



Michael Hoare explores how jewellery retailers and suppliers can protect themselves against the threat of violent robberies.

# Specialised Partners in Crime

It has become an inescapable fact of life that retailing, in all its forms, now carries a risk to personal safety and recent British Retail Consortium figures show a rise in violent offences with robberies 15% higher in the first ten months of 2009. But by their very nature, jewellers have always been associated with a higher level of risk – if only because of the character and value of merchandise handled. However, the climate of fear has increased lately because of a number of highly publicised assaults on London jewellers, and there is little doubt that as other 'traditional' prey such as banks and cash handlers have become more sophisticated, criminals have turned their attention to 'softer targets'. Town centre

The factors influencing this relate to higher values being carried by jewellers in their shops (including top level brand watches) and the general increase in commodity prices of diamonds and gold over this period. If we couple this with the fact that thieves can quickly transport goods out of the country after they have been stolen, the UK retail jewellery sector has unfortunately become an increasingly favoured target not just for the domestic criminal but for those visiting from Europe or beyond.

As regards the topic of violence in armed robberies, regrettably this is something that has increased in the recent past, with armed robbers using both firearms and knives, including machetes, to intimidate their victims.

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CCTV has also caused a ripple effect, pushing casual criminals outwards into more vulnerable areas.

To quote Neil McFarlane, T H March sales and marketing director, writing in last month's *Jeweller*, "over the past ten years, the severity of in-store armed robbery losses has increased markedly. In fact, both the frequency and severity has increased significantly over the past three years.

The threat has become much more real, in that there is no doubt that a lot of the 'short break' criminals are prepared to use the weapons they come armed with."

None of this will come as much of a surprise to jewellers and in 2009 the NAG and T H March began the fight back against criminal activity by jointly funding the SaferGems initiative, designed to assist the police with the gathering of intelligence.

But while intelligence can play an important part in preventing crime and catching criminals, jewellers are increasingly concerned about protecting their staff, their property, and increasingly their homes by practical means. Of course, there are numerous deterrent devices – including smoke, alarms, CCTV, and forensic markers – available to jewellers these days, but their effectiveness depends very much on the circumstances of their deployment, and the capacity of staff to remain calm under threat. We all know that rational thought and action can fall victim to extreme stress, and that criminals can become more dangerous when confronted or surprised. Neither criminal nor victim reacts well under stress; neither party is thinking straight, and a situation can rapidly get out of control when somebody does something unexpected.

Over the years the NAG has worked closely with Training For Success, providers



of specialist training services, on preparing managers and staff to cope under such circumstances, and this has proved very successful. However, inculcating learned behaviours has its limitations in dampening down a situation, so to reduce the risk even further some high risk environments have moved to a higher level of security by handing control of their premises to 24-hour remote monitoring centres. Our relationship with Training For Success is such that they have recommended the covert services of a specialised partner who has developed a number of cutting-edge pro-active CCTV and asset-tracking solutions that incorporate the remote management of robbery and high risk situations by trained professionals.

I have seen one such facility in action, and I have to say it is impressive. Not only can the operator, once alerted, see and hear everything that is happening during a raid, in certain circumstances they can take control of alarms, doors, smoke and chemical markers, often liaising directly with local police to contain a situation. To my mind, decisions taken in a clear-headed manner by a trained professional must dramatically reduce the possibility of dangerous errors being made by terrified staff, that could lead to an escalation in violence.

The service can also be extended to the homes of owners and key personnel who might be at risk from threats and kidnap, and while this might presently be regarded as a limited threat, it is one that should be borne in mind when considering personal safety. In this case TFS's recommended partner has extensive experience protecting directors and key workers running sensitive installations, and the resources I saw deployed give a very high level of reassurance. Finally, and perhaps of particular interest to our colleagues at the BJA, I saw the latest satellite tracking technology in use

protecting vulnerable mobile personnel. It is difficult not to sound alarmist when discussing the threat of violent robbery, but experience shows that preparation and planning can go a long way when it comes to protecting your business – particularly when your planning is done in conjunction with experienced partners.

In the end there are many levels of security and only you can choose what is right for your circumstances, but if you would like to discuss any aspect of the services I have described, please contact me at Luke Street, or Ian Kirke, managing director Training For Success at: [iankirke@tfsuccess.com](mailto:iankirke@tfsuccess.com) to arrange a confidential discussion.

