

Retail safety in a world of malls

By  Grant Dunnington

17 Aug 2015

South Africa has an ever-increasing number of shopping malls. While they offer consumers convenience and retailers good volumes of foot traffic, safety risks are a significant concern that need to be carefully managed and can be mitigated by using the right tools...

South Africans' love for shopping at malls is evident in the explosive growth of this type of retail environment across the country. South Africa has 1785 malls with floor space of 2000m² or more. The country with the next highest number of malls is Australia, which has only 1452.

As a result, the majority of South Africa's retail spending takes place within malls, and the retail sector is the third-largest contributor to the South African economy. A 2013 report by the South African Council of Shopping Centres suggests that the demand for shopping centre retail space in South Africa will increase by a further 4 to 7 million square metres by 2025/30.

The growth of the number of malls in South Africa is in line with a continued growth of this type of shopping environment globally. A recent report by Cushman & Wakefield shows that more than 1800 new shopping centres will be added to the existing global inventory of nearly 47000 malls by the end of 2016.



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Consumers enjoy the convenience of having multiple stores in one location, easy parking access and readily available entertainment. The demand for convenience close to home has also meant that the catchment area for malls has decreased.

At the 2014 Annual Congress of the South African Council of Shopping Centres, consumer retail property services company CBRE presented the results of a survey that identified South Africans' top four concerns when choosing a mall to visit as: mall cleanliness, security, price of products, and availability of coffee shops and free Wi-Fi.

With security as the second most significant concern for consumers, it is important for mall management teams and retailers themselves to understand their security risks and how they can be mitigated.

Cash services and solutions companies can provide a customised risk assessment and solution for securing retail premises and enhancing the safety of employees and the public.

Key safety points

One of the key high-risk areas for retailers is entrance and exit points, and retailers can protect themselves by implementing security personnel, monitoring equipment, or both, at these access points, and having as few entrances or exits as possible.

SBV Services' CEO Grant Dunnington says that having trustworthy employees can also reduce the risk of petty theft or of collusion with outside parties intending to commit theft. Employee vetting is an effective way to mitigate these risks well in advance.

A particularly sensitive area of risk for retail businesses is cash management. This includes all areas in where cash is handled, moved and stored.

Mike Krogh, GM of Sales at SBV Services, says that keeping as little cash on hand in stores as possible is one way to reduce risk. However, daily bank deposits can become predictable for criminals and put employees at risk. Some security service companies offer their retail customers on-site cash deposit devices or vaults, to store cash securely until it is collected by cash-in-transit teams.

Using deposit vaults is a secure way to store cash because it is counted and logged electronically as it enters the device, which reduces the stages in the cash clearance process and gives retailers more control over their cash.

Another important factor to consider is the movement of cash inside a store. Keeping distances travelled during the cash-handling process both inside and outside a store's premises as short as possible decreases vulnerability to risks.

Having a cash storage point that can only be accessed through a store also puts customers and staff at risk when guards collect cash, so retailers need to think carefully about their store layouts and the implications for cash storage and collection.

Constant communication with cash services and solutions service providers can help retailers stay alert to new criminal trends and can assist them in identifying and correcting any safety blind spots.

The focus on safety in a mall environment is important as consumers need to feel safe before they spend time and money shopping at a mall, and it frees retailers up to carry out their core business with peace of mind.

ABOUT GRANT DUNNINGTON

Grant Dunnington was appointed Group CEO of SBV Services (Pty) Ltd in September 2001.
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