

Signs such as "Our Staff Is Trained in Shoplifter Detection" are useful in deterring impulse thieves, and are especially important in fitting rooms, where temptation is high. A sign warning "We Have the Right to Inspect All Packages" is another good idea, though retailers don't in fact have that legal right.

Small, expensive merchandise should be near the counters where staff have it in view, or be placed in locked display cases. But make sure employees are nearby, as such cases can discourage shopper interest.

A camera and monitor mounted at the front of the store lets shoppers see themselves as they enter and sends the message: You're being watched. A camera further removes the shoplifter's cloak of anonymity, while increasing customer goodwill.

Keep front windows unobstructed. A thief will be wary of passersby witnessing a shoplifting incident and likely won't resort to violence if caught.

Place checkout counters near the exit to prevent customers from grabbing something on the way out. Counters should be low—waist-high is best.

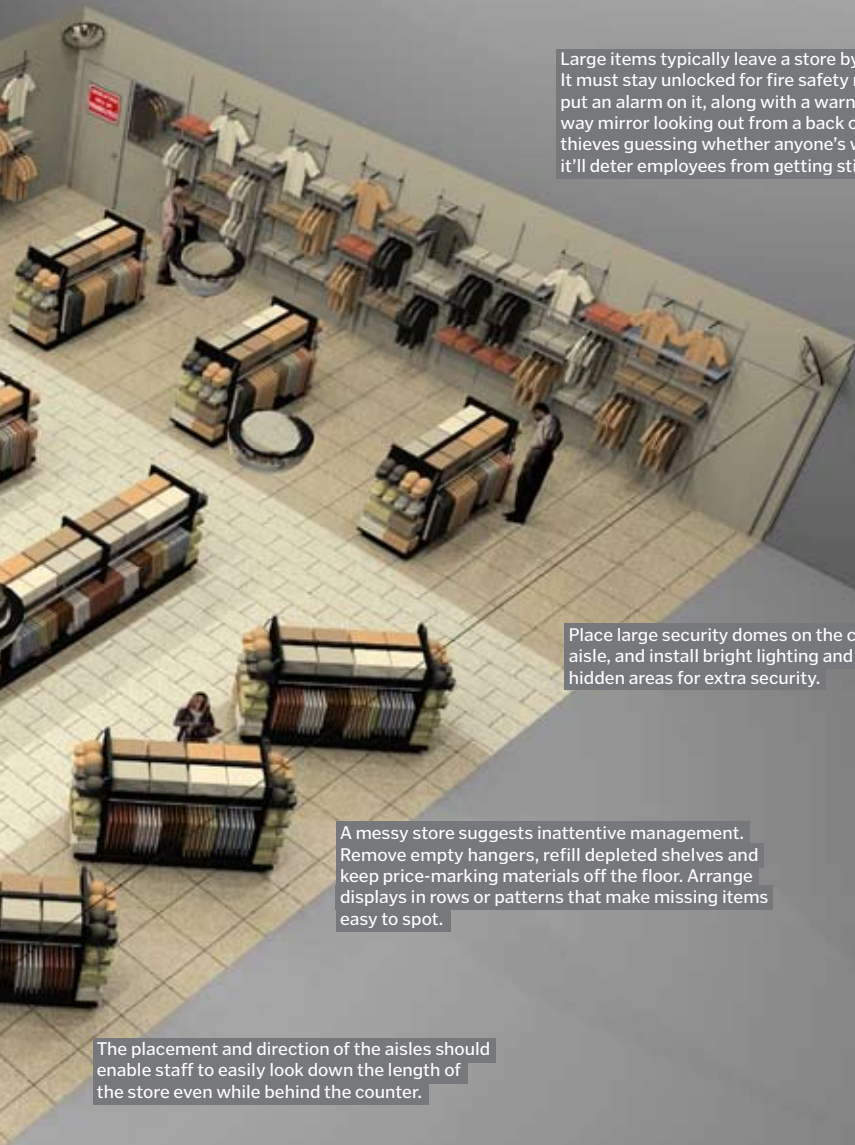
To catch a thief

Fred Tarasoff once challenged a friend who managed a grocery store to an experiment: Over three days, Tarasoff and an accomplice would try to rob him blind. "We ended up shoplifting about \$2,000 worth of merchandise," he recalls, "and I was by no means an experienced shoplifter." A Nelson, B.C.-based consultant who trains retailers on theft prevention, Tarasoff first realized the price that shoplifting exacts when a small record shop he ran went belly up in large part because a fifth of the stock was walking out the door. That's not an uncommon scenario, he discovered. External theft accounts for more than a third of retail shrinkage, and most stolen goods are gone for good: For every dollar recovered, \$30 is lost.

While trained and alert staff are the best defence against thieves, a floor plan that limits hidden areas and provides an open view of the store is not far behind. "The whole idea is

to have potential shoplifters think twice," says Tarasoff, who interviewed many shoplifters in developing his training program (online at www.stopretailloss.com). "You want to make them uncertain if and when they may be under surveillance." If a shoplifting gang identifies your store as an easy target, your losses will climb quickly, because the pros can get around most anti-theft devices, he says.

In working with retailers, Tarasoff has found that just a few tweaks to the layout will often make a big difference in security. "Retailers feel that as long as they have security systems in place, they're okay. Well, that's not enough." —JOANNA PACHNER



Large items typically leave a store by the back door. It must stay unlocked for fire safety reasons, but put an alarm on it, along with a warning sign. A one-way mirror looking out from a back office will keep thieves guessing whether anyone's watching—plus it'll deter employees from getting sticky fingers.

Place large security domes on the ceiling in every aisle, and install bright lighting and convex mirrors in hidden areas for extra security.

A messy store suggests inattentive management. Remove empty hangers, refill depleted shelves and keep price-marking materials off the floor. Arrange displays in rows or patterns that make missing items easy to spot.

The placement and direction of the aisles should enable staff to easily look down the length of the store even while behind the counter.

A BlackBerry on every belt

Arming your staff with BlackBerrys means they'll receive your missives and calls no matter where they are, and you can get updates from them on the spot. But are the benefits worth the investment?

THE COSTS

The cheapest way to stock your troops with BlackBerrys is to get the 8700 model from Rogers. It costs \$125 for the first unit, and you can add four more for free, assuming you sign a three-year voice-and-data contract. Such plans start at \$45 per month and increase based on your usage. To get 25 of your workers hooked up, you'll pay a one-time cost of \$625, and your total monthly subscription costs will be \$1,125 (though you'll likely get a discount if you buy more than 10 units).

THE BENEFITS

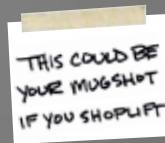
There's more to BlackBerrys than e-mail: You can use software like Sales NOW to track deals as they progress, and integrate files with your company's server. But most importantly, you'll have your staff at your disposal far more: A Carleton University study of BlackBerry users found that they worked an average of 71 hours a week, up from their pre-BlackBerry workweeks of 47 hours.

THE DRAWBACKS

A significant number of respondents to a recent survey claimed their BlackBerrys regularly or frequently hurt their productivity. Why? Too much e-mail—75% said they were overwhelmed with useless messages. Other studies have probed the impact of distractions on concentration. A 2005 study, for example, found that e-mail and ringing phones lower a person's IQ more than smoking dope.

THE VERDICT

From a financial perspective, it's a no-brainer: Buy them. Even if BlackBerrys make your staff less efficient due to distractions, they'll be logging 51% more hours. At \$625 to set up a team of 25, and \$1,125 per month for their subscription fees, you're making a tiny investment for a huge return. —JASON CHOW



TAGS AND LABELS

There are dozens of varieties, from reusable hard tags to disposable adhesives that are electronically deactivated at the register, to tags that leak ink if improperly removed.

HIDDEN CAMERA

Clocks, smoke detectors and exit signs can all be used to conceal cameras. The footage will back you up if a suspect denies stealing or gets violent, and is invaluable in prosecution. \$100-\$300.

FAKE CAMERA

Then again, why invest in the real deal if a good fake will do? With this smoked-plastic security dome, the thief won't be sure if he's being recorded, and likely won't take the risk. From \$17.95.

SIGNS

Low tech works, too. A sign like this, placed under the mirror in the change room, did wonders for one clothing store's shrinkage numbers.