White Paper:
"Retail Safety – Cause for Alarm?"
Issued December 2011

Executive Summary

Any business investing in alarm technologies (of any kind) is doing so to reduce risk to premises, stock and people (be it staff or customers). Typically, thinking of retail risk brings robbery or shoplifting to mind – something highlighted around Christmas in-line with an increased retail activity. Retail Crime is estimated to have cost the UK industry 1.1 Billion in 2009/10 with robbery alone accounting for £22,200,000 of that figure.

In any alarm situation in a retail environment there are four main stakeholders to consider:

1) The Retail Worker
2) The Employer
3) The Police
4) Any Customer Involved

The effectiveness of an alarm, the information it conveys, and the response it elicits (and its speed) impact on every stakeholder. What is clear from a recent comparison of data supplied by ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers England and Wales) and the BSIA (British Security Industry Association) is that on average **lone worker alarms are around 75% more efficient than fixed Panic Alarms** with regards to their false alarm rate. Often their overall cost of ownership is lower also.

This paper considers how alarm systems prevalent in the retail sector impact on all stakeholders, and looks at the added benefits of retail organisations deploying dedicated, BS8484 approved, lone worker solutions.

Limitations of solely using fixed Panic Alarms (P.A.'s)

Historically retail businesses install under the counter, fixed panic alarms (P.A.'s) in premises. They are limited by the demands of the 21st Century Retail environment, specifically on two fronts:

Risk is no longer limited to the point of sale (POS), so what happens to a staff member working away from the locality of the POS or immediately outside the retail environment should there be an incident? Given the size and scale of the modern-day retail space, this doesn't allow the majority of retail staff to effectively assess and reduce risks in the workplace. The retail environment (i.e. where the alarm is positioned) as seen by a customer is also invariably a small percentage of the entire operation.

Secondly, P.A.'s don't often capture audio-evidence at the point of incident that allows 3rd party discernment as a situation is unfolding in real-time, resulting in a vastly higher number of false alarms when compared to a system incorporating a level of human judgement. Generating a response is clearly important to a user but shouldn't that be qualified as the correct response given the parameters of a situation? Take the tragic case of PC Sharon Beshenivsky who was fatally wounded when responding to a Travel Agent's panic alarm in 2005. Had the full scale and nature of the incident been captured more effectively as it was unfolding, clearly the Police response deployed would have been a very different. This discernment allows the Police the potential to be more flexible and efficient, as well as offering peace of mind to a retailer and its staff that comprehensive information is being gathered at the point of escalation – most importantly it might also help save a life.

But looking at it the other way around – every alarm is only as valuable as the response it elicits. Naturally the Police need to respond to situations appropriately whilst maximising their resources – therefore, they need a suitable method for escalation. The most effective way to elicit a Police response is to escalate via a URN (unique reference number). URN's must be issued by a local Police force on the acceptance of an application from a client for an annual subscription fee. The client also needs to demonstrate that the appropriate and qualified technology is deployed correctly in order to apply.

Police forces retain the right to revoke a URN if there is a disproportionate number of false alarms from a particular source – therefore it is absolutely key that any alarm is used responsibly so an organisation is not placed in the difficult position of losing their URN. The management costs and increase in insurance premiums arising from a lost URN can be significant.

"Connexion2 has engaged with hundreds of Retailers since 2003 and every single organisation has always wanted the option of a guaranteed Police response for staff should it be needed."
Craig Swallow – Managing Director, Connexion2

Making the case for Lone Worker Alarms:

As an alternative technology to P.A's, consider the deployment of lone worker alarms. It's fair to say the term 'lone worker' is probably one that hasn't been adopted as fully as it might have in the retail industry. This is probably due to the wide mix in activities and the misconception that staff are always with at least one other colleague. Any individual working outside of close or direct supervision, even for a limited time period is a lone worker at that moment in time. The vast majority of retail operations have substantial periods where staff are lone working whether it is around the opening and closing of stores, banking runs, warehouse operations, area manager travel, and security. These risks are not reduced by a fixed P.A.

Looking at ACPO alarm statistics for 2010, it's clear that the vast majority of alarms generated by P.A's are false. The number of remote alarm systems recorded in England & Wales for 2010 is just over 1.1 million, with just under 20% of those systems each having had at least one false alarm on average. The statistics also show that out of the 251,149 recorded alarms nearly 85% of them were false – at massive cost to the Police in terms of resources and the management time involved.

Conversely, statistics collated by the British Security Industry Association's Lone Worker Steering Group (a group made up of the leading solution providers in the UK) shows lone worker alarms are hugely more efficient than a P.A. from a false alarm perspective. In the first 3 quarters of 2011 there were 135,428 'Red Alerts' (Alarms) raised through a number of users totalling 94,143 in September (our analysis of this data suggests around 67% of this figure is made up of identicom users, making it the leading lone worker device in the UK by some margin). **Over this period only 68 false alarms were subsequently passed to the Police, on average under 8 per month.**

A Lone Worker Alarm is clearly not a 'one size fits all' proposition; however there are clear benefits to retailers to deploying such a solution in tandem with other technologies;

1) Lone worker alarms assist staff when not in store and reduce the threat of verbal abuse and violence towards staff. If staff potentially suffer a risk of 'man down', then certain lone worker devices (such as identicom) can automatically alarm if they detect a worker has become incapacitated.

2) Lone worker alarms are easier to install because they are wireless (GSM), no engineer/installer is required on site or permissions required from site landlords. The lone worker alarm 'moves' with the worker and is not fixed to a specific point. Lone worker alarms can be pooled amongst staff at the same site.

3) Any credible lone worker alarm will facilitate the capture of audio, operator discernment and the guarantee of a Police escalation via URN (specifically where that solution provider has been audited and approved against BS8484 [British Standard for Lone Worker Device Services] by a UKAS accredited body). Audio evidence can support staff dealing with verbally abusive customers or as part of a defined process to engage with those suspected of in-store theft.

4) The URN issued to facilitate the escalation to Police level sits within the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) deployed to support a lone worker alarm – therefore a single agreement will cover all the solutions deployed by a single organisation typically (England & Wales). A national deployment of systems is therefore quick and effective (weeks). In addition the ARC, not the Retailer, will be held accountable by the Police for any 'over-enthusiastic' escalation volumes.

5) A lone worker solution contributes towards an employer's duty of care, and may reduce the chances of serious injury or death in a workplace. (Thus making the employer less susceptible to brand damage, profit erosion, private litigation, large fines etc)

Think about anyone that might work alone in your organisation – why wait until there is an incident? There are solutions out there that are managed for a client, don't affect existing P.A. set-up, allow a situation to be assessed prior to a Police escalation, and can be implemented at no danger to your URN.

Visit www.connexion2.com or call 0844 856 6606 for more information.

Data Sources:

- British Retail Consortium 'Retail Crime Survey 2010'
- ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers England & Wales) Crime Statistics 2009/10
- BSIA Lone Worker Steering Group 2011