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## Fighting fraud with training

Retailers get schooled on crime prevention

The No. 1 crime in Santa Clarita is fraud, said Sgt. A.J. Rotella of the city of Santa Clarita Sheriff's Business Alliance.

"Whether it affects individuals through identity theft or businesses that become victims, fraud is our biggest crime out here," he said.

Rotella, along with L.A. County Sheriff's Commercial Crimes Bureau detectives and representatives of Gap Inc.'s Organized Retail Crime division, teamed up to educate local businesses on how to defend retail victims from the growing trend.

Whether it's flicking the tip of a driver's license, flashing a hundred dollar bill under an ultraviolet light or placing a greeter at the front doors, the instructors hammered the message that the time and money spent to take extra precaution against fraud can save thousands of dollars.

"If you don't have that kind of protection, you're going to get hit; it's just a matter of when," Detective Key Budge said.

Budge asked the crowd to consider viewing their business as their home.

He asked audience members if any of them can just walk up to their homes and knock on the door, or if visitors have to go through the gate, or if they have to also get past the pit bulls.

"You have to make the decision, what level of security do you want to meet?" Budge said.

The retail theft and fraud prevention training program was one of the monthly programs hosted by the city of Santa Clarita and the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Station.

Use an inkless ink pad to have customers leave a thumbprint in the middle of their checks, Budge said.

"You're going to have (angry) customers, but if you explain to them you're trying to detect fraud to keep prices down and protect them, they'll get over it," he said. "Be suspicious of anyone buying a gift card with a credit card."

Run background checks on potential employees, Rotella said. "Someone with bad credit is probably not going to be a good employee."

Watch for customers who are sweating profusely, said Greg Nottingham from Gap Inc., which owns The Gap retail stores. Look out for groups who do not act like a group of friends would, he said. Gap Inc. estimates 250 organized retail shoplifting groups operate in the L.A. region.

The list of precautions goes on, and while some who attended said they already implement many of the recommendations, there were others who learned new techniques.

Kevin Colton, with Westfield Valencia Town Center security, said he learned that if you flick the corner of a driver's license and it doesn't make a substantive noise or it falls apart, then it is probably fake.

Theone Miller, marketing director for Westfield, said retailers were encouraged to attend to remind them of "the little things."

"Making sure the last four credit card numbers on the receipt match the last four on the credit card" is one of those little details to watch out for especially as the holidays approach, she said.

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