

SHELF CONFIDENCE

Season 6, Episode 4: Creating a safer workplace with Jon Norton of ZeroEyes

[Intro] Hello and welcome to Shelf Confidence, a podcast brought to you by the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association that focuses on trends and innovation in the food and beverage industry. I'm Larissa Newton, your host, and today I'm happy to welcome Jon Norton, regional vice president of sales for ZeroEyes, which offers a proactive solution for gun detection and situational awareness, verified by real people.

ZeroEyes' AI gun detection and intelligent situational awareness software layers onto existing digital security cameras. If a gun is identified, images are instantly shared with the ZeroEyes Operations Center, the industry's only U.S.-based, fully in-house operation center, which is staffed 24/7/365 by specially trained military and law enforcement veterans. If these experts determine that the threat is valid, they dispatch alerts and actionable intelligence — including visual description, gun type, and last known location — to local law enforcement and retail staff as quickly as 3 to 5 seconds from detection.

[Larissa] Well, thanks for joining me today, Jon. Let's start off by learning a little bit about ZeroEyes and its mission.

[Jon] Yeah, sure. So, ZeroEyes is an AI gun detection software that rides on existing security cameras and is looking for one thing and one thing only, and that's visible, brandished firearms. And, just a jump back, the mission stems unfortunately out of tragedy where the founders back in 2018, after the Parkland, Florida, school shooting, realized that video cameras are often used for forensic analysis after the fact. And so the founding team, you know, they served together in Seal teams for many years. And quite frankly, were disgusted at seeing yet another active shooter event impacting our schools. And so they sought out to change that and to be able to utilize technology, like ZeroEyes, to be able to proactively detect visible, brandished guns and be able to dispatch alerts to law enforcement professionals so they can more effectively respond.

[Larissa] Now, obviously, our membership focuses on food retailers such as grocery and convenience stores. How prevalent is gun violence in these spaces?

[Jon] Yeah, it's a good question. And if you think of the classic active shooter events, such as the Buffalo Tops grocery store shooting or what we saw at the Dollar General in Florida last year, those types of active shooter events tend to be somewhat rare. Although they, you know, are becoming more and more prevalent, unfortunately, year over year.

But what we do see is that gun-related violence touches, every, you know, kind of every aspect of society, from grocery stores to retail outlets to shopping centers, schools and universities and hospitals. Unfortunately, you know, these locations are not immune to gun-related violence and active shooter events, which is true of retail settings, as well. So I know last... we just published a post on ZeroEyes, you know, over the last two weeks: 40% of the retail... shootings and gun-related violence events that were in a retail setting occurred in convenience stores and gas stations.

So these events have a, just a very significant impact on all those who were involved, from the people to the to employees to customers and to the organization themselves. They, you know, although they may be rare in some regards, at least the active shooter events, they have such a significant impact.

[Larissa] And when these incidents do happen, there are, you know, the obvious and immediate concerns for everyone's safety. But what are some of the ripple effects that retailers need to be aware of?

[Jon] I mean, it's a good question. And I think of, I think about an organization's duty of care responsibilities. They're responsible... An organization is responsible for the safety and security of their employees and customers, while they're patroning their facilities. So when, if you think of the ripple effects, if you think of if one were to be involved in and or be, you know, be victimized by a gun-related violence event at the individual level, it's incredibly traumatic. And certainly at the organizational level, the ripple effects can be felt across, you know, not only just, you know, that specific organization that had that event, but, businesses in the surrounding area can certainly be impacted. And also employees, I mean, if I'm an employee at a facility, I want to know that my organization is doing everything that they possibly can in order to ensure that at the end of my shift that I go home to my family. So, I think that has to be top of mind for retailers.

[Larissa] So what security measures do you typically see in food retailers?

[Jon] Yeah. So, yeah, when we think of food retailers, we think of the whole supply chain from the manufacturing to the distribution. All the way to the, you know, from to the customer, you know, to the customer going into the store and doing their grocery shopping. And they vary from environment to environment. In some of our clients, we have deployments across their major distribution centers where third-party logistics carriers are moving goods to the individual stores and then, also, at the individual retail centers where

individuals are doing their shopping. So each environment's going to vary a little bit on to, as to what security measures may be necessary.

But what we kind of advocate for at ZeroEyes is to think about security in layers, because no one security solution is standalone. And, so that's where kind of, that's where we fit within that overall layered security approach is to be able to transform an organization's, security response from one of being reacting to a shots fired event to be able to proactively detect that firearm and notify first responders and security professionals upon the presence of a visible gun, within the fields of view of their given security cameras. And that enables... you know, I think very few people would disagree that... security professionals would disagree that, knowing the location of a potential shooter prior to a shot being fired is incredibly valuable in aiding in their response.

[Larissa] What role do employees play in maintaining and advocating for safer environments?

[Jon] That's such a good question because, you know, I think safety and security are everybody's responsibility. And in the military — I served for six and a half years on active duty in the military with multiple deployments to Iraq and, where I led platoons, was a platoon leader in combat. And we had multiple... when we have soldiers operating, you know, like we say outside of the wire, everybody's a set of eyes, everybody's got their head on a swivel, everybody's looking for any indicators of a threat and be able to communicate those indicators to those who are, you know, kind of formulating the response, if you will.

So I think about the same thing in any business, you know, retail setting included, where if something just doesn't look right or feel right, then, I think it's for everybody's benefit for that employee to notify their management team or their, you know, their security on-site that just something doesn't look right. You know, there's an argument going on in the parking lot; it looks like it's escalating. I'm just getting this weird feeling. So I want to make you aware of that. Or there's an irate customer who, you know, just because I didn't have change for a 20, and, you know, they stormed off just want to make you aware of that.

So, now, nine times out of 10, probably those situations will de-escalate. But, you know, in that one incident where it doesn't, and somebody chooses to escalate the situation, it's better to be, you know, to be aware rather than being in a reactive position.

[Larissa] What are some of the challenges that grocery stores or other food retailers face when implementing advanced security measures like ZeroEyes?

[Jon] Yeah, it's a good question. So we'll think about it from kind of a technological perspective. Specifically to ZeroEyes, we utilize digital IP cameras. So, the camera infrastructure does have to be, I wouldn't say modernized, because analog cameras have been an-

tiquated for probably about 20 years now. But there are still organizations that are using those cameras, you know, using analog cameras, even if they're running them through a digital encoder. So for our particular technology, that is not optimal. So we do not utilize analog cameras. So the camera networks.

But, also from an organization's perspective, the security can be viewed as an expense. And it absolutely is. But that being said, what's the impact of the gun-related violence events? And that's certainly something that we are able to calculate. But if you think about it, where we have any security measure, especially proactive solutions like ZeroEyes, are a business resiliency tool. Our whole goal is to maintain operations so that distribution center that's pushing out just-in-time deliveries to their particular stores or that store is able to keep their doors open so that people can continue to go and shop. You know, that's actively protecting revenue for your company. So, of course you can never quantify the loss of life and the devastating impacts that gun-related violence events have, but they absolutely do impact and, you know, they do have a direct revenue impact. So the more one can look at and deploy a layered security approach to be able to maintain business operations, you know, begins to change that perception that these are not necessarily expenses, but they're critical as a business resiliency tool.

[Larissa] Are there any state or federal regulations that would impact the ability of stores to implement certain security measures?

[Jon] It's a good question. Not to the best of my knowledge within a grocery store environment. But what I do hear in conversations with my customers and retailers and distribution centers is obviously concerns about privacy. And they're absolutely fair. And I think it's a, you know, I think it's important to note that ZeroEyes, you know, does not monitor live video feeds. We have no capacity to look into a client's camera and see what's going on. That's just not a capability that we have. And, you know, employers are concerned about, you know, overreaching, about an organization overreaching, you know, and individuals' privacy. So, what our analytics are trained to do is they're trained to detect guns and guns only. We don't do facial recognition. We don't do behavioral characterization. We're not monitoring live video feeds. Our analytics are trained for one thing and one thing only. And that's to detect visible brandished guns. And very few people would argue that that's not a critical piece of information that an employer one would want to know, is that there is... there's somebody with a brandished firearm on their property that could be threatening.

[Larissa] And then you touched on this a bit earlier, but what advice would you give to store owners and managers who are concerned about gun violence?

[Jon] Yeah. And it's a great question. And it's an answer that I think that one should really consider: What are the risks that individual store faces? And if gun violence certainly is one of them, then start to think about what are some easy ways that... what we can do to

transform our response plan from one being of proactive — or, excuse me — from being reactive or reacting to a shot fired or reacting to somebody brandishing a visible gun, into a proactive posture. So, you know, that's what ZeroEyes... that's our role at ZeroEyes, that's what we see. We are that critical early warning layer that if somebody does brandish a firearm in the field of view of one of your security cameras, that our analytics will detect that threat and our world class operations center will be able to verify and dispatch that alert to the store operations manager, security professionals and to 911 dispatch within seconds. So it's often a very low-cost way in order to transform one's security infrastructure from, again, one of being reactive to being in a proactive position.

And the last thing I'll share, too, is training. So, in addition to deploying technology, I think it's absolutely critical that an organization train on their processes and procedures of how they are going to respond to a gun-related violence event. And it doesn't mean conducting... you know, closing the store for multiple days and conducting, you know, very comprehensive exercises. That's not what I mean. Oftentimes, even just having a plan for if somebody does, you know, brandish a firearm in the parking lot, what are we going to do? I think just even, you know, talking through and having a response plan, proactively before something happens, I think, will enable somebody to, if, God forbid, there were to be an incident, that employees are going to be more prepared and store owners are going to be more prepared, rather than just hoping that they'll perform.

[Outro] If you are interested in learning more about ZeroEyes, visit ZeroEyes.com. That's Z-E-R-O-Eyes.com.

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