

When a store stick-up doesn't mean a price rise

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#)

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Daylight robbery at shopping centres has become a big worry ... and I'm not talking about the mark-up of products and services due to the new season and high inflation. Sadly, as shopping mall robberies increase, there's a rising chance of a real-life stick-up at a retail store near you.

There have been at least eight attacks on malls in the past three weeks - Cresta Centre, Northgate Mall, The Glen, Maponya Mall in Soweto, Kolonnade Shopping Centre in Pretoria East, Worldwear and Eastgate Mall.

In 2012-2013, armed robberies at shopping centres were up 60% year-on-year, says the Consumer Goods Risk Initiative. Statistics from the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) suggests that there have been around 530 mall robberies in South Africa since the start of the year. About a third of those (180-odd) were robberies related to the theft of cellphones. The remaining 66% of robberies included other electronics, clothes, jewellery, and other goods - and it's stores as well as customers in the malls that are being attacked.

We still have a magnificent country, but when South Africans shop till they drop they could be hitting the deck to avoid gunfire.

Be aware

In the absence of a dramatic increase in effective policing, the onus falls on consumers themselves and the businesses and shopping centres they frequent.

Consumers should be aware of rising crime risks and must stay alert. But businesses should also remember that one of the greatest consumer needs is the need to feel safe on their premises.

The craving for security explains our love of money-back guarantees and reliable products and our sense of comfort when good value is assured.

Stores can promote this sense of security.

Visible action

In one recent example, a store-owner had enough of petty thieves stealing from customers. He found that our justice system failed to secure convictions even when perpetrators were caught red-handed or police were presented with

overwhelming video evidence.

So the store owner used evidence from in-store cameras to produce poster-size photos of the criminals. He put up these photos in plain sight near his shop entrance. As a result, the thieves gave his premises a wide berth. Customers felt safe. Business improved.

Visible action deters crime. Regrettably, I suspect our big stores focus on secret procedures to improve security - so secret consumers think nothing is being done.

More overt measures are necessary.

Make shoppers feel safe

Stores and shopping mall management must act to make shoppers feel safe. Consumers must see that guards are on duty and look purposeful and prepared.

Consumers are not fools. They know some premises attract crime because they look like soft targets or because staff are complicit.

Talk to customers. Assure them their security is paramount, that staff screening is rigorous, that CCTV and other measures are in place.

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