

**How body-worn cameras in retail increase accountability and reduce crime**

# ABUSE & VIOLENCE IN RETAIL

Since the early 20th century, we've been accustomed to the phrase 'the customer is always right'. It largely replaced the previous 'caveat emptor' ('buyer beware') slogan and placed an emphasis on the retailer to always put the needs of the customer first.'

Even back in 1914 it was acknowledged that customers can be demanding, less than honest and have unrealistic expectations.

Today, the total retail market of the United Kingdom is worth over 465 billion pounds\* and retailers are continuing to adapt to ever-changing consumer habits in the post-pandemic era. However, alarm is rising in the sector regarding the torrent of abuse and violence experienced by retail staff.

In 2020-2021, with fewer shops actually open, incidents of violence and abuse almost tripled from 455 incidents a day to over 1300, three times as many as the previous year. As a result, retailers spent £715 million on crime prevention to combat these issues (BRC Crime Survey).



Retail is becoming increasingly frustrated with how to confront customers about adhering to rules in store. With regular verbal and physical assaults, safety concerns for staff have never been higher.

A variety of safety measures implemented in retail have included

de-escalation training programs for staff, CCTVs and additional security presence, but none of these have been able to slow the pace of abuse.

*\*Statista: Retail Market Worldwide - Dossier Key Figures*

## Types of abuse

Abuse comes in many forms including physical assault, intimidation, coercion, ridicule, and harassment, as well as passive-aggressive, patronising and racist language.

In the last year, unacceptable customer behaviour of swearing, yelling, threatening, spitting at and physical assault was experienced by

89% of employees working in convenience stores alone.

It's not uncommon for abusive customers to throw items, like tinned goods, at supermarket staff.

Customers will blame retail staff for everything that they perceive is wrong, even things beyond their

control. While making unreasonable demands of staff, they use hostile language without any regard for the person they're speaking to and it's commonplace for customers to make threats to employees and their families.

# Global Market Leader in Body-Worn Cameras

Reveal is a global market leader in body-worn camera technology supplying and supporting clients in 40+ countries. Starting in the police market, Reveal are now proud to supply 70% of the UK police force but have also developed extensive experience working with prisons, local government and private security to develop the best possible camera offering for sector users. With our innovative technology and substantial understanding of retail environments, Reveal offers the only custom-designed camera to the global retail market which provides an effective and affordable solution to de-escalate tense situations in store.



## Why are customers so angry?

Over the last five years, consumer expectations have risen as mobile commerce, personalisation and next-day delivery have become commonplace. Consumers are quick to vocalise their belief that they are always right and demand compensation even when the circumstances, or their behaviour, don't warrant it.

Additionally, brands find themselves being held to ransom on social media, knowing only too well how quickly

their reputation can be destroyed online.

The increase in abusive and violent behaviour from customers toward retail staff has increased since the start of the pandemic.

While this trend has dramatically increased in the space of 3 years, it has now become a very real and dangerous crisis. Public-facing staff in retail have seen a marked increase in the levels of threats, abusive language, shouting and physical assaults towards them.

Worryingly, in 2021, there were 16,753 violent incidents where a weapon was used. 44% involved a knife, 55% either an axe, hammer or syringe was present and in 1% of incidents a firearm was used, according to the ACS Crime Survey 2022. The impact of this is taking a massive, sometimes tragic, toll on mental health as well as physical health and safety at work.

A new report by the Retail Trust has found that one in five British retail workers are planning to quit the sector.

## The causes of this epidemic of bad behaviour are complex

Some have suggested that the restrictions on social interaction caused by COVID-19 have heightened our internal 'threat system' and our instincts to fight off an unseen enemy have been triggered. Combine this with political and economic unrest, concerns about the rise in the cost of living, inflation and daily news of war and violent crime and many people have become a lot more fearful and combative.

While everyone initially applauded retail and health workers for keeping us all safe, fed and stocked up with essentials, as the world went into a COVID-induced lockdown, the goodwill seems to have been short-lived.

Frustration with government advice, social distancing and mask-wearing has turned quickly into verbal abuse and aggressive behaviour. So much so that dealing with violence against staff has become the number one concern for a majority of retailers.

## What causes a customer to become abusive?

Drugs and alcohol, although not exclusively, certainly play a role in a large number of retail crime incidents. Retail workers are increasingly placed at an alarming risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public.

There are several different triggers for customers who develop abusive behaviour towards store associates.

Being refused the sale of alcohol, or other age-related goods, has often been seen as the most common

**A well-known UK supermarket saw a 41% decrease in violent crime in stores using Reveal body-worn cameras.**

reason for antisocial behavior. But theft is increasingly becoming a huge problem in the sector. Low staffing levels, self-scan tills, racism and refunds/exchange issues have now become flash points for customer rage.

As crime rates have increased in other areas of society, so has the pressure on police and security forces to respond quickly and effectively.

With increasing demands on police resources, the retail sector often has little option but to try to appease abusive customers or ignore behaviour such as theft.



As our shopping experiences have changed over recent years, new flashpoints for abuse have been created. Asking for customer age-ID from behind a counter is a very different experience from standing alongside shoppers at a self-serve checkout. Staffing shortages have also made it more difficult for people to speak to customer service. 92% of customers say they are most frustrated by there not being enough staff or checkouts and 90% blamed slow service (Retail Trust YouGov Poll).

The consequences of such actions can often cause immense, and often longterm, harm. It can be very hard for employees not to take these abusive situations personally.

Retail workers are often left in tears and shock at how aggressive people are, leading to distrust of customers in future situations.

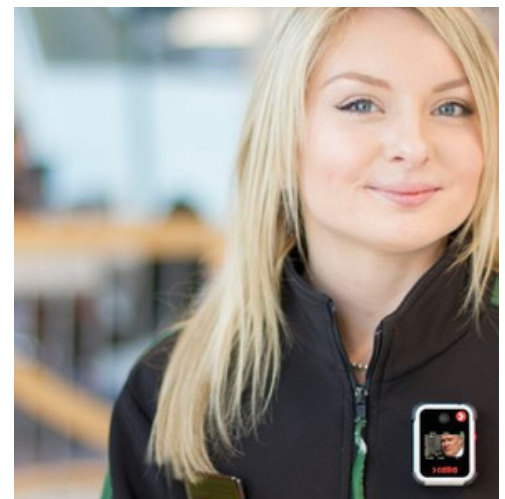
## Increasing accountability and reducing crime with body-worn cameras

Traditionally, retailers have looked to the following ways to deal with abusive customers:

- De-escalation training techniques for floor staff and line managers
- The use of positive language
- CCTV & security systems
- Offering a goodwill gesture, discount, or refund to neutralise a situation
- Allowing customers to vent their frustration
- Involving private security and/or police officers

With the level of abuse in retail not showing any sign of reduction, a fresh approach is required.

Reveal's signature front-facing body camera has already been proven to be a situation-changing tool in the de-escalation of abusive situations in retail. Positive results in a variety of UK retail environments, have shown significant improvements in protecting employees and calming irate customers.



## How do body-worn cameras work?

One of the UK's leading health and beauty retailers used Reveal's body worn retail cameras during a trial period at one of its high-risk stores. They registered a 68% reduction in the abuse of staff by customers and have now rolled out the cameras to the rest of their stores.

Reveal's discreet body-worn cameras are unobtrusive, lightweight, and easy to operate when attached to employee clothing. Once activated, by manually sliding a switch, it's a simple process to inform an abusive customer that their conversation and actions are being recorded. The power is in the hands of the wearer to have an independent account of a situation. This is particularly useful if evidence gathering, and legal enforcement become necessary. Importantly, body-worn cameras have been proven to improve the confidence and safety of the wearer.

Violent incidents tripled from 455 a day to 1300 over the past year

British Retail Consortium (BRC) Crime Survey 2022

Knowing that what they do and say is being recorded has a direct effect on the way that customers behave. It has been shown that these body-worn cameras deter violence and aggression. Reveal is committed to transforming the way body-worn camera evidence is captured and managed to protect those on both sides of the lens.



For example, our D-series and K series cameras, used by the police and private security, have a unique front-facing screen with an articulated camera head that captures compelling evidence and de-escalates tense situations with complete transparency. These cameras also have groundbreaking technology built-in and ready for activation,

including real-time AI intelligence, live facial recognition and touch-screen annotation.

Reveal has designed each body-worn camera to connect to a user-friendly interface that is hosted on world-class infrastructure. Multiple-deployment options offer a choice of Standalone, Enterprise or Cloud preference.

With fully configurable software, that integrates seamlessly with existing systems such as VMS and case management, you'll find it easy to streamline your evidence management with your existing workflow.

All of Reveal's products are designed to suit a variety of users who require different solutions for a range of diverse working environments. Reducing the number of incidents in retail is achieved by deterring aggression and recording independent accounts of events.



# Ending violence and abuse in Retail

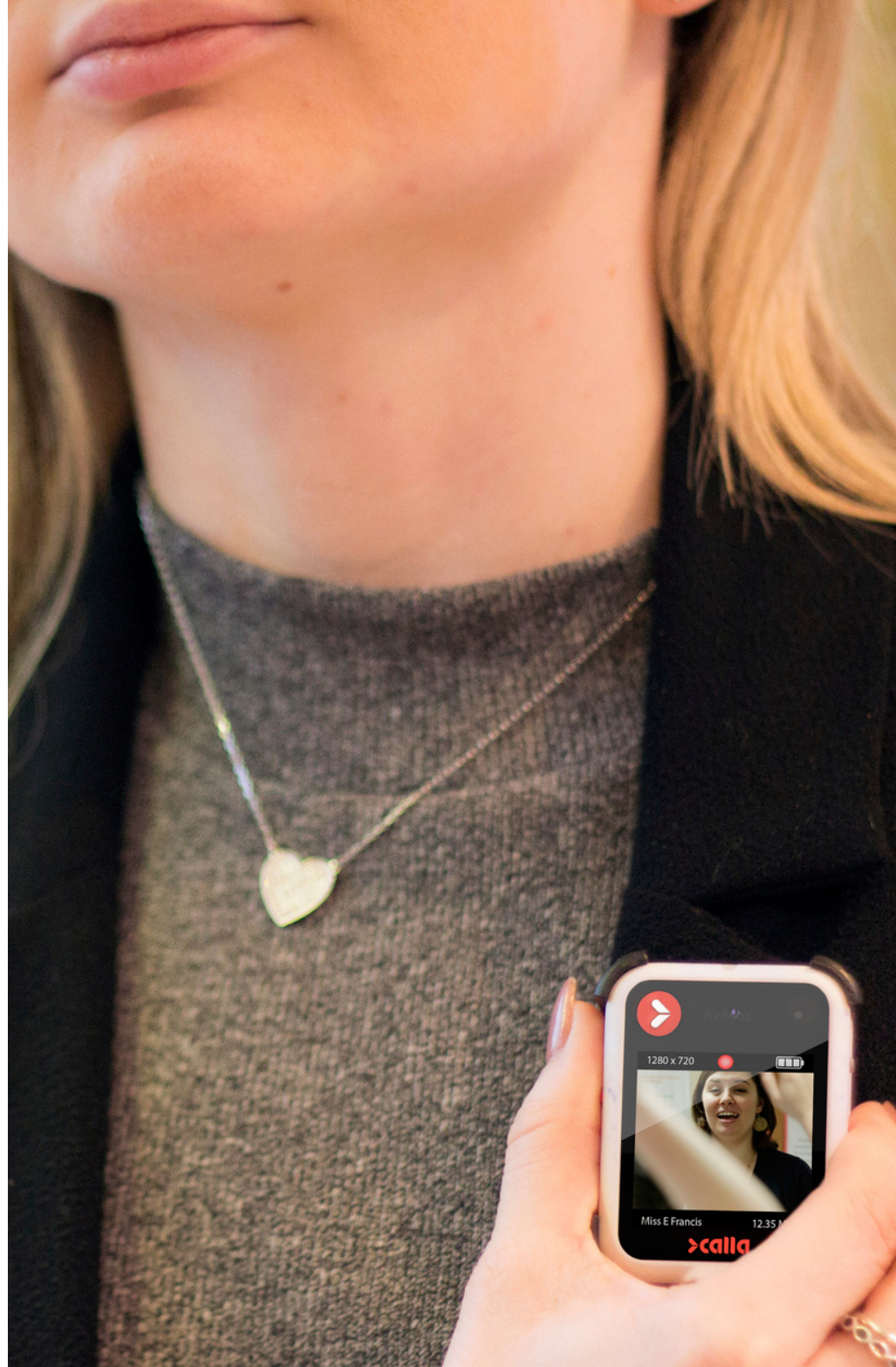
As retail continues to search for a solution to escalating violence and abuse, it's important to focus on achieving a winning combination for everyone involved.

It's not about punishing the customer but about calming the situation so that an agreeable resolution can be found for all parties.

Preventing a situation from getting out of hand is undoubtedly preferable to trying to contain one that has already erupted.

Improving relations between retail stores and customers helps to maintain brand integrity with a focus on caring for employees and the local community as a whole. Restoring and nurturing decent traditional values of behaviour is core to a well-functioning and respectful society.

Your store teams deserve to feel safe and protected at work, just as your customers should feel valued and heard. The customer may be right, at times, but abuse is never acceptable.



 **REVEAL**

To arrange your trial of our range of body-worn cameras for retail:

Contact Reveal today to take your first step toward deterring violence and aggression and start safeguarding your retail staff with body-worn cameras.

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