

Standing up for retail workers

Monday 15 February, 2021

Response to the recent demand for legislation to protect shopworkers by Nick Fisher, CEO, Facewatch Ltd

Facewatch's mission has always been to provide a service that supports retail business owners and create a better retail experience for the customer in an unobtrusive way. It is, therefore, a sad moment to read reports on the huge increase in anti-social behaviour and violence towards retail staff over the last year. Much of this increase has been caused by a small minority of the public who are frustrated by the need for the in-store safety measures brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Facewatch has, of course, been aware of these challenges and our launch of a new algorithm that is effective in recognising habitual offenders even when wearing a facemask, was one of our immediate priorities and was delivered in November last year. We now see Facewatch's role in the retail sector broadened and key to the future of safe retailing.

Facewatch instantly identifies individuals with a track record of crime or anti-social behaviour when entering a store, sending immediate alerts to multiple destinations as determined by the store. These can be to the store manager, security guards, monitoring stations, head office all at the same time in less than 2 seconds, enabling an immediate intervention.

Throughout the pandemic, retailers have needed to control customer volumes in store. In some cases, this has increased costs by using man guarding in addition to all the necessary PPE controls being applied. The Police have declared they simply do not have the resources to deal with crimes such as store theft and general abuse of retail employees. Consequently, multiple retailers are turning to Facewatch as a proven and effective solution in deterring the undesirable customers from coming to their stores for fear of being recognised, thus preventing all the hassle and stress associated with repeat offenders. In fact, Facewatch customers report a reduction in crime of 25% or more within the first 90 days of deployment with increasing results the longer the system is used.

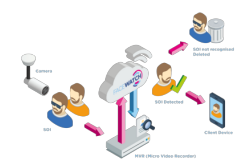
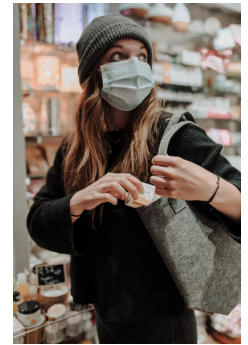
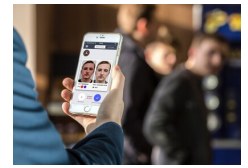
Signage displayed to customers (and repeat offenders) makes them aware that the system is deployed in the store resulting in both customers and employees reporting feeling safer as a result. There is no evidence whatsoever that it deters honest customers from shopping at the store.

There are a few minority civil liberty organisation that would have you believe that facial recognition and companies like Facewatch will hold and store your data, track and trace your movement and infringe your liberty! In fact, Facewatch deletes all biometric data of regular customers (non-offenders) immediately and operates above the already strict legislation for biometric technology.

Retail workers have been complete heroes throughout this pandemic and yet over 400 of these heroes are attacked threatened or abused in their workplace every day. That was over 150,000 in 2020 and recent report claim it has increased by 80% in some businesses since the summer. These crimes are highly corrosive to the people working in these challenging circumstances and so the Government must act to criminalise such offence. As a former retail director, who understands completely the challenges placed on modern day retailers I am completely aligned with the 65 retail CEO's who have written to Boris Johnson to ask for greater protection for shopworkers.

In support of our complete commitment to this, for the duration of the lockdown in England if anti-social behaviour and staff abuse is affecting your business Facewatch will provide one system licence and training free of charge for the first 90 days and if you are not completely satisfied with the results during this period Facewatch will remove the system.

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