



Reducing Opportunistic Crime in Garden Retail by Learning From the Field of Psychology



Introduction

Crime can be frequent and costly for retail businesses. The British Retail Consortium's (BRC) Crime Survey reported that in 2021 the overall annual cost of crime in UK retail – taking both actual incidents and crime prevention costs into account – had risen to nearly £2.5 billion, up from £1.7 billion in 2016-17. Customer theft accounted for a massive 96% of incidents and cost UK retailers £935 million, having risen year-on-year for the last 5 years. But as well as the financial damage, it can be emotional and feel personal to be a victim of retail crime.

Crime is prevalent and costly to the horticulture industry too - 22% of HTA member garden centres told us that customer theft was a major issue for their business (with a further 49% reporting it as a minor issue), meanwhile 40% of garden centres reported abuse towards staff as a minor issue too. Sophisticated, organised crime is one major area, but in this guide, we'll focus on less-organised, opportunistic crime (in particular, theft) and show how learning from psychology can make a real difference in deterring and reducing crime.

£16 million



the estimated HTA member garden centre turnover lost to theft in the last year

In this report we look at:

- 1 The state of crime in garden centres** (pages 3 and 4)
- 2 Why the crimes are committed** (page 5)
- 3 Ideas and examples applying principles of psychology to deter crime** (pages 6 – 9)

1 The state of crime in garden centres

Crime in garden centres

We conducted a survey to find out more about the crime specifically affecting garden centres. The majority of HTA member garden centres surveyed indicated that customer violence towards staff, and vandalism to stock or property wasn't an issue for their businesses (see Figure 1). Customer abuse towards staff is much more prevalent affecting 40% of garden centres, albeit on a minor scale. However, customer theft was rated as the biggest problem, with 22% of garden centres describing it as a major issue with a further 49% saying it is a minor issue for the business.

“If at all, to what extent are the following things an issue for your business?”



Figure 1: The extent of crime in garden retail

The cost of crime to garden centres

The HTA estimates that in the last year, approximately **£16million of member garden centres' turnover was lost to theft**. One third of garden centres in our survey reported that less than 0.25% of their turnover was lost to theft in the last year (see Figure 2). 14% of garden centres reported a loss between 0.5-1%, one in ten lost between 1-2%, and 9% experienced loss of 2% of turnover or more, highlighting that theft is a sizeable issue for our industry with very real consequences for businesses to be able to re-invest in the business.

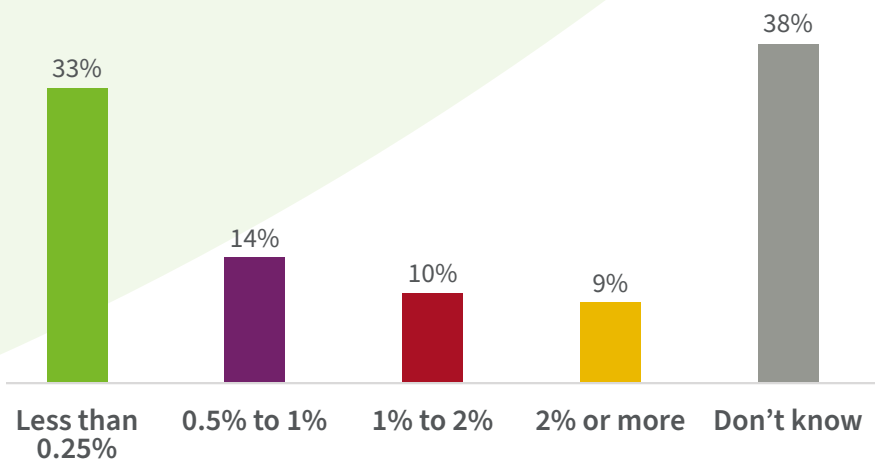


Figure 2: The proportion of retailer turnover lost to theft in the last year



1 Crime Survey 2021, British Retail Consortium (2021) - <https://brc.org.uk/media/677737/brc-crime-survey-2021.pdf>

2 HTA Q1 Member Voice Survey, HTA (2022); base: 45 retailer members

'At risk' items

Members told us that the most frequently stolen items were packet seeds, followed by secateurs and other hand tools (see Figure 3). Watering products/parts, bulbs and gifts/jewellery were reported as vulnerable to be stolen but on a more minor scale, though still affecting a significant proportion of garden centres.

“For which of the following products is theft an issue?”

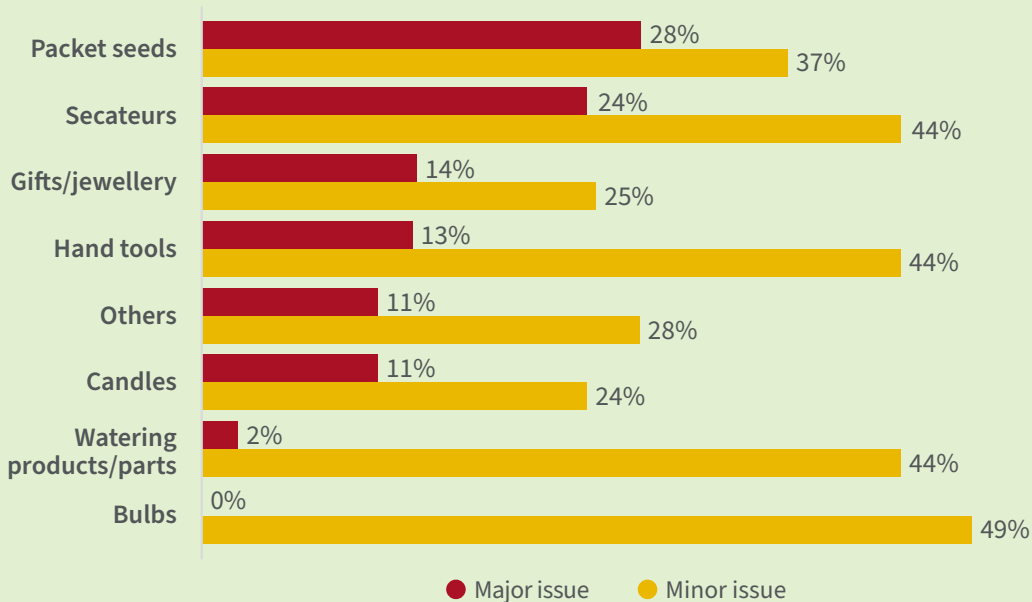


Figure 3: The relative scale of theft across different product categories

Deterrents currently used in garden centres

The majority (81%) of the garden centres surveyed have live CCTV cameras in place aiming to deter theft (and other crime). Other commonly used methods include signage, fake/dummy CCTV and the physical barrier of placing products behind locked cabinets. Security tags and sensor alarms on exit are used by approximately one in four members, though the types of products this method can be used on is likely to be limited.

But as well as physical deterrents, we can also learn from the field of psychology to understand why certain products might be more at risk of theft, why people may commit crime, and some tactics you can deploy to deter it.

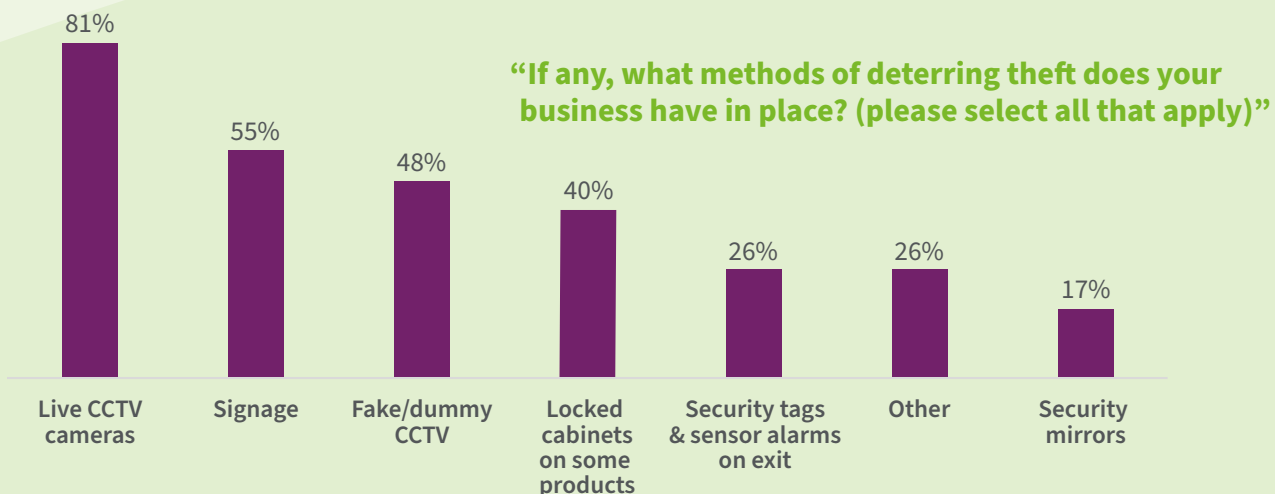


Figure 4: The physical methods of theft deterrent currently used by garden centres

2 Why the crimes are committed

Why are seeds and secateurs the most stolen items?

The CRAVED model³ provides a helpful acronym pointing out and helping us to remember the characteristics of products that are ‘hot’ to potential offenders.

- 1) **C**oncealable – items that can be hidden discretely (within clothing, bags, or within another product)
- 2) **R**emovable – items that are easy to remove (from the shelf/store)
- 3) **A**vailable – items that are accessible and easy to attain
- 4) **V**aluable – items with a higher value, especially attractive for resale
- 5) **E**njoyable – items that are stolen for a thrill or to provide enjoyment
- 6) **D**isposable – items that are easy to move on/resell

Identifying and risk assessing the products in your store which may fall into these categories can help you target the most at risk areas to focus on. For example, Seeds could be stolen more frequently due to being easily concealable, removable, available; whilst secateurs could be thought of as concealable and valuable.



Why are crimes committed? Using psychology to understand and deter the individual

The Theory of Planned Behaviour⁴ says that human behaviour is a result of three factors:

- **Attitudes** – motivations, feelings towards a person/place/event etc, reasons for performing or not performing a behaviour
- **Subjective norms** – what you think your peers believe or would think of your behaviour
- **Perceived behavioural control** – the tools or means you have to achieve the desired outcome, the “can I do it?”

These attitudes, social norms and perceived controls differ from person-to-person, and some individuals may find themselves in situations which add pressure or adjust their perceptions of acceptable behaviour. The Strain Theory⁵ suggests that when an individual experiences ‘strain’ or misalignment between the goals society says they should be working towards (e.g. financial success, a certain social status) and the legitimate means they have to achieve these goals (e.g. money, intelligence etc.), negative attitudes and deviance can occur.

Understanding why individuals might commit crimes can help us think about how to prevent them.

Retail environments are full of cues, messages and suggestions which communicate to shoppers; and we can draw on psychology to manipulate these cues in our favour, to unconsciously encourage more pro-social behaviours. This is known as ‘Nudge Theory’, and we talk through some applications of it on page 6.

³ The CRAVED model, Clarke (1999)

⁵ Strain Theory, Merton (1957)

⁴ Theory of Planned Behaviour, Azjen (1981)

3 Ideas and examples applying principles of psychology to deter crime

Psychological nudges to learn from

The ‘watching eyes’ effect

Research has shown that just the feeling of being watched may be enough to make us rethink and modify our actions. The ‘watching eyes’ effect refers to a concept whereby the mere presence of pictures and/or stylised images of eyes have been shown to reduce anti-social behaviour by 35%. The subconscious feeling of being watched helps increase the feeling of risk or judgement and undermines the perceived behavioural control we mentioned above (the perceived likelihood of success, the “can I do it without getting caught?”).

The idea has already been put to practice across Britain by local police forces to reduce bicycle theft, and in the UK Government’s National Anti-Littering strategies.



Environmental charity Hubbub’s “Communitrees” project where faces designed by local children and made from reclaimed litter reduced littering in the Forest of Dean by 30%⁸.

Similarly, eye images have been reported to increase pro-social behaviour too – one study found that a picture of human eyes added to charity donation buckets in supermarkets increased donations by 48% in comparison with a control condition⁹, subconsciously nudging shoppers to behave in a socially desirable way!

⁶ Do ‘watching eyes’ influence antisocial behavior? A systematic review & meta-analysis (Deer, Dutton & Fox, 2019) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1090513817303264>

⁷ ‘Cycle Thieves, We Are Watching You’: Impact of a Simple Signage Intervention against Bicycle Theft (Nettle, Nott & Bateson, 2012)



Example:

A study by Newcastle University and Northumbria Police which reduced bicycle theft by 62% in the locations where ‘watching eyes’ were deployed⁷.



A similar sign used by Thames Valley Police.

⁸ Communitrees Project (Hubbub, 2016): <https://www.hubbub.org.uk/the-communitrees>

⁹ Eye images increase charitable donations: Evidence from an opportunistic field experiment in a supermarket (Powell, Roberts & Nettle, 2012)

Changing mood through music

Numerous research studies have shown that different genres of music can affect moods, emotions, and feelings. **Playing carefully chosen overhead music can create a calm ambience in store, reducing tension and feelings of hostility and anger**, increasing feelings of positivity and relaxation ; in other words, altering the attitudes and the feelings towards a person/place/event etc. we mentioned earlier that often lead to a planned behaviour. The impact of music is also usually subconscious and unobtrusive – many shoppers do not notice the impact it has.

For example, slow-tempo tracks have been shown to decrease shoppers' perceptions of how long they have been waiting in queues when compared to conditions without music or with faster-tempo tracks . This is an example of reducing a frustration and pain point for a customer, that could in some cases lead to antisocial behaviour or abuse directed at staff.

The style of music can also be targeted to be purposefully unappealing to unwanted or antisocial groups. For example, classical music has been used as a 'sonic weapon' to make a particular area undesirable for antisocial youth groups or 'loiterers' to occupy.



Example:

Transport for London ran an 18-month trial of playing operatic and instrumental music at 40 underground stations. During the trial, they reported a 33% decrease in robberies, a 25% decrease in assaults on staff, and a 37% decrease in vandalism.



Note this!

Slower, instrumental/classical music has also been shown to be more beneficial to sales and customer spending than faster or popular chart music. One study found that consumer spending increased when classical music was played to create an atmosphere of wealth, compared with chart music.

Meanwhile, faster-tempo tracks can have the negative impact of speeding up a customer's journey around the store as they 'shop to the beat', reducing browsing and impulse purchasing!



¹⁰ The effect of different types of music on mood, tension and mental clarity (McCraty, Barrios-Choplin, Atkinson & Tomasino, 1998)

¹¹ Musical tempo and waiting perceptions (Oakes, 2003)

¹² The influence of background music on shopping behavior: classical versus top-forty music in a wine store. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 20. 336-340. (Areni & Kim, 1993)



Utilise your staff and encourage psychological ownership among employees

One of the easiest ways to deter shoplifters is by leveraging your staff and customer service practices. Whilst at busy times, resourcing may need to be considered, the following ideas could be some easy wins to help to deter shoplifters:

- **Greet all customers** – having a member of staff at the store entrance to welcome all customers not only sets the tone for a good customer experience, but it also lets shoplifters know that they've been acknowledged and identified, increasing the perceived behavioural control (their perceived likelihood of success) should they choose to try and steal.
- **Numbers on the shop floor** – one common shoplifting tactic is to work in pairs and distract sales floor staff. By ensuring you have multiple pairs of eyes there to potentially detect any unsavoury activity, the shoplifter's perceived behavioural control is reduced.
- **Ask customers if they would like assistance** – not only is this offering extra customer service, but by asking if a customer needs help and letting them know you'll be around if they do, you're also showing potential shoplifters that you're attentive and not passive, again increasing their perceived risk of getting caught.

- **Train staff on the signs to look out for** – staff can be made aware of the tactics shoplifters might use to get away with stealing such as concealing products within each other, false returns or price switching. Implementing a shoplifting policy can be a good way to detail how staff are expected to respond if they encounter a shoplifter in the store too, so they feel confident in raising the alarm.

Research has shown that by encouraging a sense of psychological ownership towards the business among employees, a greater propensity to intervene and actively prevent theft or antisocial behaviour against the business may be shown¹³. **Psychological ownership refers to the feeling that something is yours (an object, organisation, idea etc.) irrespective of actual legal/formal ownership**¹⁴. An engaged, satisfied workforce who feel looked after, and take ownership for the business' success and their role within that will likely care more about preventing acts of crime against it¹⁵.

This can be fostered by enabling employees to contribute to their work creatively, to work autonomously, learn about the wider impact their role has and by involving them in decision-making.

¹³ The role of psychological ownership in shoplifting prevention: An exploratory study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 44, pp. 253-265, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.07.015. (Potdar, Guthrie, Gnoth & Garry, 2018).

¹⁴ Toward a theory of psychological ownership in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 298-310; (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001).

¹⁵ Why employees stay: the roles of psychological ownership, territoriality and work relationship closeness in affecting employee turnover intention. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s11782-017-0010-x> (Lu, Liu & Zhao, 2017).

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)

CPTED focuses on the settings where the crime occurs and changing the environment to reduce opportunities for crime, rather than on those committing the criminal acts themselves. They're also known as techniques for 'designing out crime'¹⁶. Research studying ex-shoplifter's journeys and narrative when navigating retail environments showed that surveillance is a key deterrent – the threat of being observed and subsequently challenged was the most frequently referenced deterrent, with physical security measures noted as easier to overcome¹⁷. With this in mind, some key considerations for making alterations to the store environment could be:

- **Minimising 'black spots'** or areas of the store where a shoplifter could go easily undetected, or have staff positioned within sight of them – mirrors are also great tools to increase visibility of products and people if angled correctly
- Ensuring all areas of the store are **well-lit**
- Reducing the **height of shelving** to allow for clear paths of vision
- **Checkouts positioned** in a place that makes it difficult to leave the store undetected
- **Placement of commonly stolen items** like seeds and scateurs in an area where there is always a member of staff (i.e. by the checkouts)
- High-ticket items kept behind **lock and key**

- **Cameras and signage** used to let potential shoplifters know they're being watched. Cameras that are linked up to a screen so that customers can see a live feed of themselves entering the store also let potential shoplifters know the cameras are live and they're watched from the moment they enter. A similar principle is often used at self-checkout kiosks in supermarkets. A friendly way of presenting this could involve using a phrase like "Smile, you're on camera!"



Example:

An example of a camera and screen at a Sainsbury's self-checkout

Other ways the HTA can help

HTA Preferred Partner B2BSG Solutions Ltd can work alongside you to help improve your security and can supply all the equipment (e.g. security tagging, CCTV etc.) you need to keep your staff, property and stock safe. As part of our Preferred Partner scheme, they can offer HTA members a discount on their services – visit our preferred partners page and filter for Security Equipment to find out more: hta.org.uk/preferredpartners

Since their inception in 2020, the HTA's regional **WhatsApp groups** have proved invaluable for friendly retailer-to-retailer communications about local crime issues or security threats. You can register to join in the conversation in your local region here – hta.org.uk/htawhatsappcommunity

HELP

We hope you found this report interesting and informative.
Please contact marketinfo@hta.org.uk should you have any questions.

¹⁶ A review and current status of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). Journal of Planning Literature, 30(4), doi: 10.1177/0885412215595440 (Cozens & Love, 2015).

¹⁷ Practical Challenges and New Research Frontiers in Retail Crime and Its Prevention In: Vania Ceccato and Rachel Armitage (ed.), Retail Crime: International Evidence and Prevention Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. (Ceccato & Armitage, 2018).



©Horticultural Trades Association 2022

