

Violent crime within the UK has remained at a consistently high rate since, well, as far as many of us can remember. Statistics from the British Retail Consortium only support this worrying trend, despite the fact that crime is the subject of regular 'spin'; the government has attempted to explain away the issue by stressing that it is the 'fear of crime' rather than crime itself that is the problem\*. The truth remains that in the 'here and now' many retailers, jewellers in particular, face the real threat of injury and sometimes worse from perhaps the most brutal of examples of violent crime: armed robbery.

Politicians shower the victims of business crime with letters of condolence and promises to do better. And while laws exist to allow the judiciary to imprison perpetrators for long periods, often the sentencing outcomes can only be described as farcical. Let's not forget that, although the detection and prevention of violent crime *per se* is a primary target for our beleaguered police service, retail crime is so far off the radar that it

doesn't even prompt the faintest of 'blips'. As a consequence, it is arguable that quality crime prevention for jewellers from the local constabulary is either generic or non-existent. For evidence of this observation, one only has to reflect upon the candid views of Michael Plant, an independent jeweller from

when you are in the comfort of your own home absorbing the academic angle. Good stuff too if you are studying for a Masters (as I am!). Pretty irrelevant, though, when you are face-to-face with an offender in your workplace or business that is a trigger pull away from ending your life.

Those working in the retail industry often despair at what they perceive as a lacklustre response to armed robbery from the criminal justice system. Don't despair, insists Ian Kirke, there is still much that retailers can do to protect themselves against this brutal crime.

Altrincham who was featured in October's edition of this magazine. His frustrations over the failure by neighbouring police forces to provide a coherent intelligence sharing system is, I suspect, reflected on a national scale.

Having established a somewhat bleak picture of the threat posed by crime and the State's reaction to it, a simple question remains. What, if anything, can the sector do in order to stop its members being robbed by armed and often desperate offenders?

There is a plethora of research available that seeks to profile such criminals. Gender, education, addiction to prohibited drugs, age and social standing offer compelling evidence as to why a certain portion of our community operates in this manner. All good stuff

There are several myths and legends that circulate about armed robberies. However, the reality of these crimes is that the vast majority are committed by drug-addicted offenders, not by professional 'blaggers', the almost glamorous characters portrayed in such films as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. Although seemingly poor planners, drug-addicted criminals will nonetheless engage in predictable behaviour. The preparation, execution and dialogue used in their crimes have many discernable traits. Indeed, having engaged with a number of ex-armed robbers, a clearer picture begins to form around what makes some people, and therefore some businesses, more susceptible to being robbed by the armed and violent.

I recall interviewing a victim of a particularly disturbing armed robbery who was a cashier in a high street building society. Prior to the event, four males entered the building society's customer area and stood at the back. None of them acted in the manner one would expect from a genuine customer, and all four left the premises without engaging with a member of staff. The cashier later stated that her 'gut feeling' was that the men were up to no good, but unfortunately the cashier lacked the knowledge to act safely on this primary intelligence. When viewed



# focus on robbery



later on the CCTV, it was obvious that the offenders were simply 'casing' the location before executing a vicious armed robbery.

It has always been fascinating to me that, statistically, burglary detection rates are generally on a par with those of robbery\*\*. Why? You may well ask, given that, in a robbery situation there will always be at least one witness (the victim) while burglaries generally occur when the property owner is absent. The truth is that victims are, on the whole, poorly equipped to react and, in terms of visual intelligence and personal safety, they often have little recall of events useable by the police. Furthermore the predictable dialogue of armed robbers can very often encourage victims to act in a completely contradictory manner. A "Don't look!" command interpreted in such a way has an inevitable and chilling consequence – the victim usually looks.

Post-scene management is an area that's almost as fractious. Advances in evidence gathering are exciting for the law enforcement fraternity, despite the 'offside trap' regularly used in our courts by canny villains who claim cross-contamination. Police reaction times to armed robberies are pretty good, but the all-important period between the escape of the villain and their arrival has to be managed in a precise and almost clinical manner.

At the recent national robbery symposium hosted by IBP the hot topic for police, security professionals, members of the business community, academics and, interestingly enough, ex-offenders was the issue of training. Quality training will always act as a significant and long-lasting measure to help frustrate robberies, or lessen the impact on the victim and increase the likelihood of the offenders being neutralised by the police when they do take place.

I sincerely believe that there are solutions available that can successfully combat the threat of violence against retailers. If we can at least prepare staff to act safely and professionally, then we may at last begin to lessen the often horrific impact of this most ghastly of crimes.

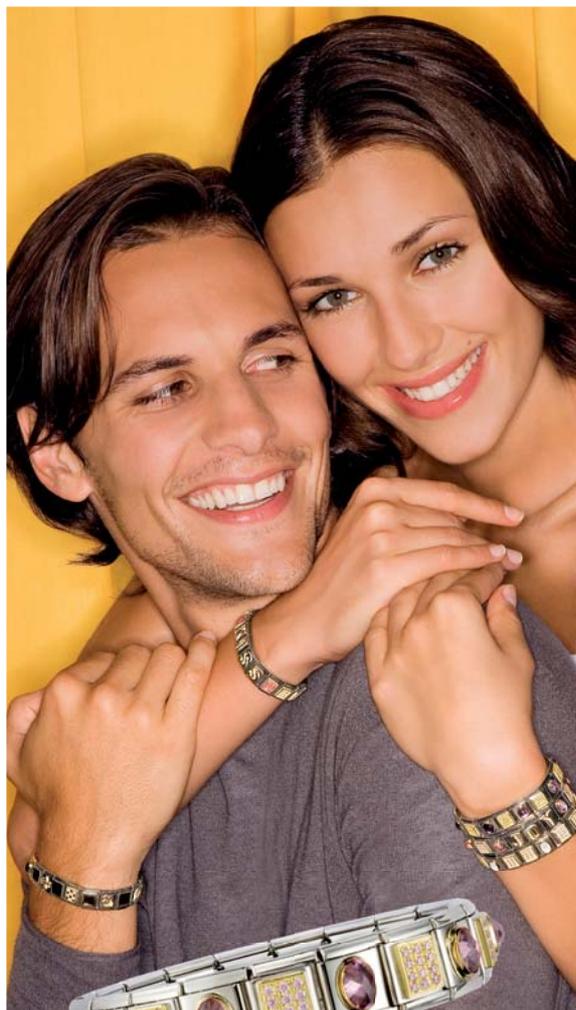
\* *The Mirror*, 24th August 2007

\*\* *Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004*

*Ian Kirke is the managing director of Training For Success (TFS), a leading risk management and training provider which specialises in reducing corporate threats. TFS has accreditation from the leading Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth, and its customer list includes many FTSE 100 companies. Its work over the past five years with supermarket Waitrose has delivered an 80% reduction in assaults on the chain's branch partners.*

*In association with the NAG, TFS will be delivering a series of one-day events for members and non-members throughout the UK, commencing in February 2008.*

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