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Police tell victims to search online for their stolen possessions

VICTIMS of crime are being urged to conduct their own online investigations into stolen property, despite the practice not having a “very high success rate”, a police sergeant has admitted.

Simon Kempton, of Dorset Police, said that officers can no longer investigate reports of petty offences such as bike theft, so victims are being asked to trawl websites, including Facebook and Gumtree, to track down their stolen possessions. Sgt Kempton said that crime victims should call police again if they can identify their property, but suggested that the chances of success are slim because items are often sold quickly below market value.

Speaking at a cyber security conference as the Police Federation’s lead officer for technology crime, he confirmed that police had started asking victims to carry out online investigations around seven years ago.

Sgt Kempton said: “In the past, someone would steal a mountain bike and end up selling it at the local pub. Now, within literally minutes, it’s up for sale on online platforms.

“If your bike is stolen and you call the police, an officer will take down all the details but is not able to monitor all the online platforms that it could appear on.

“For this reason, officers tend to advise victims to look online themselves, unless they think they know where the bike may have ended up.

“This started around six or seven years ago because police just don’t have the resources.”

He added: “It doesn’t have a very high success rate because they are often sold very quickly for below the market value as any money represents profit to people like that.

“That is something we should be able to do. The reason we can’t is based purely on resources.”

Addressing a crowd of around 100 guests in London, Sgt Kempton said that officers are falling behind in the fight against cyber crime.

He claimed that police technology consists of “creaking archaic systems” which cannot compare to what criminals have at their disposal.

He added that online marketplaces such as eBay and Gumtree are now being used to facilitate crimes such as harassment, stalking and even sexual offences.

Sgt Kempton said: “Criminals are in a far stronger position than we are when it comes to technology.”