

## Walton vs. Blart

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Alan Stein, senior VP of Marketing for [AlliedBarton](#), was not pleased to learn of the impending release of *Observe and Report*, the second movie released this year using uniformed guards in shopping malls as comic foils. The earlier slapstick *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* had set record numbers for the weekend it opened with its tale of a hypoglycemic security guard with an unrequited dream of being a state trooper.

Stein raised the issue in his next weekly conference call with his marketing communication team. After seeing the trailers, the group decided to try to take the opportunity to speak up for the profession while it was a subject of attention. Thomas Walton, AlliedBarton's VP of Security Services, crafted a personal response to the movies with the assistance of Nancy Thompson, president of [Vorticom](#), a public relations firm retained by AlliedBarton. In a 500-word article, Walton shared his view of security officers as stewards of public spaces—trained professionals with a critical role in public safety and emergency response.

Thompson took the piece to the market of public opinion, filing it as an op/ed with newspapers around the country and pitching it to reporters and columnists as an angle for their regular columns.

Editors and reporters were quick to pick up on the counterpoint to a subject of such public attention—*Paul Blart: Mall Cop* had grossed \$160 million in three months—from one of the country's largest security firms. The editorial made it verbatim in newspapers around the country including the Toledo Free Press, Tucson Citizen, Arkansas Appeal-Democrat and more.

It was picked up by reporters such as Al Lewis with the Dow Jones Newswires and Lauren Falcone with the *Boston Herald* who had their own take on the topic.

### **Loss Prevention**

The organized criminals of the *Mall Cop* genre are as comic as the movie hero. In real life, the FBI assesses the cost of theft from American retailers to be tens of billions of dollars annually. On its surface, the financial magnitude of the problem seems a perfect counterpoint to movies that portray the security role so lightly. But Walton's article did not get into financial losses. Instead, Walton based his case on the broad range of capabilities and duties of uniformed officers. He also spoke to the professionalism that his company instills uniformed staff through extensive training and education.

Read Hayes, PhD with the Loss Prevention Council and the Loss Prevention Research Team at University of Florida, points out that there is little to no research on the effect of uniformed security has on loss prevention. Hayes adds that investigators, rather than uniformed guards, are the primary security professionals tasked with loss prevention. "I think that uniformed guards have some positive effect," says Hayes, "but it is highly situational to the individual officer."

Hayes hypothesizes that appearance and deportment are likely key factors in whether or not uniformed officers deters theft; Do they appear alert, are they moving around? Are they capable of detecting and stopping crime? Do they have radio communication? These are the same factors that retail owners look for from the staff of well-trained and equipped guard services.

Movie and television producers find comic targets in almost any walk of life, from bus drivers to airline pilots. And while the public does not take comedies as documentaries, entertainment can create and propagate negative stereotypes. By taking advantage of the spotlight Hollywood provides, AlliedBarton offered an alternate storyline that helps shape that public opinion. To the extent they are successful in that effort, they make their staff more effective and their service more valuable.