

Getting the most of uniformed retail security officers

Summary Report



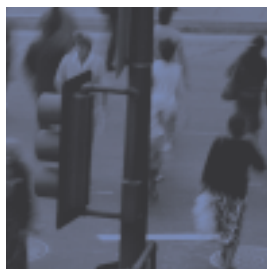
Preface

This research was funded by a consortium of sponsors through the auspices of the British Retail Consortium. The study owes much to the initiative of John Purnell, Mike Schuck and other members of the BRC Crime Team and we thank them for their support. We would particularly like to thank the following organisations for providing sponsorship as without their contributions this study would not have been possible:

- *Argos*
- *Boots*
- *Comet*
- *Homebase plc*
- *Tesco*
- *Capitol Security*
- *Carlisle Group*
- *Frances Clarke*
- *Nitelite*
- *OCS*
- *Reliance*
- *Securicor*
- *Securiplan*
- *Total Security*

In addition, many other retail and security companies offered their help in different ways and we are grateful to them.

Professor Martin Gill



Introduction

The aim of this summary report is to outline key issues that impact upon the effectiveness of uniformed retail security officers. The advice is based on findings from a study sponsored by retail clients and their suppliers and both parties have had extensive input into the ideas presented here.

The study involved interviews, group discussions and self-completion questionnaires. Participants included senior and middle managers from both security and retail companies, as well as store managers and retail security officers themselves. The findings were discussed with a range of experts, including the sponsors, before compiling the final report.

Key findings

- More than 7 in 10 officers knew nothing about the Security Industry Regulation Act, although those that did were very positive about it. Similarly, store managers knew little about the implications of regulation.
- When store managers were asked to choose just one security measure, their overwhelming favourite was uniformed security officers.
- Retailers regarded the high profile visibility of uniformed officers as a major benefit. They act as a visible deterrent, reassure staff, and are an identifiable resource when a crisis or need occurs.
- When store managers were asked an open-ended question about what makes a security officer effective, 26.1% of responses mentioned 'visibility', 20.1% 'awareness', while 'store-specific knowledge' was mentioned by 16.7% of respondents. Other notable attributes were 'being alert' (13.3%) and 'detering' (15.9%).
- Three-quarters of store managers with contract security officers claimed to assess their performance and this led to them having a more positive view of the security officers' work
- Retailers most commonly deploy uniformed security in response to the threat of violence to staff, customer theft or a combination of the two.
- Some retailers limit contract security officers' contribution to store security, due to sensitivities about external contractors learning about internal security problems that some retailers consider confidential.
- There are often marked differences between the original rationale for deploying security officers, the role specified in contracts, the role store managers expect from security officers and the assignment instructions the officers eventually receive.
- Lack of clarity on security officers' precise role creates different definitions of effectiveness at different management levels within retail organisations. Implicit expectations sometimes conflict, leading to contradictory perspectives on what 'effectiveness' really means.
- Retailers and security companies often have a negative view of each other's approach to security. This reflects the general lack of clarity about the security function in retailing.
- Retail companies measure security officers' and guarding companies' performance by compliance with standards that do not always directly relate to the original reasons for deploying them.
- Further, it is not always clear what security officers should do to achieve effectiveness in terms of any of the definitions retailers use. Is this that security officers do not have clear objectives?
- Store managers do not always understand or 'buy in' to their company's policy on the role of security personnel. Yet their evaluation of individual officers' performance has a major influence on the retail company's overall evaluation of guarding companies.
- 9 in 10 security officers believe they meet retailer expectations.
- The most frequently mentioned improvement contract security officers would make to their job was better support and feedback from store managers.

A Security Strategy

There were many examples of retailers not using security officers to maximum advantage. We identified eight questions that retailers and security companies should consider when deploying security officers, and that should form the core of the strategy.

What exactly is the problem faced in store, and what is the rationale for believing security officers offer the best solution?

- A good risk assessment is crucial and these are rarely well conducted or well-heeded. It is important to understand fully what the problem is and why it has occurred prior to deploying any measure. All too often companies deploy security officers as a knee-jerk reaction.
- Set clear objectives for officers. A lack of clarity about the reasons for engaging security officers creates confusion in the way in which they are used and what they contribute, and makes it difficult or impossible to assess whether they have delivered value for money.

In what ways will uniformed security officers help or hinder the effectiveness of other security measures?

- Specify how security officers will work with other security measures and to what precise end. Security officers are sometimes expected to work with CCTV and radio link schemes, as well as respond to alarms and other duties. Yet this type of integration needs planning.
- Working with other people and with technology can help make work more interesting, thereby boosting commitment and promoting other benefits.

Does the guarding contract reflect the rationale for deploying uniformed security officers?

- The content of contracts/agreements does not always reflect the rationale for deploying security officers. Sometimes the process of agreeing the contract becomes detached from shop floor realities. Too often little account is taken of the authority of store manager to impose his/her own ideas – rather than those of the retail company – on what security officers' should be doing. This seriously complicates assessments of security officers' performance. It also leads to role confusion with consequent negative impact on morale.
- Ensure that the agreed role is clearly communicated to all parties. It is essential that there is an overall 'owner' of the communication process, and that complementary messages are sent where appropriate and circulated amongst suppliers and retailers.

What is the Return on Investment from deploying security officers?

This will never be easy since attributing any successes to security officers directly is clouded by the existence of 'confounding factors' that is other factors that can explain positive results such as changes in product protection or reduced display quantities. Moreover, there are no easy ways of measuring 'reassurance' although it has been suggested that for example, turnover rates of front line staff may be a possibility.

A focus on financial returns may drive attention to performance rather than just costs, which currently dominate perspectives on security officers' work. Additionally it will provide evidence against the argument presented by procurement officers and others that the lowest price is best. Return on Investment Models can highlight all the contributions that security officers (and other measures) make and therein draw attention to the broader contribution of the security function. PRCI is currently developing ROI models, which are more helpful.

Are security officers and store managers adequately prepared to fulfil their security responsibilities?

- Ensure that all the key players have core competencies. Security officers do not always have the competencies to fulfil expectations. Managers do not always have the competencies or commitment to maximise the input of officers and at the same time make their job more interesting and engaging.
- The role of security officers is potentially very varied and can require a wide range of competencies. These include 'people skills' in terms of interaction with staff and customers, to practical and legal skills, such as knowing when it is appropriate to make an arrest and how to avoid 'bad stops'. It is also essential that they learn site-specific skills as each retail setting may vary considerably.
- Store managers may have a very narrow understanding of what security officers are for and may be unaware of how officer's can enhance the retail experience if properly deployed

Do you have KPIs for security officers and security companies and are they consistent with the reasons you require them?

- Performance indicators sometimes do not focus on the stated purpose of uniformed security officers.
- Many performance indicators related to 'administrative' rather than operational issues: hours worked, absences, numbers of door checks made, and so on. While these are necessary, linking performance measurement to the original reasons for deploying security officers was not always evident.
- Transparent performance measures can help ensure a level playing field during the tendering and specification phase. Retailers can better assess cost-effectiveness and provide objective feedback to officers about their performance and its impact upon retailing. Additionally this enhances their motivation and interest in their work.
- There are opportunities to develop standards to measure the effectiveness of the overall security policy and response to security risks particularly in respect of:
 - the number, type and impact of recorded security incidents
 - the cost and impact on retail efficiency
 - the impact of technology
 - levels of compliance with security procedures

Is the supervision and tasking of security officers consistent?

- Store management changes, personality clashes and other factors can result in inconsistent supervision of security officers.
- There is sometimes a lack of clarity about who should task security officers, the duties they should undertake and how they should perform them. For example, some store managers require security officers to help with display replenishment even though these tasks were never included in either assignment instructions or original contract agreements. Using security officers in this way can undermine their main role and makes it difficult to measure their effectiveness fairly.
- Tasking of security officers needs to be managed at the store level, yet this must be within the parameters of a documented corporate policy framework. This ensures an appropriate level of consistency across the organisation and with the original rationale for deploying security officers.
- There are sometimes no common standards respecting such key tasks as how to prevent violence to shoppers and staff; how to deter shop thieves; how to eject those who commit nuisance or how to prevent access by those who are barred.
- It is also essential to define officers' duties, who is responsible for local decision-making and how to ensure local and corporate objectives do not conflict and that any extra duties contribute to achieving core aims.
- The command structure must be transparent.

Are retail security officers integrated into your retail teams, and what can you do to encourage their personal commitment?

- The research found that security officers' integration within and commitment to the retailer varies considerably. Some retailers reported they had managed to increase levels of integration and commitment by ensuring that officers perceived themselves as part of a larger family.
- This internal integration is a two-way process that revolves around individual retailer perceptions of integrity, reliability, ability, availability and the absence of other alternatives.
- External integration is the degree to which officers form part of the wider local retailing scene. The natural links to develop are with the police, other retailers and shopping mall or town centre managers to:
 - increase the mutual flow of information and intelligence
 - enhance the quality of police responses to calls for assistance
 - being able to support police initiatives to address retail crime.
- Store managers were more positive about security officers when they were more closely involved with them and had a role in assessing their performance.
- It is important to demonstrate to security officers that they make a real difference to the retail environment and that their work is valued.
- Making officers' work interesting is important, there is scope for being innovative here.

Are there procedures for learning from good practice?

In an area where good practice is evolving, making an effort to learn about good ideas and new ones is crucial. This is important both internally and externally. Representative associations and independents can come together to develop good practice. This research study is just one example, and there are others. Moreover, security publications, journals, and magazines provide forums for disseminating findings. The PRCI website will provide further details.

Summary

Retail security officers can make a major contribution to an efficient, profitable and safe retail environment, and some store managers said so and were glowing in their tributes. Their symbolic uniformed presence –cannot be wholly delegated to any other member of the retail team.

However, deploying security officers does not guarantee a crime-free store. Effective security is the product of a combined, holistic approach that integrates human vigilance with carefully selected technologies – all responding to a full risk assessment.

The research findings indicated that the deployment of uniformed security officers is sometimes a ‘knee-jerk’ or default response to a perceived problem, rather than a rational solution to specific problems.

Further, all forms of security – whether technical or human – are easy to mismanage. Many organisations neither apply nor expect the same rigorous approach to their security policies that they demand for their merchandising, sales and customer service doctrines. This can result in a cascade of consequences and the visible security presence is a prime target for blame when things go wrong.

These issues deserve careful thought and we hope this brief guide will help.

For further information about this or any other crime, risk and security issues, please do not hesitate to contact us at the address shown on the back cover. You can download a copy of the full report and all the recommendations from our website: www.perpetuitygroup.com



PRCI is a management and research consultancy and is a spin out company of the University of Leicester. We have also produced reports on alarms policy, CCTV and other security topics. Let us help you to get the best out of your security, contact us at:-

Perpetuity Research & Consultancy International (PRCI) Ltd
6 Salisbury Road
Leicester
LE1 7QR
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)116 252 5728
Fax: +44 (0)116 252 2491
Email: prci@perpetuitygroup.com
www.perpetuitygroup.com/research.html



Copyright notice

Copyright © 2004 Perpetuity Research & Consultancy International (PRCI) Ltd .