

“ AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION...”



PHOTOGRAPHED BY LEONARD KAMSLER

By **WILLIAM DAY**

Shoplifting, fraudulent checks, armed robbery and dishonest employees are putting a large dent in pro shop profits. Here are some ways to protect your shop

“Crime,” an unfamiliar word to pro shop managers several years ago, now, unfortunately, is common in both word and deed.

To get a better picture of how the current crime wave is effecting the golf business, **GOLFDOM** conducted an investigation to determine what kinds of crimes are

committed against golf shops and what can be done about the problem. The investigation surveyed three different types of shops: pro shops at private clubs, public course shops and shops not attached to a course.

In private club pro shops, the most common crime is burglary.

It usually happens at night and is done by someone who is familiar with the layout of the shop and the expensive items the shop may have in stock. In three of these clubs, which have had large losses recently, a former employee was suspected of being in on the

continued

"AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. . ."

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crime. The burglars usually took items they could sell readily—golf balls and clubs. Clothes, for the most part, were left untouched. Entry to the shops was usually by window and, in one case, the intruders came down a rope lowered through the skylight.

The best protection against this crime is to have a night watchman on duty at all times. Unfortunately, the expense can be prohibitive, and only the largest private clubs can afford it. For smaller clubs several preventive measures are available, however.

Invisible deterrents

Burglar alarm systems

- **The Electric Watchman**—The windows, doors and other vulnerable areas of your place of business are wired. When you are closed for the night, a continuous current flows through the wiring. An interruption of this current gives an instantaneous signal.
- **Invisible Light**—A beam of light is directed across an open area to a photo-electric cell. If the beam of invisible light is interrupted the photo-electric cell trips a silent switch and the alarm is sounded.
- **Unheard Sound**—This system floods the area to protect with a blanket of sound waves beyond the range of the human ear. Disturbance of this wave pattern by a moving person will transmit an alarm.
- **Vibration Detector**—The detector is adjusted to react to certain attack vibrations. Commonplace burglary operations, such as hammering or chopping will cause the detector to set the alarm.

All four of these systems can be set up to sound either bells or send signals to a police station or alarm company central office.

Services of a private patrol can be acquired at less expense. It would check the shop several times a night, while checking several other business establishments as well. One difficulty involved here is that many courses are located many miles from major business centers where these protection patrols are most likely to be.

For those clubs not wanting the expense of a full-time night watchman or those situated too far out for private patrolling, there is another answer. The pro shop can be wired with an electric protective alarm system. This system is connected to either the local police station or a telephone answering service. When the alarm wire is tripped, the burglar hears nothing as the alarm goes off in the police station. Before realizing what has happened, he can be apprehended. This kind of system is relatively inexpensive and can be used by any pro shop having a telephone connection.

Along with burglary, the pro shop on a public course has added problems not usually found in a private club. Shoplifting and bad checks are two of its biggest headaches. Since this course is not restricted to members only, anyone can drift into the shop—be he golfer or not.

One public course pro shop located close to a large Eastern city lost over \$1,000 in golf balls alone to shoplifters last year. The manager believed that most of the lifting was done by non-golfers—"kids who steal the balls and then go out on the course and sell them to golfers."

Shoplifting is difficult to stop completely, especially on days when the manager and his assistants are busy with customers and do not have time to watch the merchandise and browsers in the store. A system of mirrors like the ones used in large department stores is a good way of dealing with this problem because a complete view of the shop from any

angle is obtained. Several shops, however, prefer to keep daily running inventories of fast moving items such as golf balls. By this method losses become immediately apparent and the culprits usually can be traced. For the shop doing a large volume a private guard in the store is still the surest deterrent yet. Smaller shops temporarily might invest in this method during their peak selling periods.

When it is possible instruct employees to maintain a constant vigil to prevent shoplifting. Be certain, however, that they know beforehand the state law covering shoplifting. For example, some states allow in-store apprehension of shoplifters, other states do not.

One public pro shop manager said that he had been stuck with several losses from bad checks. He was fooled by "convincing stories" and "honest faces." Most shops simply don't cash checks from strange customers. This seems to be the best solution; insurance does exist, but it is quite expensive and requires check writers to submit to photographing. A shop manager interviewed said he would take the loss on the check rather than subject his customers to this kind of embarrassment! A shop that does accept checks should always insist on proper identification.

Pro shops located in urban areas are most likely to be plagued by armed robberies. One city shop manager described an armed robbery he had had just recently. Three men came into the store, pulled guns and demanded all of the cash including rather large contributions from two customers as well. The victims were bound and gagged before the robbers fled the shop. Here, obviously, the prime interest was not in golfing goods but in money. Any business in the city runs a higher risk of this type of crime.

continued on page 66

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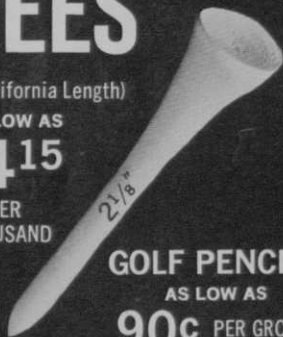
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"AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. . ."

continued from page 40

As armed robbery is a direct threat to life as well as to loss of income, many devices have been developed to deter or, at least, deal with this act. One such device is again the electrical alarm system in which the manager is the one to trip the signal by button, pressure or foot pad. The alarm sounds at a distance and quickly summons the police or protective service.

Prevent shoplifting

Store layout and design

- place cash register near exit
- install shelves for parcels customers bring into the store
- small, inexpensive items should be displayed near the cashier or behind the counter, expensive items in locked cases
- eliminate cross aisles where possible
- cut tops and bottoms off dressing-room doors
- light store properly

Merchandise arrangement

- do not stack merchandise above eye level
- eliminate blind spots in store displays

Visible deterrents

- anti-shoplifting signs
- photographic surveillance system with signs calling attention to it
- uniformed guard

Sales policies

- attach labels firmly so that they cannot be switched
- mark price tags in ink, never pencil
- allow customers no more than two or three small items within reach at a time
- customers should have no more than three or four garments in a dressing room at one time
- staple or tape bag after completing sale
- peak sales force should coincide with peak traffic periods

Employee pilfering is one thing that is a common problem to all pro shops. Most of the managers interviewed by GOLFDOM were reluctant to discuss this matter, but this crime is on the increase in every retail establishment—pro golf shops being no exception. (The Small Business Administration in 1966 reported that dishonest employees account for two-thirds of all retail thievery.) A good way to check on suspected employee pilfering, as with shoplifting, is by keeping a tight inventory on all items. If pilfering is taking place it will probably show up in this way. However, this method does not necessarily point a finger at the guilty party. Unless he is caught, the losses are most likely to continue. One shop dealt with this problem by hiring a special detective disguised as a part-time salesman. The detective was able to discover the pilferer and, because of his legal training, was able to build a strong case against the employee. This is probably the best answer when this problem occurs.

As mentioned earlier, pro shop losses from crime are rising each year. Although no shop could give the exact amount of money lost, two claimed burglaries in excess of \$10,000 worth of merchandise. A few losses over \$10,000 could spell disaster for both the large and the small pro shop.

Unfortunately, the advice and methods suggested by our investigation deal primarily with prevention rather than cure mainly because there seems to be no sure remedy for the current rash of crimes. Measures that deter the crime itself or prevent added loss or injury while the crime is being committed seem to be, at present, the safest and most reliable methods of dealing with these problems in the pro shops. □

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