

Reduce the Risk of Armed Robbery

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In Queensland, there was a spike in armed robberies targeting licensed premises in late 2013 and early 2014. Fortunately, that situation has largely rectified itself, although offences continue to occur on a regular basis. Of course, detached bottleshops are the most vulnerable; however, there's been a disturbing trend of late to target on premise gaming rooms. Let's have a look at how our businesses can increase the risk of apprehension to the criminal, make it harder to commit the actual robbery and diminish their return – this may even lead to preventing a crime from being committed.

Increase the risk to the offender

There are several ways to increase the risk to the offender – the first being to extend guardianship. This might include opening and closing the premises as a group or in pairs, networking and coordinating with other businesses nearby, or having security guards patrol randomly and at closing times. The second method is to assist natural surveillance. This can be done with improved lighting, minimising areas of concealment, having internal and external lighting support clear lines of sight from the inside out and the outside in.

The third method is to reduce anonymity. This isn't always easy, but in business premises this might be as simple as offering assistance or asking if a patron or customer needs anything. It may also include having a chat when performing normal tasks (removing glasses, cleaning, loading shelves etc). The idea is to acknowledge the person and make them feel 'identified'. The fourth method is using place managers – this includes the use of door security or greeters, more than one staff member for opening and closing. The last strategy is to strengthen formal surveillance. This can include efficient alarm systems (intruder and duress), correct use of CCTV cameras, and security guards.

Increase the effort

This more often refers to design features that make life difficult for offenders. An example of this are the security screens in banks. They are not generally practical in most premises, however the height and width of counters can make it harder for offenders to gain access to cash points. Access control is another strategy. This means minimising the entry and exit points during quiet times and restricting access to well monitored areas. Having the flexibility to close earlier with low or no patronage is another good strategy.

Reducing the rewards

Reducing the reward for an offender is a really important prevention method and can be accomplished by concealing targets. This means strictly limit the opportunities patrons have to view cash including cash drawers, cash transfers (clearances) and the location of safes. Removing targets can also be achieved by allowing electronic payments for products and services – this is becoming more prevalent as the economy

transitions into a relatively cashless society. Other strategies such as identifying property can also deter in terms of property offences.

Selecting the target

Elements offenders may consider when selecting hotel/bottleshop targets:

- Escape route and ease of escape
- Low staff numbers especially during opening and closing times
- Female staff present
- Cash point(s) visible from the street and easily accessible
- Isolated cash points
- Poor lighting and poor visibility from outside
- CCTV is generally not a deterrent but a tool for later identification
- Random police patrols and guards
- Barriers and time delays on safes
- Staff training and compliance with procedures

Some of the features that make a target attractive to an offender are fixed and difficult to change. This can include location, neighbourhood, and accessibility to escape routes. However research has shown that the risk of armed robbery can be significantly reduced if other features, such as design, security, cash handling and staff training are improved.

It is important that staff take ownership of the business and observe activities. This includes car park activity if possible and normal and abnormal activity inside and outside the premises that promotes suspicion. Suspicious activity must be acted on and reported.

Emerging trends

Whilst there are always motivated offenders, changes in suitable targets, offender characteristics and location factors can influence a shift in crime trends. For instance, the steady increase in developments outside of the CBD has provided additional locations for offenders to commit offences. As a result, we have seen a shift in this type of crime from the CBD to the outer suburbs. Increases in bank security and crime prevention strategies have contributed to making them a high risk and low reward target. With the continued existence of motivated offenders, this has created a trend shift to 'softer' high yield targets like hotels, taverns and clubs (especially with gaming machines). These locations still provide greater financial incentives with fewer prevention measures. In addition, a potential lack of staff training often fails to prepare staff for dealing with such confrontations.

Crime trends are in a constant state of flux. When a pattern of crime emerges, preventative measures are not far behind. Preventative measures come in many shapes and sizes; however, when they are applied they are often successful in

reducing crime. In some cases however, when one avenue is cut off, a motivated offender will look for another, and this can generate a shift in crime trends.