

FACING THE MUSIC TOGETHER

Face it, or displace it - retailers have tough choice over shrink prevention, argues Laurence King, MD of profit protection specialists ORIS Group

Most store managers like a little muzak around the aisles to soothe the shopper and ease the retail experience, but it apparently has the opposite effect upon 'undesirables' who loiter outside.

Some retailers have taken to turning classical music upon the gangs who congregate outside their stores - some of whom will have engaged in shoplifting there – but all of whom will be deterring welcome shoppers.

“One larger retailer is using this tactic and it works – it seems that Mozart is not for the masses,” argues Laurence King, managing director of profit protection specialist The ORIS Group..

But King, who has worked for some of the bigger names on the High Street, makes a more serious point.

“This retailer uses the tactic as a last resort. He knows it works, but he recognises that it is simply displacing the problem to another store and creating issues for the town centre management teams whose job it is to control High Street crime.

“What is needed is for us all to face the music together and drive anti-social behaviour out of town,” says King.

He adds: “The British Retail Consortium’s town centre initiative is doing just that by retailers teaming together and using banning orders in conjunction with CCTV and close collaboration at the entry to towns such as bus and train stations. It sends the message to those intent on causing trouble that they are simply not welcome.”

He argues that although this may displace on a larger scale and send criminal gangs to neighbouring towns or counties, Home Office plans to reduce police areas and concentrate on fewer 'super forces' would mean greater intelligence sharing and criminals having less opportunity to slip under the radar.

King argues that the time is now ripe for working with the Home Office and within the Data Protection legislation to extend this thinking to internal theft.

“Staff theft is on the increase and the current situation means that if someone is caught and sacked they can simply move to another store. Many retailers don't prosecute because of the hassle factor and the perception that the police don't put business crime high enough up the agenda.”

King says that retailers also don't, or believe they can't, share HR information on rogue staff with other retailers, so the cycle, rather than being broken, continues.

“The technology exists to allow case management of internal fraud to be tracked over weeks and months, so we need to look closely at the Data Protection Act to see what we can share with our colleagues and the police. That way we are providing the missing jigsaw piece that could help drive shrinkage out of the High Street.

“We need to collaborate with the police and the Home Office on this as it could send a clear message to would-be thieves that retail crime is not a soft touch and does not pay.”