

What does a shoplifter look like?



Murry Taylor

Chief Operating Officer for Group 1 Security.

Murry's previous positions included State Loss Prevention Manager BIG W and National Risk Manager Retail Adventures. Murry can be contacted at mtaylor@group1security.com.au, on 0434 432 728 or at www.group1security.com.au.



Group 1 Security is a specialist in Retail Asset Protection providing solutions to both large and small retailers nationally and are a preferred supplier for the Australian Retail Association.

Over the past couple of months shoplifting has featured numerous times in both print and TV media and, in most cases, retailers have stated they have seen an increase. As the economy remains tight, one thing you can guarantee is that shoplifting won't be going away any time soon. There are basically two types of shoplifters, the opportunist and the professional.

The opportunist: This style of shoplifter isn't all that different to you and me. They don't consider themselves to be criminals and are horrified when described in this fashion.

Most don't enter a shop with the specific intention of stealing but, as they go through the store, an opportunity may present itself, such as an item being left in a location where the likelihood of the customer being caught is minimal and the product is of such interest to them that they take it and continue on with their day.

Their method of concealing the product is never too sophisticated and will usually be concealed in their pocket or bag.

As stated, when this type of shoplifter is caught and subsequently arrested, their reaction is usually one of disbelief. To call them a criminal could almost be classed as an act of war.

The professional: This shoplifter is a very different style of person to the opportunist. They can work alone or in groups.

The professional goes to a store with the specific intention of stealing and will often steal to order. They will enter a store with a list of products they already have orders for, so they will target these.

The professional's method of removing large quantities of stock from a store can be quite sophisticated. There are several techniques frequently used by them. Some are as follows:



• Booster box: There are several different ways a booster box can be used. One method is the professional enters the store with a box in a trolley. The box is clearly identifiable as a box for an office chair (or something large) and has packaging tape around it. The box is empty and the bottom flaps aren't sealed, so products can be fed into the box from underneath and, as the box is filled, the packaging tape takes the weight. When the offender leaves the store, they usually aren't even challenged as the box is clearly identifiable as a product from another retailer.

• Double docketing: This is done using a couple of items or an entire trolley. Seasoned pros will knock over a trolley in no time. They will load two trolleys up with identical items, then pick a register to go through.

While being served, they will usually have a conversation with the register operator so they will be remembered. Once they collect their receipts and exit they will go and unload the stock and then head straight back into the store with their receipts, grab the preloaded trolley prepared earlier and maybe one other small item. They will then go back to the same register operator, say hello, and then tell them that they had forgotten something.

They pay for the extra item, show the original docket and then walk out with a second trolley load at no cost. They will then go to another store and refund one trolley load so they have their money back.

• Distraction: This is where at least two people work together, one

will distract the staff member while the other takes whatever is on offer. Professionals that do this regularly become extremely proficient.

One couple that took a while to catch had this process down so well that they could walk past the counter and tell whether the drawers were locked by the way the keyholes were sitting. In one store, this couple walked out with just over \$7000 worth of stock in less than 10 minutes.

While these are a few techniques you can look out for, the real question is, what does a shoplifter look like? Is it the 19-year-old boy with the ripped jeans and tattooed sleeve down one arm? Or is it the 30-year-old businesswoman dressed in a power suit talking on her iPhone? Or perhaps the 60-year-old grandmother with her grandson casually strolling through the store?

Out of these three examples, who do you think would be the most likely candidate to be a shoplifter? You may be surprised.

I have taken a sample of data (252) from apprehensions my teams have made over the years and, while the data is only a portion of the numbers apprehended, it still paints a very interesting picture.

When you look at the table, the one thing you can really take from it is that there is no clear description of a typical shoplifter. So next time you or your staff are focusing on the young bloke walking around your store, don't forget to look at the businesswoman taking her time in the perfume section or the older gentleman browsing the DVD aisles. ■

Metropolitan Stores – 54 per cent			
Regional Stores – 46 per cent			
Female	59%	Male	41%
Female under 20 years	2%	Male under 20 years	0%
Female 20-29 years	22%	Male 20-29 years	17%
Female 30-39 years	18%	Male 30-39 years	12%
Female 40-49 years	9%	Male 40-49 years	3%
Female 50+ years	8%	Male 50+ years	9%