

GemNotes

BOOK 'EM

Jewelry customers might sleep a little more soundly at night knowing their precious diamonds are protected by an invincible crimefighter.

Gemprint(tm), a computerized identification system for diamonds, looks less intimidating than a gun-toting police officer or a superhero in a red cape and tights. But the laser equipment and PC software package -- an upgraded version of the 19-year-old Gemprint system -- is designed for unquestionable ID of loose and mounted diamonds.

Gemprint was founded in 1977 on the premise that no two diamonds are alike. The system records the subtle distinctions in diamond cuts, just as fingerprinting does for people. A low-powered laser shines through a diamond to reflect the "sparkle pattern" of the diamond as created by the angles of its cut. In the original Gemprint equipment, a piece of Polaroid film was placed against the laser pattern, and a photograph was taken of the diamond's sparkle. The photograph could be used to recognize the diamond if it were lost or replaced with another.

When Gemprint became a division of Omphalos Recovery Systems Inc. of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1987, the new owners set out to find a more efficient and effective method. "It needed to be computerized," says Jim Engdahl, Gemprint's president and chief executive officer. "That's the real benefit of the technology."

The result is the Interactive Scanning Instrument, a condensed version of the previous diamond scanners, which plugs into a PC (model 486 or faster using Windows 3.11 or higher). The laser captures the sparkle pattern of the diamond, then produces it on the screen. Retailers record this pattern with the owner's name and information about the diamond.

"There's so much concern about getting back the same diamond that you leave for a repair," says Steven Rosen of Sydney Rosen Co. in Philadelphia, Pa. Rosen's company has used Gemprint in its various forms for years and switched almost a year ago to the computerized version. When a customer brings in diamond jewelry for repair, he or she watches a salesperson make a Gemprint of the diamond and then receives a printed version. When it's time to pick up the jewelry, the diamond is scanned again. This time, the computer matches the new pattern with the one in the database. When the patterns match, the customer knows it's the same diamond.

Rosen also uses Gemprint in the selling process so customers know the diamonds they choose are not switched.

More confidence, less crime: Besides increasing consumer confidence in a store, Gemprint is designed to take a bite out of crime on a bigger scale. When a customer buys a diamond, retailers complete a registration form with detailed information about the customer and a description of the stone. The registration and the scan of the diamond are submitted to the Gemprint International Database, routinely accessed by law enforcement agencies, including the FBI. The database also registers the serial numbers of high-end watches.

More than \$672 million worth of jewelry has been registered in the database in the hopes that, if thieves fancy the valuables, they will be recovered and returned to their rightful owners. Gemprint says more than \$1 million in stolen jewelry has been recovered through its database.

The idea that diamonds could be seen again after they are stolen is especially appealing to insurance companies. In fact, many offer 10% premium discounts for diamond jewelry registered with Gemprint; some even require it for high-value or high-risk jewelry.

Engdahl estimates 500 to 600 retailers use the old Gemprint system and already 50 to 100 use the new one. "As we expand and grow into more public markets, we plan to launch the product on a global basis," he says. A major score in that direction is the addition of the Goldsmiths Group, a 196-store retail jewelry chain in the United Kingdom that became a Gemprint dealer and ordered 60 systems in September.

Goldsmiths and other retailers have said they plan to use the new Gemprint system as a value-added incentive and marketing tool to convince customers of their trustworthiness. Gemprint retailers use the technology with the strong belief that a confident customer is a buying customer. "It gives us a competitive edge in the marketplace," says Rosen. "Gemprint adds a tremendous amount of credibility to the sale."

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