



How Bromley BID helps protect its levy-payers from low-level business crime

Bromley BID has outsourced the management of its business crime reduction scheme – and its Disc system – to Safer Business Network as part of its SBN Link product. Its levy-payers and local policing are both benefitting from better information-sharing, more incident reporting and lower levels of retail crime...

Bromley Business Improvement District (BID), operating as 'Your Bromley' and covering Bromley town centre, implemented Disc in 2016, with BID Manager Frances Forrest administrating the system.

In 2020, Your Bromley outsourced the management of its Disc system to Safer Business Network (SBN), which operates in 11 London boroughs and administers several award-winning Business Crime Reduction Partnerships across some of the capital's most challenging districts.

"In November 2020 I needed hospital treatment and wasn't sure how long I'd be off for" explains Frances Forrest. "It was easy to get my very able team, with some additional support, to step in to cover most of my job, but I knew I needed specialists to deal with the safety side. The only company I knew which could do so was SBN.

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“SBN has expert knowledge as they run so many Disc systems across London. And I do think that working with an accredited organisation which is a specialist in its field is reassuring to levy payers, as well as making reporting to our directors and levy payers easier.”

For that money, the company supports a wide range of services to meet the diverse needs of two very different BIDs. And ensuring a safe and secure environment for levy payers of both BIDs, their customers and their staff is a core function.

Using Disc to build a unique relationship with police

Working closely with local partners through Disc, SBN has built a unique relationship with police, retailers and councils, and uses Disc for secure information-sharing between them all. Additionally, it also organises bi-monthly face-to-face Security and Intelligence Meetings bringing together businesses, the police, the council and the BID to maximise efficient and effective information exchange.

“I like to call Disc my Facebook for Offenders, with photos and information about what they're up to”

Francis Forrest



“Numbers attending these meetings have steadily increased” says Frances Forrest. “The meetings concentrate not so much on individuals and specific cases but on the importance of putting evidence onto Disc so we can build cases against repeat or prolific offenders and get positive results in court.”

Every week Your Bromley's Disc system sends out a completely automated eNewsletter, updating businesses on what has been added to Disc in the previous seven days, providing an insight into the work that SBN's Alessandra Valencic, SBN's Disc Administrator for Your Bromley, and BID staff, have been doing on their behalf - and, importantly, celebrating successes.

Says Frances: “It's vital that businesses see what we're doing behind the scenes. All the work we do to reduce low-level crime and ASB isn't always very visible; sometimes you need to shout

out: 'This is what we've achieved, this is what YOU helped us to do.' Of course, it's especially important for BIDs to make sure levy-payers are aware of all the great work they do for them!"

"We also publish the Borough Commander's newsletter, so businesses are informed on Disc every week of everything that the Met is actually dealing with. If levy-payers can see, for example, that the police have dealt with 500 stop-and-searches, seized 200 knives off the street, and stopped robberies from happening, they'll be aware of the work the police are doing to reduce low-level crime and ASB in the area, even if they can't always respond as quickly as they would like to individual shoplifting incidents."

Managing businesses' expectations

"It's important to manage businesses' expectations" says Frances. "The police are really under pressure at the moment. Businesses need to call the police with the right things – there's no point calling them for a one-off £10 shoplifting incident."

"But this is where Disc helps our levy-payers and the police. "By recording incidents and intelligence in Disc we can all work with the Met to build intelligence around a specific offender. No judge will punish anyone for shoplifting £20 worth of goods, unless it can be shown that they've done it thirty times in thirty different stores and they're having a big impact on the town centre."

One of the most effective ways to tackle low-level business crime in Bromley has been to work with the police to issue offenders with Community Protection Warnings, Community Protection Notices or Criminal Behaviour Orders, and SBN manages all these processes for the BID.

"Of course, when somebody gets issued with one of these injunctions, we obviously share the good news on Disc" says Frances. "People need to know that their input has had a positive effect not only on their own bottom-line but on the community in general. Disc provides an easy way to spread this kind of message to every single business in the community."

In Bromley, every police officer can access the BID's Disc system so they can see everything that's shared by the businesses, and helping them to recognise offenders and take action. SBN is proud of its pivotal role here – in getting information and passing it to the Met and strengthening the relationship between them and retailers.

The BID and SBN work closely with local security providers. For example In Bromley's main shopping centre most security guards are members of Disc. Feedback from them confirms that they feel better equipped to look out for known offenders, giving them an enhanced sense of empowerment.

"Another key advantage of working with SBN is that they're able to share details of offenders and crime trends from other parts of the city too."

The power of working across borders

Alessandra Valencic, SBN's Crime Reduction Manager at Your Bromley, takes up the story: "It's the power of working across borders" she says.

"So, for example, there's been a massive influx of fake currency in other areas recently, and because we can immediately share that information through Disc, businesses in Bromley are suddenly able to be alert for them, and can check their notes immediately.

"Our message to the business community is 'We need to work together, we need to share intelligence, we need to work as one.' But at the same time we're sending the same message to the people responsible for low-level crime and organised crime. If everyone recognises a particular offender, they will stop coming into the town centre and this message will be spread across the criminal community.

"And the beauty of Disc and working with Lewisham and Bromley BIDs in neighbouring boroughs, is that offenders who have moved on from Lewisham to Bromley will be quickly recognised there too" explains Alessandra.

"When a business uploads an image of an offender to Disc, and puts out a plea for information to identify them, we'll probably know them and can cross-reference the pictures and case notes and work with the relevant policing teams to address the problem. This means if a business wants to report an incident, they actually have a named associate, rather than a vague description. Once we have a name, we can do a proper report which we'll need for a successful prosecution."

With only 7 per cent of business crime actually reported to police, the relationship between SBN and Bromley BID is proving to be a powerful force. By sharing information and encouraging recording of incidents in Disc – as well as sharing intel securely between networked Disc systems – they can bring more offenders to court and make the town centre safer for everyone.

To find out more about Your Bromley, visit www.yourbromley.com; for more about Disc visit www.discagainstcrime.com; for more about Safer Business Network visit www.saferbusiness.org.uk.



Alessandra Valencic: "We need to work as one"