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A Day In The Life...

The Unspoken Job of A Loss Prevention Professional

Written By: Scott Roberts

Recently a marketing colleague shared a news video of a shoplifting incident with me. The video contained footage of 2 shoplifting subjects resisting an apprehension by fleeing in a waiting car – but not before spraying the Loss Prevention (“LP”) associate who was attempting to apprehend them with a chemical spray. The marketing manager labeled the video as “dramatic”. For LP professionals it is unfortunately a day in the life. During my career in LP I have received

and presented many LP training seminars, the ones where the rules of engagement are spelled out and the proper steps to a successful apprehension are reviewed – from initial observation to surveillance methods to how to safely apprehend a subject. I’ve worked with some great LP professionals who take their jobs seriously and follow the rules of apprehension and safety each and every day. But somehow, somehow we tend to find ourselves in situations where our personal safety is at risk in the pursuit of catching a shoplifter.

As an example, there was the time when we attempted to apprehend a male subject who had concealed a pair of jeans, total value \$65, only to be greeted with what looked to be a snub nose revolver. He fired and he missed.

Or the time when the repeat shoplifter, with 100 prior arrests for Larceny and Assault & Battery, frequently hiding in the racks to fill up comforter sized

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shopping bags with merchandise, pulls a sharp edged weapon during his attempted apprehension. He's ready for a fight, so much so that an order has to be given not to approach him further and limit our efforts to keeping him under surveillance until the police arrive.



Then there's the kicking and the biting and the punching – it goes on and on. Through LinkedIn a few LP professionals shared their experiences: one who was stunned gunned; another who was bitten so hard that he went to the hospital for a tetanus shot; and yet another who is still smarting from an unexpected punch in the face. Another tells a chilling tale of having a suspect handcuffed in the LP office while waiting for the police to arrive. They hear a noise and check behind the seat in which the subject is sitting and notice a handgun has fallen out. During the police interrogation the subject stated that he dropped the gun while trying to pull it on the LP staff in an attempt to escape.

Below are some headlines I came across while doing a Google search;

- *A Jersey City man was charged with robbery after biting a Wal-Mart security guard on the neck while shoplifting from the store in North Bergen, New Jersey.*
- *In a Central Judicial Processing Court it was revealed that a male subject bit a security officer in a struggle as he was being detained. The Judge set bail at \$50,000.*
- *YouTube has videos of LP staff and police fighting with shoplifting subjects.*
- *There are too many headlines that tell of subjects being shot, with some even killed, by police as a result of a shoplifting incident.*

Most of my experiences happened in suburban locations, not in the inner city or economically depressed neighborhoods where crime is prevalent. The suburban parking lots where I worked had a mix of Hondas, Mercedes, BMWs and Pontiacs. What happens to LP professionals in crime-ridden areas is even worse. There are stories of constant danger, where you can see drug addicts repeatedly pass in front of a store entrance waiting for a chance to run in and grab whatever they can. They are waiting outside because they know who the LP's are on the inside – they see each other every day! The employees in the store know who the shoplifters are too – they see them every day. And when they turn their heads for a minute or have to respond to another task they strike... fast! So LP teams get creative and rotate staff from store to store, they call guard companies to post uniformed guards at the doors and they work with local

police departments to identify the worst of the worst and whatever else will DETER the repeated offenders.
I use the word DETER because sometimes that's the best they can do.

There's definitely a right way and a wrong way to conduct surveillance and make apprehensions. The best of the best can do it without any employee or customer ever realizing a shoplifting incident has occurred. Oddly enough it requires a bit of cooperation from the shoplifter, who needs to willingly come with you to an office or an out of view area for processing and potential arrest. The majority of them do come willingly and without incident. It is somewhat easy to accomplish – be in control, speak with respect, treat the subject with respect, give clear direction without escalating your voice or demeanor. Sometimes you have drug addicts who need money for the next fix, or a group of Organized Retail Crime ("ORC") members who lay and wait to distract and prevent an apprehension, or an idiot who thinks that bringing a gun to steal \$65 worth of merchandise is a smart thing to do. The training doesn't always account for that – except to state to let the person go if danger is evident. The dilemma arises when the danger isn't evident, when there are no visible signs that the person you're about to apprehend even has a drug problem, a gun, a couple friends waiting to knock you down, or has no reservation about sticking you with their needle in their attempt to flee.

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You rely on the training, but in these situations you have to rely equally on your own sense of self-preservation. If someone wants to pull a weapon to get away – so be it. Let them go! There isn't an item in any store worth injuring yourself for. Just be ready the next time when they come back – because they will come back – and when they do, notify police and keep the subject under surveillance until they arrive.

I have a deep affinity for LP professionals. It was one of the most satisfying positions in my career. Over the years the challenges and goals of the LP have changed. Increasing advancements in technology have presented LP professionals with tools that help to avoid, detect, investigate and prosecute subjects like never before. I have worked with systems that can recognize known offenders as they pass by a camera view and then send an email or text of the person's presence to an LP's phone. My company has installed systems that use technology to deter acts of ORC by integrating Public View Monitors, Video Analytics and Marketing messages to alert would be thieves that they are being watched and recorded. Even these advancements still do not deter the determined shoplifter from taking what they want. At best they'll outrun you and get away, at worst they spend a night in jail – again.

I recently read in article from a Michigan news source about a man who was apprehended multiple times - on a monthly basis - at multiple stores of the same name in the Grand Rapids area. His record includes five charges of driving while license suspended, drunken driving,

multiple charges of receiving and concealing stolen property, two counts of removing property belonging to someone else and failure to return rental property. Before his arrest he had pleaded guilty to retail fraud from the same store where he would be arrested in

April. There he was sentenced to 30 days in jail after failing to show up at Grand Rapids District Court because he was already in jail for the March retail fraud.

Some shoplifters are frequent offenders and are known to us by name. They come in so much and visit many different stores that it becomes a game of surveillance chess, especially for those who do not have CCTV systems. You peak around a corner or through a rack, only to see them peaking from around another corner trying to find out where you are. They use their phones too, texting their colleagues when someone gets near or sending descriptions of the "floorwalkers" they have identified. Some coordinate their efforts with several team members, including the lookout(s), the set up person(s), the bag person(s), the delivery person(s) and the driver(s), who is either



waiting at the curb or is parked close by. Once they get the goods into the car they simply scatter in different directions and head back into the mall or store. The driver then moves the car from one spot in the parking lot to a different spot closer to the next shoplift. For some groups there are multiple cars and drivers, waiting in the parking lot for the next load to be delivered. Once the car is full they either drive to their hotel and empty the car then head to the next mall down the road, or they simply just head to the next mall down the road until the car is full.

It is common to have these groups travel large geographic areas connected by major highways. For example, at a high end clothing store in Massachusetts we apprehended two well dressed Russian ORC suspects that

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were recognized from photos of them stealing in a Florida location a few weeks before.

A large portion of retailers are leveraging IP networks and combining company-wide store apprehension data, allowing LP's to run an internal name search of a subject to determine if they have been apprehended before and if so, on which date, from which store, theft amount, disposition and any outstanding issues – such as a trespass or stay away order for assaulting LP staff. This type of centralized data gathering has helped in the arrest and prosecution of the ORC members nationwide.

Historically the dangerous and frequent interactions between LP staff and shoplifters used to be confined to the business. Police typically did not get involved unless there was a high dollar value or

shoplifting groups and terrorist activities. What used to be localized theft has become an industry in itself, generating more than \$13 billion in annual theft (<http://www.shopliftingprevention.org/whatnaspoffers/nrc/publiceducstats.htm>). And it all starts at your local Walmart, Walgreens or Macy's, with the LP staff on the front lines like never before.

All I can say is remember your training and avoid physical altercations whenever possible – no item is worth injury or worse, and follow safe surveillance and apprehension guidelines.■

the subject had a warrant or two. In recent years – with the onslaught of ORC – the big name retailers have assigned LP staff specific to ORC activities. Today the ORC LP staff routinely interacts with local and federal police task forces that have been set up to combat ORC. The federal efforts have been able to tie the proceeds from shoplifted merchandise to international

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott began his career as a Loss Prevention Manager for a major US retailer where he was routinely recognized for outstanding achievement. He entered the sales arena in the late 1990's and has successfully sold solutions for several major manufacturers of Access Control, CCTV, Intrusion, and cutting edge Biometric technologies.

Scott attended college for Business Management and holds a Master Web Developer certificate from Clark University. For the past 10 years



he has served on a Board of Directors for a Non-Profit Alumni Association dedicated to enriching the

lives of inner city youths from the Boston area. He also serves as the IT Development manager for the organization and volunteers as a youth basketball coach for the town of Auburn, MA.

Scott offers a customer first approach with transparent interactions to arm each and every client with the information they need to know in order to make the best decisions to move forward. His excellent customer service attitude rewards everyone involved with shorter learning curves, detailed communications and increased efficiencies. If you would like to get in touch with Scott you can email him at sroberts@setronics.com or call him directly @ 978-835-3790.

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Just Case You Missed



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What are some of the more dangerous situations you have found yourself in?

Scott Roberts

Sales Executive at Setronics

I am asking this question in response to a shoplifting video my marketing manager sent me. Seems she came across an attempted apprehension of two subjects who ended up fleeing in a car - but not before spraying the LP person with chemicals as he tried to apprehend. The marketing manager labeled the video "dramatic". For some LP professional it is unfortunately "a day in the life ..". I proceeded to then give examples of dangerous situations I have found myself in – like having a gun pulled, a knife pulled, being dragged by a car (trying to uncover the license plate), jumped by members of a shoplifting ring while apprehending a member, being kicked, being bit and being spit at. I invite you to share some of the dangerous situations you as a Loss Prevention professional may have found yourself in, so others can see the risks LP can face everyday.



Amy Montgomery

Senior Market Investigator at CVS Caremark

I use both CCTV and floor walking. In some of my locations it is best to use CCTV; others are out on the floor. But either way the most dangerous situation I think I have been in recently is: I attempted to make a stop on a female shoplifter. I was able to get the merchandise back, but she ran. With two exits on each side of the store, by the time I walked to the other side of the store to go to the office, she re-entered the store from the other exit with 5 guys and pointed me out to everyone. They surrounded me, looked me up and down, one of my lp co-workers walked out of one of the aisles, and they left. I wasn't expecting that.



Gabriel

Gabriel Costanzo

Exploring new opportunities in Retail and Loss Prevention Management

I once apprehended a female who had concealed 56 dvd movies inside of her pants and was attempting to exit the store. After I recovered the product from her in our AP office, she went from being calm to completely opposite and attacked me in the office and even took a bite mark out of my shoulder.

It turned out that she had been recently paroled in Alabama for manslaughter after serving 7 years for the crime.

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Dan Nesselroth

Account Manager at LP Innovations

Dan

When I think of such situations, I am immediately taken back in time to when I first started out in LP as a floorwalker. This was during a time when attitudes were much much different than they are now. Back then, the focus was on apprehensions and nothing else. Recoveries did not count. We were pressured for stats, and there was no such thing as a distance boundary outside the front doors. Any reasonable force was authorized to bring someone back, except for carrying weapons ourselves. I was working at a big box hardware store in a very bad neighborhood and dangerous stops were a weekly event. Yes, knives pulled, punched, kicked, nearly run over by cars, and the most dangerous situation I had was when I apprehended a woman who was halfway into her car and was within reach of a handgun on the passenger seat. It was a 25 dollar theft. That was the moment I grew up as an LP professional and it ended my youthful cowboy attitude. And that was not nearly as bad as some of the things my co-workers went through. One was put in the hospital and struck deaf in one ear by a baseball bat to his head. One contracted hepatitis from getting bitten by a shoplifter. One was stalked by a shoplifter he put in prison. The problem was the management approach to Loss Prevention. Stats had very very little impact on shrink and were a source of great liability. Dangerous to LP and frequently dangerous to shoplifters as well. I had a knife pulled on me once and let the guy go. I got written up for not taking him in. The next day he was back..knowing he would pull a weapon I called the cops and had THEM apprehend him. I got written up for that too. No merchandise is worthy anyone getting hurt, and thankfully most if not all companies have come around to this way of thinking. It's been safer for the LP staff and safer for the company as a result. We as an industry now know we are in the business of business and NOT the business of justice.



Jose Nieves

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Jose

I think that overall evolution has changed L/P work for the worst. We are here to protect a store from a loss. But what thief do you know now a days that is going to be compliant, stop. They are going to do what ever it takes, or hurt anyone or anything in there power to get away, or get that fix.



Troy

Troy BOSTICK

Store Protection Specialist at Ross Stores, Inc.

At Ross, we weren't allowed to apprehend, but I once walked up on three shoplifters attempting to boost a MK handbag. I could do nothing more than ask, "may I help you find something." They skedaddled and I recovered the handbag, but I was lucky because I was outnumbered three to one. We squeezed a Ross into a store that used to be a Dollar Tree, and as a result, we piled our merchandise high. On top of that, since we were a low-volume store, we had no CCTV on the sales floor. I asked management to install convex mirrors at the areas of the store with high shrink and low visibility, but I was ignored. One of these days, a Store Protection Specialist is going to get killed if safety is not taken more seriously.

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Greg Mueller

District Loss Prevention Manager (New Mexico) at Kroger / Smith's Food & Drugs

The comment of "a day in. The life" is very accurate. This is not only not uncommon, but here in New Mexico is becoming the standard. More and more companies are going to a hands off policy to protect employees and customers alike, this is common knowledge among shoplifters and boosters alike; but even companies which still employ a hands on approach have policies in place to allow a subject to leave if a weapon is produced. This has lead to the bad guys all packing guns and knives. This profession has become dangerous and that danger continues to increase .



Greg Mueller

District Loss Prevention Manager (New Mexico) at Kroger / Smith's Food & Drugs

Due to the increased frequency of near miss encounters by my LPSs, I started looking for a training program which would teach my LPSs how to assess the danger level of a subject, before engaging. This is critical for the safety of the LPS, other employees, our customers, and the shoplifting subject as well. I found a customized program through International Protective Services in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The course was called Survival Techneics for Loss Provention Professionals. It is a several day course which teaches LPs how to assess the danger level of a subject during the Servalince stage... Will the subject become combative, or will they be compliant, how likely are they to be armed, and so on. All important things to know before you engage, and should be used to determine if you will engage or if the danger to the LP, Customers in the area and/or other employees is to great; allowing the subject to leave the store and having them intercepted by law enforcement, in the parking lot, or down the street. The other aspect of the course is what to do when you've miss judge a subject and it all goes wrong Everone's worst nightmare come true. At this point it is one not so simple point survive! But how, what do you do, and when do you do it..... This may be the most valuable part of the course. I am working with my division safety manager to implement this training into our LP training program. In her words she can train the entire division's management staff and LP department for less then the 1st injury claim and subsequent lawsuit; deffently something to think about.



Russell Conover

Experienced multi-store ALPM looking for new opportunity

Scott the good old days are gone. I trained my people to use camera review of high theft ORC desirable merchandise. Once an individual was identified their activities were reviewed from coming in the door until exit. We noticed a pattern of a small purchase to an EBT or customer preffered card. We then used transaction history to further build the case
We started to find large groups working together immediately. These cases were then turned over to the ORC group in our area. This increased our shoplifts dramatically & showed improved shrink results. In addition the police could do the intelligence necessary improving their safety as well.



To view the full conversation click here --> <http://ow.ly/ybkJA>

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