

Business

Using design to help
minimise crimes affecting
small-to-medium enterprises



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Design Out Crime is an initiative from the Home Office's Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime and the Design Council. The Alliance is tasked with bringing about innovation and encouraging others to 'think crime' in the first stages of design, planning and product development. It is comprised of experts from the world of design, industry and law enforcement.



Introduction

The Design Out Crime programme, an initiative of the Home Office’s Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime (The Alliance), aims to identify design-led opportunities to protect people from becoming the victims of various kinds of crime.

For this project, the Alliance has worked with the Design Council to collect evidence and insights towards a better understanding of business-related crime, particularly in relation to small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). The aim is to help designers, manufacturers and policy makers comprehend the scale and effects of the problem and encourage more design commissions to tackle it.

The Alliance aims to:

Generate positive design solutions to specific crime and disorder problems, based on an understanding of the methods used by offenders.

Advise on strategies for the wider implementation of these solutions.

Inspire designers to produce positive design solutions (through commissions, awards and publicity).

Raise consumer awareness and increase demand for secure and attractive products.

Demonstrate the business case for Design Out Crime by showing that it increases sales by adding value.

Raise the profile of Design Out Crime within industry, placing it at the core of corporate social responsibility.



The problem



The problem

A major sector of the UK economy...¹

- There are 4.8 million SMEs in the UK
- 64% of commercial innovations come from small firms
- Small firms contribute more than 50% to UK turnover
- Over 50% of turnover made by independent retailers goes back into the local community²

... is losing out to crime

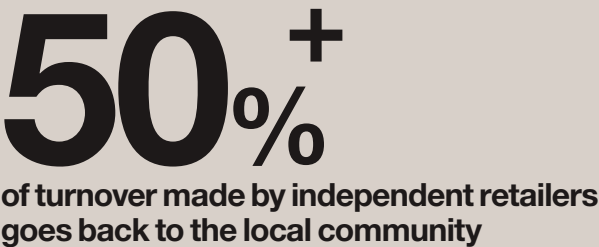
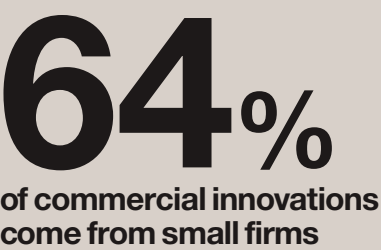
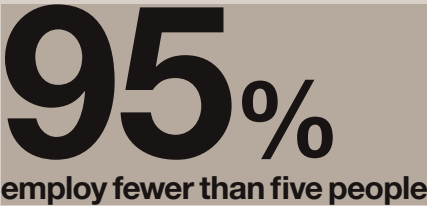
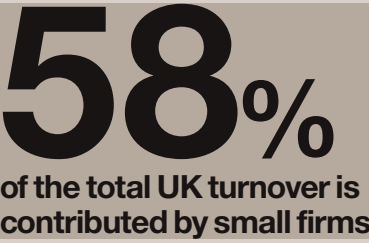
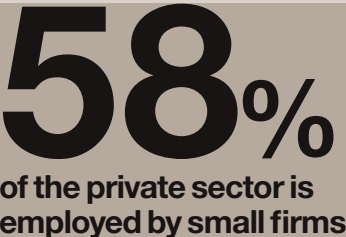
The Federation of Small Businesses (2010) reported that 64% of its members had been a victim of crime over the previous 12 months. It is estimated that the mean overall cost of crime to businesses affected over a 12 month period is £2900 – amounting to billions when added together.³ But many SME owners and staff feel they come second to large businesses in getting government and police support against crime.

SME retailers often operate on tight margins and can be driven out of business completely by crime. This means a loss of service to the community. Larger retailers, meanwhile, inevitably pass on the costs of shop theft to customers through higher prices, meaning the poorest are hardest hit.

Small-to-Medium-Enterprises (SME) definitions:

Micro: 0-9 people
Small: 10-50 people
Medium: 51-249 people

Small business statistics⁴



Types of crime affecting SMEs

Shoplifting/shop theft

The latest police recorded crime figures show a fall in acquisitive crime overall, but a 10% rise in shop theft.⁵ Shoplifting/shop theft is an ongoing and significant problem for the retail industry, both nationally and globally⁶ and the UK government is taking serious measures to combat it by designing harsher penalties and sentences for such offences.

Customer theft in 2008-2009 reportedly accounted for 42% of all losses by value. 498,405 incidents were recorded, but it is estimated that half of all customer theft goes unreported. The real level is thought to be around 750,000-1,000,000.⁷

Robbery/till snatches

Robbery is defined as taking anything of value from any person by force or threat of force.

Robberies almost doubled over 2008-2009, but still only accounted for just 4% of all retail crime, by value.⁸ On average, robbery costs £2,077, excluding damage to property. The range of values varied widely, however, with several jewellery stores losing tens of thousands of pounds while one mixed retailer lost only £40.

A 2009 survey shows an alarming rise in retail robberies,⁹ with

- A 30% increase in the number of robberies
- An 11% increase in the cost of each robbery

It's estimated that half of all customer theft goes unreported¹⁰

Customer theft in 2008-2009 accounted for

42%
of losses by value¹¹

498,405
shop thefts were recorded¹²

Actual thefts estimated at

750,000-1,000,000¹³

Burglary

Burglary is defined as unlawful entry of a building with the intent to steal. Burglaries accounted for 9% of retail crime losses in the 2008-2009 survey period.¹⁴ On average, £1887 of stock was reportedly stolen through burglaries, 33% less than in 2007-2008.

Research conducted by the ACS shows a significant rise in retail burglary figures,¹⁵ including:

- A 19% increase in the number of incidents
- An alarming 190% increase in the cost of each incident, now amounting to an average of £6,091

9%
of retail crime
losses is due
to burglary¹⁶

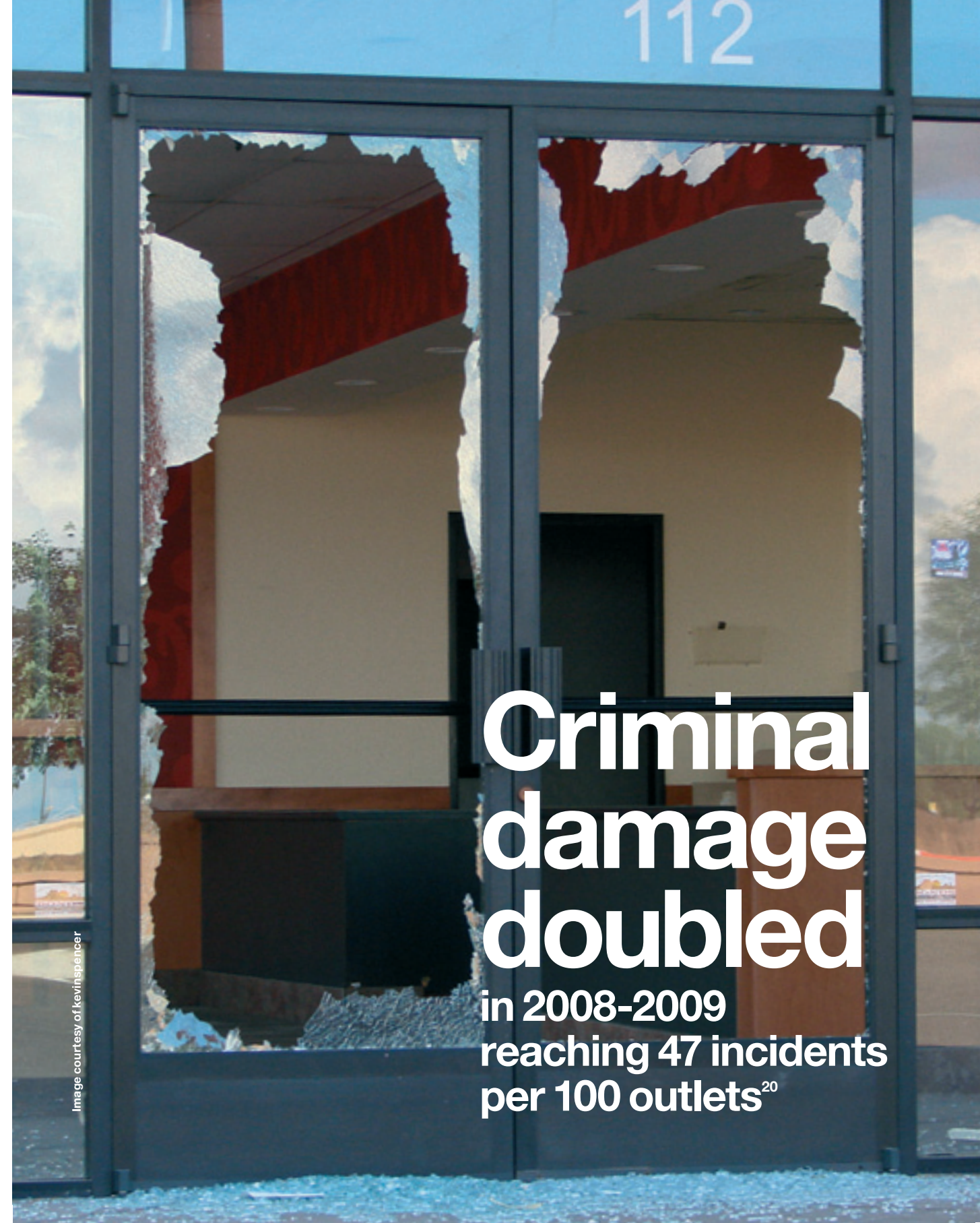
Criminal damage

Criminal damage is intentional or reckless damage to another person's property. It more than doubled in 2008-2009, reaching 47 incidents per 100 outlets – nearly half of all stores.¹⁷ Around three quarters of this was associated with attempted burglaries and robberies. Retail crime causes of criminal damage:¹⁸

- Attempted burglary 64%
- Antisocial behaviour 27%
- Attempted robbery 9%
- Violence against retail staff and antisocial behaviour

In 2009 there was a doubling of violence against retail staff from the previous year. All aspects of violence and antisocial behaviour, physical threats and verbal abuse reportedly increased at this time. The number of threats made against staff increased nine-fold, physical violence increased by 58% and verbal abuse by 37%.¹⁹

In areas where there is a greater fear of violence and intimidation, retailers report greater staff turnover and higher sickness/absence rates. Unfortunately, many employees now appear to accept this abuse as part of the job, a misperception that retailers are working hard to challenge.



**Criminal
damage
doubled**
in 2008-2009
reaching 47 incidents
per 100 outlets²⁰

Some common retail crime interventions

Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)

Closed-circuit television (CCTV) is an important and popular retail crime prevention technology. Retailers focusing on loss prevention often devote most of their resources to it. Using it against criminals requires dedicated monitoring of the cameras. It's true that sophisticated CCTV systems can now single out suspicious behaviour from numerous screens and automatically alert staff. However, this can simply make staff overly complacent. CCTV is often more effective if used in conjunction with electronic article surveillance (EAS) systems (see below). The EAS system will reveal the perpetrator and the video may provide evidence for prosecution.

Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS)

EAS refers to the security tags attached to merchandise that cause an alarm to sound on exiting the store. This is generally used by larger retailers that allow customers to handle merchandise. It is second only to CCTV in popularity amongst retailers looking for inventory protection.

Loss prevention personnel

Loss prevention personnel patrol a store acting like real shoppers. They may try on merchandise and browse the racks, all the while looking out for shoplifters/thieves and stopping them when they leave the store (only then has a crime actually been committed). Many large retail companies use this technique. These personnel must follow strict rules, however, because of very high liability risks.

Security staff

The presence of security staff acts as a deterrent to retail criminal activity. However, due to expense, this technique is mainly used by larger retail establishments.

Exit inspections

Shoppers in some stores are asked when leaving the premises to have their purchases checked against their receipt.

Store design

Store layout can be designed to reduce blind spots and to ensure customers pass the register area and staff on exiting. Cash registers should never be left unlocked or unattended and high-value merchandise should not be displayed near the store exits.

Mirrors

Mirrors can be used to eliminate blind-spots where thieves might operate and provide better overall visibility.

Lock and key

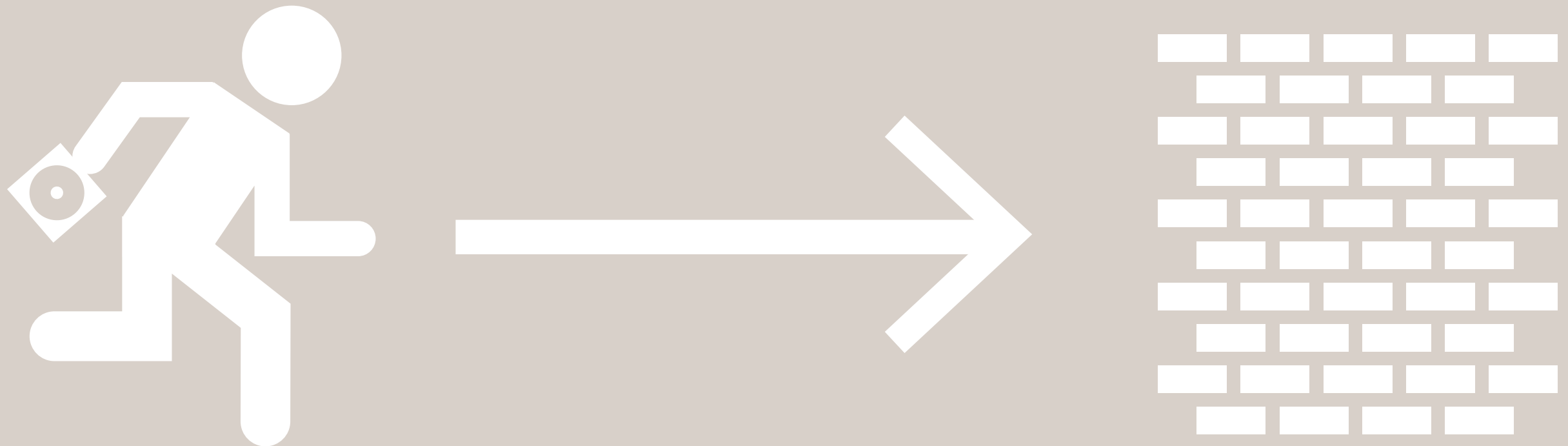
Small, expensive items are often locked in cabinets or behind a counter. Alarms are also sometimes used on unlocked exits and unused checkout aisles.

Signage

Posted prominently, signs and posters carrying security messages can act as deterrents. e.g. 'Shoplifters will be prosecuted', 'This building is alarmed' or 'No cash left on the premises overnight'.



Responding to the problem



Giving SMEs the right information

Design Out Crime undertook an in-depth exercise to review and better understand the SME retail crime environment, speaking to experts in industry, government and the police.

Two main conclusions were drawn. First, the market for securing small shops is saturated with a diverse range of product-based solutions.

Second, in instances where products fail, human error is frequently at fault. Specifically, retailers often simply use the wrong solutions in addressing crime problems. It emerged that there is a lack of impartial advice, tailored to their needs and that retailers were often pushed in the wrong direction by salespeople.

The need for a good self-assessment tool for SMEs seemed clear. Although one such tool had already been developed by the Home Office in August 2009,²¹ scoping revealed ways in which this could be refined to improve targeting of information and usability. The programme then focused on a redesign based on these findings.

Retailers often use the wrong solutions in addressing crime problems

The design brief

Redesign the Secure Your Business tool and supporting materials to better help small businesses protect themselves against crime.

Designers were challenged to redesign the original self-assessment tool and supporting materials. The aim was to improve uptake by addressing four priority areas:

Get to the heart of the problem

Help users find information on the crime prevention questions most pertinent to their needs.

Provide a flexible service

Give users a choice about how they interact with the tool, making it a resource to return to for crime prevention measures as the need arises.

Support action

Ensure the tool delivers relevant and digestible recommendations that are easy for users to act on.

Raise awareness

Create clear promotional materials that are relevant to SMEs and will drive use of the tool.



The new Business Self-Assessment Tool (BSAT)

As well as devising a simple and appealing look for the tool, designers focused on giving users a clear, personalised and helpful experience that could address their needs as quickly as possible.

Users begin using the new tool by identifying themselves as one of three types:

- New businesses that need general advice
- Established businesses looking to identify areas of weakness
- Businesses facing a specific crime problem (which they can identify from a drop-down list)

Rather than forcing users to take a long questionnaire, it was found that answering just seven questions could quickly identify key areas where a business required support.

That support is now offered in the form of clear, concise guidance notes at the end of the questionnaire. There are fourteen of these documents in all, divided into subject areas such as Building Security, Cyber Crime, Preventing Staff Dishonesty and Cashing Up.

Users can easily access the entire library of guidance notes if they want to.

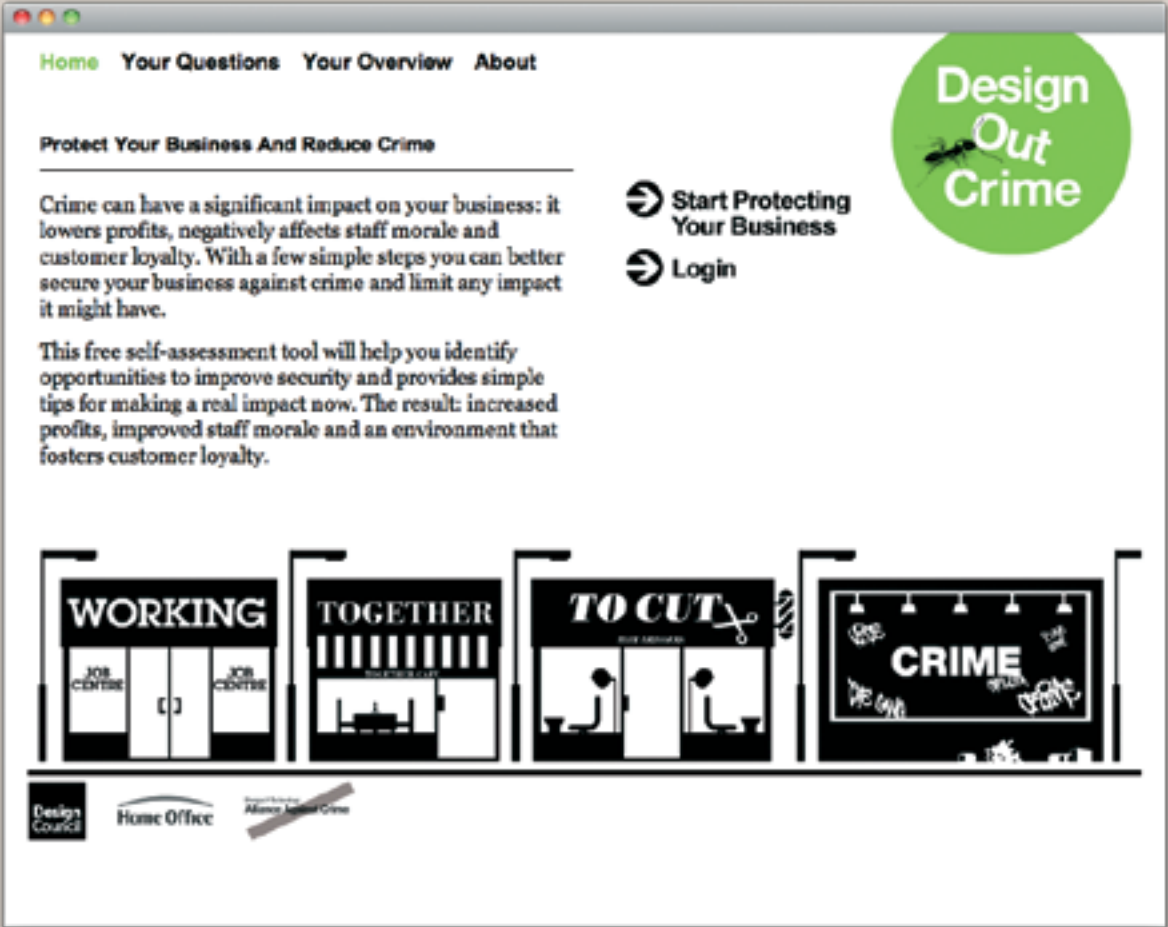
If, after this, users are still unsure of their needs or would like to build on other areas to help improve security, they can go back to the questionnaire and answer more questions.

Try using the tool yourself at www.designoutcrime.org.uk/toolkit/

BSAT results

Business-related crime is complex territory because of the range of different business needs and the wide variety of different solutions available.

BSAT meets an important need, ensuring businesses have the right information about security measures and resources for their specific environments. It now helps businesses assess their own needs in depth, make an informed choice about which measures are right for them and devise clear and relevant security policies to keep staff on track with best practice.



Retailers' crime problems in their own words

Beyond BSAT – how else might designers intervene?

While the tool can help businesses learn about existing solutions – of which there are a lot – are there still needs going unmet?

Let's see what retailers themselves say about their problems...

Security tags are fairly effective, but, at 10-50p per unit, represent a large expense for retailers and some cannot afford them. They are also not suitable for smaller items



'Alarms and tags have been our best method, but of course there is a big cost in both money and time: about £500 a year.'
— Ruth, bookshop owner, East Oxford

'Tagging costs a lot of money. It's about 50p for one tag and you can see how much stock we've got in here.'
— Ayub, clothes shop owner, London

'Our profit margin is so low that to do a tagging system would just mean that there's no point in us being here.'
— Maria, ladies fashion retailer, London

Security tags are sometimes ripped off



'We've started hiding extra security tags inside the products so, although they'll rip off the very obvious one on the outside of the box, they miss the second and that sets off the alarm.'
— Robin, bicycle shop owner, East London

CCTV is generally thought to be effective, but is too great an expense for a lot of businesses



'We can't afford CCTV, because the rates, the rent, the electricity, is just going up... I would love to have a nice new CCTV and security system.'
— Ayub, clothes shop owner, East London

'We've looked into CCTV but had to put that on hold because of the big initial outlay. We were set to go with that but then the credit crunch happened.'
— John, art/design book and product retailer, London

Display cabinets deter thieves, but also make a sale less likely. Legitimate customers like to be able to pick up and handle products without having to ask shop staff.



'We think about where things are displayed, but that's a very difficult thing because we want people to be able to come in and pick up things; that's the appeal of the shop.'
— John, art/design book and product retailer, London



'If we wanted to totally stop theft, we would have to cover everything in glass and that would be impossible.'
— Malcom, managing director, specialist whiskey retailer, Central London

Small retailers often find police unresponsive, even when they have a proven theft and a culprit. They frequently have the impression that their problems are not a priority for the police.



'To be honest, I have totally lost faith in the cops. They have never solved any crime committed here.'
— Argun, printer and stationary store manager, East London

'The police won't do anything. We saw somebody put a bottle down their trousers and there was a policeman in the shop. He took the bottle off him and just told him to sod off. It makes you very annoyed.'
— Malcom, managing director, specialist whiskey retailer, Central London

'The schools say once the children are out of school it's not their responsibility and the police say that they've got more important things to do than look after kids. It's a no-win situation.'
— Ashraf, newsagent owner, London

Retailers often feel they need extra staff just to deal with theft.

'It's such a small shop but we need to have two of us in here.'
— Maria, ladies fashion retailer, London

'You need more people at the end of the day. You can't afford more people in the small business.'
— Ashraf, newsagent owner, London

'We could stop theft totally if we employed more people but it's an expense that we can't justify.'
— Malcom, managing director, specialist whiskey retailer, Central London

Retailers often feel powerless to stop even known thieves returning to their premises.



'You can ban them but there's nothing to prevent them from coming back in. There's no photos to say this person's banned.'
— Maria, ladies fashion retailer, London

'There is no way of preventing them from coming back in, really.'
— Malcom, managing director, specialist whiskey retailer, Central London



'When you're on your own and you're dealing with ten to twenty kids that's the most difficult thing. They don't come to buy anything, they come to steal. When you've got a couple of other customers there as well it's very hard to control the crowd.'
— Ashraf, newsagent owner, London

Theft, technically, does not occur until someone leaves a shop with a stolen item, but at this point it's harder to catch them.

'We can't accuse anyone of anything until they've left the shop with the item. So now they've left the shop and left with the item and we can't do anything about it. But we get into trouble for losing stock.'
— Claudine and Arny, charity shop workers, London

To summarise...

A number of the problems businesses describe may be dealt with by the self-assessment tool. The confectioner who was perpetually inundated by schoolchildren, for example, might benefit from clear signage limiting the number of schoolchildren allowed in his shop.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that many retailers are aware of the solutions available and still have a problem. One in particular was common to all: shoplifting and theft. Overwhelmingly, shopkeepers, even those using the best measures, said this was difficult to prevent and that police were of little help. Furthermore, these kinds of incidents account for overwhelmingly the greatest proportion of loss by value to retailers: 42%, against just 4% for robbery and 9% for burglary.²²

Shop theft can also be a gateway to more serious crime for younger people.²³ Clever new designs against shoplifting may therefore offer the bonus of helping to stop young people turning to crime.

Small crime is a big problem

It appears that shop theft is generally seen as a fact of life, something almost impossible to completely prevent or punish. No device or process is entirely effective against it and the ones with the most benefit are prohibitively expensive for many retailers.

Greater police and security presence is often seen as desirable by shop owners, but it's not clear that this would be a complete solution either. Sadly, it is almost certainly true that the police simply lack the resources to arrest and prosecute every perpetrator of petty theft.

Yet, in aggregate, the financial losses from petty crime are huge – and this is to say nothing of the enormous inconvenience to retailers and the considerable time lost dealing with the problem.



Designing out shop theft



Understanding the problem

Common shoplifting and shop theft techniques

Part of the difficulty in addressing shoplifting and shop theft is that it is not one single activity, but breaks down into several:

Hiding merchandise

This is the most common method. Items are concealed in the shoplifter’s clothing, in handbags, strollers, umbrellas or purchased merchandise.

Walk out technique

This simply involves selecting goods, and then walking out with them in hand. It can be very effective if the shoplifter’s appearance and attitude are not of a type to arouse suspicion. Bold shoplifters may grab an item and run out of the store.

‘Accidental’ stealing

Here a thief pays for some items while holding others in full view or putting them into pockets. The apparent intention to pay often confuses the staff, but if the thief is challenged, he or she can simply pass the theft off as a mistake. This method is also referred to as ‘left handing,’ a reference to the stolen item being held in the left hand while payment is made with the right.

Distraction

A group of two or more will enter a store and distract as many employees as they can, keeping customers, sales employees and security guards occupied in different ways while one of them waits for a good moment to steal.

Fake returns

The shoplifter picks up an item and tries to receive money for it at the return station, often claiming to have lost the receipt. The technique may involve aggressively asking to speak to the cashier’s supervisor so that the cashier, keen to avoid confrontation, will simply issue the refund.

Metal-lined clothing or containers

Metal-lined bags, containers, or clothing (such as aluminium foil-lined undergarments) allow a shoplifter to shield RFID tagged merchandise from scanners.

Other methods

Other methods include price label switching and short-changing.

Understanding the context

Thinking thief

Understanding how shop thieves steal is critical to any design process:

- Why do thieves feel able to steal from stores? What makes a store attractive to potential thieves and how can it be made less so?
- How can design make a shop layout less appealing to thieves while retaining an appeal to shoppers and retailers?
- Can a thief easily avoid attracting attention while looking for opportunities to commit crime? Thieves say that they generally wander around a store unobtrusively while they weigh up the risks. How can designers make offenders feel less able to do this?
- On stealing goods, can the thief avoid being seen? Could design make the act of shop theft more visible?
- Is it easy for thieves to get away? Thieves say the getaway is crucial, a priority consideration. It is clear that retailers have not placed the same importance on this issue. How can design respond?
- Is it easy for the thief to sell on stolen goods? Is there a design-led strategy that could increase the risk of being caught when doing this?

Why is shop theft so persistent?

In interviews, many shoplifters report that they find it very easy to steal.²⁴ The following factors contribute:

Poor store and packaging design

- Poor store layout: blind spots where thieves can conceal goods unseen – caused, for example, by high shelves, poor location of goods or poorly placed point-of-sale display stands.
- Poorly designed packaging, making it easy for thieves to get items out of the packaging, then conceal and steal them.
- CCTV that is poorly specified and records images that aren’t good enough for a prosecution even if the thief is caught.
- Alarm systems that do not work.
- Tags that can be easily removed.

Poor management

- Sales staff are often either not motivated or not trained to look for suspicious behaviour and respond to it when they see it.
- Security officers are often not supervised or motivated.

Poor procedures

Staff sometimes find security procedures such as cashing up, checking CCTV and watching out for shoplifting get in the way of their ordinary duties. This is a key reason why these measures fail. Shop owners often say they cannot employ enough staff to adequately handle security measures, especially when it comes to preventing theft.

RSA Design Out Shoplifting competition 2009/10



In 2009/10, the Design Council and the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) ran a competition for design students to meet the challenge of shop theft. The brief was as follows:

Can the design of shop furniture, products, packaging, retail space (large and small), display areas, security procedures, retail management and the myriad of other factors in this environment – even the experience of shopping itself – reduce shoplifting and improve ambiance without turning a small newsagent or a large department store into Alcatraz?

Download the brief at http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/Documents/Documents/OurWork/Crime/DesignOutShoplifting_RSAentries.pdf

Winners

Ugly Face – Rachel Muli

An advertising campaign designed to educate young women about the harm that cosmetics theft does to stores and make it clear to them that the practice is socially unacceptable (fig. 1).

PaidUnPaid – Jy-Yeon-Suh

Barcodes are coated with transparent Photochromatic ink that turns blue when scanned over UV light at the checkout, providing a simple, quick visual check on whether an item has been paid for (fig. 2).

Finalists

Security Guard – Jamie Bates

A system of wrist-communication devices for security guards, allowing them to co-ordinate their activities and converge on problem areas without thieves being alerted too soon (fig. 3).

Identification Floor Panel – Oliver Boulton

A floor panel at exits and checkouts would flash green to show items had been paid for, red to show they had not, using RFID tags to assess each item (fig. 4).

Anti-Refund-Fraud – Alex Camp

A tamper-proof sticker would be placed on items to show they had been paid for, preventing shoplifters bringing stolen items into a shop and getting fraudulent refunds on them (fig. 5).

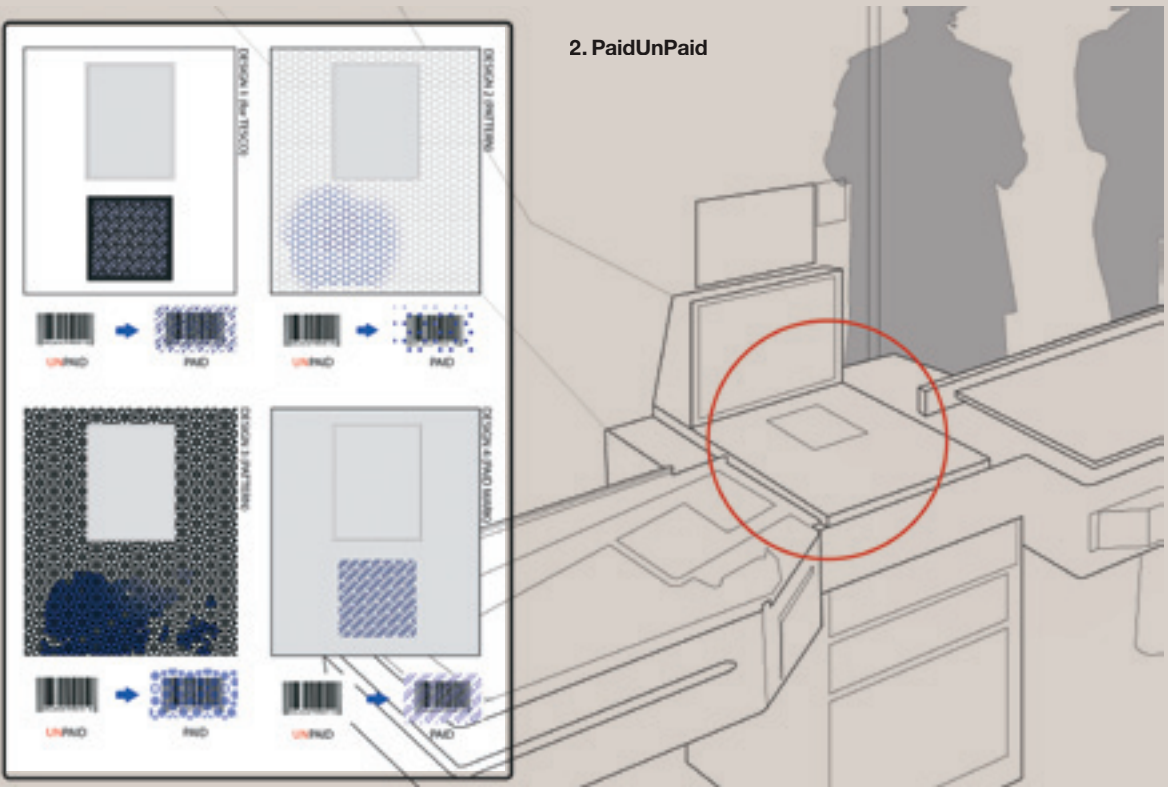
Digital Ownership – Matthew Pateman

A product would only activate certain other services if it was paid for. For instance, a washing machine might refuse to wash a stolen shirt (fig. 6).

1. Ugly Face

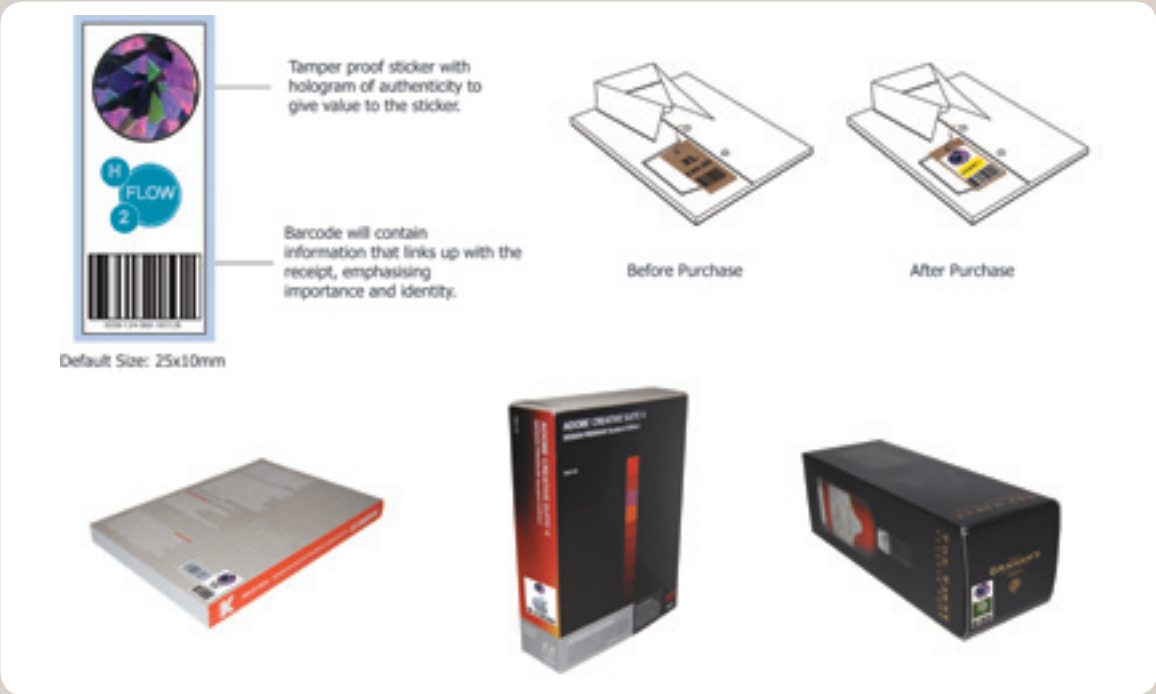


2. PaidUnPaid

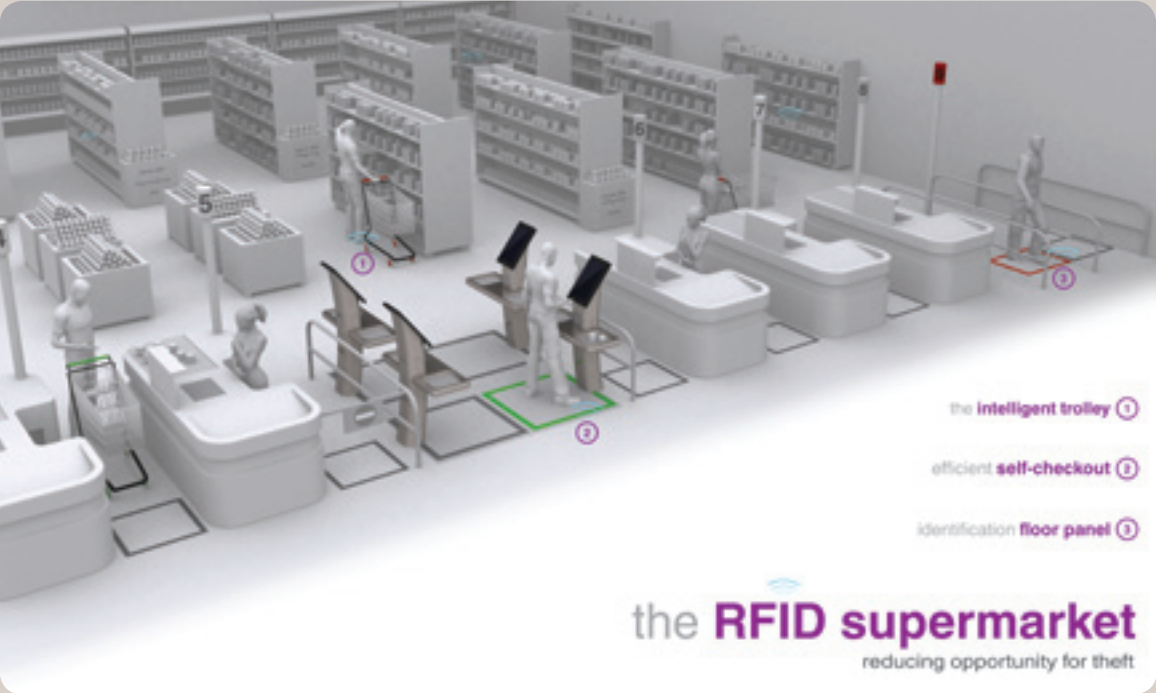




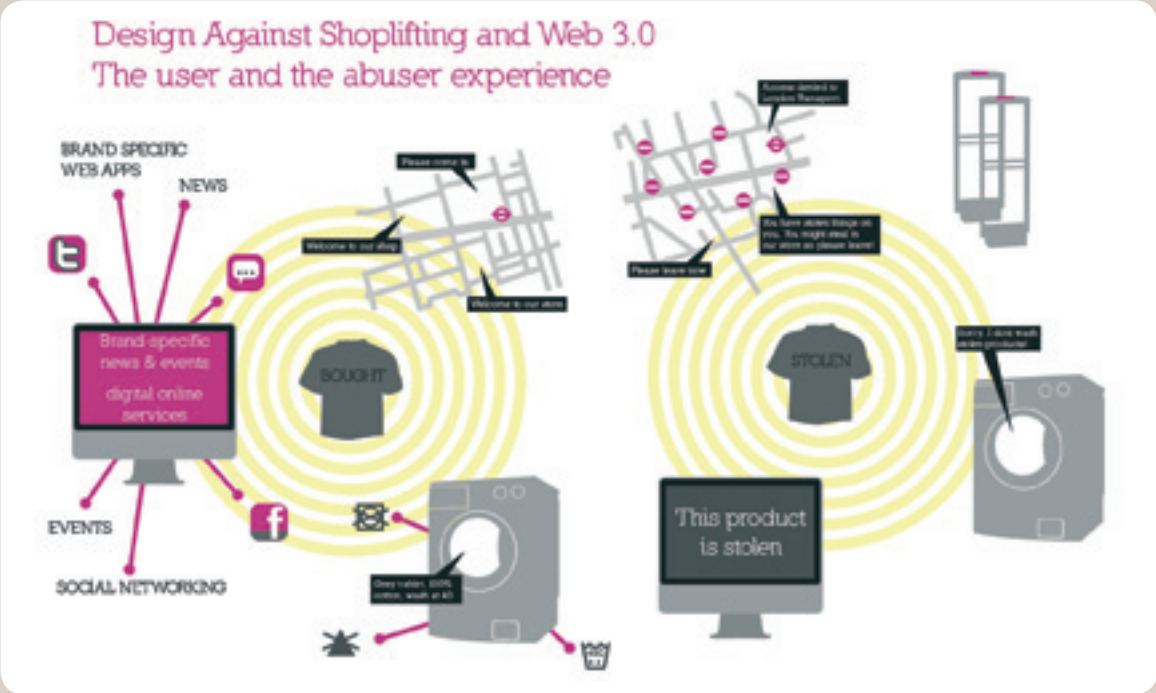
3. Security Guard



5. Anti-Refund-Fraud



4. Identification Floor Panel



6. Digital Ownership

What more can designers do?

Given the complexity and difficulty of the problem, it seems fair to say that the BSAT tool and the RSA Designing Out Shoplifting competition are a good start, but only a start.

In particular, since shoplifters and other petty thieves are often not prosecuted even when caught, the overwhelming question remains: how can shop theft be deterred?

Solutions may lie not only in shop security, but also packaging, store design and even communications over local networks. Thought also needs to be given to the question of whether different solutions are needed for different types of retailer or whether one size can, as it were, fit all. In devising new devices, the problem of cost for many retailers must also be considered.

Difficult as the situation seems, the fact remains that if the problem, or set of problems, outlined here are anything, they are design problems, embedded as they are in relationships between people, the spaces they inhabit, the objects that they use, and technology. If problems are opportunities there are certainly design opportunities here – backed up by the great incentive of helping the millions of individuals across the UK for whom these problems are ongoing, perpetual and urgent.

‘We can’t do anything, the police can’t do anything so they just keep doing it.’

Ashraf, newsagent owner, London

How can shop theft be deterred?



Endnotes

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**For more information
on Design Out Crime visit**
www.designoutcrime.org.uk

Design Council
34 Bow Street, London
WC2E 7DL United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0)20 7420 5249
Fax: +44(0)20 7420 5300
Email: info@designcouncil.org.uk
www.designcouncil.org.uk

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Design: MultiAdaptor
www.multiadaptor.com

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The Home Office's Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime has brought together industry, the public sector, designers and crime prevention experts to create the Design Out Crime programme.



Aiming to develop design-led ideas for crime-proofing products, businesses and communities, the programme has worked on five priority areas:

Alcohol

Finding design-led approaches to reduce the harm caused by alcohol-related antisocial and criminal behaviour, especially assaults in pubs and clubs.

Business

Using design to help minimise crimes such as shoplifting and retail theft that affect businesses, their customers and their employees.

Communities and housing

Embedding design-led approaches to help communities become safer by reducing crime and the opportunities for it to occur.

Hot products

Developing innovations in technology, services and product design that help make personal electronics more crime-proof.

Schools

Understanding the crime problems such as bullying, fighting and petty theft that affect young people in schools so that effective design solutions can be created.