

**The Prevention of Shop Theft:  
an approach  
through crime analysis**

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### **Crime Prevention Unit Papers**

The Home Office Crime Prevention Unit was formed in 1983 with a view to promoting preventive action against crime. Included in its remit is a particular responsibility for the dissemination of information on crime prevention topics. The present series of occasional papers, while based largely upon research material, has been established primarily for practitioners whose work has a direct bearing on the reduction of crime.

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## Foreword

Store detectives seek to control shop theft through detection, arrest and, by referral to the police, through punishment and deterrence. There are, however, limitations to the effectiveness of this approach and the costs associated with it in terms of police time and to the stores themselves are considerable. This report advocates shifting the balance of stores' response to crime from reaction to prevention and suggests that management can, through close examination of the problem of shop theft, target their preventive effort.

The report is based on a case study in situational crime prevention at a large London music store in which information on shoplifting incidents recorded by store detectives was analysed. The analysis identified a number of key locations in the store where preventive effort could be focused, and suggested preventive measures for consideration, some of which the management of the store participating in the study have recently implemented.

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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	(iii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Introduction	1
HMV: a case study	3
Summary of preventive options	13
Overall conclusions	15
Appendix	17
References	21

## INTRODUCTION

The police record over a quarter of a million offences of shop theft annually, and this may be only a small proportion of the true level (Walsh, 1978. Murphy, 1984). Shoplifting (1) is judged by the Association for the Prevention of Theft in Shops (APTS) to account for the loss of goods worth a billion pounds per year.

The larger stores have traditionally dealt with shoplifting by employing store detectives to arrest and deter offenders. The effectiveness of this policy as a means of controlling crime has yet to be fully assessed, but it clearly carries public costs. Such costs are incurred in the administration of the Criminal Justice System since handling shoplifters occupies much police time and contributes significantly to the workload of the courts and probation service. As an extreme case, the Shoplifting Unit at Marylebone Police Station, catering for both sides of London's Oxford Street, has four supervisory officers and 14 constables including a team to search the homes of some of those arrested for further stolen property. Excluding overtime, the Unit costs about £12,700 per week. The shoplifting problem is exacerbated by stores' sales techniques such as self-service displays, which contribute not only to profit but also to criminal opportunity. It is a matter for debate as to whether or not a store has a right to pursue profit without regard to the consequences for public expenditure.

It is of course the case that the traditional response not only brings with it costs to the public, but also considerable costs to the stores themselves in maintaining the store detectives and other security staff. Emphasis on arresting thieves also carries a small but serious risk of assaults on staff — a risk which has in part led one company, Marks and Spencers, to spend £1.5 million on uniformed security guards over the fiscal year 1984/85 (*The Times*, 8th May 1985). There are also the risks of lawsuits for wrongful arrestor distress, and of public criticism for over-reaction in prosecuting the elderly or disturbed.

The traditional approach to shop theft raises further problems. There are severe constraints on increasing the impact of store detectives, and efforts to improve ways of spotting, catching and prosecuting offenders may have diminishing returns. The more people store detectives arrest and report to the police, the less they are 'on-floor' to guard against other offenders. The more offenders the police receive, the longer the delay before store detectives can hand over subsequent prisoners to the police patrol, accompany the officer to the station, make their statement and return to the store. The police cannot always deal promptly with the arrested shop thief. The once-mooted possibility of streamlining the process by having the police charge offenders at the store will not be put into effect since the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 requires that offenders be charged at specified police stations.

(1) It is recognised that the term 'shoplifting' is to some extent a euphemism for shop theft; however, for consistency with common parlance the two words are here used interchangeably.

The public and private costs of the stores' reactive approach to shop theft, together with the constraints on its impact on crime, suggest that an alternative approach is needed. At first sight preventive measures seem to have the potential to bypass the constraints on current practice without raising the number of offenders to be processed at public expense or eating deeply into private profits. Store managers, while sympathetic to the principle of prevention, are understandably cautious about putting it into practice, and while some ground has been covered in recent years (Home Office, 1983), there is still much to achieve. One reason for this may be that managers can find it hard to choose, from the many preventive techniques available, the combination most likely to prove cost-effective in their store, and to give a reasonable return on investment. Information on the extent and location of thefts in their store, and the methods used by the thieves, is central to such choice. In many stores the information exists but is not collated, remaining in the minds of store detectives, in the records they keep of incidents, and sometimes in the stock control system. One method for collating this information for use in generating preventive options is crime analysis, the first of several stages in the preventive process.

### **The preventive process**

The preventive process aims to obtain a clear picture of the nature of the crime problem, highlight preventive options, and once these are implemented, check on their impact.

#### *(a) Crime analysis: defining the problem*

Crime in a town, a street or a store often occurs in patterns, with particular 'troublespots' clearly distinguishable from a background of more 'random' offending. The troublespots reflect the existence of a vulnerability or criminal opportunity — a desirable target, easily stolen or damaged, or poorly supervised. In developing a preventive strategy such troublespots should be identified. To do this, management should preferably use detailed stock control data. As a substitute and/or complement to stock control, they may need to adapt and extend current systems for recording shoplifting incidents.

#### *(b) Choice of strategy: deciding what to do*

Identification of criminal opportunities is followed by devising strategies to block them. For shoplifting, strategies can be devised under the familiar headings of store and display design, sales methods and technology, alarms, store detective deployment and involvement of other staff in surveillance. These techniques could, of course, be contemplated without going through the preceding analysis. The advantage of the current approach, however, is that it enables the preventive strategy to be *targeted* onto the presenting crime problem. It is thus likely to be more cost-effectively applied and its effect more easily evaluated.

*(c) Implementation: putting the plans into practice*

Little can be said about putting plans into practice save that it can be extremely difficult. Understandably, crime prevention is often only a secondary consideration of store management, especially where increasing customer flow and sales appears a better way of raising profits than does decreasing the losses: turning the tap on more fully is a better way of raising the water level in a drinking trough than plugging a few relatively small leaks. So preventive initiatives are most likely to appeal to management, and most likely to modify a store's layout and practices, if they are able to attach themselves to the coat-tails of sales-oriented changes — such as computerisation of stock control, or the kind of major revision of store layout and furnishing that takes place every few years.

An important but neglected component of implementation is *monitoring*: checking to see whether plans are fully realised. Changes in sales practice may have been recommended, for example, but unforeseen factors may prevent their full introduction.

*(d) Evaluation: is it working?*

Evaluation involves a hard-headed (and statistically-sound) look at the impact on crime of the measures adopted, the financial and other costs, benefits and side-effects, and identification of difficulties outstanding. It will also involve checking that crimes prevented have not been displaced to different times and places or different targets.

Obtaining good-quality management information, analysis of patterns (as for example in patterns of shopper movement, space allocation and space management), decision-making based on costs and benefits, deliberate implementation and careful evaluation are all part of modern management science applied in the retail context. What seems not yet to have happened, however, is the transfer of this approach from sales to crime prevention.

To assess the contribution of crime analysis to preventing shop theft, a case study was conducted. The study sought first to see whether crime analysis can generate sensible preventive options for store management: and second, whether the options implemented are cost-effective. This report describes the results of the crime analysis and the recommendations to management that it generated. It also documents the constraints on the store detectives' capacity to control crime.

**HMV: a case study**

During 1984 the Metropolitan Police became concerned that the Oxford Street branch of HMV, the national chain of music shops, was referring increasing numbers of shoplifters to them. These shoplifters were predominantly young.

In 1985, the problem had grown: in the two months from 1 January, of 1,074 arrests handled by the Shoplifting Unit at Marylebone Police Station, 420 or 39% (2) came from this particular store, which was just one of the extremely large and varied collection of stores in one of London's premier shopping areas.

Cassettes account for the bulk of the store's sales. It also sells records, videotapes and various accessories. At the time of the study it also sold computers and computer tapes. It has four sales floors, connected by stairs and lifts, and two entrances onto the same street, only one of which is normally in use, permanently supervised by a uniformed security guard. The store employs some 80 sales staff, six uniformed security guards, and five plain clothes store detectives. Its security systems include closed circuit television (CCTV), and an alarm system on the more valuable goods such as videotapes. It has a daily sales turnover of £60-£70,000. Arrests by store detectives for shoplifting in 1984 totalled 1,456. Of these about 80% were referred to the police, who in their turn decided that 26% of the referrals should be prosecuted.

There are three reasons for the high rate of arrests at this store. First, a relatively large number of store detectives are employed, in what is a fairly compact store. Second, cassettes are the quintessential target for theft: they are light, easily pocketable, attractive to the young for their own use as well as for resale, and have a relatively high unit value. Third, the store's sales method involves leaving tapes and records in their containers in so-called 'live displays', rather than in the more traditional 'masterbag' system, in which only the containers are available for shoppers to examine or take to the cash desk, where sales staff reunite them with their contents from a secure store. HMV is not the only music retailer using live displays; its rationale for doing so is that, beyond a certain level of financial turnover at a given store, the cost of the masterbag system in sales lost through delay in handling purchases far outweighs any benefits through decreased rates of theft. The live display system also allows the store, whose growth in sales is constrained by limited space, to do away with the storage areas that the masterbag system requires. There are thus sound commercial reasons why the store operates in a way which provides a clear example of the conflict between marketing style and crime prevention. From a historical perspective the conflict has arisen in the last 30 years following the changeover from 'counter' style operation and demand buying to self-service and impulse buying. According to Walsh (1978) the older approach had evolved to a peak of perfection as a means of preventing shop theft, but could not compete with self-service as a means of boosting sales and cutting staff costs.

*The case for prevention at HMV: limitations on store detective impact*

Customer entries to the store are approximately twenty thousand on a busy day, and assuming (conservatively, from 'random following' studies — cf Buckle

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(2) This and subsequent figures provided by the MPD were obtained from local records which for reasons of redefinition may not be entirely comparable with published figures.

and Farrington, 1984; Murphy, 1984) that one in a hundred will steal something, there are a possible 200 offenders scattered anonymously among the legitimate customers, faced by four store detectives on duty at any one time (though not necessarily on floor). Since each detective on average catches about one shoplifter per day — just under 5 offenders were arrested in the store per working day throughout 1984 — the detectives are obviously missing a lot of thieves.

The scope for increasing arrests is constrained by the personal skills of store detectives in identifying offenders, the design characteristics of the store which afford opportunity for the furtive concealment of stolen goods, and the amount of time each detective can spend on the shop floor. If in attempting to increase the arrest rate managers make significant improvements in the skills of the detectives and alter the store layout to facilitate surveillance of customers, the constraint imposed by the time factor — something beyond their control — remains substantial. Thus assuming that on average an arrest takes a store detective 2½ hours to deal with, and assuming 4 detectives are on duty at any one time, the theoretical maximum arrest rate at the store is only 12 per day (3). In practical terms it is not feasible to increase the arrest rate by taking on more detectives, as HMV would need to employ nearly 17 times the present number, working at peak efficiency, to have the capacity to catch and process all 200 offenders. The problems associated with such a strategy are obvious. First there is the financial cost to the store — which in fact already employs the greatest density of store detectives per square foot of sales area on Oxford Street; and second the certainty that, raising the number of arrests would increase the time the police take to handle each one, unless the police in their turn augment their resources — with the result that the additional store detectives will spend less of their time on floor.

The store detectives' limited capacity in relation to the number of offenders they may be facing on the floor, constraints on increasing their arrest productivity and doubts about the cost-effectiveness of increases in their numbers, to say nothing of the cost on the public purse, raise serious doubts about the current approach and suggest that management might more thoroughly explore preventive strategies (4).

#### *Crime analysis: defining the crime problem at HMV*

Defining the problem begins with crime analysis. The ideal source of data for crime analysis is a detailed stock control system. The one in use at HMV unfortunately could shed little light on the precise whereabouts of theft losses

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(3) The detectives estimate that an arrest can take them off the floor for 1 to 4 hours: 2½ hours is a rough average. The upper and lower limits of the theoretical maximum arrest rate are thus 32 and 8 per day: neither figure affects the argument.

(4) In the interest of lightening the load on the public purse the current analysis also suggests that management should consider responding to suspects or actual offenders in ways other than almost automatically referring the majority to the police: possibilities range from formal in-store cautioning of those arrested by store detectives to pre-emptively warning off those behaving suspiciously (Murphy, 1984).

(a situation fairly soon to be remedied), so effort was focused on the store detectives' records. An expanded record sheet was developed in cooperation with the detectives covering not only location of incidents but a range of other information including methods of theft and descriptions of the offenders caught.

Some 500 consecutive record sheets were obtained during December 1984 — February 1985, containing both preceded and open-ended material. One problem with the data arose where offenders had visited several locations to steal, or groups of offenders had stolen items together. Difficulties were also encountered in obtaining precise details of property, value, and section of the store when multi-site offenders were arrested. These problems were resolved by analysing the data in several different ways: broadly location, property and offenders. As a result the numerical base on which the analyses were conducted varies between about 300 and 500.

#### *Location of goods taken*

The store detectives' records show that crime at HMV is strongly clustered (5). Of some 40 sections of the store, offenders are most frequently caught stealing from three: 'rock and pop' (31%), computers (28%) and 'soul and disco' (14%) — altogether accounting for 73% of all incidents. When the proportion of the total number of items taken in each section is considered (Table 1), a very similar picture emerges.

Table 2 shows the total value of the goods taken (and subsequently recovered by the store detectives) in each section.

In this case, the computer section appears to be the most worthwhile target for prevention in terms of the reductions in financial loss promised, although the other two sections remain prominent.

While the clustering of crime at HMV means that preventive measures can be confined to particular locations within the store, it should be noted that these three key sites are as popular with legitimate customers as with thieves, so the volume of goods to be protected will be large (6).

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(5) Obviously the detectives tended to spend more time observing the sections of the store where they believed shoplifting to be most likely, so that the results of the crime analysis will inevitably be consistent with the store detectives' own hypotheses. However, each detective on duty was generally posted to cover an entire floor containing a number of sections, and was encouraged to move about; hence the locational patterns of crime revealed should bear sufficient resemblance to the 'true' picture to inform the initial management response.

(6) The high proportion of the store's 'theft turnover' that takes place in the rock and pop section in particular quite closely matches the section's share of the legitimate sales turnover. The rock and pop figures therefore do not reflect a higher risk of theft per cassette on display — but simply the greater size and activity of the section. Nevertheless, this does not mean that rock and pop should be denied special attention, for focusing preventive effort here would still enable the store to target a significant proportion of its crime problem.

**Table 1: Items recovered from shoplifters, by section of store**

Section	No.	% of total items
Rock 'n' pop	224	31
Computers	212	29
Soul 'n' disco	97	13
Reggae	25	3
Collections	21	3
11-20 each, Easy listening; Blank cassettes; Video; Pop collections	total number	59 8
6-10 each, International; European; Films and shows; Singles; Country and western; Jazz	total number	51 7
5 and under each, Classical; Video and computers; Top 60 tapes; LPs; Rock video; Accessories; Books; Sale; Humour; Arabic; Punk; Nostalgia; Folk; Walkman; Chart	total number	37 5
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>726 100% (rounded)</b>

Note: these figures are relative estimates as they are taken from records of single-site offenders only.

**Table 2: Value of goods recovered from shoplifters, by section of store**

Section	Value (£) of goods	% of grand total value
Computers	1,716	36
Rock 'n' pop	1,227	26
Soul 'n' disco	487	10
Video	372	8
Reggae	161	3
Collections	120	2
£50-£100 Classical; Easy listening; Pop collections; Rock video: Blank cassettes	total value	406 9
£25-£50 Jazz; Films and show's; Top 60 tapes; LPs	total value	146 3
Under £25 Singles; Books; European; Sale; Country and western; Accessories; Video and computer; Humour; Folk; Arabic; International; Walkman; Punk; Chart; Nostalgia	total value	100 2
<b>Grand Total Value</b>		<b>4,796 100% (rounded)</b>

Note: these figures are relative estimates as they are taken from records of single-site offenders only.

*Type of property taken*

Cassettes were the most popular goods to steal. Music cassettes (56%) and computer cassettes (22%), together accounted for 78% of the total number of items stolen and recovered over the study period — and owing to the higher unit value of the other goods (especially videotapes), a slightly smaller proportion of the total value. Videotapes, LPs, single records and accessories were all stolen in small quantities. No compact discs were taken — surprising from the point of view of their higher sales value than audio cassettes, but less so in terms of their usefulness to the young, who are unlikely to have the expensive equipment necessary to play them.

*The offenders*

Some 61% of arrested offenders were juveniles (aged 16 and under). 52% of offenders were aged 13-16, the peak age band at this store; a further 30% were aged 17 to 24. The distribution is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Age of offenders arrested at HMV**

Age band	%
under 10	1
10-12	8
13-16	52
17-24	30
25-30	4
31-45	4
over 45	1
	100

Almost none of those arrested were previously known by the store detectives who in this store appear to be facing an inexhaustible flow of first time offenders. Arguably shoplifting offers an easy beginning to many a criminal career. Consistent with this idea is the fact that over 90% of the juveniles arrested at HMV were first offenders in terms of criminal/police cautioning records (although they may have been stealing undetected for some time). This provides further grounds for seeking to replace the traditional reactive approach by preventive measures that reduce the opportunities for young people to commit crime.

As well as being the province of the young, shoplifting at HMV is also predominantly a male offence (91% of those arrested). Altogether some 79% of offenders were males aged 24 and under, a finding clearly contrary to the popular stereotype of the shoplifter as middle-aged woman. Juvenile males as individuals tend to take relatively small numbers of items of relatively low overall value, but their predominance among offenders means they account for almost half the total take.

All these findings must however be qualified. With the large proportion of shoplifters estimated to avoid arrest, there is a strong possibility that the store detectives are tending to catch the type of people they expect will steal, or those that are particularly unskilled or inexperienced. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to use the offender information as a working basis; the ultimate check, of course, is whether the preventive advice based on the information reduces crime.

#### *Methods of stealing*

Some 89% of offenders arrested had simply concealed the goods, hoping to walk out undetected. Another seven percent were attempting a price swap, peeling off the label from a high-value cassette and replacing it with one of lower value that they had also removed in the store, or with which they had come prepared. Other methods (such as use of stolen credit cards or returned goods deceptions) were recorded only rarely.

The place of concealment most commonly reported was the pocket (34%). The next was in a bag (29%, with nearly half of these in an HMV bag). Another 22% of offenders concealed items in clothing; a further 10% hid them in other more ingenious places such as beneath hats, within magazines or in a 'Walkman' personal stereo. Ten percent did not conceal the goods.

Significantly, while concealment was the principal method of theft, store detectives rarely spotted it without prior suspicion of the individual in question. The Appendix shows that less than one in five of the cues that made the store detectives suspicious of customers related to the act of concealment itself, or to related signs such as objects bulging out clothing.

#### *The pattern of crime at HMV: summary*

The recorded crime problem at HMV falls into a clear pattern. The store detectives' records show that about three-quarters of the items taken at HMV are stolen from the three key sections of rock and pop, soul and disco, and computers. Cassettes account for about three-quarters of the goods that disappear. Computer cassettes are the single most important category of vulnerable goods in terms of value. Sixty-one percent of offenders caught are juveniles, and 79% are males aged 24 and under. Almost none of those caught are previously known to the store detectives, who must cope with an inexhaustible stream of fresh offenders. Concealment is the principal method of theft used (although there is a small amount of price label swapping), but the act of concealment rarely attracts the attention of staff and cassettes, once hidden in a pocket or bag, are hard to detect.

### *Identifying preventive options*

The most obvious strategy to prevent shop theft at HMV would be to abandon the live display system — but management are reluctant to do this because it would reduce sales and require more staff and floor space. The crime analysis exercise suggests some alternative preventive approaches which are less likely to jeopardise profit. Most of the options flow directly from the research. A few arguably go beyond the data and are put forward more speculatively.

Cassettes are the obvious target for prevention of theft, and many of the preventive measures described below could be concentrated in the three key sections of the store for greater economy and impact. Sales considerations permitting, the sections could be brought together into one high security area. Displacement of the shoplifters' activities to other goods and other sections is unlikely. LPs and even single records are too bulky to conceal easily, and probably intrinsically less attractive to thieves (LPs are becoming old fashioned; there is less value per item on singles than cassettes); and on the cassette floor itself, it is improbable, for example, that someone who is thwarted from stealing 'soul and disco' or 'rock and pop' tapes will also find 'Arabic', 'easy listening' or 'nostalgia' to his or her taste.

#### (i) Preventing concealment

As one means of coping with concealment, bag parks were recommended in the report of the Home Office Standing Committee on Crime Prevention in 1973 (Home Office, 1973), but ten years later a follow-up report (Home Office, 1983) states that for a number of practical reasons, few British stores have taken up the suggestion. With cassettes as easy to conceal as they are, there is every possibility too that the provision of a bag park would simply mean that cassettes would disappear into pockets instead. However, putting better seals on HMV bags containing legitimate purchases would prevent some theft by denying opportunist thieves one of the hiding places for their booty frequently-used at present.

Cassettes might also be made physically harder to push into a pocket or hide in a bag. For example, plastic grips are available which enable cassettes to hang from a bar on the display shelf. These hinder concealment and can only be removed by a device at the sales desk. They are then fitted onto new stock on delivery.

A number of measures could be taken to heighten the conspicuousness of the act of concealment. Display racks that spring back or make a noise when an item is removed would make this first step towards concealment more obvious than at present. Covering cassette containers with tough plastic wrapping that crackles noisily when ripped off would make removal of cassettes from their containers, to leave behind any security tags, harder to accomplish un-noticed. Since half the offenders were seen to conceal the property after walking away from where they

had removed it from the shelf, hiding it when skulking behind other gondolas, in corners or on the stairs, this preparation for concealment could be made more conspicuous with large price labels or wrappers, colour-coded by section of origin. Notices could also be displayed alerting customers of the requirement to pay for goods on the floor on which they are on sale.

#### (ii) Layout

To complement the strategy of making the act of concealment more conspicuous, store layout and design can be altered to improve surveillance by store staff. Reducing the possibilities for furtive hiding of property at or near the display shelves (the point at which many items were pocketed or slipped into a bag) might involve repositioning the shelves and gondolas to improve lines of sight for staff; reducing the height of the gondolas (which currently, as attempts continue to squeeze the greatest possible display space out of the store's square footage, are rising like plants to the light and so providing ever better cover for thieves); incorporating 'see-through' sections in the gondolas; or raising the sales points on plinths, which would have no impact on selling space.

#### (iii) Aids to surveillance

An important principle to adopt with design for surveillance is to ensure that the arrangements selected give the advantage to the 'hunters' — the store staff — rather than to the 'hunted': security mirrors, for example, have been criticised for allowing shoplifters to keep a covert eye on staff when choosing their moment to steal (Home Office, 1983). CCTV offers considerable advantage in this respect. However while it is already in use in the store, it is significant that none of the offenders arrested in the study period was caught using the CCTV. The number of attempted thefts the cameras deterred however remains unknown. Whatever the case, the siting of the cameras might be reviewed to ensure they are placed for maximum impact on the vulnerable shelves, and where possible most easily seen by the public.

#### (iv) Alarms

Once successfully concealed, stolen goods can be detected by electronic alarms that respond to tags. Their scope is large and increasing as technology advances. The actual economic preventive value of alarms now available will depend upon several factors. The first is the ease with which they can be defeated by peeling the tags off or by 'electronic counter-measures' (which in some cases can be simple to use and make). Second is the dependence of the effectiveness of the alarms on the location of sensors. If sensors are placed at the street door, large numbers of customers milling about may make it difficult for security staff to decide who had set off the alarm (especially if the offender kept cool). Placing sensors at the exits from individual floors within the store might be a better answer (the music and computer cassettes are above the ground floor). The third factor is cost of

the system in relation to the value of the goods to be protected, and the rate of theft: it is clearly only sensible to invest in a comparatively expensive measure such as an alarm system where the value of the disappearing goods themselves is high.

The argument about the cost-effectiveness of alarms applies of course to all preventive measures, and can be taken further. Physical security systems range from the relatively simple and cheap to the highly sophisticated and expensive, depending on the degree of cover provided. The number of 'professional' thieves who escape the store detectives' attention at HMV is unknown, but the large number of shoplifters actually caught at HMV are predominantly young and inexpert. Under these circumstances, installing overelaborate systems in a misdirected effort to cope with the greater skills and nerve of professional thieves would not be cost-effective. Equipment that heightens a young offender's sense of risk may be of particular value, and this could be exploited by clearly publicizing the existence of the alarm system within the store.

Deterrence — influencing the decision to steal

Introducing many of the preventive measures just described, such as alarms or improved surveillance, could very easily increase arrest levels. But this is not what is intended: a general strategy of putting off offenders by raising arrest levels is neither desirable on public cost grounds, nor, given the constraints on the store detectives' performance discussed earlier, is it feasible for the store to pursue as standard practice. Furthermore, the 'inexhaustible stream of first-time offenders' at HMV will be unaware of what the arrest rate is, so a high rate may deter no more people than a low one. Only exceptional circumstances may make deterrence-by-arrest an appropriate strategy for this store: for example, should a series of pupils from a particular school appear in the detectives' records a temporary reactive response leading to the arrest of offenders, together with action by the local police schools liaison officer, might stem a developing fashion for 'doing' HMV.

More generally, deterrence does have a place in a preventive context as long as it avoids the unwelcome by-product of large numbers of arrests. This means using deterrent measures to dissuade people from stealing rather than catching them once they have stolen. As a general principle, the decision to steal seems to depend less on the degree of punishment awaiting the captured thief, than on the *perceived risk of being caught* (Clarke, 1980). One way of raising perceived risk is through the prominent siting of notices warning that store detectives and physical security systems are in operation; and it may be possible to attune the notices to the sensitivities of the typical offenders caught in this store — using young men and teenagers in graphic illustrations of store detectives or security guards making an arrest, and thieves caught with the aid of alarm systems or CCTV. The illustrations could also play on the finding that many offenders emit clear signs of intent to steal including rapid looking about (the 'owl head'

syndrome) and nervousness (see Appendix). An advertising agency could be employed to find ways of using this information to maximum deterrent effect, making inexperienced young males feel that they, and their ways of stealing, are known to the watchers in the store.

As far as the store detectives in particular are concerned, shoplifters' perceptions of the risk they pose will be independent of the actual numbers of detectives on the floor as these are intentionally invisible in plain clothes. So while employing *some* store detectives (and publicising the fact) may deter, it is reasonable to argue that beyond a certain minimum increasing the numbers of detectives will have no effect on the offenders' sense of risk. However this could be heightened by increasing the proportion of security staff in uniform to emphasise the constant presence of watchers.

### **Summary of preventive options**

The options listed below are arranged under headings of layout and design, security systems, security staff and deterrent publicity; general management issues are also considered. For greater cost-effectiveness, many of the measures suggested should be targeted on the three key areas in the store studied: *computers, rock and pop* and *soul and disco*. The aim of the measures proposed is physically to block the act of concealment, or heighten the would-be shoplifter's sense of risk and so reduce the numbers arrested.

#### *Layout and design*

- \* Consider raising the checkout areas, lowering the gondolas or making them partially 'see-through', improving lines of sight and removing poorly over-looked corners.
- \* Try to reduce crowding, particularly at queues and round the computer display area, by for example increased spacing between the displays and installation of queue barriers.
- \* Consider bringing the key target areas into one higher security zone.

#### *Security systems*

- \* In general security systems should be able to cope with the young and amateur offenders who form the bulk of those caught at HMV. Overelaborate devices aimed at an unknown number of 'professionals' are likely to be much less cost-effective.
- \* Consider re-siting CCTV cameras close to the key target areas (but guard against offenders sneaking off to conceal goods elsewhere, by a review of blind corners, lifts and stairs).
- \* Consider extending the alarm marker system to include the tape floor.
- \* To prevent concealment consider encasing each cassette in the three key areas with a large plastic grip, removable at the sales desk and re-usable.

- \* Distinguish legitimate shoppers buying goods from several sites from offenders wandering round waiting for a suitable moment to conceal their booty, by supplying, and encouraging the use of, supermarket-type baskets;
- \* and consider colour coding for price labels, with codes for different floors and different sections.
- \* Consider improving the sealing of HMV bags containing legitimate purchases. This may reduce impulse stealing.

#### *Security staff*

- \* Deterrence of shoplifters might be enhanced by deploying *uniformed security* guards on each floor, as these can provide a constant and visible presence which may deter the young and inexperienced offender. Security mirrors and store layout and design should be reviewed to ensure the guards can see all parts of the floor more easily than shoplifters can see the guard coming and so raise the level of perceived risk of detection.

#### *Deterrent publicity*

- \* The deterrent value of the various security measures might be enhanced by including mention of their presence in posters.
- \* The deterrent value of store detectives may bear little relation to the numbers on duty, but can perhaps be enhanced by putting up notices warning shoppers that detectives are in action.
- \* The various notices might be more effective if they include representations of the typical offenders caught, juvenile males, being arrested at the store. Advertising consultants might be brought in to advise on their content.

#### *General management issues*

- \* Management should obtain and analyse systematic information from store detectives, to monitor and update preventive strategies: the pattern of crime in the store may change, not only in response to initial preventive measures, but also due to external influences such as shoplifting 'fashions' among the young, or the emergence of particular gangs. Store detectives' records should include items to assist in this process, particularly information on location and also perhaps the schools which juvenile offenders attend: records should include not only actual arrests but also warnings; and when the store records are computerised, subject to the requirements of data protection legislation, all this data should be included in the scheme. If management decide to involve security guards and sales personnel in surveillance of suspicious customers, they should also participate in the record keeping, obviously with minimal paperwork.
- \* In designing their computerised stock control system, management should ensure that it operates at a sufficient level of detail to identify sections (consistent with those used by store detectives and other staff in their incident

records), and wherever possible can distinguish between theft (shoppers or staff), damage and delivery shortage. Regular reports on losses by location should be made available to security and other staff, and incident records should be cross-checked against stock control.

- \* The analysis of constraints on store detectives' capacity suggests that stores like HMV could usefully consider moving away, on a trial basis, from the current fairly rigid policy of referral of shoplifters to the police, and consider adopting a more flexible policy which would involve in some cases formal cautioning of offenders by store staff, and in others pre-emptive warning off of customers behaving suspiciously. These approaches will be cheaper to the store and to the public purse and may be no less effective.

### **Overall conclusions**

The contribution of crime analysis in this exercise was not so much in originating the preventive ideas themselves — many are common sense in nature, or are already products or services on the market — but in assembling the right information to guide selection of the shortlist of preventive options most suitable for the circumstances of this store, and especially in identifying where preventive effort should be focused.

The case study confirmed in detail what many suspected, namely that the traditional 'spot arrest and refer to police' model of controlling shoplifting is inadequate to the task, at least in the circumstances of the store studied here. Detectives at HMV probably face many more offenders than they could catch and process and attempts to increase the arrest rate by taking on more detectives would be impossibly expensive to the store, apart from choking up the local police facilities for handling the offenders. While the case for the alternative, preventive approach is not yet proven (for the store, the ultimate test of course is whether it works, without sacrificing profits), the research strongly suggests it is worthwhile exploring. The likely cost-effectiveness of many of the preventive options identified in this exercise — and thus the proportion coming within the bounds of financial feasibility — was enhanced by the discovery that by far the greatest proportion of losses identified by store detectives came from only three out of nearly forty sections of the shop.

Store detectives have much more to offer than simply their role as catchers and deterrers of shoplifters (and staff thieves). Subject to certain limitations and cross-checking, they can usefully inform management decision-making through crime analysis, identify weaknesses insecurity and suggest preventive measures on the basis of their considerable experience. The analysis complete, they are available as one of a number of resources which management can and should use in a selective, deliberate and integrated manner to reduce crime. It should prove possible, using recording of the kind tried out here, for each store or group of stores to develop and clarify policies, guidelines and training material to enhance the currently rather 'home-grown' self-taught skills and experience of

detectives. In other words, the role of the *manager* of store detectives is an important one that should be developed.

As this report goes to press, a number of its recommendations have been implemented by HMV. Uniformed security guards have replaced some of the store detectives and a 'sticky label' alarm system is now in operation covering the entire audio cassette floor. The computer cassette section has closed, in part due to its popularity with thieves. The impact on crime of these measures will be kept under review.

## Appendix

### Factors that made store detectives suspicious

#### *Preparatory behaviour of offender*

Looking about (including 'eyes')	131
Looking at camera	4
Looking at cashiers	2
Heard planning to steal	2
Looked at same area shelf long time	3
Standing very close to display	1
Choosing goods very quickly	2
Picking up and replacing tapes	1
Replacing goods on wrong shelf	2
Walking holding cassettes	7
Walking along time/suspiciously	4
Walking holding cassette separately from case	3
Large number of cassettes and large bag	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>

#### *Nervousness*

Nervous (including 'sweating immensely')	16
Kept dropping cassettes	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

#### *Concealment*

Saw act of concealment	16
Saw removal of tape from box or unwrapping of box	4
Holding goods close to body/clothing	10
Holding clothing to hide goods	1
Holding tape between body and magazine	1
Tape hidden by crossed hands before body	1
Large object under clothing	1
Fiddling with pockets	1
Large or open bag	4
Fiddling with bag	1
Picked off price label	3
Goods openly exposed	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

#### *Shopper out of place*

With goods in wrong section/on wrong floor/ being taken out of section	9
On stairs/in lift with goods in hand	5
Approaching stairs with cassette in hand	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

<i>Wrong people/in wrong place/simply unlucky</i>		
Juvenile(s) in particular section/messing about/breakdancing		12
Other		<u>5</u>
	Total	<u>17</u>
 <i>Security systems</i>		
Tape seal on HMV bag broken/HMV bag open		4
Alarm activated		1
Alerted by sales staff		1
Label on cassette		1
Price sticker stuck on hand		<u>1</u>
	Total	<u>8</u>
	Grand Total	<u>265</u>

Note: the figures relate to elements mentioned by store detectives on the record sheet — more than one element may have been cited in a given incident.

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