

Hardening the Target

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have indicated on their AJICW website that the criminal element in Canada considers diamonds and gold and other jewellery as the commodity of choice, second only to automobile theft. It is far more lucrative than bank robbery.

Any person involved in any aspect of the jewellery industry is a potential target for these criminals. Many people believe that the Police are the first line of defense against criminal activity. It is the respectful opinion of the writer that this is not true. This is not a despairing comment against the police. I am a very strong supporter of the police and work hard every day with the police to assist them in many investigations. There are many situations when the police have been actively investigating a criminal element and it came to the attention of the officers that a hit was planned against some jeweller so the officers reacted and made arrests before the hit could take place, but generally they are not the first line of defense. The only situation I can recall that I am personally aware of was in Toronto several years ago. An independent jeweller on Bloor Street had a small retail jewellery business that serviced the local community. Because he was a community jeweller and friends with most people in the area, he did not feel that he required a high level of security in his store. He did not have high security locks, a camera system, any form of security on windows and doors. He had normal low security showcases, and NO INSURANCE. One evening the jeweller remained after hours and was talking to two police officers in his back room when he heard a loud crash in the front of his store. The jeweller along with the two police officers made their way to the front of the store and caught a bandit about to smash a watch showcase. The individual was immediately arrested by the police and taken to the local police station. This jeweller was lucky. If he had not had those officers in his back room, the situation could have been much more serious. A loss of merchandise, which could have put him out of business or even worse, personal injury or death. Every jeweller cannot have the luxury of having two police friends in the back room if some criminal activity was to take place, so they themselves must harden the target against would-be thieves. People in the industry must do everything they can to protect themselves and assist the police if a crime does take place.

Jewelers Mutual Insurance web site is an excellent source of information on how to protect yourself and your business while open for business and when your premise is closed.

The hardening of this target must be done in a form of layering of security and at the same time, not creating an unpleasant and hostile environment for the honest customers that come into the store, or place of business.

An unarmed security guard in your place of business is a deterrent to crimes such as frauds, grab and runs and distraction thefts. A jeweller may choose to have the guard out front visible

to the general public and others may have him/her positioned in a room with a one way glass looking out onto the public area with signage posted "Security Guard on Duty"

Armed security guards can be intimidating and frightening to even the most honest and law abiding customers and are not an absolute defense against crime. In fact they could increase the liability of the jeweller. In many Provinces in Canada it may not be possible to get an armed guard for a retail outlet. You would have to hire an off duty police officer.

Many years ago in Montreal a jewellery chain hired off duty police to guard their stores during the Christmas Season. Some bandits attempted to rob one of the locations that had the officer inside. A shootout occurred and one of the bandits was killed. The officer was not injured but staff and other patrons were traumatized. Several shots were fired and all but one MISSED the target. Fortunately, all the rounds that missed did not hit anyone else.

With the increase of organized gangs including local street gangs, taking down a location that contains a security guard can actually be a "badge of honor" for these organized criminals. Something they can brag about to their friends.

In 2008 a jeweller armed himself and shot a criminal that attempted to rob him in his jewellery store. Thank goodness the jeweller was not injured. Jewellers Vigilance Canada does not recommend jewellers arm themselves.

Let me make it clear that I am not against the right of a citizen to legally own firearms and to justifiably use such weapons in self defense. I have two firearms legally registered to myself.

I am not part of the "Hug a Thug" culture that is springing up in many areas, but the rule and not the exception is that criminals are bent on stealing jewellery to turn into cash and to escape without adding to the severity of the crime by assaulting someone. In some cases they are certainly willing to use deadly force but generally only when provoked or to prevent their apprehension.

There may be many readers that do not support my position on armed guards. I simply wish them good luck.

In a recent attempt robbery in Ottawa, Ontario, the jewellery retailer thought they had a high level of security without overly affecting the inviting atmosphere of the store. They had installed laminate glass on their showcases which also had a clear security film, similar to polygon on the glass. Two would-be thieves came into the store masked and wearing parkas. They walked up to the diamond solitaire case and attempted to smash the glass in order to get at the merchandise. They hit the glass several times with a crowbar but were unable to break it. The glass cracked but the security film held it in place. The thieves then gave up and ran from

the store. The police suggested the criminals may have been in the store earlier looking at the merchandise so they would know what the target was, but due to the fact the jewellers had significantly hardened that target they were not able to get the merchandise. If the jeweller had also advertised the high security glass with a small sign somewhere on the case the bandits would have seen it for sure and perhaps, just perhaps, not attempted the theft.

The low quality cameras in this store had been properly placed and gave the police valuable evidence in relation to the criminals.

There was a time when security cameras were offensive to customers; however I suggest in this day and age the majority of honest law abiding citizens do not even see them, no matter how visible they may be, but the criminals do.

It is always nice to have the latest and greatest of camera equipment but cost can be prohibitive. A lower resolution camera properly placed, unobstructed by signs or displays can give a good, identifiable picture of an individual who committed a crime in your premise and the sharing of these pictures with other jewellers or within your own network can help prevent further crimes and assist in prosecution. I have seen many cases when victims and witnesses did not have to attend court because the bandit pleads guilty after a good picture was presented as part of the crown's evidence.

Each jeweller should consult with police first to ensure they do not have any objection to sharing the picture and as well make sure it is not a violation of the Provincial Privacy act.

It is imperative that anybody involved in the selling of jewellery insure that their staff is properly and regularly instructed on how to behave during a serious criminal event. The protection of life should be of utmost concern.

Restricting access into a jewellers location can also be a deterrent but not an absolute defense against external criminal activity. In a retail location, who do you not buzz in? Even today, honest law abiding citizens may cover themselves because of religious beliefs. Restricted access is just another layer of protection.

There can be many layers involved in the hardening of a target. Access to your location with bars on windows or security film on windows and doors, proper alarm systems, proper positioning of cameras and safes (it is not a good idea to have a safe, no matter what level of security it is, positioned against an exterior wall) proper locks, properly protected displays and training of staff.

As hard as your target may be, it has always been said (Author unknown) "As we surpass our father's skills, our sons shall shame our own." , and unfortunately this does not only apply to

honest hardworking citizens but it applies to criminals as well, no matter what man creates, man can defeat. You must always be aware of what's taking place as far as criminal activity is concerned in your area. A valuable tool in doing this is regular communications with local police, associations, such as Jewellers Vigilance Canada or Jewellers Security Alliance and local networking.

Knowledge is power and it will help you Harden your Target.