



Tilley Award 2004

Project Title

'ATM Robbery – Creating a safer environment'

Force

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ATM Robbery – ‘Creating a safer environment’

Summary:

For a 12 month period between January 2002 and January 2003 there were a total of 14 reported/recorded offences of Robbery associated with an ATM Cash dispenser at a branch of LloydsTSB in the Birchfield Road area of Perry Barr, Birmingham. Notably, 13 of these offences occurred in the latter part of the period between August and January.

A considerable analytical study of the victim, location and offender was undertaken to see what realistic short term and long term responses and measures could be put into place with a view to detecting and preventing further offences.

The ATM was in close proximity – a couple of yards away from a telephone kiosk which offenders often used to hide inside. Next to the telephone kiosk was a bench seat - these two features alone gave the criminal excellent anonymity. The ATM had very poor lighting, no appropriate warning signage – in order to provide the user with awareness messages, and the fixed external camera overlooking the ATM was not positioned to overlook the area of the ATM. The recording facilities were also extremely poor. Other aggravating features included a Subway, and concrete anti parking posts which were often used by people to sit on.

A number of significant physical changes to the immediate area of the ATM were made. The telephone kiosk was turned 90 degrees allowing natural surveillance inside. The bench seat was removed and the ATM machine was renewed and improved lighting installed. Reflective panels/mirrors were fitted to enable users to see to the side and behind them, and appropriately worded signs were installed reminding the user to be on their guard.

The CCTV system was upgraded – and the external camera repositioned to cover the area of the ATM. Based on the concept of ‘defensible space’, a ‘User Zone’ was introduced. This area was defined by yellow hatched markings painted in a half circle on the footpath. In addition, a minimum standard of response, recording and investigation were devised and introduced.

As a result of these measures being introduced, there has been a significant reduction in Robbery associated with this ATM. January 2003 up to and including February 2004 saw only 2 recorded offences of Robbery associated with this ATM. This facility which has also shown an increase of 22% in overall usage since these measures were introduced – which is good news for LloydsTSB!

ATM Robbery – ‘Creating a safer environment’

Defining the problem

The bank premises are situated on a main arterial route into Birmingham City centre. Known as the Birchfield Road (A34), it is approximately 4 miles north of the city centre. This road serves as a border with a neighbouring OCU and served by numerous residential side roads. The area has history of high crime – particularly relevant to robbery, burglary and vehicle offences that have a proven link to drugs. This is aggravated by a series of gang related incidents involving firearms where only a quarter of a mile away two girls were tragically shot whilst attending a New Years Eve party in 2001.

The 5-month period between August 2002 and January 2003 saw alarming 13 robbery offences associated with this ATM recorded. This was a substantial increase on the previous year where, for the same period, only 3 similar offences were reported/recorded.

A notable trend surrounding these latest offences was the severity of violence used in that 2 victims sustained serious injury requiring hospital treatment i.e.; a broken hip and a broken cheekbone. The affects resulted in an increase cost of policing - in terms of proactive high profile patrols and investigation into reported incidents, an increase in victims, the fear of crime, and loss of revenue to the bank through fear avoidance brought about by a reduction in ATM usage. There was of course the relevance that, for a variety of reasons, some incidents may have not been reported.

There was clearly a need for short and long term interventions to tackle the problem

Why, What Where and How?

With recorded Police data relating to the 14 offences between June 2002 and January 2003 and other information available, specific areas needed researching in order to establish likely and contributory causes including;

- Modus Operandi
- Victim profiles
- Offender/Prolific offender profiles
- Property type
- Offence profile – including days of week, time of day
- Location and the surrounding environment
- Effectiveness of existing crime prevention methods/working practices of LloydsTSB
- Effectiveness of policing strategies including response and investigation methods
- Effect on business activity (Police/LloydsTSB)

Modus Operandi

The M.O for these were relatively similar in that offenders were often in close proximity whilst the victim was using or had used the ATM machine. Some were seen inside a telephone kiosk sited nearby or on a bench seat prior to the victims using the ATM. All but 2 of the 14 offences involved 2 or more offenders all of whom were of afro Caribbean appearance. One offence involved a youth of Asian appearance and the other a youth described as white skinned. All of the 14 offences involved offenders engaging in threatening conversation with the victim. 7 of the offences resulted in the victim being pushed, 3 were punched and 4 were threatened with a weapon (knife). 98% of the offenders made off on foot making good their escape down a side road adjacent to the bank or a Subway providing access to the other side of the Birchfield Rd on a neighbouring OCU. (Operational Command Unit)

Victim Profiles

13 of the victims were male with a single offence involving a female. 8 of the victims were white skinned, two were of Asian appearance, one afro Caribbean, and 3 of Indian origin. The majority of the victims were early to late 20's with other age ranges of mid 40's to late 50's. Two of the victims were in the late 60's to early 70's range. 80% of the victims were LloydsTSB account holders (LloydsTSB data)

One 22yr old victim actually fought off, chased and detained a 34yr old offender – a resident from the other side of the city.

Offender/Prolific Offenders

Using existing information from police data and intelligence from OCU and neighbouring OCU/Force databases together with current information regarding offender descriptions, M.O, property etc. Identification procedures and the ability/willingness of the complainant to assist.

Property Type

All of these offences resulted in various cash denominations up to £200 being taken by the offenders.

Offence Profile

Thursday, Friday and Saturday's were highlighted as a pattern particularly between 08.00hrs and 11.00hrs. There were 2 offences between 08.00 – 09.00hrs on a Sunday.

Location and surrounding environment

The bank premises are situated on the corner plot of a main arterial road and residential road and there were many environmental features around the immediate vicinity of the ATM machine, which were considered to be a contributory factor in the increase of Robbery at this location.

The environmental features included:

- Telephone kiosk - used by some offenders to stalk victim
- Bench seat - gives offender anonymity (lawful justification to be in close proximity of victim)
- External camera - Incorrectly positioned
- CCTV System - Upgrade required and strict working practices and procedures not adhered to
- Subway - provides good observation point and escape route for offender
- Side Road (Bragg Rd) - provides another observation point and quick escape route
- Lighting - Very poor in the immediate vicinity of ATM
- Absence of appropriate warning notices – awareness/deterrent message not being 'delivered'
- Wide footpath – does not restrict the free movement of the offender making escape easier

Effectiveness of existing crime prevention methods/working practices of LloydsTSB

There were very little crime prevention measures in place. Working practices in respect of the CCTV were poor (as previously highlighted) and the quality of imagery was equally poor. *It is to be borne in mind that at the time, it was NOT generally bank policy to have external CCTV camera facilities

Effectiveness of existing policing strategies including response and investigation

High profile patrols were proven to be ineffective and more often displaced the pattern of offending – although it did provide reassurance for the public in the immediate area. The immediate prospect of street identification procedures, recording and investigation were considered to be ineffective. A more pro-active rather than re-active response was needed.

(Source of Police Data – Crimes, Browser, Flints databases)

Effect on business activity – Police/LloydsTSB

The problem had a significant effect on the business activity of this branch of LloydsTSB in that usage in the ATM had shown a slight decrease. A possible reflection on fear of crime issues, fewer people were actually using this facility. In policing terms, extra expense was incurred through specific re-assurance high profile patrolling coupled with response and investigation of the reported offences.

Responding to the problem

The initial response to the problem was the implementation of high profile foot patrols in and around the area of the bank. Whilst providing the assurance to address the fear of crime issue and prevent further offences it proved relatively ineffective. It merely displaced the pattern of offending however it did not displace the activity to any other location. Barclays Bank, less than a quarter of a mile away, saw no increase in criminal activity at their ATM.

Response, including street identification procedures, the recording and investigation procedures were given a thorough review. As a result, a small dedicated team of experienced officers were put together to respond, record and investigate offences of robbery. A minimum standard of recording through to investigation was adopted and the robbery team were provided with a vehicle acquired through sponsorship.

A key working dialogue with LloydsTSB was needed to look at what other short and long term preventative measures could be introduced to supplement changes in police strategy.

Initial consultation with LloydsTSB were, it's fair to say, quite difficult. There seemed to be an initial perception that the police wanted the bank to remove the ATM altogether – which had to be a consideration but certainly a last resort.

The built environment was certainly influencing criminal behaviour and as such, various identified environmental features around the immediate area of the bank were already identified as possible contributory causes.

Police consulted the following organisations (in addition to the bank) with a view to making specific environmental changes based on the principles of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). This would be to minimise the opportunity available for criminals to commit crime at this particular location.

British Telecom (Payphones), Birmingham City Highways/Transportation, Birmingham City Planning, LloydsTSB (Technical Services), Midlands Electricity Board

British Telecom

British Telecom (Payphones) was initially reluctant in discussing the possibility of moving the kiosk at all. There was however a compromise achieved and they were receptive to the suggestion of turning the kiosk 90 degrees rather than re-siting it completely. It was agreed to do the work but it required the involvement of Midlands Electricity Board to undertake the necessary electrical work. Midlands Electricity agreed to carry out the necessary work to facilitate turning the kiosk around. The work was completed within 3 weeks of it being agreed.

Birmingham City Council

Birmingham City Highways/Transportation Department agreed to remove the bench seating and this work was done within a week of it being agreed. Other areas such as on street parking, pavement width, street lighting and Subway are subject of long term re-generation proposals for the area.

LloydsTSB

The ATM machine was upgraded within a month. On Police recommendation, additional measures were introduced. The existing camera installed to overlook the area of the ATM was poorly positioned. Images were partially obscured by the banks corporate sign and it therefore was of little value. The camera was repositioned and the system upgraded with strict operating/monitoring procedures adopted. Reflective panels/mirrors were also installed to enable a user of the ATM to see behind and to the sides. Lighting around the ATM was improved and appropriate warning signs placed to raise the awareness message for users to be on their guard and to deter offending.

User Zone – Defensible Space

The work of Jacobs (1961) informed us of three crime prevention themes namely:

- Territoriality – the ability of an individual to take control of and manage their space
- Surveillance – offenders prefer anonymity and therefore avoid anonymity
- Crowding out crime – increased activity increases surveillance and reduces opportunity

Newman (1973) broadened the theory with 'defensible space' which is a psychological concept of private areas or demarcation zones within a defined environment.

South Africa has applied the 'defensible space' theory by having demarcation zones in front of ATM machines. An area sufficient to allow one person to stand in creates a comfort zone, which discourages others to step inside it – therefore creating a degree of informal control.

The concept of using this theory was considered here. It was considered as a supplementary addition to the changes already made to see if it influenced customer as well as offender behaviour.

As a result of consultation between the Police, LloydsTSB, Planning and the City Highways Department, a defined user zone was installed. A defined hatched area in front of the ATM was placed on the footpath in painted in bright yellow paint.

The final outcome – Did it work?

The work was completed in stages between December 2002 when the new ATM was installed up to April 2003 when the user zone was introduced. Given the outlined changes in policing strategies and working practices of the bank, the initiative saw a dramatic fall in the number of robbery offences associated with this ATM.

The offender subsequently detained and identified by the victim was subsequently sentenced to 3 years imprisonment. In 2003 another offender was identified and charged with a number of offences at this location and others, which resulted in a 10-year prison sentence.

Reported/recorded offences of robbery in this locality between January 2003 and July 2003 amounted to two. Only one of these offences however could be associated to the ATM machine whereby the victim was attacked whilst making a £10 withdrawal in the early hours of the morning. The 2 offenders stole the victim's vehicle. Since January 2003 up until February 2004 there have only been these two offences.

(Police Data – Browser, Crimes)

Use of the ATM also increased by 22% on the previous year. A comparison made was 12,460 transactions in Dec 2002 to an increase of 19,600 transactions in Dec 2003.

(LloydsTSB data)

Savings

A reduction in policing costs - high profile uniformed foot patrols are no longer needed to address the problem. More efficient response, recording and investigative methods using experienced team of officers improved efficiency including the use of intelligence to target prolific/known offenders. Lost revenue to LloydsTSB brought about by fear avoidance has now been significantly reduced reflected on the increased use of the ATM.

Displacement

There are no measures of similar increased criminal activity at any ATM points within the Queens Road Command Unit – particularly at a nearby Barclays Bank ATM.

Lesson learnt

The significant reduction in these offences has been achieved by putting into place a package of measures to address the problem. This police led initiative could only have succeeded had it not been for the co-operation of other agencies and LloydsTSB in particular who initially were fairly resistant in acknowledging any responsibility.

The introduction of the user zone was contributory to the successful reduction in robbery and it was the first time such a concept was introduced on a 'High St' bank in the West Midlands force area. It has been introduced on some University campus sites and has been piloted by Greater Manchester Police (Operation Hawk) in areas across the south of the city.

Observations

Many people, including representatives from LloydsTSB, other interested parties, the author and his Chief Superintendent, have directly observed the psychological effect the user zone had on customers. Every ATM customer having to queue for the machine waited outside the yellow hatched area until the ATM was free. Those who inadvertently strayed inside it quickly stepped back upon realising they shouldn't be there!

Knock on effects

LloydsTSB have recently introduced a ramp facility to provide access into the premises for wheelchair access. The working relationship following this initiative continued in that LloydsTSB consulted the police in relation to design - as it was proposed to be in close proximity to the ATM. As a result, the ramp facility provides a degree of physical protection to users of the ATM who are raised slightly from street level, which improves natural surveillance.

Interest

The initiative has received significant interest from forces across the country including Devon & Cornwall, Kent, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Police including other areas throughout the West Midlands force area. The project received local and national press and media attention as well as being included in a Government West Midlands Street Crime progress report, which was highlighted to the Prime Minister.

The way forward

LloydsTSB are looking at consulting with other crime reduction officers with a view to introducing similar measures throughout various sites in the West Midlands. There are long term re-generation proposals for this area of Perry Barr, which will include the removal of the Subway, width reduction of the footpath and the upgrading of street lighting. Consultation with Birmingham City Council - Economic Development has already got underway.

