

RETAIL CRIME



Credit: Fog Bandit UK

CCTV

Despite 94% of retailers already having CCTV, it was ranked as the highest priority investment area by 31% of retailers.

Samantha Coldbeck, owner of Wharfedale Premier in Hull, told RN that investing in high-quality CCTV is of the utmost importance. "We have more than 14 HD cameras in our store," she said. "Our CCTV is HD quality, and once a perpetrator knows how good it is, they will go to another shop – especially if they know you are proactive with wanting to reduce crime."

Coldbeck recommended buying cameras that can be accessed via a smartphone. "Being able to view your footage on your phone means you have a system that you are able to use remotely," she said. "That way, you can view a potential incident communicated by staff even if you aren't at the shop."

"You don't have to spend thousands on cameras, but they should be a priority."

FOG DEVICES

Fog devices were revealed to be the second-most-desired area of security investment by retailers.

Security fogging is used as a robbery deterrent by creating a curtain of fog, breaking the perpetrators' eye contact and reducing the threat to staff.

Fog Bandit UK's sales and marketing manager, Neil Christmas, told RN: "The fog pushes the intruder out of the exit. The device can either be set off by a switch behind the counter, or by a panic button worn by a staff member."

He said the fog clears in five to 10 minutes. "It's crucial for it to clear quickly so police can attend the scene and business can resume," he said.

Christmas added that staff training is essential. "If staff feel comfortable, they are going to feel more protected," he said. "We work with the retailer to bring a deterrent message to their store meaning they are less likely to be targeted."

LONE WORKING ALARMS

Lone working alarms are the third-most-prioritised area of investment expressed by retailers. Solo Protect's marketing manager, Rob Harris, told RN the alarms demonstrate care to your workforce.

"Retail staff have to bear the brunt of a lot of abuse," he said. "The alarms help them to document the behaviour, as it is hooked up to a monitoring service which can call the police."

"It shows that, as a business owner, you are putting the right checks into place and reducing risk."

The alarms can either be a traditional panic button, or can be installed secretly on a name badge.

"We know that retailers are under great pressures, and we have tailored our service to help with that," he said. "Our products come with staff training, which enables them to remain mobile in the store while staying safe, and gives them a return in investment."

RETAILER VIEWS

Anita Nye

Premier Eldred Drive
Stores, Orpington, Kent



"A fog device is being fitted in our nearby Post Office in the next few weeks, so we are waiting to see what it looks like before we make an investment. We are worried about it being an eyesore, and we won't be able to tell until it's up whether it would work in our store. We don't know much about it, either, in terms of how it works, so once we see it in action we will be a bit more clued-up to be able to make a decision."

Dave Hiscott

Londis Westham Road,
Weymouth, Dorset



"Our staff have been wearing audible wristbands in a trial for the past six months. There are three pre-set phrases, which, when pressed, play on the store tannoy – for example, warning customers that we don't tolerate anti-social behaviour. It's been really effective. It also connects to an external monitoring centre, whereby everything recorded can be used evidentially, and staff there can call the police, too. Our staff feel a lot more safe and confident."

Sam Coldbeck

Wharfedale Premier,
Hull, East Yorkshire



"Our CCTV cameras are able to carry out facial recognition, but we have put it on hold at the moment. There is a lack of clarity in the law and it's not something we are willing to gamble on until we know a bit more. It's important for us to be seen as a responsible retailer, and we don't want to be seen advertising something that we shouldn't. We are just using our CCTV cameras as usual in the meantime, which are still very effective in deterring crime."

Retail crime: the true impact

A survey by RN highlights the impact of retail crime, and calls on the government and local councils for grants to help retailers invest in security measures

Independent retailers can only afford 25% of the cost needed to pay for their next security investment, according to an RN survey.

Launched with the help of the NFRN, more than 100 retailers documented the level of crime in their store, and listed how they would like to better invest in security to reduce the threat they face.

The results found that, over five years, retailers spent £4,308 on average on devices to deter crime. Ninety-four per cent of the retailers already have CCTV installed in their store, followed by 83% with a burglar alarm and 74% with external shutters.

When asked what their preferred next security investment would be, CCTV remained the most desired at 31%, followed by 14% requiring a fog device and 7% wanting to install a lone working alarm.

However, retailers revealed they can only cover 25% of the funds that would be required to pay for the investment, going on to highlight they would need a grant of £4,273 to make the final purchase.

In February, crime minister Kit Malthouse pledged his support for the survey in a personal letter, seeking collaboration once the results were published.

Business shadow minister Bill Esterson, the National Business Crime Centre and Usdaw also backed the campaign.

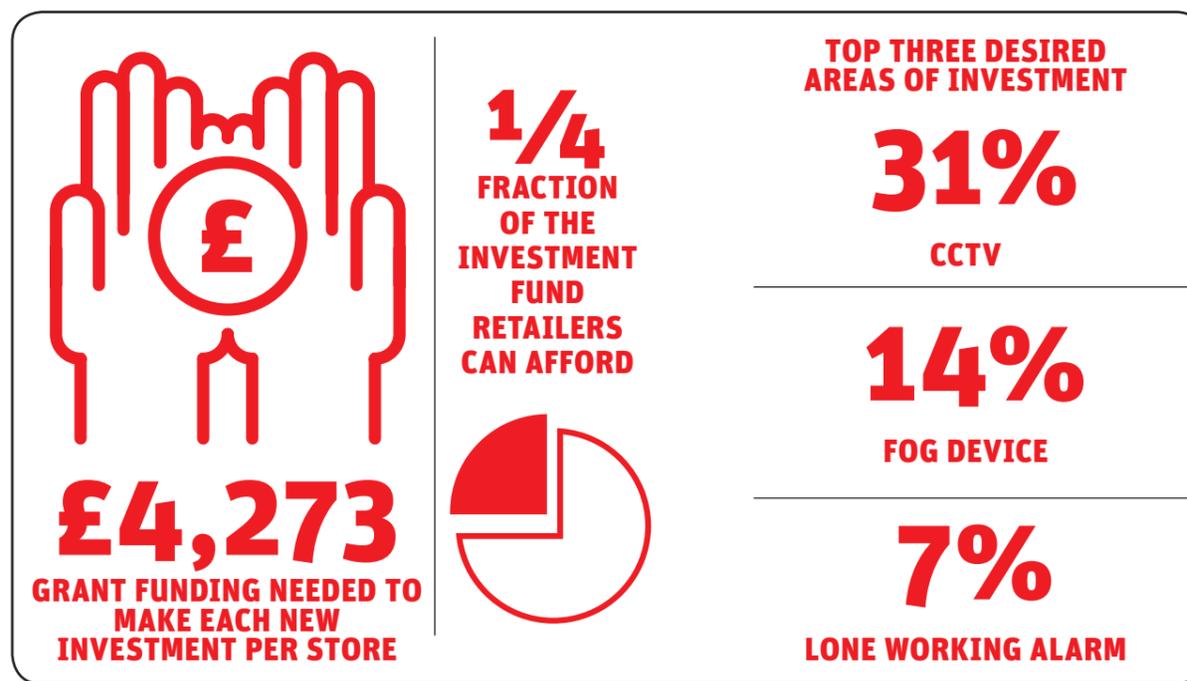
"I will support measures that bring peace of mind and security to shop workers in the face of criminal activity," said Esterson at the time.

The move comes after the Home Office broke its promise to retailers last November, by failing to publish the findings of its retail crime consultation carried out in 2019.

The 12-week call for evidence on violence and abuse toward shop staff, backed by MP Victoria Atkins and trade bodies, hoped it would support new measures to tackle retail crime.

Commenting on the survey findings, Scottish retailer Hussan Lal said: "The results have shown how retail crime impacts the way a whole business operates."

"It has a knock-on effect on the livelihood of retailers, and I am hopeful we can lobby for funding."



REACTION

When presented with the statistics from the survey, the National Business Crime Centre's chief inspector, Patrick Holdaway, told RN: "The results of the survey look really interesting and provide a different lens to other existing retail crime surveys."

Udaw's general secretary, Paddy Lillie, responded: "Yet another survey has revealed the extent to which retail crime is a burden on the industry."

"It has a deep impact, not just on businesses, but also on staff and the communities shops serve."

NFRN national president Stuart Reddish advised retailers to use the coronavirus bounce-back loan to invest in security.

"This gives smaller businesses access to finance more quickly than usual," he explained. "Retailers won't have to pay interest rates for the first year, and only low ones afterwards."

"With six years to pay it back, retailers should use the funding on better protecting themselves, their staff and their shops from incidents of retail crime."