SIX SECURITY SOLUTIONS
FOR A POST-PANDEMIC RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

Sean Foley, Senior Vice President, Interface Security Systems considers the vital changes necessary in retail security to cope with a changing world

Over the last two years the retail industry has undergone massive changes. Retailers of all sizes have shown extraordinary resilience and creativity by reshaping their business models and operations. They have evolved from a high-touch, personal environment to new service models that include online ordering, home delivery, and curbside pickup. Consumers are eagerly embracing the benefits of omnichannel retailing, a convenience they will come to expect long after the health crisis is over.

A more volatile environment

However, the pandemic has also significantly impacted the security landscape for retailers.

The recently published 2021 NRF Retail Security Survey revealed that almost seven in ten (69%) retail loss prevention and asset protection professionals said the pandemic has resulted in an increase in overall risk for their organization.

Reports of customers abusing retail employees also increased during this crisis with 61% of respondents reporting workplace violence. The physical distancing measures introduced in stores, the requirements for face coverings and proof of vaccination, and restrictions on some products to deter panic buying have contributed to this increase in retail worker abuse.

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As the uncertainty of the health crisis continues to hang over the retail industry, loss prevention and security professionals are reporting that organized retail crime (ORC) and, in some places, opportunistic looting is on the rise. Almost four in ten (39%) respondents in the NRF Survey said they saw the greatest increase in fraud in omnichannel sales channels such as buy-online-pick-up-in-store (BOPIS), up from 19% the year before. Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) agree that organized retail crime gangs are exhibiting higher levels of aggression and violence than they did the year before.

Technology to the rescue

To combat these trends, more than half (53%) of the retailers who participated in the NRF survey said their companies are allocating additional technology resources, and another 50% said they are allocating additional capital specific to loss prevention equipment.

1. INTERACTIVE REMOTE VIDEO MONITORING

One of the most powerful layers of security for a retail business is an interactive monitoring solution. With live video and two-way audio capabilities, these systems allow trained security staff to see, hear and communicate with employees 24/7. This solution guarantees personnel safety and ensures the premises remain secure.

Virtual guard services allow remote operators to connect to live audio and video feeds and scan the location proactively for any potential threat day or night — just as an on-premises security guard might do.

Automated and customized voice down message services can also be used to address some of the most pressing matters. They can be scheduled throughout the day through an organization's existing speaker system to remind customers and employees about proper social distancing and/or food safety practices.

2. VIDEO VERIFIED ALARMS

Video verified alarms, which integrate a basic alarm system with video, is another effective solution that can make a huge difference for retailers. A video-verified alarm system that clearly demonstrates an imminent situation will prompt law enforcement to move more quickly to the location. It can save businesses thousands of dollars in false alarm fees.

3. POINT-OF-SALE EXCEPTION REPORTING

Another security concern all retailers face is cash and inventory loss or shrink. Solutions like point-of-sale (POS) exception reporting integrated with video surveillance systems enable loss prevention professionals to quickly identify anomalies in order to detect and prevent shrink. The solution can identify suspicious transactions among millions of POS transactions.

4. REMOTE RETAIL AUDITS

A regular remote audit can help reduce shrink and improve employee productivity by pinpointing key problem areas while delivering actionable insights with visual reporting.

Showing adaptability through the pandemic, some retailers put remote audit programs in place at no upfront cost by simply leveraging their existing video systems.

5. LONE WORKER SAFETY

One way in which business models have adapted to keep costs under control is by utilizing more lone workers for opening, closing, third shifts, curbside deliveries, and other customer interactions outside of the premises. While this has helped many organizations trim costs, it has also exposed lone workers to greater risks.

Most businesses have video security systems in place, but many were not installed with current working conditions in mind. Security cameras now need to have coverage that extends to curbside delivery areas for example. Likewise, employing a full-time security guard is not sustainable for many businesses still struggling to stay open. When providing realistic options to lone workers, it's important that any solution be simple and robust enough that employees will see the value and choose to use it. It should require no installation or configuration by the user.

There is a new breed of smart, wearable, and discreet personal protection devices that enable businesses to add another layer of protection for their employees when working alone. These wearable personal protection devices can easily be worn on a lanyard, belt, vest, jacket, or pants. Unlike phone-based apps that take several steps to engage and can actually escalate a situation if an assailant suspects the victim is calling for help, a dedicated personal safety monitoring device is always on and includes a single-push panic button that silently dispatches police and connects to a live monitoring service in seconds.

A properly designed personal protection device delivers comprehensive situational awareness by sending time and location stamped GPS coordinates to authorities. It also opens a two-way audio communication channel with the employee and captures evidentiary grade photos to provide hard evidence for law enforcement.

Having an experienced security professional and law enforcement available at the touch of a button can boost morale and give lone workers the confidence to do their jobs without taking on unnecessary risk. Today, wearable personal protection monitoring solutions can be directly integrated with interactive 24/7 Command & Control Centers.

These new services are a critical component in increasing safety measures for employees and customers and should be an essential component of a comprehensive business security strategy.

6. VIDEO ANALYTICS FOR RETAILERS

Recent research, and most notably the work of the ECR Retail Loss group 'Reviewing the use of video technologies in retail', shows that there is a strong case to be made for retailers, especially large, distributed enterprises, to unify their use of video, not just as an element of their security operation, but as a core part of their business strategy. The ECR report looks at the ways in which video systems in general, and video analytics in particular, can be deployed across retail businesses for health and safety compliance, as well as for business intelligence.

Extracting insights from the data generated by security cameras and monitoring solutions can help retailers maximize ROI for their security investments when budgets are tight and there is a greater demand for results.

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When a business truly understands the behaviors of its customers by collecting key insights, it can then tailor every customer touchpoint to maximize customer satisfaction, increase sales revenue and improve operational efficiency.

Video analytics solutions that offer another layer of valuable customer and employee behavior data can unlock valuable, real-time insights. Examples include the number of people who come into their stores, what they do while there, which products they are engaged with the most, and how the store design or floor plan is working.

All of this data will reveal insights that can help retailers optimize store layout, make critical decisions on merchandising, correlate customer footfall to online campaigns, identify staffing bottlenecks, test new store designs, or compare the effectiveness of in-store campaigns.

With video analytics, brick-and-mortar stores can turn their security cameras into powerful business intelligence tools to enhance customer experience and maximize sales.

Conclusion

Many of the new business models adopted during the pandemic are here to stay. Security systems can play a major role by providing more eyes and ears on the ground. Video verified alarm services that integrate video surveillance and alarm systems together can reduce false alarms and avoid nuisance calls and fees.

For lone workers or minimal staffing, a virtual guard service can watch over the premises and announce its presence with voice-down notifications from a professional monitoring service. Retail video analytics can also provide insightful data for sales and marketing teams to identify peak periods and monitor customer flow and interaction throughout a store. All of these technologies and services can improve safety and security while simultaneously providing a solid path to profitability for retailers.