

Shoplifting

Shoplifting can cost your business thousands of dollars each year. Shoplifters may be any age, gender, or economic or ethnic background. There is no "typical" shoplifter. They often work in pairs or groups to divert the clerk's attention while they steal. They often operate when employees are apt to be less alert, e.g., at store opening and closing times, during the lunch and dinner times, and during shift changes. Shoplifters also learn to take advantage of crowded stores during peak hours. Effective prevention begins with an aware and alert staff. The following tips will help prevent shoplifting.

Anti-Theft Devices

- Install security towers at your exits. They will sound an alarm or otherwise indicate when someone takes a tagged item out of the store without paying for it and having the tag deactivated or removed.
- Attach anti-theft tags to your merchandise.
- Provide cashiers with a means of deactivating or removing the tags when items are paid for.

Display Strategies

- Minimize the shoplifter's access to merchandise without inconveniencing customers.
- Keep display and clothing racks away from entrances and exits to discourage "hit-and-run" thieves.
- Alternate hangers front-to-back to prevent thieves from quickly grabbing bundles of display clothing.
- Keep small and expensive items out of reach or in locked display cases. Have sales people show only one item at a time from a case.
- Protect merchandise in display cases by keeping the case doors locked and installing laminated glass or clear acrylic plastic in the windows. Use plastic tie-downs or metal chords to secure merchandise on the top of cases.
- Use good locks and laminated or "strong" glass in cases that contain expensive items. This will help prevent smash-and-grab attacks.
- Arrange merchandise neatly to make it easier to detect missing items.
- Take daily or weekly inventories of expensive items.

Educating Employees

Train your sales people to:

- Watch for people with loose or baggy clothing inappropriate for weather, and people with large bags or other props, such as newspapers, strollers, briefcases, or umbrellas that can easily conceal merchandise.
- Pick up stray receipts around the store.
- Be aware of shoplifter's tactics to confuse and distract you. For example, when working in teams one shoplifter will create a disturbance, e.g., complaining loudly, staging a faint, or knocking over merchandise, to draw attention away from the other who is doing the lifting.
- Be attentive to people in your area. This helps legitimate customers and deters shoplifters. A simple "Can I help you?" or "I'll be with you in a moment" warns shoplifters they are being watched. Keep a close watch on people who seem nervous or refuse assistance.
- Cover their entire area of responsibility, even blind spots.
- Have another sales person cover your area when you leave the floor, e.g., to check for items in the stockroom.
- Be especially alert at when the store is crowded. Shoplifters often operate when sales people are busy helping legitimate customers.
- Watch for shoppers walking with short or unnatural steps, which may indicate that they are concealing lifted items.
- Watch customer's eyes. If they are looking at you they may need assistance or are thinking about shoplifting.

Train cashiers to:

- Check the lower racks of shopping carts, watch for switched labels, look inside items that can also be used as containers for lifted items, e.g., tool boxes, jacket sleeves, waste baskets, etc.
- Check for factory seals on boxed items. And look inside if the boxes are not sealed.
- Staple receipts to the outside of packages.
- Check for and remove or desensitized electronic tags.
- Be familiar with the store prices. This can help prevent price switching.

Have supervisors:

- Keep employees alert by holding periodic review sessions on store shoplifting policies.
- Discourage socializing on the sales floor. A group of employees in one spot usually means inadequate coverage somewhere else.
- Schedule hours so that an adequate number of sales people are working at all times.

- Watch for customers lingering in one area, loitering near stock rooms or other restricted areas, or wandering aimlessly through the store.
- Watch for customers who consistently shop during the hours when few people are working in the store.
- Watch for customers who visit the store frequently, but make only token purchases.
- Be alert for disturbances that distract sales people and cashiers.

Fitting Room Security

- Keep fitting room doors locked when not in use.
- Install cafe doors to allow staff members to monitor fitting room use.
- Limit the number of items allowed to be taken into the dressing room.
- Post a sign that directs customers to see a sales person before taking items into a fitting room.
- Issue color-coded tickets and tags to indicate the number of items taken into fitting rooms.
- Use a return rack for unwanted items.
- Post signs in fitting rooms warning against shoplifting.

Preventing Ticket Switching

- Use tamper-proof gummed labels.
- Attach tags with a hard-to-break plastic string.
- Use preprinted, not hand-written, price tags.
- Use concealed multiple price tags.

Protective Measures

- Make the shoplifters feel watched. Elevate the cashier's platform. Install mirrors that enable cashiers and sales people to see over and around displays. Install one-way glass in offices to enable employees to see into the store without being seen from the floor.
- Install surveillance cameras to cover cash registers, high-value merchandise displays, entrances, loading docks, etc. Use software that can be programmed to create an alarm when suspicious activity occurs. Mount monitors showing live video at main entrances to let shoppers know that they will be under surveillance in the store.
- Post signs warning against shoplifting. Emphasize that you will prosecute. The best way to discourage shoplifters and keep your business from being tagged as an easy mark is to take a get-tough attitude and prosecute on the first offense.
- Encourage checking parcels on entry.
- Require receipts for merchandise returns for cash. Require a photo ID and signature for returns without a receipt. And then just give merchandise-only vouchers.

- Take an inventory of returned merchandise against receipts on a regular basis to catch false returns, i.e., ones without returned merchandise.

Stopping a Shoplifter

If you suspect that someone may be considering lifting something, approach the person and ask "Can I help you?" or "Can I ring that up for you?" If you suspect someone has lifted and concealed something, keep him or her in sight and notify a manager or security personnel immediately. If you are working alone, request the assistance of another worker. Plan a "buddy system" for your own safety and as a witness.

If someone leaves your store without paying for an item, have an employee follow the suspect and get a good description of him or her and any vehicle used, and call 911 to report the crime. Do not have your employee attempt to detain the suspect unless he or she has been trained in apprehension and arrest procedures.