**Shoplifters on Shoplifting:
Raising the Awareness of Frontline Staff**
Produced by Perpetuity Research and Consultancy
International (PRCI) Ltd
Leicester: Perpetuity Press (2003), DVD/video (VHS), colour
(Running time 30 minutes, £199.00 +VAT)

Reviewed by Claire Lawrence

This DVD/video is an excellent introduction to the world of shoplifting as seen through the eyes of shoplifters. It uses the now familiar 'hidden camera' technique to enable the viewer to accompany shoplifters around some major stores in order to see, first hand, how they operate, and how they think through what they do.

The DVD/video starts with a general opening about the financial impact of shoplifting, and continues with a statement that it aims to offer some information about what to look for, and how shoplifters (rather than security professionals) perceive the retail environment; and it certainly fulfils these aims. However, the opening is a little devoid of context. It would be interesting to know who these shoplifters were and how they were recruited. Had they had been caught in the past? And if so, how had they been caught (ie had most of those appearing in the film been caught previously via technological measures or staff vigilance?). What were the shoplifters' instructions on 'performing' in the footage?

In addition, although great efforts are made to show that vigilance and appropriate use of technology can reduce shoplifters' offending behaviour, the specifics of this were often not outlined—and individual managers and stores would need to spend time with staff during training or review going through what could be done to make the job of the shoplifter more difficult. For example, shoplifters were repeatedly shown stealing packs of batteries (removing security tags, taking advantage of their position near checkout counters). Some information about where such goods could be placed to avoid the likelihood of theft would have been useful. A short manual to accompany the DVD/video could achieve this.

As a training tool, however the film has much to recommend it. It is relatively short—the running time is 30 minutes, which is about the right length for a staff-training device. There were some great touches: for example, one of the more prolific shoplifters appeared middle-aged and reasonably well-dressed—not fitting the 'stereotyped' view of a shoplifter—thus illustrating that shoplifters come in all shapes and sizes, and aiding the message on the importance of staff vigilance. Much of the actual *information* contained in the footage is not new: shoplifter may use bags, they may pretend to look at goods and then conceal them within their clothing and leave the store, etc; as a result, this would be a particularly appropriate training tool for lower level and/or younger retail staff. While we may know that shoplifters do these things, actually watching them at work offers some visual illustration of exactly what it is that staff need to be vigilant about. In addition, this would be useful for a retail or security manager to watch prior to investing in high-cost technological security measures, in order to assess more completely whether their use will be as effective as initially thought.

Overall, this is an interesting and informative look at the rarely seen world of shoplifters. It gives an insight into their goals and *modus operandi* in a way that should improve the vigilance of retail staff in retail and give security and retail managers food for thought.

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