

Businesses turn to Bodycams as Retail Crime Soars

The statistics are quite sobering.

The latest British Retail Consortium (BRC) Annual Crime Survey reports that retail crime has hit record heights.

The organisation - which represents over 200 major retail brands - says that 22,000 thefts daily are costing retailers a staggering £2.2 billion. It's a depressing tally that has jumped by more than 20% in just one year.

Violence and abuse directed at shop workers has also soared by over 50%, with over 2,000 incidents recorded every day, a figure four times higher than in 2020.

Daily, retail staff report 70 incidents involving a weapon.

In a brutal summation, Helen Dickinson, the BRC's Chief Executive, stated that: "Retail crime is spiralling out of control," rightly adding, that "We owe it to the three million hardworking people working in retail to bring the epidemic of crime to heel. No one should go to work in fear."

The Home Office's Commercial Victimization Study also shows that whilst clearly not an issue unique to the industry, retailers and wholesalers suffer the highest rates of crime of any business sector.

Within that sector, the CVS found that supermarkets in particular experience much higher levels of customer theft, assault and threats.

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-Helen Dickinson, Chief Executive, British Retail Consortium.

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Of course for those in the frontline – the checkout operators, customer service assistants, shelf-stackers, managers and security staff – it’s personal.

In a survey of over 10,000 retail staff, the shopworkers’ union, USDAW (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers), found that 77% had experience verbal abuse and 53% had been threatened by a customer.

Even more shocking, the union’s Freedom From Fear report found that one in ten of all retail workers had actually been the victim of an assault.

Such is the scale of that problem that the government is introducing a standalone offence of assaulting a retail worker. Due to apply in England and Wales, those convicted under the new law will face up to six months in prison and/or an unlimited fine.



This follows the introduction of similar legislation by the Scottish government in 2020, since when it has been used to address around 10,000 incidents.

It’s a move much welcomed by retailers and their staff alike. But its success in tackling what many see as an epidemic of retail crime will require retailers to do their part.

In its 2024 report, The State of UK retail worker safety, communications and security specialist, Motorola, found that 62% of retail workers felt their store could be doing more to protect them and their co-workers.

Of course retailers are far from inert. Under its Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities campaign, the Co-Op equipped staff at 250 of its stores with Motorola’s VT100 body worn cameras.

As Co-op store manager Nigel Smith commented: “Having the body cams in our store has proved beneficial – they’ve given colleagues that extra reassurance and they have all taken to using them well.

“If people come into the store with intent to cause trouble, if they see that we have a camera on, it does make them think twice.”



DID YOU KNOW?

Retail is one of the UK’s most important trade sectors. A UK parliamentary research briefing reports that some 325,000 retail business support around three million jobs and generate annual sales well north of 500 billion.

BRC data reveals a wider picture with retailers having increased spending on crime prevention measures by 50% in 2023-24 to a £2.2 billion.

That can be seen as a substantial cost, but it's also investment as technologies such as body-worn cameras (also known bodycams or videobadges) can help deter, de-escalate and evidence incidents.

Predicting that the global market for body-worn cameras in the retail sector will double between 2022-27, Paul Bremner, research analyst at technology research and advisory group, Omdia, notes: "Retailers are increasingly seeking durable, high-performance solutions that not only aid in loss prevention but also provide critical protection for staff against aggressive or hostile behaviours, enhancing both security and workplace safety."

Given the increasingly vital role bodycams are playing in the fight against growing retail crime, for retailers the decision is not so much whether to invest in them, but which technologies they should invest in.

The crisis in numbers

- 29% increase in police recorded shoplifting offences in 2023-24.¹
- 10% of retail workers were victims of assault.²
- £2.2 billion annual cost of customer theft.³
- 55,000 theft incidents daily.³
- 50% increase in retail violence and abuse.³
- 77% of retail workers suffer verbal abuse.²

1. Office for National Statistics, Crime in England & Wales 2024. 2. USDAW, Freedom From Fear 2024. 3. British Retail Consortium, Annual Crime Survey 2025.

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-Co-Op store manager, Nigel Smith.



10 features to look for in retail bodycam solution

Digital Evidence Management Systems

This might seem counterintuitive, but the place to start is not necessarily with bodycams. The most vital piece of kit is a Digital Evidence Management System (DEMS).

This is the back-office technology that captures, organises, manages and enables sharing of digital evidence.

One platform Avaira's engineers' favour is Motorola's VideoManager. This cloud or on-premise DEMS provides full control over all connected bodycams as well as third party cameras, and incorporates an automated audit system which maintains the integrity of evidence.

It makes the creation of evidence-ready footage fast, simple and secure.

Like a defendant, this will stand up in court!

Connectivity

The connectivity your chosen bodycam needs to offer will depend upon where you plan to deploy it.

Many body-worn cameras are equipped with WiFi capabilities.

That's fine as long as the person wearing it works only within range of the router which, typically, is sited within a store. Once they step out of range, they're vulnerable.

A bodycam such as the Motorola V500 which incorporates Long Term Evolution (LTE) wireless communications will offer 4G or 5G mobile connections.

That means video and audio can be captured and transmitted to your DEMS from both within a store and, say, a car park or loading area.

Two-way radio integration

An integrated video and audio solution provides an even more robust safety and security solution.

For example, Motorola's R7 digital portable two-way radio and Wave TLK 110 push-to-talk (PTT) Wave PTX can be connected to the Motorola VB400 bodycam.

This offers multiple safety and evidential benefits. Hit the radio's emergency button and the bodycam will not just alert colleagues but instantly start recording. The wearer receives urgent support whilst evidence is gathered.

Digital two-way radios also facilitate one-to-one and team communications, enabling a more co-ordinated response to events.

Features such as man down and fall alerts, better protect lone workers with a failure to respond automatically notifying colleagues.



Live streaming & audio

A bodycam offering live-streaming allows managers to view an incident as it unfolds. That footage will also be captured for evidential purposes, increasing the chances of a successful prosecution.

Motorola's GoLive Audio technology, which is a feature of many of the company's body cameras, goes one step further. At a push of button this connects a vulnerable worker with their supervisor or security advisor who can then offer immediate advice on how to best manage a situation whilst they observe it in real time.

Peer-assisted recording

Peer-assisted recording (PAR) is a clever feature which powers collective recording by a number of related bodycams

Activation of PAR-enabled bodycam will automatically trigger recording by nearby body cameras.

This provides for a more comprehensive and robust evidential capture, with multiple cameras providing different perspectives to both overcome obstruction of view of any one camera and delivering a more detailed record.

Pre and post-recording

Expecting the unexpected is, by definition, tricky. How is a retail worker to know when an incident is going to occur and, therefore, when to activate their body-worn camera?

This is why better quality bodycams offer both pre and post-record functionality. This allows the wearer to capture footage before and after they actually activate their camera.

For some models that might be a 30-second buffer, although Motorola bodycams offer a more generous two-minutes of before and afters.

This can be really useful if, for example, an individual caught on camera contests the circumstances leading up to or following an incident. The buffered footage provides what may be essential context, strengthening an evidential case.

Battery life

Like a carton of UHT, you want the battery in your bodycam to have a long life.

Look for a bodycam with a battery that can put in a shift. When setting a marker, bear in mind that retail shifts can run up to 12 hours.

Equally, check out recharge times so you know you're always going to have cameras available when you need them.



Low light capabilities

Retail crime is not restricted to the bright lights of the aisles. Theft, criminal damage and assaults can occur in dimly lit car parks, paths, stairwells, loading bays and other areas.

For this reason, when specifying a bodycam, it's important to assess its low light capabilities.

As an example, the aforementioned VB400 bodycam will capture high-definition footage in low light conditions down to 0.2 lux. That's equivalent to one-fifth of a lumen per square metre. If you're still scratching your head as to what that means, in comparison a standard 8w LED household bulb will emit over 800 lumens.

CCTV integration

The ability to integrate your mobile and static cameras under a single video management system is incredibly useful.

CCTV is brilliant at providing oversight of your front and back of house retail space, whilst body-worn cameras offer both mobility and a first-person view from, literally, the shopfloor.

Returning to our good friend the VB400 bodycam, this is compatible with any video management system which supports the ONVIF Profile S IP video streaming interface.

This means that both CCTV and bodycam footage can be captured, stored and managed on the same platform.

Encryption and verification

Maintaining the integrity of evidence captured is, of course, vital. It's important then that a full audit trail is secured and that content is encrypted, end-to-end.

Deploying a DEMS such as VideoManager provides that reassurance. The Motorola platform digitally signs video as it is inputted, verifying its authenticity, whilst audit logs provide traceability of all actions taken on the content such as viewing, sharing and downloading

The system has also been designed to support adherence to National Cyber Security principles, so that, for example, all data flowing both in and out of a VideoManager cloud is encrypted. Data within the cloud is further protected through network-level isolation

At a device level, cameras like the VB400 also prevent wearers from accessing, viewing or deleting any recordings directly from their bodycam. This inhibits any attempt to interfere with or destroy video evidence.



Need help specifying retail body-worn cameras?

If you would like further advice on choosing the right bodycam for retail roles in your business, please contact our specialist team for an expert consultation.

info@avoira.com [0333 001 5151](tel:0333 001 5151) avoira.com

