

TOGETHER, SECURITY AND COPPERS ENSURE HAPPY SHOPPERS

By Rod Cowan*

Market City shopping centre, above Sydney's Paddy's Markets in the heart of Chinatown, pulls around 14 million visitors a year.

Most are shoppers attracted to the array of fashion (36 factory outlets offering discounts up to 70% on brands such as Bracewell, Cue, Esprit, General Pants, Lonsdale, Nautica, and Ojay), jewellery, beauty, gift and souvenir stores.

Some are there for Sydney's renowned Yum Cha restaurant, China Grand, take in a movie at the Reading Cinemas, or a drink at the Tavern.

Others, Leading Senior Constable Jacob Reeves found, are there for entirely different reasons.

"When I first came here, I just could not believe the amount of antisocial behaviour and undesirable people here," says Reeves.

Reeves began working at the NSW Police City Central Crime Prevention Bureau in October 2007. After checking the statistics for local crime hotspots, he found 20 to 30 thefts a week were happening in the centre. He decided to observe firsthand the demographics and how security was working.

"I had a feeling the types of people [doing the stealing] would stand out to security and it would be quite simple to rectify the problem," says Reeves. "I looked at what security did and they basically patrolled but did not respond to these people in a proactive manner. If they were stealing or were caught, only then security would deal with them."

As it happened, Reliance Security's Ed Laxton had also recently started as security manager for Market City and he

too wanted to do something.

An undercover operation with police and security working together was a short-term success. Three days a week over two weeks resulted in 25 arrests and 30 charges but the thieves simply got smarter.

Reeves and Laxton began looking at long-term cooperation.

One key was the use of banning orders, which the centre can issue under NSW law. A banning database was created and the rules around them changed. By adjusting the lengths of bans to match unacceptable behaviour and introducing a right of appeal, the banning notices have become more effective, especially in court.

Another factor is sharing intelligence. Any suspicious activity results in photos, stills of video footage and other details being passed on to Reeves. For example, security obtained the passport details of a Colombian national attempting a bag snatch. Reeves in turn passed on the intelligence to the police proactive crime team. Such intelligence is vital, with police up against organised (often international) teams operating anywhere between Melbourne and Brisbane. One gang of bag thieves is possibly working in cahoots with another team specialising in credit card frauds. All are running their own form of intelligence operations.

"There's a fair bit of training and a fair bit of organising behind these groups," says Reeves' boss, Detective Inspector Tom Houlahan.

For intelligence sharing to work, however, it has to be two-way, says Laxton.

"If we were talking to the police and nothing happened, you would not feel you were achieving anything," says Laxton.

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Shoulder to shoulder against crime: (L-R) Ed Laxton, Reliance Security, Leading Senior Constable Jacob Reeves, Ian McIntosh, Market City, and Detective Inspector Tom Houlahan.

“Our business plan talks about creating a safe environment. I don’t know how to do that without having risk managers walking these corridors and back of house every day.”

“The difference is, we talk to [Reeves] and we get results. We feel like we are in partnership with [Reeves] and the rest of the police team.”

Police and private security working closely together is, to say the least, unusual. Two years on a graffiti taskforce housed with Railcorp transit officers, Reeves says, “shaped my attitude toward external parties”

Full-throated support of his boss helps, too. As Houlahan points out his performance is judged partly on crime statistics – when an increase occurs he has to answer for it.

“I simply do not have the resources to rely solely on the police to solve the problem,” says Houlahan. That is why the relationship here is so important to us.”

One reason the relationship works is that the centre management is flexible enough to let Reeves advise on how security could work.

An arrangement not everyone is keen on.

“We managed to develop a relationship that I still don’t have and can’t get with any other centre in terms of 100 per cent interest, 100 per cent co-operation, and the information exchange,” says Reeves.

More often than not, says Houlahan, the problem is that businesses factor crime losses into their accounting.

“People always say when there is trouble with crime you need more police. You don’t need more police, but we need to use our resources more smartly. That is what the general retailer needs to do, as well. If there is some way of reducing their losses without additional expenses or minimal additional expense, they should incorporate that,” says Houlahan.

The difference with Market City?

“Our business plan talks about creating a safe environment. I don’t know how to do that without having risk managers walking these corridors and back of house every day,” says Ian McIntosh, Market City’s Centre Manager.

“We actually changed, probably about four years ago the direction of security, away from security to risk management. So, we saw risks in the centre as the most important thing. At the end of the day, the number of risks that the guards identified, the controls they have used, or the mitigation strategies they have taken to mitigate or remove a risk, have been the evaluators we have used. So, instead of walking miles and hitting data points, it is now important that they



identify risk and try to control or manage the risk.

“We saw persons of interest or offences in the centre just as a risk that is something they would manage in a day. It becomes a point of daily routine. You have to be continually observant. That is probably the thing that has made it work better it is that the guards are active, they are actually every minute looking for risk, that’s the focus.”

The risk-managed approach is working.

In contrast to his early visits, Reeves says: “You can come in here and you’d be struggling to find somebody that was going to play up.”

As McIntosh puts it, there are three elements at play victim, opportunity and offender, two of which he wants removed.

“We want the victims to come 14 million a year and we want them,” says McIntosh. “We don’t want the opportunity, so we target open bags, purses on the tops of strollers. As for the offender, if we can identify and remove them from the centre and make sure they never shop here or walk through

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the place, then I have 14 million people who are not victims.”

And, with thefts dropping to between zero and five a week, they are more likely to remain happy shoppers, rather than become victims.

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