

**Sensing that jewellers were seen as a soft target for criminals and worried by the disjointed police response I looked for a solution and came up with SaferGems.**

When I started this whole process there was understandable ambivalence amongst jewellers on the subject of violent robbery. On the one hand we knew it happened and hoped never to become a victim, but there was also a feeling of 'tempting fate' associated with talking publicly about it. Victims were reluctant to talk because to do so exposed their feelings of vulnerability. However, from time to time members would call in about robberies that had happened to them and to express the view that there was a trend towards more frequency and greater violence during attacks. Accurate statistics were difficult to come by but those that did exist seemed to show that violent crimes were decreasing in general, however experience showed that as the 'traditional' targets, such as banks and cash handlers, became more sophisticated in their security measures criminals looked for 'softer' targets – and that meant jewellers.

In 2006 the Chairman of a large multiple wrote requesting my help in compiling information showing what the trade was experiencing and exposing the shortcomings of the police. At the time his company had suffered robberies at a dozen different sites, all with the same MO. They were being investigated by different police forces and he was frustrated by the lack of a co-ordinated response from police. Early in 2008 the frequency of attacks began to build again and there was a series of high profile robberies in the West End that received media coverage during the early summer. Clearly there was an issue here that needed tackling. Attacks were getting more violent despite increased security measures, organised gangs were at work, and we lacked confidence in the police.

My view has always been that there is little point in writing to police and politicians pointing out their shortcomings, because they already know that something is wrong but either don't have the willpower or resources to tackle it. Far better, I believe, to suggest solutions that politicians can latch on to. Better still; find your own answers to the problem. What was clear from all this work was that what we lacked was intelligence! The consensus view, shared by the police, was that they didn't appear to work effectively on making connections between crimes committed in neighbouring boroughs let alone neighbouring forces; that any intelligence gathered by individual jewellers and passed to local police forces was often misdirected, and mostly not shared with those who could benefit from it most.

It was also evident that where successful initiatives and information sharing networks had flourished they crumbled through lack of continuity because they were often the work of one committed police officer. Who, once their talent was spotted, was moved or promoted, thus undermining the initiative. Equally, it is no secret that pressure on individual forces to improve clear up rates, and the bureaucracy involved in cross border co-operation, tends to mitigate against the police successfully spotting and predicting trends or shutting down the activity of criminal networks involved in organising raids and getting the proceeds out of the country.

For these reasons, whilst the police were happy to assist with expertise, they thought sector initiatives or networks should be hosted and funded by the beneficiary industries. Clearly finance and resources influenced this thinking, but so did the need to ensure consistency, continuity, and relevance. I tended to agree. So in 2009 I joined forces with our insurance brokers T H March, who had been looking at ways of reversing the deteriorating claims history of the sector, to form SaferGems.

Put simply, SaferGems is a centralised intelligence database, hosted by a trusted third party and fed by reports from jewellers, police, and the public, which collates data to reveal crime patterns and alerts to participating jewellers and clients. The results have been impressive. Not so much in the members of armed gangs arrested, although that does happen, but in the way information has prevented crime. Typical examples would be jewellers who, armed with a SaferGems alert have reported their suspicions of attempted robbery or fraud; or the pawnbroker who wrote quite recently “I am writing to thank you for your assistance and for the SaferGems alerts generally. As mentioned, I am convinced the alerts substantially contributed to preventing the loss of jewellery from our company yesterday”. The other benefit is that more crimes can be associated with their perpetrators, and the police gain from liaison with our network.

Having collated intelligence on crimes totally over £14million in 2012 alone, SaferGems continues to be a work in progress; the network expands every day; and the increasing price of gold keeps jewellers in the spotlight.

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