

VocoVo

ebook

Theft and security: How to protect your store and your colleagues



How safe is the shop floor?

Whilst retail stores aren't traditionally viewed as a dangerous workplace, colleagues on the shop floor have all too often been subjected to verbal and physical abuse from customers as well as dealing with incidents such as shoplifting, or payment fraud. Intimidation and theft have intensified in the last few years, especially during the pandemic, causing a devastating effect on workers' mental health and retailers' pockets.

In the UK, retail crime cost an astonishing

£1.5 billion

which includes both actual losses as well as crime prevention costs. This means for every £1 lost to crime, retailers spend £1 preventing it.



extra layer of stress for colleagues and negatively impact team morale and wellbeing, which might eventually result in colleagues leaving. The onus is therefore on retailers to swiftly implement additional measures, or better utilise current ones, to protect their staff and their stock.

To better understand the current security measures and how to create a safer workplace for every colleague, retail solutions technology provider, VoCoVo, undertook a survey of 1,003 in-store employees and 258 senior retail decision makers with over 100 stores across the UK, North America and Germany.

The research set out to grasp the current challenges faced by shop floor colleagues and the role implemented in-store smart technology plays in helping retailers overcome them, including turning their workplace into a safer environment. This e-book will shine a light on the solutions available to retailers to better support colleagues, deter theft and reduce violent customer behaviour, drawing from previous VoCoVo research findings as well to establish how things have changed and what is yet to be done to safeguard colleagues' health and retailers' inventories.

Understaffed stores: an open door?



18% of colleagues in the UK and US consider theft their biggest shop floor challenge. This is second only to the four in ten (40%) retail workers for whom the current labour shortages are proving to be the biggest daily struggle. A lack of colleagues in itself can provide an opportunity to would-be thieves, who could perceive an understaffed store as an easy hit for shoplifting.

64%

of those in **the entertainment retail sector, cite labour shortages as one of their biggest issues**. This is worrying due to the big-ticket items on sale that could be potentially stolen.

With fewer colleagues on the shop floor, the risk of theft and loss increases as opportunistic thieves take advantage of unsupervised areas such as fitting rooms or self-service checkouts. As retail is struggling to hire new colleagues, those already working on the shop floor have reported filling in multiple roles and responsibilities, with 76% having to wear different hats every day to combat labour shortages. Unfortunately, that means there are simply not enough colleagues to cover all shop floor areas at all times.

Difficulty to recruit

In addition, skeleton staffing levels increase the chances of workers being left alone on the shop floor, often late at night, which can act as the perfect invitation for thieves. As such, colleagues can feel under immense pressure to tackle issues on their own, making them feel more isolated and putting their wellbeing at a greater risk. Whilst recruitment is proving difficult at the moment, retailers must seek other solutions that can help improve their security measures and protect colleagues.

Silver linings: Fears of abusive behaviour are down



It's not all bad news. Despite rising theft, recent VoCoVo research has highlighted that fewer colleagues report feeling worried about abusive behaviour than during the pandemic.

Twelve percent of colleagues currently consider abusive customer behaviour their biggest struggle on the shop floor. Overall, however, the fears of abusive customer behaviour have decreased compared to May 2020 when VoCoVo's Forgotten Frontline research was conducted and showed customer abuse to be a major challenge for 21% of colleagues.

32% of colleagues cited **'protecting staff from customer abuse'** as the biggest challenge their store was facing

The reasons for this varied from colleagues being outnumbered by customers to working alone or being unable to communicate with the security team. Whilst it is clear this particular challenge has reduced since the end of pandemic restrictions, the impending cost of living crisis could mean abuse towards colleagues could rise once again, alongside theft.

The impact on colleagues

The threat of violence and intimidation has a devastating effect on the mental health of colleagues and could contribute to them considering leaving their jobs. As the retail landscape is already dealing with talent shortages and recruitment challenges, this outcome would be less than ideal. Hiring and training new colleagues is also considerably more expensive than keeping the current team together. Luckily, there is a way to both retain colleagues and better protect them.



Smart technology: A welcome solution

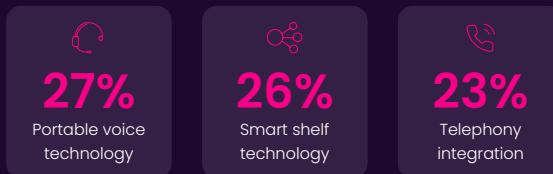
Thirty-two percent of senior retail decision makers believe that smart technology is critical to ensuring colleagues' safety and 26% view it as beneficial to deter in-store theft and inventory loss. A wide range of in-store smart devices can indeed help prevent shoplifting incidents and customer abuse towards in-store colleagues, as well as give those on the shop floor the confidence and tools they need to face a suspicious situation.

Positively, 36% of colleagues would like to see more smart tech implemented in their stores, with 45% already using it every day. Promising smart technology adoption rates and an appetite for more devices are great indicators that the fight against retail crime is not yet a lost one. This is an encouraging finding for senior retail decision makers who are currently finalising their budgets for next year and looking into further smart tech implementation in their stores.

Catching shoplifters is a team effort and a two-part process, in which a colleague needs to alert a security team member who can then take appropriate action. A colleague can contact security at the push of a button without having to track them down or walk to the nearest PA system. This is far more discreet, allowing shop floor colleagues to raise the alarm without putting themselves at a greater risk or escalating a situation.

Integrations with smart CCTV cameras can also help send automatic alerts to the security teams when they spot something suspicious. When utilising voice technology such as headsets, linking them to the phone system can help colleagues call emergency services from anywhere in the store, without them having to find a phone first. Further integrations with smart shelf-edge technology can alert colleagues to unexpected discrepancies in stock levels too.

Some retailers across Europe and the USA have already implemented multiple different smart technologies which should have the necessary functionalities to help prevent theft, including;



With the right training and integration, retailers can leverage these to protect their inventories and ensure colleagues' safety.



A connected store is a safer store

Whilst customer behaviour cannot be changed, retailers can empower colleagues with the tools to cope. As ongoing labour shortages, rising inflation and impending cost of living crisis could translate to even more in-store crime, retailers need to act fast to implement additional security measures and prioritise the health and safety of shop floor colleagues.

Creating a more connected store and implementing more smart devices is a great solution to reduce theft and put a stop to verbal and physical abuse. Whilst the visibility of smart technology can be a powerful deterrent on its own, it's the various integrations that can really make a difference on the shop floor and empower colleagues to face any situation with greater confidence. As such, stores can take positive steps to becoming safer places to work and shop.




VoCoVo

About VoCoVo

Established in 2016, VoCoVo drives transformation in retail communications to maximise operational efficiency and enhance customer experience for leading global retailers. Now connecting over 100,000 colleagues in 21 countries through voice, their retail-ready hardware, software, and smart integrations power store teams across Grocery, Home & DIY, and Fashion.

VoCoVo is growing fast and is trusted by household names in the UK, Europe, Australia, and North America. The company has a list of accolades, from regional Business of the Year and Innovation awards to 5th place in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100.

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