A Retail Crime Diversion Programme targets first time juvenile offenders. Participants are invited to attend the programme with their parents. Of the first 200 juveniles who completed the programme only 6 have re-offended.

Birmingham

A major fashion retailer more than saved their annual retail crime partnership fee in the first day by deterring thieves identified by the programme

Kingston upon Thames

Following the introduction of a night time crime prevention programme criminal damage has been reduced by 42%.

Appendix

Published references and additional material available:

- Community Crime Reduction Partnerships

- British Retail Consortium (BRC), 21 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H9BP 0207 854 8900

Home Office Publications:

The Home Office provides a wide range of crime prevention advice material.

- Home Office Communication Directorate, Room 151, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H9AT 0870 241 4680

Other useful publications:

- Spot and Stop Card Fraud and Credit Card Fraud - the Facts. Both available from APACS 020 7711 6200
- Safe and Secure Town Centres - A Good Practice Guide. The Association of Town Centre Management, 1, Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9BT. 020 7222 0120
- Crime Prevention in Shopping Centres - A guide to Good Practice. The British Council of Shopping Centres, 1, Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9BT. 020 7222 0120

The following websites may be useful:

www.businesscrime.org.uk
www.brc.org.uk
www.crimereduction.gov.uk
www.retail-systems.com
www.crimeconcern.org.uk
www.securebydesign.com
www.apacs.org.uk - credit card fraud