

Retailers' efforts to combat theft may backfire

Article

The finding: Despite dramatic anti-theft measures put in place by retailers like [Walmart](#) and [Walgreens](#), few have found a silver bullet—and many have instead faced unintended consequences.

- **Theft prevention measures are irritating.** Nearly 4 in 5 (78%) of consumers say it's annoying when products are locked up or secured in cases, per a recent [Zebra survey](#).
- **Those roadblocks increase strain on store associates.** Seven in 10 (70%) say it's hard to find an associate to unlock those cases when shopping in a store.
- **They also create a negative impression about safety.** Roughly the same share (71%) are concerned that stores with locked cases experience more theft and crime—that's up 8 percentage points from last year.

Why it matters: Retailers' aggressive tactics push consumers away; about 1 in 5 shoppers have left a store without getting what they needed because a retail associate wasn't available to help.

- Rather than deal with a frustrating in-store experience, many [consumers turn to Amazon, which they know will offer more “speed and ease”](#) than physical stores, said CEO **Andy Jassy** on a recent earnings call.
- Once a shopper buys essentials like toothpaste and paper towels from Amazon, they'll likely buy it again.

Our take: Brick-and-mortar retailers need to avoid ceding their few clear advantages over online competitors—letting shoppers touch and feel their products and making it easy for consumers to get what they need quickly.

Rather than make their stores “plexiglass prisons,” they should follow the lead of **Best Buy** and **Lowe's** by focusing on properly staffing stores and training employees to handle suspected shoplifting.

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