

# Offender perspectives on shoplifting

- Amsterdam

Dr Tim Pascoe



# Aims

This presentation aims to:

- Consider a **decision tree** that represents offenders' thinking on entering a store to steal
- Evaluate the **offender perspective** on the risks & opportunities the **retail environment** presents
- Discuss the implications of these findings from an **organisational perspective**
- Advocate a **holistic approach** to prevention as part of the wider problem of '**shrink**'



# Overview

- Security measures & other anti-shrinkage tactics **do influence** offender behaviour
- Yet the **motivation** to steal is very **high** & often driven by **drug dependency**
- **Determination, willingness to take risks & acquiring criminal skills** help shoplifters defeat preventive measures
- Limited available data suggests only a fraction of thefts are deterred or detected
- We must not underestimate shoplifters



# Victimisation of retail premises

	Number of employees at establishment			
	All	1-9	10-49	50-250
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3,955	2,738	1,052	165
<b>Any crime</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Any property crime (including burglary)</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>91</b>
Theft by customers	43	36	56	58
Vandalism	23	18	31	39
Theft by persons unknown	20	15	29	43
Fraud by outsiders	18	13	26	37
Theft by employees	10	4	18	44
Theft by outsiders	9	7	12	16
Theft from vehicles <sup>1</sup>	8	5	13	18
Fraud by employees	4	2	7	12
Theft of vehicles <sup>1</sup>	3	2	4	11
<b>Any burglary</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>42</b>
Attempted burglary	17	13	24	32
Burglary	16	13	23	28
<b>Any violent crime</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>
Threat, assaults, intimidation	20	14	32	41
Robbery or attempted robbery	6	4	7	11
<b>Being offered stolen goods</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Alcohol/tobacco smuggling</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Bribery, corruption</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Electronic crime<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1</b>



# Classifying shoplifters

- Some research classifies shoplifters by their **experience & frequency of offending**
- Others by their **motivation** (i.e. whether they steal for personal use or steal to sell on)
- **All thieves can be skilled**
- **All thieves can exploit opportunities**
- Thieves can also demonstrate **intelligence & intuition** in how they **assess risk** to apply skills with maximum effect





# Decision tree

- Key decisions occur during four phases:

Entering the store

Negative Positive

ABORT PROCEED  
← →

Locating the product

Negative Positive

ABORT PROCEED  
← →

Concealing the product

Negative Positive

ABORT PROCEED  
← →

Leaving the store

Negative Positive

ABORT PROCEED  
← →

- Appraisal of combinations of factors influence decisions to *proceed* or *abort* at each stage
- All decisions can be driven or dominated by rational & emotional factors



# Part 1

## - What offenders say



# Entering the store

Will they hassle me?

Is there anyone in the store I could collude with?

Has anyone noticed me?

Do I feel confident?

What security measures are present?

Am I dressed correctly?

How many staff are working?

Do I need to steal today?

Do I know the layout?

Where are the exits?

Does this store sell what I'm looking for?

Are there any good opportunities?

Does the store have high shelves?





## Entering the store

- Offenders are adept at spotting & exploiting opportunities
- Staff presence will not deter if detection can be evaded
- Some consider customers a greater risk

Are there any good opportunities



## Entering the store

## Locating the product

Am I being watched?

Do I feel comfortable in this part of the store?

Do I look like a thief?

How are the products I want to steal protected?

What are they worth?

Is there anything about the product that makes it hard to sell?

Am I being followed?

Can I reach the products I want to steal?

Can I sell these products?

What products are worth stealing?



## Entering the store

## Locating the product

Can I sell these products?

- Many 'hot' products are FMCGs in high demand
- Easy to conceal in clothing or bags
- Easy to sell, low risk for anyone selling on
- Frequent replenishment = constant supply
- Often neglected by security surveillance



## Entering the store

## Locating the product

## Concealing the product

Should I move the products before concealment?

Will anyone see me conceal the product?

Can I carry enough in one go?

What about product placement?

Do I need a partner?

Can I steal this without getting caught?

Can I neutralise the product protection?

Can I conceal the products in my clothing or a bag?

Do I need to create a distraction?

What role will a partner have to play?

Will it make a noise?





## Entering the store

## Locating the product

## Concealing the product

- Offenders use ordinary clothing to considerable effect
- Bulky items aren't necessarily harder to steal
- Packaging can be discarded if value makes it worthwhile

Can I conceal these products in my clothes or in a bag?





## Entering the store

## Locating the product

## Concealing the product

## Leaving the store

Will I be able to come back?

Have they been watching me since I came in?

Is there anything that will stop me leaving?

What will I do if the alarm goes?

Will I have to fight to get out?

Am I nervous?

Should I make a decoy purchase?

How will I leave?

What if a guard stops or chases me?

Will anyone notice me?



Entering  
the store

Locating  
the product

Concealing  
the product

Leaving the  
store

How will I leave?

- Some product placement tactics give a false sense of security
- Using learnt techniques helps deflect attention
- Products can be moved to evade surveillance



# Part 2

- What's going wrong & what are we getting right?



# Strategic challenges

- Security measures often applied in a piecemeal fashion
- Security managers often not persuaded of the commercial implications of protective measures
- Loss prevention is often not a priority within strategic thinking



# Tactical conflicts

- Security & marketing functions often perceived to have different priorities
- Security measures often perceived to inhibit rather than assist sales
- Some merchandising techniques take little account of loss prevention issues
- Full impact of shoplifting on shrink rarely quantified or understood





# Operational challenges

- Non-security staff not adequately informed of nor trained in loss prevention issues
- In-store decisions taken without security considerations
- Decisions often driven by assumptions rather than knowledge



# Case study: EAS

- The offender perspective has many ramifications
- Impossible to discuss all, so let's focus on one: EAS or 'tagging'
- Product tagging costs millions each year
- Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't
- The following clips illustrate how offenders think and act in response to product tagging



# Case study: EAS

- Hidden tags would have caught this offender out
- The security case displaced him to a higher value product with the same size packaging



# Case study: EAS

- Most of the tags shown are easily removed
- However, they would deter offenders from stealing large quantities if every tag had to be removed



You see these ones have got the security tags on there.

# Case study: EAS

- Offenders can deploy technology of their own
- This 'magic bag' is lined with metal foil to prevent EAS activations





# Case study: Design solutions



- The offender perspective has many ramifications
- Think environment – think design - think thief – think cost
- Some examples

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Slide 4 of 4



Slide 1 of 2





Slide 2 of 2



# What works

- Well spaced displays
- Bright, light colours (walls, furniture, displays)
- Well-placed Signage (clear, accurate & consistent messages)
- Effective Lighting
- Controlled Access
- Monitored Syringe Disposal Units
- Fitting rooms
- Toilets





# Part 3

## - Towards a holistic solution



# Offender perspectives on retail security measures

Offenders identified 10 different security measures (in descending order of importance):

1. CCTV
2. Electronic Article Surveillance
3. Sales Clerks
4. Loss Prevention Officers
5. Mirrors
6. Customers
7. Layout of store
8. Random Police Officers on patrol
9. Product Hooks
10. Products locked up behind counters



# Security in perspective

- Current solutions definitely help, but motivated offenders can overcome them
- Product protection is an organisational issue requiring consideration at all levels
- Organisations need to gather data to identify precisely where action is needed
- Security solutions must be coordinated & respond to specific defined problems
- This requires a good risk assessment
- Design solutions are often a cost effective choice but form only part of the toolbox



# Thank You!

Dr Tim Pascoe  
PRCI

Tel: 0116 222 5555

Mobile: 07971207308

email: [t.pascoe@perpetuitygroup.com](mailto:t.pascoe@perpetuitygroup.com)

