

Case Study

Display *And* Protect Your High-Theft Merchandise

This specialty grocer uses technology-advanced high-theft solutions to protect its products and keep its shrink level below the industry standard.

by Erin Harris

Jon Stokes was given an opportunity most LP (loss prevention) professionals envy. Before Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Markets (Fresh & Easy) even opened its doors two years ago, Stokes was hired as a certified protection professional (CPP) to build the grocer's LP program from the ground up. Years of LP experience taught Stokes that the grocer's 140 locations would experience shrink problems with certain products if a proactive approach was not taken. Stokes was tasked with implementing a chainwide solution that would keep the grocer's shrink level at or below the industry's average.

Be Proactive In Your LP Efforts

Fresh & Easy is a neighborhood market concept with a 10,000- to 15,000-square-foot footprint. The grocer is unique in that it operates a self-checkout-only environment. Therefore, Fresh & Easy does not employ cashiers, but rather uses several assisted checkouts (ACOs) — people stationed at the front of the store in the self-checkout area to assist with transactions when needed. In addition to food, Fresh & Easy sells what the retail industry currently considers high-shrink products, including razor blades, baby formula, and health and beauty items. “The company asked me what I'd need to have to deal with shrink issues proactively rather than reactively,” says Stokes. “Finding a solution to proactively combat the shrink issue and prevent theft at our self-checkout units was my main priority.”

For a solution, Stokes turned to Alpha, a designer of security products engineered to protect high-theft merchandise. He chose Alpha because he had used the company's products in the past and experienced positive results.

To protect high-shrink products, Fresh & Easy uses various shapes and sizes of “keepers,” Alpha's transparent lockable boxes sized to fit the dimensions of the product they're protecting.

Keepers are made of polycarbonate and use either AM (acousto-magnetic) or RF (radio frequency), so ferrite rods cannot be deactivated. “Fresh & Easy uses more than 70 keepers and locking bottle caps to secure our products,” says Stokes. “We also use baby formula keepers, which have a hinged top and are made exclusively to fit and protect baby formula canisters.”

Protect, Promote Your Merchandise Simultaneously

The keepers' transparent casing allows customers to view the package and product information without being able to touch the actual product. Each keeper is reusable, acts as a visual deterrent, and provides retailers a way to take merchandise from locked cabinets and openly display it. Keepers come with a patented magnetic lock, which ACOs open with the vendor's

S3 key. S3 keys are serialized keys that open all Alpha products used at Fresh & Easy, and they can be matched and traced to a specific retailer. One S3 key unlocks the entire line of Alpha S3 security products. ACOs keep the S3 keys on their person, so when a customer swipes a keeper at the self-checkout unit, the ACO can unlock the product and remove the product from its keeper. In case a customer gets a keeper past the checkout process or an ACO

does not properly remove the tag, Fresh & Easy's Checkpoint EAS (electronic article surveillance) system located at the front door will sound.

Stokes explains that Fresh & Easy stores will continue to use Alpha keepers to protect high-shrink items against theft. Because keepers are reusable, Stokes expects each keeper's life cycle to last 18 months. The keepers have enabled Fresh & Easy to stay below the industry's shrink level. Stokes explains that Alpha works with product manufacturers so the company can update and design new security products as manufacturers change the size and shape of their packaging. ■



Alpha “keepers” help Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Markets protect its products, decrease shrink, and increase profits.