



Combined action

Martin Gosling examines two European projects in which G4S Security Services and commercial enterprises have joined forces in the fight against crime

There are two principal strategies available for dealing with crime: forestall it, or deal with the consequences when it happens.

Although the first option is obviously preferable, modern law enforcement methods across many countries and communities appear to favour, instead, a policy of reacting after the event.

As a function of traditional

policing, the "beat" system evolved as the most effective way of deterring potential offenders. When each designated area of urban streets is patrolled around the clock by officers on foot, anti-social behaviour of every sort is discouraged from its inception by the certain knowledge that a policeman is close by and can be summoned quickly.

This method of policing was

successful even before the advent of personal radios, and both property owners and members of the public were reassured by the close proximity of an officer who could call on swift, additional assistance from a nearby beat when necessary.

In recent years, the escalation of serious offending – predominantly terrorism and computer fraud – has meant that police resources are often diverted away from street





Providing security for 40 retail outlets in Antwerp's famous Meir shopping district involves a combination of uniformed and plain-clothed G4S personnel as well as CCTV surveillance.

crime and what is erroneously termed low-level deviance. This includes shoplifting, street mugging, pavement drug dealing and alcohol-fuelled thuggery.

That is not to say that such offences are ignored – simply that by dealing with them in a reactive fashion and measuring success against response time targets, some police forces may be seen to have lost touch with the original purpose of their existence (see “Prevention, not punishment”, opposite).

Understandably, businesses are looking to provide their own responses.

Co-operative security

The scale of theft from commercial premises is enormous. In 2006, European retailers lost €29 billion worth of stock, according to the European Retail Theft Barometer, and it is against this background that several successful initiatives have taken shape.

Business enterprises have united with private security organisations and, by achieving collaboration with the statutory police in each area, have formed an effective alliance against crime.

One of the most vibrant responses to escalating crime has evolved in Almere, the youngest city in the Netherlands. The first house in Almere was built in 1976 but the population is now 180,000 and is expected to reach 350,000 by the year 2030.

Such rapid expansion has sucked in large scale commercial enterprise and an associated growth of industrial activity. Inevitably, this brought with it a surge in crime of many sorts. Commercial loss and damage to property became out of hand and a search for radical solutions began.

Former Government Minister Annemarie Jorritsma-Lebbink has been the Mayor of Almere since 2003 and is the driving force behind the foundation of the SBBA – the Foundation for the Security of Industrial Premises in Almere.

This collective enterprise embraces the broad range of commercial activity: wholesale, retail, construction and warehousing. Together they have devised an overall strategy that involves close co-operation with both the private security sector – G4S Security Services (Netherlands)

– and the local police, aimed at tackling the problem head-on.

Over 700 companies, large and small, have bought into this collective approach in Almere, but the rate at which each should pay towards the cost of the scheme can raise problems – compounded by some enterprises benefiting from the drop in crime while making no financial contribution at all.

Annemarie Jorritsma says, “The SBBA was actually born out of misery. When we started in 1995, the rate of crime against industry had reached an absolute limit.” She adds that although they have now achieved an astonishing drop in criminality, they recognise that the system needs constant refinement if it is to stay ahead of the game.

The main component of this success seems to be the way in which all the players function well together.

The private security foot patrols are co-ordinated with the routines of individual company staff while increased use of CCTV and sophisticated alarm systems has proved especially effective. Crucially, the local police have become closely



involved in the initiative and regular meetings of all parties ensure that specific problems are analysed and preventative strategies refined in the light of new intelligence and the scheduled movement of valuable goods.

The Antwerp Meir

The collective security initiative run in the Antwerp Meir shopping district is probably the longest established and most efficient scheme of its kind. Begun more than 15 years ago, this collaborative effort represents a beacon for others to follow.

One of Belgium's premier retail precincts, the Meir is on a par with London's Oxford Street and Madison Avenue in New York. But because the Meir is free of traffic, enormous numbers of people flow through the area in the high season and the potential for crime at every level is considerable. Although international chain stores such as H&M are predominant, around 40 shopping outlets on the Meir, including independents, take part in the enterprise.

Again, the success of the arrangements have depended on

close collaboration between the retail consortium, the regular police and a private security company. The overall picture is one of flexibility and the deployment of a mixture of resources aimed at achieving maximum effect.

The input of G4S Security Services (Belgium) personnel is tailored to the requirements of individual stores, and specific levels of security response are offered according to the budget of each participating member. The strategy is underpinned by foot patrols deployed at staggered start times and which are able to respond to alarm calls from clients and to seek reinforcement from colleagues should a serious incident develop.

If, following the customer's instructions, police are called, the level of cooperation is such that they invariably attend promptly. Should G4S staff deal with an incident and later attend court, then extra costs are incurred by the retail organisation concerned.

Business Unit manager for G4S, Robby Van Mele, points out that whereas in other cities large stores deploy only static guards, the flexibility of the Meir system

Prevention, not punishment

"The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime and the next that of detection and punishment of offenders if crime is committed" – Sir Richard Mayne, first Commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police (1829)

pays dividends with ten operatives patrolling the Meir throughout each day. This visible presence creates a deterrent to crime that benefits everyone – and a reduction in street delinquency of all types has been achieved.

This is clearly a dynamic answer to retail security problems, but further adjustments are being sought. Rather than having a tariff system of services offered to different stores who buy in according to their budgets, it is hoped to achieve a simpler, unitary arrangement of meeting the overall cost.

But is all this really effective?

Business managers who see their losses being reduced certainly think so. And perhaps those who founded the first police forces long ago (see panel above), would agree that this is the right way to set about preventing crime. ■