

GETTING THE WHOLE STORY

by: John Lamont

A recent documentary helped raise the awareness of jewellery crime in Canada. But what the show neglected to report is just as important.

Earlier this year, Global Television aired a documentary on jewellery crime in Canada. On one hand, the documentary shone a light on the severity of crimes against our industry. On the other hand, it seemed to infer that police were not paying attention to this type of crime. Jewellers vigilance Canada (JVC) sees a much different picture. We know first-hand how police focus on these crimes. John Lamont, JVC's Director of Crime Prevention, asks the question: "What are you doing about your own protection?"

- Phyllis Richard, JVC's Executive Director

At the end of January (2013), Global Television aired a documentary on its 16x9 program called "Diamond Heist." The documentary was well put together and gave examples of violent jewellery crime throughout Canada. The documentary focused on South American gangs that were coming from the U.S. to Canada and were primarily targeting travelling salespeople. Many of the store videos used in the documentary were of other armed robberies throughout Canada - armed robberies and thefts committed by people other than South American gang members.

The documentary raises the awareness of jewellery crime in Canada and the serious nature of a lot of these incidents. However, the video left the inference that nothing is being done, especially on the part of the Police in Canada, to combat this type of crime. Towards the end of the video, the commentator suggested that Police in Canada are not focused enough on this type of crime.

It is to this comment that I have some dispute. For example, the first segment of the video showed a reenactment of a robbery that took place in Toronto at the end of November 2012, in which \$700,000 in diamonds was stolen from a travelling salesman as he sat in his car. Guns were pointed at the salesperson who, was no doubt, very traumatized by the whole situation. There was no special security equipment protecting him or the merchandise, which was in a briefcase in the trunk. There was no trunk safe or cameras installed in the vehicle - no security whatsoever.

However, the Toronto Police took this incident very seriously, as they do with all armed robberies. It was immediately assigned to the Toronto Holdup Squad, a specialized unit of hand-selected officers that deals with all robberies in Toronto. Also, in 2010 Toronto Police conducted a large investigation on South American gangs called Project Cola. Numerous arrests were made and a vast amount of intelligence was gathered.

If there is some criticism to be pointed at the Police it is that neither JVC nor the industry in the area were notified in any way so that other travelling salespeople could be made aware these criminals were operating in the area.

A MATTER OF TIME

The video also mentioned the mother of all thefts; three million dollars in jewellery stolen from the trunk of someone's car at a mall while two security guards enjoyed a coffee inside the mall. Again, there was no security equipment in the car, no fingerprints, no DNA, no witnesses - just two red-faced security guards with a lot of questions to answer.

Certainly, we cannot fault the Police for this theft or for a lack of focus on the investigation. The investigating officers later contacted JVC for similar events in Canada and canvassed many other police departments in Western Canada with little success. Only on TV are these types of crimes solved within 30 minutes.

This was a jewellery event that was being moved from mall to mall; the guards were obviously followed and the bandits struck at the right time. Any person moving this type of merchandise should be trained on how to identify suspicious vehicles following them. ISPS in New York City is one company that provides this type of training.

The documentary also showed an interview with a jeweller that had been a victim of a major armed robbery in his retail store. He talked of how several masked men entered his store with guns, traumatizing his staff and smashing several showcases. The criminals stole more than two million dollars in merchandise.

For many years, JVC has suggested that jewellers install security glass in the showcases to reduce the amount of the loss. It won't stop an armed robbery, but it makes it very difficult to break the glass and it slows the criminals down. They know they only have a certain amount of time before Police arrive.

In some parts of Europe, armed robberies got so bad that jewellers installed special locks in their showcases - time-lapse locks that take six minutes before they will open along with high security glass. Drastic measures. Can you imagine telling your customers they have to wait six minutes before the case will open?

ERROR IN OMISSION

What the documentary did not indicate was that, within a short time after this robbery, the Peel Police Central Robbery Unit arrested five people who were *not* South American gang members. They recovered a number of watches. One of the lead investigators told me that the majority of diamonds were sold to a (willfully blind) jeweller at a building in downtown Toronto. When Peel Police went to the building, which is occupied by mostly jewellery manufacturers and wholesalers, one jeweller told them that anyone in the building would buy this merchandise (with no questions asked) because it is so profitable. The stones are removed and sent to Montreal where they are sold to another jeweller who may have no idea it is stolen merchandise. The gold is immediately melted down.

The documentary interviewed John Kennedy, President of Jewelers Security Alliance (JSA), a leading authority on jewellery crime in the U.S., who indicated there had been a decrease in attacks against jewellery salespeople in the U.S. and especially in New York City. The commentator indicated the New York Police had cracked down on this type of crime. This is what may have driven the Columbians (South American gang members) to enter Canada. This could be true, but the fact remains that the New York Police have cracked down on all kinds of crime. Even homicides are one-third what they use to be.

PUTTING MEASURES IN PLACE

What has caused this decrease in crime? The entire jewellery area of 45th street is covered with police surveillance cameras. Police have taken a "Stop and Frisk" approach to some people on the streets. While this is controversial by any measure, whatever they are doing is working and is driving criminals

elsewhere - maybe even to Canada. Canadians are not ready for these types of police methods, but if crime gets high enough their opinions may change.

These organized gangs from South America are not new to Canada. In 1993, when I was Assistant Security Manager of a large jewellery chain in Canada, we suffered a large theft committed by Columbians in Markville Mall, Markham, Ontario. During this theft, the sealant on a showcase was slit, the staff distracted, and the glass lifted, resulting in the theft of \$245,000 in diamond jewellery. After that theft we started using special sealant that cannot be slit with a knife. We did not blame the Police. We learned from our own mistakes and put measures in place to protect ourselves.

THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

JVC spoke with Detective Bedford of the York Regional Police, who was interviewed for the 16x9 documentary. He indicated that during the interview he told the interviewer of a number of successes the York Police had in dealing with these organized crime groups. These included project CUJO, which resulted in the arrest of five South American gang members; Project BOT, which resulted in eight arrests of these gang members; and Project Imenaza, which resulted in five arrests; and another robbery investigation that resulted in three more South American gang members arrested. That part of the documentary ended up on the cutting room floor and was never aired. Selective journalism to create sensationalism? It definitely raised the awareness of serious jewellery crime in Canada, but it did not tell the complete story.

Instead of pointing fingers, law enforcement and the jewellery industry should work together to better identify criminal activity and to protect all jewellery assets - people as well as merchandise. The responsibility lies with the Police *and* with each industry member. JVC has a Crime Prevention Program and an information-sharing network from coast to coast. Are you a member?