

Guarding retail spaces: Strategies to stem the tide of shoplifting

2 years ago



Insight from Peter Jackson, managing director, Jacksons Fencing

The retail industry is grappling with an unprecedented surge in shoplifting, theft, and burglaries, including the alarming scenes on [London's Oxford Street in August 2023\[1\]](#), where crowds gathered to loot stores, have put retailers nationwide on high alert.

Recent data from the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers (USDAW) has revealed a [24% increase in shoplifting rates\[2\]](#). In the first half of 2023 alone, there were approximately 8 million reported shoplifting incidents. With the continuing cost of living crisis and the festive season approaching, these numbers are expected to continue their upward trajectory.

While additional government support for both retail workers and targeted businesses is essential, practical security measures play a pivotal role in deterring these crimes. British retailers have invested millions in tools like CCTV, security personnel, electronic tagging, and alarms to combat theft within stores. The Grocer reported that theft prevention strategies cost retailers approximately [£2bn in 2021/2022\[3\]](#). However, the threats extend beyond the shop floor.

For many large town centre stores, supermarkets, and units on retail parks, the rear doors and delivery areas have the potential to be targeted by criminal gangs. It's not uncommon for opportunistic thieves to target pallets or cages as they're unloaded from lorries. After-hours break-ins pose a significant risk, especially over the festive season when significant volumes of high-value stock are distributed to stores and supermarkets.

Addressing anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is another challenge faced by retailers. In 2022, an [Aldi store in Derby\[4\]](#) took a proactive step by investing in security fencing to protect staff and deter loitering groups. This additional fencing was deemed crucial in safeguarding the community, as dangerous items like weapons and hypodermic needles were frequently found outside the store.

Fencing and gates: A critical component of retail security

1. Risk assessment and target hardening

Begin by conducting a thorough risk assessment to identify potential weak spots requiring protection. Implement physical security measures that intensify as they approach the target, a strategy known as 'target hardening.' This approach deters intruders while maintaining ease of access for customers and staff.

- Effective perimeter security

Select fencing solutions in line with potential threats, site characteristics, and topography. Striking a balance between deterring intruders and maintaining a welcoming appearance is crucial. Opt for difficult-to-climb security fencing that provides a robust obstacle against thieves, vandals, and intruders.

- Controlling vehicular speeds and access

Enhance security by implementing measures like bollards at high street ends to control vehicular speeds and access. Additionally, fortify security by using road blockers and sliding gates at delivery area entrances, which can help delay vehicles for necessary checks.

- Balancing security with aesthetics

To maintain a welcoming atmosphere for nearby residents, it's crucial to avoid an imposing security presence, especially in areas close to residential communities. Opting for timber fencing and traffic barriers for car parks can strike a balance between security and creating an inviting environment for shoppers, reducing the risk of vandalism and burglary.

Taking an integrated approach

Combine secure perimeter fencing with effective lighting, Perimeter Intrusion Detection Systems (PIDS), and strategically placed CCTV. These measures hinder unauthorised entry and escape, increasing the likelihood of detection and apprehension.

Prioritising employee wellbeing

Installing robust security fencing, complemented by CCTV, good lighting, and guarding, creates a safe environment for employees. This safeguards their wellbeing and provides peace of mind knowing they are effectively protected in the event of a burglary or crime.

When selecting security products for retail sites, opt for items that have undergone rigorous testing and carry relevant certifications for their security level. Each component should meet industry-specific standards for its intended purpose and originate from manufacturers accredited under ISO 9001:2015, ensuring a high standard of quality and reliability in safeguarding the premises.

As the cost-of-living crisis persists and crime rates rise, the time to implement on-site security measures is now. Investing in comprehensive security, ensures retailers can protect their assets, employees, and customers, creating a safer shopping environment for all. High-quality security fencing is a sound investment, requiring minimal maintenance once installed, and is highly weather-resistant and protected against rust or corrosion. With all sectors preparing for economic challenges in the coming year, enhancing on-site security while selecting cost-effective measures is a surefire way to safeguard your people, property, and profits.

[1] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/oxford-circus-jd-robbery-rampage-tiktok-b2391303.html>

[2] <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2023/Jul/Worrying-24-increase-in-shoplifting>

[3] <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/supermarkets/how-crime-hit-supermarkets-are-turning-into-fortresses/682815.article>

[4] <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/news/derby-news/new-fencing-installed-derby-supermarket-7229095>