

Oct 2006

ELECTRONIC BUSINESS WATCH

Evaluation of an electronic business watch network in East Dulwich

Project overview

Background

The project to install an electronic business watch network in shop premises was an extension of the existing business watch concept of self help and mutual aid. Digital radio alert devices were deployed for 31 traders in Lordship Lane during the first week of October 2005; the selection criteria were defined by levels per trader of reported crime and the locality of their premises.

Southwark Council already has electronic business watch networks in its borough, and, as a result of the success of these existing projects, it was decided by the crime reduction officer for East Dulwich to replicate this good practice for the traders of Lordship Lane.

Objectives

The project objectives are focused on promoting a safer shopping environment for both trader and customer.

By establishing a digital business watch network for Lordship Lane, the project aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Reduce crime and diminish the fear of crime
- Provide a catalyst for establishing Business Watch Schemes
- Promote greater communication between the public and law enforcement agencies
- Strengthen the bonds uniting the communities involved

Although further funding has been allocated to extend the existing pilot network, the project team has decided to carry out the evaluation as a means of gauging the effectiveness of the project and to assist in identifying any further actions required. The evaluation of the traders took place on 16th November 2005, and was carried out by Bob Wise, Crime Prevention Officer for East Dulwich Police and Darryl Roberts from the IT providers.

Evaluation project-outline

The evaluation took place approximately six weeks after the Installation of the digital network. All traders were asked to complete a questionnaire and were also given the opportunity to submit any additional comments.

All efforts were taken to ensure that questionnaires were completed by an individual with a managerial role, or as a collective, but this was not always possible.

Thirty-two traders were asked to take part in this evaluation.

Peace of mind at your fingertips ***What is a digital network?***

Essentially, the digital technology provides an electronic form of neighbourhood watch. In times of trouble, or in an emergency, a trader can alert neighbouring traders by simply pressing the orange or the red button on the unit.

On pressing either button, all traders in the network community will receive an alert in the form of an audible alarm, as well as a message containing the following information:

- the trader's name
- his/her address
- his/her telephone number
- the type of alert: **warning** or **emergency**

On receipt of either a warning or emergency alert, neighbouring traders can help by:

- Warning -

Assisting the caller by telephoning them, or going to their premises

Or

- Emergency -

Going to the caller's premises, and/or calling the Emergency Services, if appropriate

Working Example

Here are two typical examples of how traders in Lordship Lane would use their digital technology:

WARNING:

If any customers are trying to use counterfeit money or fake credit cards, a warning can be broadcast to ensure other traders do not fall victim to this activity.

The availability of instant messaging, coupled with the use of window stickers and other local awareness campaigns, will deter unwanted people from the area.

HELP:

In the event of an emergency, e.g. fire or medical, a trader can summon on-the-spot assistance immediately while waiting for emergency services to arrive.

Traders are made aware that they still must dial 999, but that by pressing their red button they will have neighbours in attendance in seconds.

Evaluation summary

Summary preface

26 out of 31 traders who were approached to participate in the evaluation returned their questionnaires. All questionnaires were signed, and are held on file.

To follow is an overview of the evaluation results followed by the traders' comments and considerations as a result of the evaluation.

Questionnaire results

Question 1:

Your network connects you to your neighbours. As a result, do you feel it benefits you in the following situations?

a) Reducing the feeling of isolation in worrying situations?

Answer:

24 said yes

2 said no

b) Reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour?

Answer:

25 said yes

1 said no

c) Helping to identify the perpetrators of crime?

Answer:

23 said yes

3 said no

Question 2:

Do you feel that a network can assist towards building a better community life?

Answer:

24 said yes

1 said maybe
1 said no

Question 3:

In times of trouble do you feel it is beneficial to be able to communicate with your neighbours?

Answer:

25 said yes
1 said no

Question 4:

In a real emergency, after calling 999 first, would you also like to be able to communicate with your neighbours?

Answer:

25 said yes
1 said no

Traders' comments

In addition to answering the given questions, all traders were invited to submit additional comments. The following comments are quotations from the traders themselves:

"A week after the boxes were installed, I triggered a red alert by accident. Within minutes I had half a dozen men asking if I was okay, and a call from another trader to say they were on their way.

"I felt a bit foolish, but ever since I have felt much safer at work. I am more confident in dealing with people who may be a problem because I know that the box - and therefore my neighbours - is in my reach.

"In turn, I have responded to several calls – some 'accidents' such as mine – but one from Speedy Pizza next door, which was having problems with a young girl.

"We all appreciate the box system very much, and it has the additional advantage of bringing us out of our own shops in a practical show of support for each other! I think that more traders communicate with each other now and there is a growing feeling of community in Lordship Lane."

– Brown's Antiques

"Local traders seem to respond well to emergencies with other businesses. The box is a great idea."

– Mad Cow Design

"Just a thought: I think it would be good if there could be a link with the Street Wardens."

– The Irish Shop

“In the first month of installation our box has warned us twice of a problem. Both occasions turned out to be false alarms, but everybody with the system has responded by direct visits and phone. Worked very well.”

– **Bells**

“It is a very good idea. Get more shops involved in it. The box increases safety in our area.”

– **H. Hirst & Sons Ltd**

“Fantastic idea that has worked well since its introduction.”

– **The Bishop**

“It makes me feel better while working on my own in the evening.”

– **Unwins**

“In times of trouble we really seem safe. Neighbours come round and also the police. It really works, it really helps, it’s really good..”

– **Speedo Pizza**

“Staff feel safer knowing it’s there.”

– **EDT Antic Ltd.**

“It is a good idea, you should supply them everywhere.”

– **Lane Café**

“I believe that the box is a splendid idea.”

– **Willis B**

“I personally recommend [the] box as on two occasions I have had to use it.”

– **Targett Arms**