

New Solution Protects Today's "New Jewelry Store"

A T-Mobile Premium Retailer Turns to a Benefit-Denial Solution to Combat Theft and Increase Sales, Store Safety, and Customer Experience

It is surely a sign of the technology-driven times we live in that a cell phone retailer might have the same value of product on the floor as the jewelry store down the street. "We carry premium electronics and accessories on our sales floor to allow for an enhanced customer experience, and at any given time we have tens of thousands worth of merchandise out," explained Roy Herrera, corporate loss prevention manager for Amtel LLC, a T-Mobile Premium Retailer. "The game has changed. As the wireless industry has evolved, prices have increased substantially. The demand for high-end devices sometimes approaches a frenzy-type situation."



Roy Herrera

This evolution has not been lost on thieves. In recent years, phone stores have become preferred targets for robberies, joining—and often supplanting—banks, liquor stores, and jewelry shops. "You do the math," said Dermot Shea, chief of detectives of the New York Police Department, after a rash of cell phone robberies. "You hit a store and steal seventy-five of those. Even if robbery crews unload them for only 25 percent of their store price, it's a good hit," he told the *New York Times* ("Detective's Death Shows How Cellphone Stores Are Now 'Easy Target' for Robberies," Feb. 15, 2019).

Finding a Unique Solution

Unit prices and high demand have created a dangerous mix for retail outlets. In South Dallas, for example, one Amtel store was being hit by thieves two to three times per week, Herrera noted. Banks have dye packs. What option does a cell phone store have?

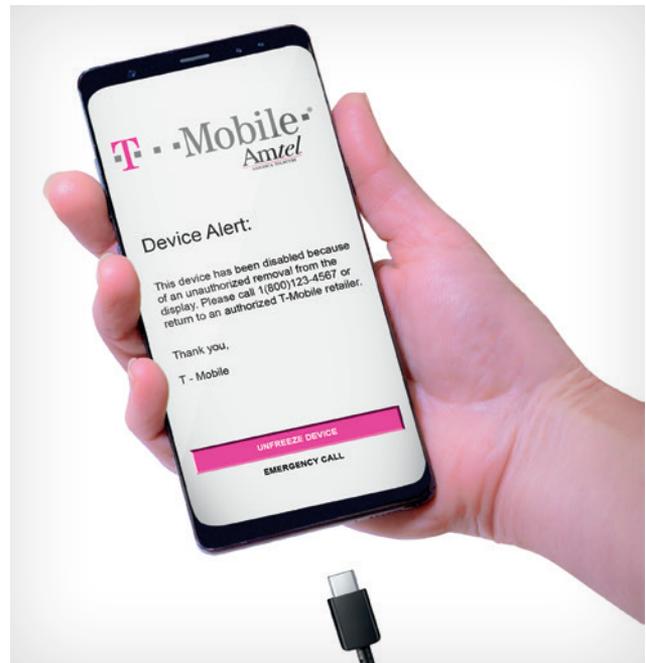
The retailer knew it needed to curb losses, but that was only one of the goals Herrera had in mind as he searched for a modern approach to prevent theft of cell phones from stores. "Most importantly, we wanted to have a safe working environment for our associates. We also wanted to improve compliance with T-Mobile requirements, and we wanted to enhance the customer experience," Herrera said.

By Garrett Seivold



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With those goals in mind, the retailer had to look beyond traditional product protection. A barrier-based solution, like putting high-end phones in display cases, puts staff at higher risk in robbery events, frustrates customers, and dampens sales. Physical protection strategies also do nothing to generate data for compliance tracking and device interaction.



Strictly from a loss prevention perspective, it's already been successful for Amtel. Those stores in South Dallas that were being hit multiple times per week? In less than thirty days after installing BricTECH on high-end phones, unit theft dropped 60 percent.

Amtel employed Sennco Solutions' BricTECH benefit-denial solution to safeguard merchandise, deter thieves, improve worker safety, and generate analytics to facilitate compliance. The company started rolling out the solution in October 2018 and currently has it activated in eighty-eight stores.

Using any Android device as an install "wand," an Amtel store manager can activate the application via Bluetooth or near-field communication (NFC) on any Samsung device. Once BricTECH is activated, the phone has several locking features that essentially render it worthless—via a "this phone is the property of" display—if someone unplugs it from a display or takes it outside a defined geofence. That makes it a universal deterrent to opportunists, grab-and-run thieves, and organized retail crime alike.

The geofencing feature can also be disabled, so instead of making a phone immediately worthless, LP investigators can follow and track stolen phones to break up crime rings and aid arrests. "We've called people to remind them they are in possession of stolen merchandise," said Herrera. "We've actually had people take stolen phones back to the store, and word has also gotten out on the street that it's impossible to erase the software because it's built into the phone, and you can't tell which phones have this feature."

Return on Investment

But theft isn't necessary for a return on investment. Immediately upon activation, the software starts providing

business value, said Herrera. It's one of his favorite features, along with not needing a special type of device to install the software or needing supporting infrastructure to activate geofencing. "One thing that's so great is that it's not just about deterring theft, but the analytics also support the merchandising side of it," said Herrera. "If there are issues or questions regarding the phones we have on display, it gives us data to utilize."

It also supports compliance. For example, T-Mobile specifies a certain number of high-end phones should always be available for customers to touch and try; data from BricTECH shows if stores are meeting that standard. "If we see a store has four instead of the five phones they need to meet standards, we can call up the store to ask, 'Hey, why isn't this device up?'"

"Once installed we can look virtually at each device we have in each store," explained Herrera. "It allows us to intertwine the product protection aspect with the merchandising, compliance, and servicing customers, who demand being able to interact with phones."

The business value is additive. Strictly from a loss prevention perspective, it's already been successful for Amtel. Those stores in South Dallas that were being hit multiple times per week? In less than thirty days after installing BricTECH on high-end phones, unit theft dropped 60 percent. Amtel is one of T-Mobile's largest premium retail partners and operates in over 152 locations nationwide. Partners Ehab Sweis and George Tadros only see Amtel growing in the coming years. ■

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