

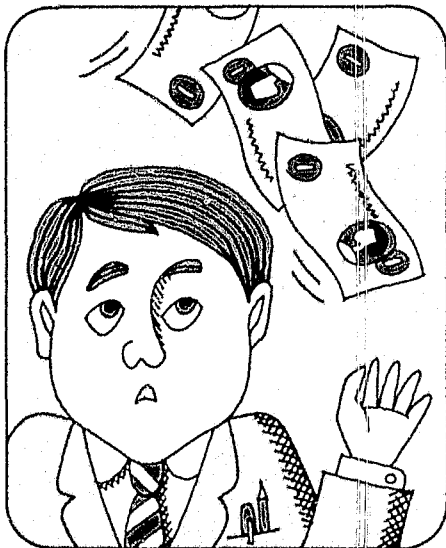
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A Home Office

and Police guide



THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

No-one who makes his living by running a shop will need to be told that the profits to be made are small! However, if you find that the final net profit at the end of your year's trading is something like 2% or 3% of your total turnover, then you may be losing almost as much money as you are making . . . through theft. In newspaper articles and the like you will see from time to time estimates of the total value of the losses caused to retailers by stealing. In truth, though, no-one can really say just how bad the problem is, because not enough people keep the sort of records that will show what they are losing in their individual businesses. Do you know, for your business, what your gross profit should have been last year? If you do, can you explain why there was a difference between that possible gross profit and what you actually achieved?

Taking the few figures that are available, and applying a mixture of common-sense and intelligent guesswork, it seems that smaller shops may be losing the equivalent of 2% of their turnover – or, to look at it another way, for every £1.00 that is put into the till, there should have been £1.02. Does that sound trivial? Then reflect that after you have paid all wages and expenses, the final profit that you make and bank at the end of the year is probably only 2p or 3p for every £1.00 you take.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

This lost money is going in what is often referred to as *shrinkage*, and three elements go to make it up. National averages show that of every £1.00 that is lost, about 30p can be put down to error and to genuine wastage, while of the remaining 70p that dishonest people are stealing from you, about 30p are accounted for by shoplifters taking your goods. This leaves about 40p, which is stolen (in the form of goods or cash) by some members of your staff.

Many people, unfortunately, at this stage say: "Nonsense!", for while they are alert to shoplifting, they often find it difficult to believe that any of their staff may be dishonest when it is first pointed out to them. Although the breakdown quoted is based on long experience of experts on shop security problems, any employer will naturally feel that his own staff are honest and trustworthy. And so of course they are – most of them. Unhappily, though, it only takes one dishonest person working for you to reduce your profits very badly indeed; and if one such person

is seen to get away with it, there is the added danger that others may be tempted to imitate him. Remember, too, that whereas shoplifters usually steal your goods, staff have easy access to cash – which is tempting to everyone all the time, easier to take and to hide, and almost impossible to detect and identify after the theft. Anyone who steals successfully will be tempted to try again. Shoplifters may or may not come back to your shop; staff return each day.

HOW DO THEY GET AWAY WITH IT?

The methods that the dishonest use to get hold of your goods or your money are many and varied: to try to list them all would be tiring and of very little value, for new dodges are being thought up all the time. But certain principles are common, so that there are factors that you should be aware of and on the watch for.

SHOPLIFTERS

Very few shoplifters will bother with concealed hooks, parcels with false sides, or any of the other gadgets that you may find described from time to time. Instead they will rely on working quickly, using a moment's inattention to allow them to slip an article into a pocket or an open bag – or even to enable them to walk out openly holding the chosen object.

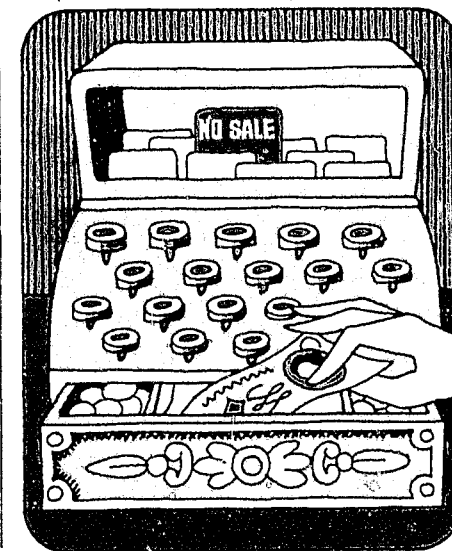
A common working method is to have two "lifters" operating together: while one keeps the shop assistant busy with

enquiries, or complaints, or even just chatter, the other takes the opportunity to remove stock from shelves and counters.

STAFF

The favourite target for dishonest staff is, of course, the cash register. Do you make a point of reading the till total each day and balancing the moneys? Do you sometimes make a spot check on the till during the day? If not, especially if you tend to neglect the first precaution, you are inviting theft.

Under-ringing, perhaps the commonest practice, means that when selling an article priced at, say, £1.25, the assistant will ring only 25p, and later will pocket a pound note. If challenged, she or he will claim that the under-ring was simply an error. If your shop accepts cheques, there is a variation on this trick. On accepting a cheque, the assistant will put it aside without ringing it up: when later a cash purchase to the



same value is made, she rings up the amount as a cheque, puts into the drawer the cheque taken previously, and quietly pockets the cash.

Among the many other fiddles are deliberate mis-accounting for returned goods; altering the undercopy of a bill; arranging with a customer (usually a relative or friend) to undercharge for purchases; and various dishonest "private arrangements" with van drivers about deliveries – accepting short consignments in exchange for a "cut" of the driver's earnings in selling elsewhere what should have come into your stock.

PRIORITIES

It is quite natural to feel that you want to catch a suspected shoplifter red-handed, and therefore to spend a lot of time trying to watch a suspicious-seeming person without being noticed yourself. But when you think about it, this is quite the wrong way to act: no matter how artfully you go about it, you will rarely actually detect a theft taking place; in the meantime you may be neglecting your honest customers – and in some cases thefts may take place elsewhere in the shop while you are pre-occupied! You should, of course, be ready to deal with any offender that you do catch, but it really makes better sense to try to prevent any attempted thefts in your shop in the first place.

In this as in so many matters, in fact, *prevention is better than cure* – the aim should be to deter, rather than detect. If a dishonest person finds that it is difficult to steal from your shop, he will be discouraged and you will be saved a great number of problems.

In the next section you will find suggestions for making your shop un-

attractive to thieves, without driving away your honest clients; and in the section after that you will find some guidance on what to do when, despite all attempts to deter, you have actually caught a thief.

PUT THEM OFF

Security can be quite an expensive business, and naturally you will want to be sure that your money is not being wasted. So before you pay out any of your profits, take a hard look at your shop and at the way it is run, to see what you can do either for no expense whatever, or at very low cost. In this, as in so many security matters, the local crime prevention officer is a most valuable ally. He can give you first-rate advice on how best to make life difficult for the dishonest, and he may recommend local security services that can help you further.

The biggest deterrent to any thief is simply being seen. A shop whose staff



are alert, when they keep a friendly eye on everyone, is just the sort of place that thieves will leave alone. There's no need to tiptoe around peering over people's shoulders, of course! Just to show that you are aware of a person's presence, to say "I'll be with you in a moment", to ask "Can I help you?" or "Is there anything you'd like to see?", will be quite enough to prove that you are alert – and, very importantly, this sort of action will not risk offending any honest person.

If you are to achieve this, then you must have good visibility over your shop area. High island units, corners and bays cut off from the line of sight of the staff, underlit areas, are all invitations to the would-be thief. If it is quite impossible to avoid having a "hidden" area, then you may have to think about moving the cash register to another point; or having one member of staff working where she can see into the hidden area. If none of these can be done, it will be worth-while buying a convex mirror to let you cover the danger zone. They can be bought quite cheaply – but they can only deter thieves if they are easily seen, and if it is clear that they are used! The mirror tucked away high on a wall, covered with a film of dust, won't deter anyone at all, nor earn its keep; nor will one that is left in place after the fittings have been changed around so that the blind spot is now somewhere else.

Wherever the nature of the goods on sale permits it, every purchase should be wrapped up, and a sales ticket should be put inside the bag or stapled outside. In self-service stores, every item on sale should carry a tag showing the name of your shop and the price of the article, so that there can be no arguments about the amount to be rung up on the till, and no-one can pretend to have bought an item of your stock in another shop.

YOU KNOW BEST

Some ideas must depend for their use on what you know of your own customers. In some shops, warning notices are a great help, saying perhaps "It is our policy to prosecute all shoplifters", or, in self-service stores, "Have you anything unpaid for?". Similarly, letting your customers know that a plain-clothes detective from an agency works in the shop on a random basis might be very effective in some cases.

STAFF RULES

When it comes to deterring dishonesty among your staff, it is again vital to show that you are alert to security matters. Not only will this help to deter someone who might otherwise turn dishonest, but it will also help by encouraging your staff to become security-minded themselves.

Be sure to take up references when taking on new staff, and to check on any gaps in the record of their previous jobs. If a reference seems rather guarded, a quiet word on the telephone may sometimes provide a clearer picture.

Make sure that you have strict rules for the handling of cash, use of the cash register, and so forth, and train your staff thoroughly in them. If you employ more than a couple of people, it will probably be wise to have written rules which are given to every member of staff – any breach of those rules in regard to security matters should be grounds for dismissal. No matter how bad the local staff shortages may be, it is clearly better to be undermanned for a while than have someone reducing your profits.

Provide somewhere for your assistants to lock away their handbags and personal possessions: bags should never be allowed on the shop floor.

Allow your staff to buy from you at a generous discount.

Storerooms should be kept locked, where physically possible, and the movement of goods should be strictly controlled. In particular, you yourself should keep a strict eye on deliveries, to see that no parcels are signed for unless *either* they have been checked or the delivery sheet is marked "unchecked". It is your watchfulness



that will ensure that damaged parcels, in particular, are carefully checked, and that no-one is working any "private arrangements" with a delivery man.

If you employ enough staff to warrant it, the use of the test-purchasing facilities offered by security firms will help prevent till-fiddles, provided of course that staff know that such tests are made. For obvious reasons they must not know just when checks are to be carried out.

DETECTING, AND WHAT TO DO AFTERWARDS

Deterrence and detection are very much linked, of course, since it is the likelihood of being caught that does most to stop the dishonest. You will see therefore that once you have worked out schemes to improve security, it is vital to actually use them: if you have arranged your displays to give you good visibility, and installed a mirror to cover a blind spot, then you must be sure that you and your staff watch the shop and look at the mirror. When you have strict procedures for using the cash register, make spot checks to ensure that they are being followed. Make a point of balancing up the takings every day, and of investigating any variance. Remember that too much money in the till is as bad a sign as too little: it may mean that someone has forgotten, or not yet had the chance, to take out the amount that has been under-rung. Make sure your till is cleared regularly, so that there is not a wad of notes to tempt till-snatchers.

What you should – and should not – do when you believe you have detected a theft is a matter for expert advice. Here the crime prevention officer at your police station is the person you need. Obviously this is something that needs doing in advance! – in fact, the sooner you arrange to see him, the more benefit you stand to gain.

When you catch a shoplifter or member of your staff stealing, it is advisable to report matters to the police. To dismiss an employee without prosecuting him risks either condemning him without trial, or, if his next employer neglects to take references, enabling him

to steal from him in turn. In the occasional case where the shoplifter or member of staff is in need of financial or psychiatric help, reporting him to the police will bring those needs to the attention of the authorities. Once the police have arrived, what happens will vary from area to area. It is wisest to find out the local procedure before a case arises – this is just one of many matters in which your local crime prevention officer can advise you. In the final section of this booklet, you will find an outline of some of the many problems that your crime prevention officer will help you with: his advice is free, and because it is based on his local knowledge as well as upon official procedure, it is doubly valuable.

ROUNDING IT OFF

Security is a continuing process. When you have worked out your requirements, and made plans to meet them, you will need to keep them up. You will also need to look afresh at the whole matter from time to time, to see if what you are doing is still relevant.

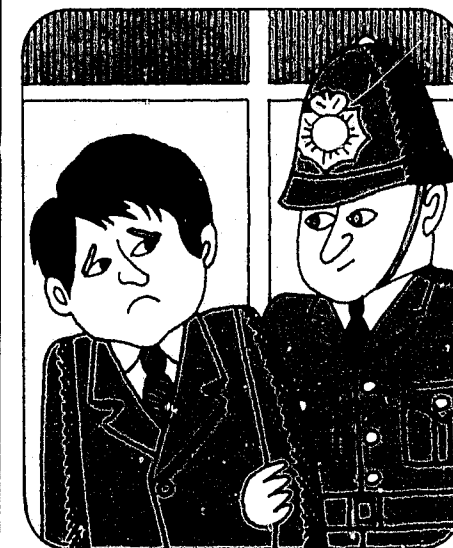
It is obviously important to be sure that any money you spend in improving security is being well spent. This means that you really need to keep good trading records, which will enable you to measure the value of your losses, and to see if they are rising or falling, or staying constant. It is the percentage of your turnover that you lose, not the number of people you catch, that measures your success or failure in this area.

Your local trade association will often be able to help, sometimes with training courses for you and for your staff: training is also a function of the

Distributive Industry Training Board, whose courses include security matters.

Remember that if you have the goodwill and enthusiasm of your staff, they can be valuable helpers in security. Where they belong to a trade union, it will be wise to discuss your security measures with a union official. Unions realise that these arrangements are in the best interests of their members, and will co-operate with you.

Your best ally in the fight against the attention of thieves is your local crime prevention officer. Invite him round to have a look at your shop and to advise you. For the outlay of an hour or so of your time – and perhaps a cup of tea! – you will receive expert advice on layout, cash-handling procedures, local thieves and their dodges, "early-warning" schemes being operated amongst local shops to let each other know about thieves in operation, what happens after you catch a thief, where you can obtain good security services, where to buy technical aids such as mirrors, and many more points besides.



NOTE: This leaflet is to be
"Shoplift and Thieves' Staff" and is
on Internal Security in the Home
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