



TO CATCH A THIEF...

Titan Security reports on why retail security in the West has become less effective and what can be done to solve it.

Over the last few years, retail security in the West has become less effective at combatting crime. In 2024 especially, sharp increases were seen in both retail thefts and violence against staff across the UK, Europe and the US. When considering why retail security is failing as it stands today, and how to improve upon it, there are two main factors to consider: individual store responses and systemic issues in responses to retail crime.

Here is the state of retail security as of 2024 across the Europe, the UK and the US:

RETAIL THEFT

- In Europe, stores reported a 93 percent surge in

retail theft/attempted theft in 2024 compared with earlier years.

- In the UK in 2024, 600 retail thefts per hour were recorded.
- In the US, the retail industry lost \$45-billion worth of stock to retail theft.

INCIDENTS AGAINST STAFF

- Across Europe, 2000 incidents against staff were reported each day through the year.
- In the UK, incidents of abuse against staff grew from 46,000 in 2023 to 71,000 in 2024.
- In the US, 46 percent of stores reported violence against staff occurring throughout 2024.

The biggest perpetrators of retail crime in the UK and US are 18-24 year olds

POLICE RESPONSE

- The UK government has recently promised an additional £2-billion to target retail crime – a clear indicator that there has not been enough funding prior to now.
- Few arrests happen in the UK following shoplifting or abuse against staff also happen due to prisons being at capacity.
- In the US, only 60 percent of calls regarding violence against staff were responded to in 2024. 74 percent of calls regarding shoplifting were responded to. Many retail crimes in the States, however, go unreported.

BIGGEST PERPETRATORS

- In the UK and the USA, the biggest perpetrators of retail crime are 18-24 year olds. The group least likely to commit shoplifting offences are 55+.
- In Europe, organised gangs are most likely to commit retail crimes.

WHY IS RETAIL SECURITY FAILING?

INDIVIDUAL STORE RESPONSE

- Lack of effective security.
- Many stores across the West – especially high street and convenience stores – have not updated their security systems in a long time.
- Over time, experienced shoplifters can learn the blindspots of a store's CCTV system, the times guard changeovers happen, or other weaknesses in the system, and choose those times to strike.

FOCUS ON LOSS PREVENTION, BUT NOT STAFF SAFETY

- Most retail security focuses on loss prevention as opposed to staff safety.
- The sharp increase in abuse against staff over 2024 in the West, however, is indicative that security in stores needs to focus as much on the safety of staff as on loss prevention.

LACK OF COMMUNITY BETWEEN STORES

- Shoplifters or other perpetrators of retail crime are likely to attack multiple stores in one street or shopping centre.
- There is little community and communication between stores – allowing shoplifters to go from store to store with little apprehension.

FAILURES IN STAFF TRAINING

- One of the biggest reasons for violence against retail staff is approaching suspected thieves.
- When staff are not trained in how to safely handle suspected shoplifting, it can lead to dangerous situations for them.

SYSTEMIC FAILURES

ORGANISED CRIME

- As the statistics show, organised gangs are a growing concern in Europe. This is far harder to target than individual crime and should be a greater focus for policies and governments.

GOVERNMENT LIMITS

- In the UK, police can only arrest shoplifters if the value of stolen goods is over £200. There is

currently discussion to change this.

- In the US, shoplifting is considered a misdemeanour. Without a felony, the most likely punishment for shoplifting is a one-time fine of \$1,000.
- Repeat offences occur due to lack of punishment.

LACK OF PROSECUTION

- In the UK and Europe, prosecution rates for shoplifting stand at only 14.5 percent.
- In the US, prosecution rates for shoplifting are only 34.1 percent.
- Due to the lack of prosecution across the board for shoplifting, retailers have little trust in the police to do anything of use – so many incidents of both shoplifting and violence against staff go unreported.

HOW CAN THIS BE SOLVED?

Solving the issues of retail security as it stands today should be a joint effort – it is through a combination of individual store approaches and systemic changes that will see the most effective changes.

RETAILERS SHOULD LOBBY FOR INCREASED PENALTIES FROM POLICE VIA THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

INDIVIDUAL STORE RESPONSES

The Problem: Lack of effective security.

The Solution: Stores can add additional security measures where necessary – for example, adding security guards overnight if break-in thefts are common – or should improve on their existing security measures to close the gaps in their security system.

Some stores are starting to adopt CCTV with built-in AI to improve their CCTV systems. AI models within CCTV cameras have far more effective facial recognition systems and behavioural analytics can accurately predict a theft or an incident against staff before it happens. Communications can then be sent to the store, allowing for security personnel or adequately trained staff to deal with the issue at hand, before it has the chance to occur.

The Problem: Focus on loss prevention, but not staff safety.

The Solution: Security measures should be put in place that focus on the safety of the staff as well as loss prevention.

The behavioural analytics of AI-powered CCTV as outlined above can aid with this. It is also advisable for stores to install or provide their staff with panic alarms. These can then be triggered the moment a staff member feels threatened, allowing for swift police or security response.

The Problem: Lack of community between stores.

The Solution: Stores on the same street or in the same centre should have a method of communication between themselves, police, CCTV monitors and other authorities.

An example of this would be StoreNet in the UK – a network of radios that allow communication between all stores and authorities in a specific area.

The Problem: Failures in staff training.

The Solution: Staff should be trained in how to adequately handle an instance of shoplifting or abuse against staff.

If a store has a constant security presence, staff should be trained to not approach suspected criminals and instead to approach their security presence and alert them to the issue. If there is no ongoing presence, staff should be trained in how to report incidents to police or a security partner without bringing attention to themselves – only approaching suspects if they have adequate security training themselves.

IT IS ADVISABLE FOR STORES TO INSTALL OR PROVIDE THEIR STAFF WITH PANIC ALARMS

SYSTEMIC RESPONSES

The Problem: Organised crime.

The Solution: Governments and police forces need to be encouraged to put more funding towards combatting organised crime. It is a growing retail issue, especially in Europe.

Organised crime is not something that stores can tackle on their own. It should become a focus for police forces to find out about and shut down organised crime rings targeting the retail industry. It is imperative, however, that governments and police work alongside retailers in their work to tackle organised crime. Retailers may be able to provide important intelligence or first-hand accounts of crimes and may be integral in the catching of criminals involved.

The Problem: Government limits.

The Solution: Stronger penalties for shoplifting and

violence against store staff should be instated to ensure that repeat offences do not occur.

Retailers should lobby for increased penalties from police via their local governments. First offences should be met with warnings and fines, with increased fines, community service or time served in jail for repeat offences. If criminals start to see that there are real consequences to retail crime – and not just a slap on the wrist and a warning – crime rates will begin to drop.

The Problem: Lack of prosecution.

The Solution: As well as lobbying for higher penalties for retail crime, retailers should also be lobbying for police to prosecute shoplifting offences more often.

There should be prosecution of some sort for all non-essential shoplifting offences – especially if it is a repeated offence. Many shoplifters across the West are let off with warnings, or not caught at all. The police need to have faster responses to shoplifting calls and to take the crime more seriously than they do in order to build trust with retailers and be their first call if an incident should occur.

Retail security is becoming less and less effective across Europe, the UK and the USA, both down to failures in individual stores' security responses and in systemic failures – a huge one being a lack of trust that retailers have in the system, given the lack of police response and prosecution to reports of crime.

With increasing rates in shoplifting and violence against staff, these steps to improve retail security are more important than ever to take – and responsibility falls on stores themselves, and governments. Between tweaks and changes to the security systems in individual stores and increased lobbying for governments to allow for higher penalties and higher levels of prosecution, we can move towards retail security systems that work at combatting retail crime.

With both individual stores and governments taking responsibility and action to improve the state of retail security, we can move towards a more effective retail security system across the West ●

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