

Shop thieves and their decisions

Why do People Steal?

CANNOT STOP THE WHY!

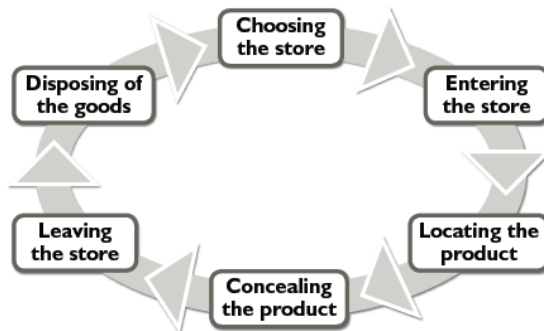
- What problem? other people do it?
- Drug dependency,
- Don't see theft as a crime
- It's a thrill, Cannot afford the items
- Embarrassed, don't want to be seen buying
- They are easy to re-sell
- The items are too expensive, The line is too long
- The company owes me a favour, I was not paid for my extra effort
- The company makes too much profit, no one will be hurt
- Who cares?

How do People Steal?

FOCUS NEEDS TO BE ON THE HOW!

- Just took it, no one would know or see me
- Did not scan my friends items, its easy
- Put it in the trash, no one checks
- Just took a few every time, no one notices
- Concealed them in this bag, no one checked
- Leverage weaknesses in the process
- Posted them to myself from the store post box
- Hid them in a big box, I was on my own
- Damaged them deliberately, bought them cheap
- I let my friend just walk in and then walk out
- Ran in, put it in a bag and ran out
- Just put the item in pocket, kill the tag and walk out

Figure 1: Shop thieves' decision circle



Choosing the Store

- Many steal locally so understanding who the local thieves are, and sharing that knowledge with local retailers increases the chances of them getting caught
- Thieves like familiarity, and so consideration should be given to changing elements of the environment which make it less predictable without at the same time impacting on the honest customer's experience
- A good store operating with alert staff and effective security will quickly develop a reputation that will help deter some thieves
- Staff who are paid well, are highly motivated and well trained are less corruptible and offer less options to the shop thief
- The local environment can attract thieves, especially if it offers plenty of escape routes on foot or in a vehicle. The object should be to design the local environment so that thieves are more visible and escape routes are less attractive

Entering the Store

- Offenders like to blend into the background to look like an honest customer; they don't like to attract attention. The more visible they are the less likely they are to steal. Designing the environment to maximise their visibility is, for them, unwelcome
- Thieves obviously don't like staff paying attention to them. Good customer service, such as taking an active interest in people as they enter the store may also double as an effective deterrent

Locating the Product

- At this stage offenders had an opportunity to assess the security measures in place as well as other risks, such as being suspected by staff. Some worried they might give themselves away by looking around too much and not focussing on products. These are potential tell tale signs staff can be trained to look for
- Good places to steal from were blind spots or areas where blind spots could be created. Thieves said they could turn their back against cameras and on-lookers so CRAVED goods located here were an advantage

Concealing the Product

- Some offenders wear special clothing to help them hide goods. Staff can be trained to look for anything that is out of sink with the season or is otherwise unusual
- Similarly, some thieves use bags or packages and other items such as umbrellas to hide stolen goods. Clearly not everyone dressed unusually or carrying such items is a thief but it may be a factor alongside others that helps to identify a potential suspect, especially if there was some sort of inconsistency such as carrying an umbrella on a day when rain was unlikely
- Some thieves purchased legitimate items and hid stolen goods within them (such as a suit case). Security may help here such as a bar code on the inside of the item so the cashier has to open the item at the point of sale

- Understanding how thieves steal may put staff on their guard about what to look for, knowing about sleight of hand, distraction, blind spots and collusion (and how that works) give these staff an edge and thieves another risk to manage. Security measures, including safer cases can make goods harder to steal, but as has been shown, these need to be used in a way that increases the overall risk, measures in isolation are not typically a major impediment to most thieves
- This is a big opportunity for future research

Leaving the store

- Not all offenders walk directly out of the store immediately after stealing the goods, some buy goods (usually an inexpensive item) to imply they are a normal shopper and to give them a moment to see whether there are any signs that they are under suspicion. So buying some goods should not be viewed as implying they did not steal other products
- Some thieves had an accomplice who created a commotion if it looked like the theft had been discovered. Looking for people who distract, or more accurately noticing behaviours as distracting techniques can help prevent thefts and catch offenders (including accomplices acting as distracters)
- Thieves needed to get to the exit, the larger the gap between the tills and the exit, and the more the exit is able to be watched the greater the danger for thieves

Disposing of the goods

- Where goods are stolen for personal consumption, then they are not disposed of in the conventional sense. But some thieves sell to members of the public and to businesses. An education programme alerting people to the dangers of buying stolen goods has much to commend it. This could focus on personal dangers, such as potentially buying dangerous goods (they may be counterfeit) and to societal dangers on how shop theft feeds other crime including illegal drug taking and even organised crime
- Co-ordinated action against fences would provide focus on a group who rarely attract law enforcement action. This may be facilitated by enhancing product traceability

The Art of Stealing

- Move quickly. Some offenders claimed that if they moved quickly it was very difficult for anyone watching to see what was happening
- Sleight of hand. There are various ruses here. One involves handling various items on the shelf, stealing one in the process but arranging the remainder so that no-one notices that a product has been missing
- Distraction. One was to appear to take a product from the shelf and drop it. In fact two are taken, one is replaced and the other is secreted for example up a sleeve or inside a jacket
- Hide the stolen products under other products. Some thieves hid the goods they stole under larger products in a shopping basket or trolley
- Collude with insiders. Some act in collusion with staff and this can give them more time
- Blind spots. Products are taken and disguised in a perfectly normal way, but thieves operate in blind spots or otherwise believe that they cannot be seen. Some claimed they would test EAS systems by putting a peeled off EAS tag onto an outgoing customer to see if the alarm system activated