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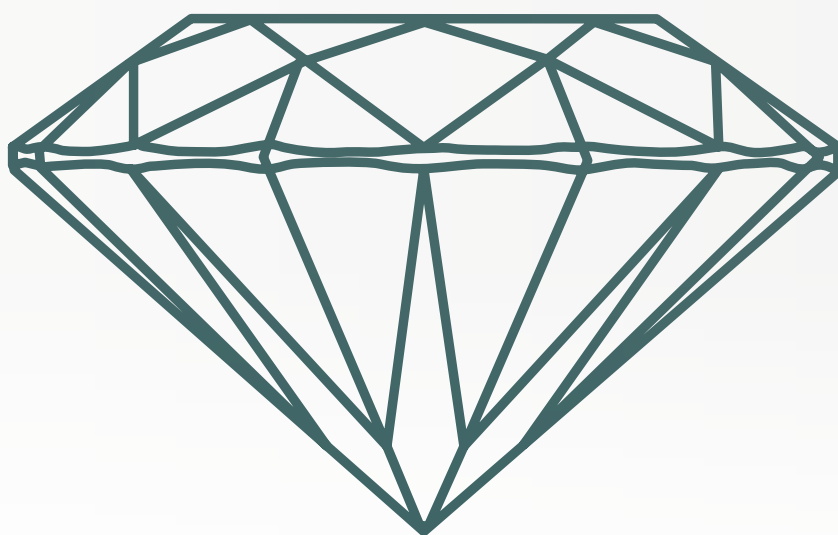


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COMPANY CULTURE: SO MUCH MORE THAN FREE SNACKS

ERIK HINDS, GIA

What makes a great company culture? This buzzword is often thrown around, especially among newer generations entering the workforce. While many companies tout their culture by showcasing perks like parties, snacks, and swag, these superficial benefits don't define a positive work environment. True company culture is about how work gets done, how decisions are made, and how employees are treated—it goes far beyond a trendy break room.

So, how can companies authentically convey their culture to potential candidates? This is a challenge, as applicants often lose interest during the hiring process due to a lack of meaningful information about the company culture. It's easier to market flashy perks than the intangible aspects of a workplace. To genuinely showcase their culture, companies must first understand their employees' experiences and sentiments.

This requires an "Employee Listening Strategy"—regularly soliciting feedback (often anonymously) to gauge employee satisfaction. This may be uncomfortable, but it's crucial for understanding if the employee experience is improving or declining. Nothing is more damaging than an employer brand that makes false claims about its culture, only to have new hires encounter a different reality. High turnover due to misaligned expectations is a clear sign of a disconnect between the employer brand and the actual employee experience.

Once a company has a clear picture of its culture, it can develop an authentic employer brand. Sharing real employee stories and testimonials is a powerful way to connect with potential applicants. Leveraging social media platforms like LinkedIn allows companies to showcase what life is really like at the organization without just posting job openings. This targeted approach enables companies to attract specific types of candidates. For example, featuring testimonials from successful sales team members can help fill open sales roles.

Employee referral programs are another effective strategy. Encouraging employees to share company content on social media can reach a wider audience without costly ad campaigns. The budget saved can be used to incentivize referrals, which are often cheaper, faster, and more effective than other hiring methods. Referrals also tend to result in higher retention rates and less time spent on training, as the referring employee has already vetted the candidate's fit with the company culture.

In today's competitive labor market, companies must prioritize showcasing their genuine culture to attract top talent. Applicants want to know what a company is really like, beyond the standard job descriptions and benefits lists. By listening to employees, building an authentic employer brand, and incentivizing referrals, companies of all sizes can ensure the longevity of the positive culture they've worked hard to create. The key is to truly represent the employee experience. Share their stories, and they will help you thrive.

Key Takeaways

- A positive work environment is defined by how work is executed, decision-making processes, and the treatment of employees, rather than superficial benefits like parties or snacks.
- Regularly soliciting feedback, often anonymously, is essential to understand employee satisfaction and ensure that the actual workplace experience aligns with the company's professed culture.



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT



- Misrepresenting company culture can lead to high turnover rates as new hires may find discrepancies between their expectations and reality, highlighting the importance of genuine representation of the company culture.
- Sharing authentic testimonials and stories from employees on platforms like LinkedIn helps potential candidates get a true sense of life within the organization, attracting candidates who are a good fit for the culture.
- Encouraging employees to refer candidates not only broadens the talent pool without additional advertising costs but also typically results in higher retention rates and faster integration, as referred candidates are pre-vetted for fit with the company culture.

Rachel Wells, "20 U.S. Companies Hiring from Referrals in 2024, According to Research," *Forbes*, June 3, 2024.



MY JOURNEY WITH SUCCESSION PLANNING

SARAH PERSON, CG, JEA, EXCLUSIVELY DIAMONDS

As the owner and operator of Exclusively Diamonds for nearly four decades, I've witnessed firsthand the evolution and challenges of running a family business in the jewelry industry. In our line of work, it's not uncommon to see multiple generations involved, each contributing to the legacy of the business. My journey began working alongside my mother, eventually taking over the reins, and now, my daughter Maria has been a vital part of our team for the past 12 years, marking the third generation in our family business.

However, statistics reveal a stark reality for family-owned enterprises: only 30% successfully transition to the second generation, and merely 12% make it to the third. This data underscores the critical importance of succession planning for all business owners, regardless of whether there's a family member in line to take over. The alternative—having no plan—can lead to chaos and potential collapse if something unexpected happens to the owner.

According to *Sage Journals*, over 90% of U.S. small business are family-owned or have the potential to become one, highlighting the widespread relevance of succession planning. Despite this, the Exit Planning Institute reports that a staggering 70% of small businesses fail to successfully transition due to a lack of preparation. Shockingly, only 34% of family-owned businesses have a clear succession plan in place, as stated by PwC.

For us, the journey toward creating a succession plan began when Maria expressed her interest in acquiring an ownership stake in Exclusively Diamonds. Concerned about the risks posed by not having a plan, we decided to take proactive steps. Our insurance company facilitated our connection with legal and financial experts who specialized in business succession planning in Minnesota.

Collaborating closely with an attorney and our accountant, we tailored a plan that aligned with both Maria's and my needs, ensuring a smooth transition without burdening the business or straining our familial relationship. Within eight weeks, we had a structured plan in place to gradually transfer ownership over the next decade to become equal partners. Once that is achieved, we will determine the next steps of succession planning within our business.

Initially, our plan worked seamlessly, but as we approached the second phase, changes in tax laws prompted us to revise our strategy. This flexibility is one of the key benefits of having a succession plan—it can adapt to evolving circumstances, such as tax implications, economic shifts, or health considerations, while maintaining a clear path for business continuity.

Our Chief Financial Officer also played a pivotal role in this process, understanding the imperative of executing a well-defined succession plan. Knowing that we had taken concrete steps to secure Exclusively Diamonds' future provided her with reassurance and confidence in the longevity of our business legacy.

In conclusion, our journey with succession planning has been a testament to the importance of foresight and preparation in safeguarding a family business. By proactively addressing succession through careful planning and expert guidance, we've not only ensured continuity but also paved the way for future generations to thrive in carrying forward our legacy.

As business owners, we must recognize that succession planning isn't just about securing our own future—it's about preserving the vitality of the businesses we've built and the livelihoods of those who depend on them. For anyone in a similar position, I urge you to prioritize succession planning early on, for the benefit of your business, your family, and your peace of mind.

The American Gem Society offers an excellent course to help business owners create a succession plan. To learn more, visit ags.org/business-succession.



Key Takeaways

- Only 30% of family-owned businesses successfully transition to the second generation, and a mere 12% make it to the third. This highlights the critical need for proactive succession planning to ensure the longevity and stability of family enterprises.
- Despite over 90% of U.S. small businesses being family-owned or having the potential to become one, approximately 70% fail to transition successfully because they lack proper succession plans. Additionally, only 34% have a clear succession strategy in place.
- Succession plans must be adaptable to changes such as tax law updates, economic shifts, or unforeseen health issues. The ability to revise strategies in response to these changes is essential for maintaining business continuity. By collaborating with legal and financial experts, a well-structured plan for ownership transfer, ensuring smooth transitions and preserving family relationships can be created.
- Involving key team members, such as the Chief Financial Officer, is vital in executing a succession plan. Their understanding and support provide reassurance and confidence in the business's future, reinforcing the importance of a well-defined and collective approach to succession.



Thank you to Jewelers Mutual® for graciously providing the following for inclusion in the American Gem Society's annual recertification exam.

PRIORITIZE SECURITY TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL YEAR

JEWELERS MUTUAL® GROUP

Safeguarding your jewelry business is essential to its success. By implementing robust security measures, you can significantly reduce the risk and protect your team, customers, and valuable inventory. Let's explore essential strategies to achieve this goal.

1. Create a culture of security

Security isn't a one-time effort—it's an ongoing commitment. Fostering a culture of vigilance and preparedness will help you protect your store, staff, and customers effectively.

- Conduct regular training on security protocols and emergency procedures to ensure everyone is prepared.
- Foster a security-conscious atmosphere where your team takes ownership of security and feels confident sharing any suspicious activity.
- Acknowledge and reward your team members who demonstrate exceptional attention to security to keep everyone motivated.

2. Fortify your existing security systems

Your alarm and camera systems are the backbone of your store's security. Ensure these systems are fully operational and installed correctly. Regular maintenance and testing are critical to their effectiveness.

- Test alarms regularly to confirm they're connected to monitoring services and functioning as intended.
- Review camera placements to ensure they cover all critical areas, such as entrances, display cases, and storage rooms.
- Verify recording capabilities to confirm cameras are capturing clear footage and storing it securely for later review if necessary.

3. Update call lists and define roles

Make sure everyone knows their responsibilities and whom to contact. Quick, coordinated action is critical in a crisis.

- Keep your emergency contact list current.
- Define roles for all team members and assign specific responsibilities.
- Establish clear emergency procedures and conduct regular drills to ensure everyone is prepared.

4. Respond to all alarms, even on nights and weekends

Alarms should never be ignored, regardless of the time or day. Immediate action is essential.

- Always contact local law enforcement when an alarm signal is triggered, even if it's a communication failure.
- Avoid entering the premises without law enforcement present. They will inspect the property and surrounding areas to ensure it's safe to proceed.



5. Partner with law enforcement

Building a strong relationship with local law enforcement and mall security can enhance your store's safety.

- Inform security personnel and law enforcement of the unique vulnerabilities and request increased surveillance and patrols.
- Invite them to tour your store to familiarize them with the layout, identify potential security risks, and better support you in case of an incident.

6. Build relationships with neighboring businesses and security teams

A collaborative approach to security can benefit everyone in your immediate vicinity.

- Strengthen relationships with neighboring businesses and local or mall security teams.
- Share information about suspicious activity to foster a vigilant community prepared to respond to threats collectively.

Vigilance Is Key to Prevention

Even with robust systems and procedures, human vigilance remains a critical layer of defense. Train your staff to recognize and report unusual activity, such as:

- Individuals loitering near the store or acting nervously
- Suspicious vehicles, especially those with out-of-state or temporary tags, parked nearby for extended periods
- Unusual construction work in or near the store
- People walking around with earpieces, possibly coordinating a group
- Individuals carrying devices or cases with antennas that might disrupt communications

Encourage staff to trust their instincts and report any concerns immediately. A quick response to potential threats can prevent incidents before they occur.

The Time Is Now for Robust, Preventive Action

A well-secured jewelry business is not only a deterrent to criminals but also a reassurance to your team and customers that their safety is your top priority. A robust security plan will help you stay prepared to handle any challenges that come your way.

Contact the expert Asset Protection team at Jewelers Mutual® Group via assetprotection@jminsure.com with any questions about your specific store security needs.

Key Takeaways

- Make security an ongoing effort through regular training, clear procedures, and defined responsibilities. Keep emergency contacts up-to-date, ensure every team member knows their role, and recognize those who uphold strong security practices.
- Maintain alarm and surveillance systems with regular testing and monitoring. Adjust camera placement to cover key areas, confirm clear footage, and check to be sure recordings are stored securely for future review.
- Keep emergency contact information up-to-date to ensure swift communication during crises. Assign specific security-related responsibilities to each team member to ensure coordinated and efficient responses and establish clear procedures so that everyone knows how to act swiftly and effectively during emergencies.
- Treat every alarm activation as serious. Notify law enforcement immediately and do not enter the premises until they confirm it's safe.
- Work with law enforcement, mall security, and neighboring businesses to identify vulnerabilities, increase awareness, and share updates about suspicious activity.



WHY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MATTERS IN FINE JEWELRY RETAIL

BRAD VOORHEES, SCALETX

Performance management is a crucial aspect of running a successful small business, especially in industries like fine jewelry retail, where customer service and product expertise are at the core of operations. In this article, we'll explore some essential tips and strategies to establish and maintain a robust performance management system tailored to the fine jewelry retail environment.

The fine jewelry industry is built on trust, expertise, and personalized customer service. Customers are not just buying a product; they are purchasing a sentimental, high-value item with expectations of quality and care. Your staff plays a key role in delivering that experience, and managing their performance effectively is critical to maintaining your business's reputation and growth.

Key Benefits of a Performance Management System

1. **Enhanced customer experience:** Well-trained and motivated employees provide better customer service. This ensures clients feel valued and will return to your store for future purchases.
2. **Increased sales:** By regularly assessing and improving the performance of your sales staff, you can identify areas where they can up-sell, cross-sell, and close sales more effectively.
3. **Employee retention:** Employees who feel supported in their growth and development are more likely to stay with your business, reducing turnover and the costs associated with hiring and training new staff.
4. **Business growth:** A motivated team working at their full potential will drive your business toward long-term success.

Building a Strong Performance Management System

Performance management isn't just about annual reviews or corrective action when something goes wrong. It's an ongoing process that involves setting expectations, providing regular feedback, and fostering continuous improvement.

Here's how you can create a solid performance management framework for your fine jewelry retail business:

1. Set clear expectations:

Start by defining what success looks like in each role. For a fine jewelry retail associate, this could include:

- Meeting sales targets
- Providing exceptional customer service
- Demonstrating product knowledge and expertise
- Maintaining the visual appeal of the store



These expectations should be clearly communicated to your team from day one. Having measurable and specific goals helps you and your employees stay aligned on what is expected.

2. Ongoing training and development:

Jewelry is a specialized product, and your staff must possess in-depth knowledge of gemstones, metals, and design trends to be effective. Regular training sessions can ensure your team remains informed about new collections, market trends, and customer preferences.

Consider offering:

- Product knowledge training, especially for new employees
- Sales technique workshops to help staff handle objections and close sales
- Customer service refresher courses to reinforce soft skills

3. Regular feedback and coaching:

Feedback is most effective when it is timely, constructive, and actionable. Don't wait for an annual review to provide feedback. Instead, create a culture of open communication where employees feel comfortable asking questions and receiving guidance.

A few ways to provide regular feedback include:

- On-the-spot coaching: When you notice a teachable moment—whether it's an exceptional sale or a missed opportunity—provide immediate feedback.
- Peer reviews: Consider incorporating peer reviews or group feedback sessions. Often, coworkers can offer insights into performance that a manager might not notice.

4. Track performance with metrics:

Having data-driven performance metrics can help you make more objective decisions about your team's performance. Some key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to fine jewelry retail include:

- Sales figures: Track individual and store-wide sales to see how each team member contributes to revenue.
- Conversion rates: Measure the percentage of customers who make a purchase after interacting with a salesperson.
- Customer satisfaction: Use post-sale surveys or online reviews to gauge how customers feel about their shopping experience.
- Up-selling and cross-selling success: Track how well your employees are doing with up-selling high-end products or suggesting complementary items.

5. Reward and recognition:

Recognizing your employees' hard work and achievements can go a long way in keeping them motivated. In a small business setting, you may not always have the resources for large bonuses, but there are other ways to reward employees, such as:

- Offering flexible scheduling for high performers
- Providing small incentives (gift cards, extra time off) for meeting sales goals
- Creating an "Employee of the Month" program
- Publicly acknowledging success during team meetings

The key is to tailor your rewards to what your employees value most. Recognition should feel personal and genuine, showing your staff that you appreciate their contributions to the business.



6. Address underperformance early:

It's important to address performance issues before they escalate. If an employee is struggling to meet expectations, use a constructive approach:

- Identify the root cause: Is it a lack of training, motivation, or personal challenges outside of work?
- Set clear improvement goals: Be specific about what needs to change and set a timeline for improvement.
- Provide support: Offer additional training or mentorship to help the employee succeed.
- Sometimes, pairing a struggling employee with a more experienced team member can make a significant difference.

If improvement doesn't happen after several interventions, you may need to consider whether the role is the right fit for that individual.

Continuous Improvement for Business Success

In fine jewelry retail, your employees are the face of your brand. An effective performance management system helps ensure that every team member is aligned with your business goals and committed to delivering an outstanding customer experience.

By setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and investing in your team's development, you can build a high-performing team that not only meets but exceeds your customers' expectations—ultimately driving growth and success for your business.

Key Takeaways

- Effective performance management ensures that staff deliver high-quality customer service and possess the necessary product expertise, which are vital for maintaining the business's reputation and driving growth.
- The key benefits of a performance management system include an enhanced customer experience, increased sales, employee retention, and business growth.
- Define what success looks like for each role by setting measurable and specific goals, such as meeting sales targets, providing exceptional customer service, demonstrating product knowledge, and maintaining store aesthetics. Clear communication of these expectations from the outset ensures alignment between management and employees.
- Continuous training is crucial in the specialized field of jewelry retail. Regular sessions should cover product knowledge, sales techniques, and customer service skills to keep the team informed about new collections, market trends, and evolving customer preferences.
- Foster a culture of open communication by providing timely, constructive, and actionable feedback. Implement methods like on-the-spot coaching and peer reviews to address performance in real-time. Additionally, use key performance indicators (KPIs) such as sales figures, conversion rates, customer satisfaction, and upselling success to objectively measure and enhance team performance.



A KALEIDOSCOPIC ARTIST'S PALETTE: PLAY-OF-COLOR

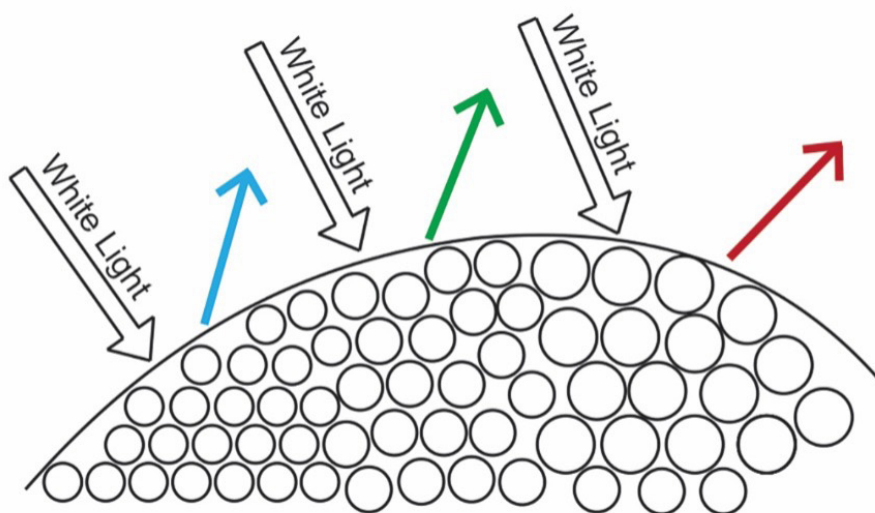
WADE ABEL, CG, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

Opals are mesmerizing gemstones with the ability to display all the colors of the spectrum when viewed from different angles. This phenomenon, known as “play-of-color,” is a hallmark of opal that contributes to its rarity and value. It is important to note that this phenomenon is largely unique to this gem. There are various types of opal, such as black opal and white opal, that are distinguished by the gemstone’s body color, yet each may exhibit play-of-color to varying degrees and in different patterns.

OPTICAL CAUSES OF PLAY-OF-COLOR

The cause of the play-of-color in opals is fascinating and, like other phenomenal gemstones, is a result of the gemstone’s internal structure. Opals comprise sub-microscopic silica spheres stacked and layered in a grid-like pattern. Along with the spheres, opals can contain water, which plays an important role in creating the play-of-color phenomenon. (GeologyScience, 2023) This internal structure diffracts light, breaking up the white light as it passes through. The result is the observation of spectral colors that can shift as the viewing angle or the light source changes. The size of these silica spheres is a determining factor for the colors observed in the opal.

Generally, spheres approximately 200 to 320 nanometers in diameter will diffract light in the visible spectrum, creating the play-of-color. (Broken River Mining, n.d.) Larger spheres will result in colors closer to red on the visible light spectrum, while smaller spheres result in colors closer to violet, with all other colors possible based on the range of sizes. The arrangement of the spheres dictates the patterns observed, which impacts the division of colors, the size of the patterning, and how the color “plays” for the observer.



As white light enters the opal, the spheres within the structure cause the white light to disperse into spectral colors. The size of the spheres is directly related to the amount of refraction of the dispersed light, which is observed as the variation in color. Demonstrated here, blue is observed with the smaller spheres, green with the medium spheres, and red with the largest spheres.



PATTERNS CREATED BY PLAY-OF-COLOR

The play-of-color patterns in opal can vary widely. Common patterns include small, closely spaced patches of color called “pinfire,” large, angular patches of color called “harlequin,” and sweeping bands of color that can look like brushstrokes called “flame.” The value of an opal is often influenced by the brightness and uniqueness of these patterns, with clear, distinct play-of-color being more highly prized.

FEATURING PLAY-OF-COLOR IN JEWELRY

Opals with play-of-color are a favorite in jewelry design because of their unique ability to catch the eye and adapt to changing lighting conditions. Opals can be paired with other colored gemstones. This can emphasize and complement the colors present in the play-of-color. Maximizing the exposure to light is important when setting opals in jewelry to increase the play-of-color phenomenon. They are often fashioned as cabochons that allow light to enter and interact with the stone from various angles.

Jewelers need to consider the opal’s delicacy, as the stone is relatively soft and porous compared to other gemstones. Choosing a setting that can protect it is essential. Opals can be designed as doublets, where the opal is adhered to a sturdy base material, or triplets, which include a clear gemstone protective covering and a sturdy darker backing with the opal slice in between. Both increase opal’s durability in jewelry and ease of care. This should always be disclosed when describing the gem.

PROTECTING THIS PHENOMENAL GEM

With any gemstone, care is crucial. For opals, care must be taken to preserve the phenomenal effects of play-of-color. The presence of water makes opal susceptible to temperature changes where the expansion and contraction of the material can result in cracking. Because opal is porous, chemicals may be absorbed into the gemstone, including perfumes, household cleaners, and hairsprays. This can alter the color and reduce the play-of-color effect. Using a mild soap with warm water and a soft cloth or brush for cleaning is best. Avoid ultrasonic or steam cleaners, as these can cause damage due to the opal’s water content and general softness.

SYNTHETIC OPALS AND PLAY-OF-COLOR

Synthetic opals can be created to mimic the play-of-color phenomenon seen in natural stones. These lab-created opals are made using a process called “gel growth” that involves stacking layers of micro-spheres of silica or polymers in a controlled environment, replicating the natural structure that causes diffraction. This material can often be identified by viewing it from the side, which reveals a columnar structure, or when viewed from the top, a more even, polygonal pattern resembling lizard skin may be evident.

AN UNMATCHED PHENOMENON

The play-of-color in opals is a testament to nature’s artistry, combining intricate internal structures with the simple yet profound physics of light diffraction. These gemstones continue to captivate the jewelry designer and the wearer with their unique, one-of-a-kind beauty. By understanding the underlying mechanisms and appreciating the delicate beauty of these patterns, jewelers and enthusiasts can better appreciate and preserve the enchanting allure of opals.

Key Takeaways

- Opals are renowned for their “play-of-color,” a phenomenon where the gemstone displays a spectrum of colors that change with viewing angles. This characteristic is largely unique to opals and significantly enhances their rarity and value.
- The play-of-color is caused by the internal structure of opals, which consists of tightly packed silica spheres ranging from 200 to 320 nanometers in diameter. These spheres diffract light, breaking it into its constituent colors. The size and arrangement of these spheres determine the specific colors and patterns observed.
- Due to their captivating play-of-color, opals are popular in jewelry. They are typically set as cabochons to maximize light interaction and are often paired with other colored gemstones to enhance their visual appeal. To protect their delicate nature, opals are sometimes made into doublets or triplets, which increase durability while maintaining aesthetic beauty.
- Opals require careful maintenance to preserve their play-of-color. They are sensitive to temperature changes, which can cause cracking, and they are porous, making them susceptible to damage from chemicals like perfumes and cleaning agents. Proper care involves gentle cleaning with mild soap and water and avoiding harsh cleaning methods such as ultrasonic or steam cleaners.

2023, September 29). Opal. GeologyScience. Retrieved April 29, 2024, from <https://geologyscience.com/gemstone/opal>

(n.d.). How Do Opal Colours Form? Broken River Mining. Retrieved April 29, 2024, from <https://www.brokenrivermining.com.au/pages/how-do-different-opal-colours-form>



Thank you to GIA for graciously providing the following for inclusion in the American Gem Society's annual recertification exam.



Scan QR code to view the full article in Gems & Gemology.

GEMS ON CANVAS: PIGMENTS HISTORICALLY SOURCED FROM GEM MATERIALS

BRITNI LECROY, GIA

Pigments have been sourced from gemstones and gem materials for centuries. These colors have been applied to ancient cave drawings, classical canvas paintings, and modern artworks, revealing the evolution of the human creative experience as well as the history and progression of studies such as anthropology and chemistry.

One of the earliest gemstones known to have been used as pigment is hematite. The dark, metallic color associated with gem-quality hematite is a result of densely stacked, deep-red, microscopic crystals that ultimately absorb most visible-color wavelengths. Hematite's red color can be seen when the mineral exists as either pulverized powder or thin crystals that allow light to pass through. Within the realm of art, the powdered pigment form is referred to as red ochre and has been used from the dawn of artistic expression. The use of red ochre as a pigment has been recorded in works of art from all periods and traditions around the world, from the Pleistocene to the present day. The earliest cave paintings from every habitable continent on Earth, revealing humans at their most primitive artistic abilities, feature red ochre. It has become widely accepted by scholars that the adoption of red ochre is synonymous with the beginnings of art and, therefore, human intellectual evolution. Its importance to modern artworks is incalculable. Twentieth-century masters such as Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, and Andy Warhol created works featuring the color, bringing it full circle. Modern red ochre paints continue to be predominantly made with natural hematite.



Figure 1. Historical pigments pictured with their source companions. Left to right: bone, cinnabar, hematite, malachite (with coarse pigment powder), lapis lazuli (ultramarine), and azurite (with fine pigment powder). Bottom center: cinnabar and azurite pigment. Gem materials gifted to GIA by Richard Marcus (mammoth ivory slice), Francisco Bank (hematite rough), the Hauser family in memory of Joel and Barbara Hauser (polished malachite), Zohreh Armini (polished lapis lazuli), and Josephine Scripps (azurite rough). Photo by Robert Weldon.



Figure 2. A meeting of Greek mythological figures is imagined in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1523, oil on canvas). Ariadne (far left) wears a robe in ultramarine and a red vermillion sash. Ultramarine is also featured in the sky and distant landscape. Malachite is used in the green foliage to the right of Bacchus. The sea and greener areas of the distant landscape are composed of azurite. Photo courtesy of the National Gallery, London.

Malachite pigment can be traced to ancient Egypt, where it was used as an eye paint during the predynastic period, spanning from 6000 BCE to 3100 BCE. Although azurite is far less abundant than malachite, azurite pigment has been utilized more widely. It was the most important and heavily used blue pigment in Europe throughout the medieval period since it was far more affordable than ultramarine (sourced from lapis lazuli) and enjoyed peak use during the Renaissance. In European easel painting, malachite was vitally important from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. Both colors were replaced by synthetics by the nineteenth century.

Of all the natural pigments created throughout history, ultramarine, a blue derived from lapis lazuli, reigned supreme. Ultramarine was said to be as expensive as an equal weight of gold. Its high cost was due to the inconvenience of only one source location, the Sar-e-Sang mines in Afghanistan, supported by the arduous procedure required to process the rock into pure pigment. During its prime, the blue was deemed so sacred that it was reserved for the most important works and only the holiest of religious figures. Ultramarine was so costly and valuable that only the wealthiest members of society could afford it and its use in paintings was reserved for these patrons. Its high cost inspired a contest for synthesizing artificial ultramarine, and in 1828, a French winner was awarded. This synthetic known as "French ultramarine" has been a pigment staple since the mid-nineteenth century.

For centuries, bone and ivory have been used to create black pigments. Heating them in a closed, oxygen-free crucible produces black pigment. The carbon source is primarily the protein collagen that is incorporated in the matrix of the material. A variety of animal bones have been used as pigment source material throughout history, including cattle and lamb and possibly even human remains in earlier centuries. Bone black has been found in prehistoric, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, medieval, and Renaissance art. Ivory black pigment was manufactured until the end of World War II. Due to species protection measures, all ivory black sold on the market today must be sourced solely from old stock or be composed of high-grade bone black. Charcoaled bovine bones are still commonly used to create bone black pigment and the color is easily found at art stores today.

Cinnabar's rich red color comes from crushing and grinding the mineral. Its synthetic counterpart, vermillion, produced by combining mercury and sulfur, has been in use for centuries and largely replaced natural cinnabar by the 14th century. After ultramarine, cinnabar



was among the most valuable pigments, with major sources in Spain and China. The pigment was highly prized by the Romans for wall paintings and held sacred significance, while the Chinese used it extensively in lacquerware. Of the more than 800 Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Israel—the earliest known biblical texts—four fragments contain red ink made from cinnabar.

Key Takeaways

- Gem materials hematite, azurite, malachite, lapis lazuli, bone, ivory, and cinnabar have been used as pigments for centuries, with some used prehistorically.
- The historical use of gem-based pigments has left a lasting impact on both the art world and scientific studies. Modern artists, including Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, and Andy Warhol, have incorporated these traditional colors into their work. Additionally, the study of these pigments contributes to fields such as anthropology and chemistry.
- Ultramarine, sourced from lapis lazuli, was once so valuable that it was worth an equal weight of gold.
- Some colors, like bone black derived from animal bones and red ochre derived from hematite, are still manufactured and easily purchased today.



THE IMPORTANCE OF DIAMOND SCREENING: CHALLENGES, TECHNIQUES, AND RESOURCES

WADE ABEL, CG, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

The diamond industry is undergoing significant change with the growing prevalence of laboratory-grown diamonds. Ensuring accurate disclosure and verification has become a pressing concern. A recent webinar featured a panel of experts discussing the challenges, techniques, and resources available for diamond screening. Panelists included Guy Borenstein, Director of Gemstone Procurement at Stuller, Inc.; Raluca Anghel, Head of External Affairs at the Natural Diamond Council; and Randy Lightfoot, CG, Gemologist and Appraiser at Mayflower Estate Buyers & Consulting. The discussion covered key aspects of diamond testing, screening technologies, and best practices for industry professionals.

Understanding the Differences Between Natural and Laboratory-Grown Diamonds

Laboratory-grown and natural diamonds share the same optical, chemical, and physical properties, making them difficult to distinguish. However, the differences lie in their chemical signatures, specifically in defect structures at the atomic level.

Natural diamonds contain nitrogen aggregates, which take millions of years to form. In contrast, laboratory-grown diamonds, whether created using Chemical Vapor Deposition (CVD) or High-Pressure High-Temperature (HPHT) methods, exhibit different nitrogen configurations and defect patterns or have no detectable nitrogen.

Diamonds are categorized into Type I and Type II based on nitrogen content. Natural diamonds predominantly fall under Type I, containing nitrogen aggregates, while laboratory-grown diamonds are typically Type II, which have no detectable nitrogen in the crystal structure when analyzed with advanced spectroscopy.

Key Technologies in Diamond Screening

Four diamond screening technologies used for accessible diamond verification instruments (DVIs) include:

- 1. UV Transmission testing:** Measures a diamond's ability to absorb or transmit ultraviolet light. Natural diamonds with nitrogen aggregates block UV, while some laboratory-grown diamonds allow it to pass through.
- 2. Fluorescence imaging:** Uses deep ultraviolet (UV) light to examine fluorescence color and phosphorescence, which can help identify laboratory-grown diamonds.
- 3. Fluorescence spectroscopy:** Analyzes spectral peaks formed by nitrogen aggregates to determine a diamond's origin.
- 4. Phosphorescence decay:** Measures how long a diamond continues to glow after exposure to UV light. Natural diamonds exhibit short decay, while some laboratory-grown diamonds phosphoresce longer.

While these screening techniques offer valuable insights, no single method provides a definitive determination. Advanced laboratory tests such as Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) and photoluminescence (PL) spectroscopy may be required for conclusive results.



Project ASSURE and Selecting the Right Screening Instrument

The ASSURE Program, launched by the Natural Diamond Council, is an independent testing regimen for diamond verification instruments. The ASSURE Directory is a public database that lists tested diamond verification instruments along with performance reports. These reports include the following key performance metrics that can assist in the purchase decision for a DVI.

- **Diamond False Positive Rate:** Determines how often laboratory-grown diamonds and diamond simulants are incorrectly classified as natural diamonds as a percentage. This should be 0% to prevent misidentifying lab-grown diamonds as natural.
- **Diamond Referral Rate:** Determines how often instruments refer a natural diamond for additional testing as a percentage of all tested.
- **Diamond Accuracy:** Determines the ratio of natural diamonds correctly classified to the total number of natural diamonds in the sample set as a percentage.
- **Laboratory-Grown Diamond Referral Rate:** Determines how often instruments refer a laboratory-grown diamond for additional testing as a percentage of all tested. This should be 100%.

Retailers should reference the ASSURE Directory and review these key performance metrics when selecting screening equipment rather than relying solely on manufacturers' claims.

Gemological Techniques for Diamond Screening

While high-tech screening instruments play a vital role, traditional gemological techniques can also provide useful clues:

- **Fluorescence testing:** Natural diamonds often fluoresce blue under long-wave UV light and exhibit weaker fluorescence under short-wave UV. Laboratory-grown diamonds can fluoresce in a range of colors, often showing stronger reactions in short-wave UV than long-wave UV.
- **Cross-polarized light (CPF) and strain patterns:** Natural diamonds display irregular, smudged strain patterns due to their prolonged geological formation process. CVD-grown diamonds often exhibit uniform, parallel strain patterns, indicating controlled growth. HPHT-grown diamonds typically show little to no strain, setting them apart from natural diamonds.

Additional Visual Clues

- **Inclusions:** Some laboratory-grown diamonds exhibit metallic or crosshatch inclusions, which are rare in natural diamonds.
- **Growth patterns:** CVD diamonds often display layered growth, while natural diamonds show irregular growth structures.

These standard gemological tools, when used in combination with advanced screening instruments, enhance the accuracy of diamond verification.

Best Practices for Diamond Screening in the Supply Chain

It is important to incorporate diamond screening at every stage in the supply chain:

- **Vet suppliers:** Work with reputable sources that conduct rigorous screening.
- **Establish screening policies:** Implement internal procedures for referring uncertain diamonds for additional testing, including using advanced testing services provided by reputable laboratories.
- **Regularly calibrate equipment:** Ensure instruments function accurately by performing routine maintenance.

By adopting comprehensive screening protocols, businesses can maintain the integrity of their diamond inventory and uphold consumer trust.

Final Thoughts

The importance of diamond screening cannot be overstated. With laboratory-grown diamonds becoming more prevalent, industry professionals must remain vigilant in their verification processes. Utilizing a combination of advanced screening instruments, standard gemological techniques, and third-party verification resources ensures accurate disclosure and protects consumer confidence. By staying informed and proactive, professionals across the diamond industry can navigate the challenges of diamond screening with confidence.



Key Takeaways

- Natural and lab-grown diamonds differ in their chemical signatures at the atomic level. Natural diamonds typically contain nitrogen aggregates, whereas lab-grown diamonds have different nitrogen configurations or none at all, enabling differentiation through advanced analysis.
- Several key technologies are employed to distinguish between natural and lab-grown diamonds, including: UV transmission, fluorescence imaging and spectroscopy, phosphorescence decay, and advanced testing techniques: Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) and photoluminescence (PL) spectroscopy provide conclusive results when screening is inconclusive.
- The ASSURE Program by the Natural Diamond Council offers an independent testing regimen for diamond verification instruments. The ASSURE Directory, a public database, lists tested instruments along with performance reports focusing on metrics such as false positive rates, referral rates, and overall accuracy. Retailers are encouraged to use these metrics to select reliable screening equipment instead of solely relying on manufacturers' claims.
- To maintain the integrity of diamond inventories and uphold consumer trust, industry professionals should:
 - Vet suppliers
 - Establish screening policies
 - Regularly calibrate equipment
 - Combine screening techniques: Utilize both advanced screening technologies and traditional gemological methods to enhance verification accuracy.



REPAIR AND SERVICE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BENCH JEWELER

ANDREA VENN, PH.D., CGA, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

Clear communication between sales staff and the bench jeweler is essential—especially before discussing repairs and services with clients. When sales professionals are equipped with accurate information from the start, they can build trust, set realistic expectations, and avoid potential miscommunications. This article provides a set of helpful questions to guide those early conversations, ensuring a more efficient and seamless experience for both the jeweler and the client.

General Services

It is extremely helpful for sales staff to confidently answer client questions about general services. By understanding the bench jeweler's preferences for commonly requested services offered on demand and staying current on expected completion times, store members can consistently deliver a positive client experience.

- Should sales staff offer on-demand services such as jewelry cleaning, jewelry polishing, rhodium-plating, or changing watch batteries and bands for customers?
 - If so, is there a different charge for these services for jewelry purchased from the store versus being purchased elsewhere?
- Which engraving options does the bench jeweler provide? Determine whether the store offers engraving on store items only or on client items as well.
 - Can staff offer hand-engraving, monogramming, laser engraving, or machine engraving options?
 - Which fonts are available? Can clients provide or request a custom font?

Several different types of jewelry can require gemstone tightening or replacement. It is best to know if the business keeps a current stock of common melee-size gemstones for quick in-house repairs. It can save the day when a client walks in needing a same-day fix before a special event. Below are additional questions regarding gemstone repair or replacement.

- Does your jeweler require different timing or processes for repair depending on setting type?
- What criteria should be used to determine pricing for tightening loose gemstones held by prongs, channels, bars, bezels, and other options? Is there a discount for tightening multiple gemstones?
- What is the process for matching or replacing missing gemstones?
- What is the store's procedure for having gemstones repolished or recut?

Some of the most commonly requested repairs include ring services, prong repairs, clasp repairs or replacements, and chain repairs. Before offering these services to your clients, it's helpful to ask your jeweler a few key questions to better understand their preferred processes.



Ring Services

- At what point is a ring too damaged to repair or restore? If so, is there a process for remaking a similar or new ring?
- What are the store's minimum requirements for the width and thickness of a worn or cracked ring shank before requiring a shank replacement?
- If a client requests that a ring be sized up or down more than two sizes, what options are available to avoid negatively impacting the internal structure and the gemstones set into the ring?
- When adding sizing beads, bumps, bars, or diagonal threaded wire to the inside base of rings to adjust the fit and keep the ring from rolling on the finger:
 - How many sizing aids should be added, and where should they be located on the shank base?
 - How should bead or bar size be measured and recorded at take-in?

Prongs and Heads

- What are the store's processes for replacing worn prong tips, prongs, or full prongs?
 - What are the requirements for each level and pricing?
- What condition would a ring's prongs need to be in to merit a new head and set?
- Does the store include rhodium plating on white gold prong or head repair, or is it a separate service?

Clasp and Chain Repair

- Does the jeweler prefer to repair a clasp or replace it after the spring breaks?
- How does the store charge for clasp replacement, especially if new jump rings or stringing is required?
- Will the jeweler repair hollow chains? If so, what is the preferred repair procedure?
- Are there sample chains of different lengths for clients to try on to communicate the desired end result to the jeweler?
- Should the wear on jump rings, points of end tabs, or the intersections of links be noted at intake?
- Does the jeweler refuse repairs on overly worn chains or have a system to keep track of the locations of completed repairs?

Sales staff should initiate conversations with the jeweler to ensure accurate, confident communication with clients. By understanding preferred processes regarding general services, gemstone repairs, ring and prong maintenance, and clasp and chain procedures, sales staff can better anticipate client needs and provide clear, consistent information. Establishing this foundation supports trust and professionalism, streamlines repair workflows, and minimizes miscommunication--creating a smoother, more reliable service experience from intake to pickup.

For those involved in jewelry intake, the American Gem Society's new Jewelry Evaluation Advisor™ (JEA) course offers additional support in building these foundational skills, helping to strengthen communication and elevate the client experience. To learn more, visit ags.org/jeaprogram.



JEWELRY DESIGN & MANUFACTURING



Key Takeaways

- Sales staff should initiate discussions with the bench jeweler about available repair and service options. Being well-versed in standard services such as cleaning, polishing, rhodium-plating, and watch battery changes allows sales staff to confidently address client inquiries. This knowledge ensures that accurate information is provided to clients from their first interaction, fostering trust and streamlining the service process.
- Sales teams should clarify with the bench jeweler which types of engravings are available, font options, and whether custom fonts can be requested. Additionally, familiarity with the bench jeweler's preferences in handling gemstone repair processes, including tightening, replacement, and repolishing, ensures clients receive timely and accurate service information. Educating the entire sales staff on watch terminology and mechanics is crucial to avoid losing potential lifelong customers.
- Understanding the bench jeweler's preferred methods for repairing or replacing clasps and chains, including pricing structures and repair limitations, allows sales staff to manage client expectations effectively.



ADA COMPLIANCE FOR THE JEWELRY INDUSTRY

SARA YOOD, ESQ., AND SALLY WINTERS, ESQ., JEWELERS VIGILANCE COMMITTEE

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) was enacted to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities and to ensure equal access to goods and services in both physical and digital spaces. As the retail landscape evolves, businesses—including those in the jewelry industry—must remain compliant with ADA regulations to provide an inclusive customer experience.

ADA Compliance for Physical Locations

Title III of the ADA applies to businesses that are open to the public, classifying them as “places of public accommodation.” Jewelry stores, pop-up shops, and other retail locations must adhere to ADA regulations to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Compliance encompasses several key aspects, including communication, physical access, and reasonable modifications to store policies and procedures.

- **Communication Accessibility:** Businesses must communicate effectively with customers who have disabilities, just as they would with any other patrons. This may involve providing qualified interpreters for customers who are deaf or hard of hearing, offering printed scripts of stock speeches, or utilizing assistive technologies such as real-time captioning.
- **Physical Access:** Accessibility extends beyond just ramps and wide doorways. Jewelry store owners should ensure that restrooms, parking areas, seating arrangements, and display cases are accessible to individuals using mobility aids such as wheelchairs. Lowering counters and providing alternative ways to interact with products can significantly improve accessibility. Proper lighting and quiet rooms can also be beneficial for individuals sensitive to loud noises or bright lights.
- **Reasonable Modifications:** The ADA requires businesses to make reasonable accommodations to facilitate accessibility. This may include accepting alternative forms of identification for customers who cannot obtain a driver’s license due to a disability or allowing service animals in stores regardless of any existing “no-pets” policies. These accommodations ensure that individuals with disabilities receive equal access to services without unnecessary barriers.

By implementing these measures, jewelry retailers not only comply with ADA regulations but also foster an inclusive environment that enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty.

ADA Compliance for Digital Platforms

With the increasing prevalence of online shopping, ADA compliance now extends beyond physical storefronts. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has determined that Title III of the ADA also applies to company websites and other digital platforms, even though the ADA itself does not explicitly outline internet-specific accessibility requirements. To bridge this gap, businesses should follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

The WCAG framework is structured around four key principles:

1. **Perceivable** – Web content must be accessible to users with different sensory abilities. This includes providing text alternatives for images, closed captions for videos, and compatibility with braille display devices. Businesses should also offer adjustable text sizes and ensure that assistive technologies, such as screen readers, can interpret website content effectively.



2. **Operable** – Websites should be easy to navigate, even for users who cannot use a traditional mouse or touchscreen interface. This means ensuring that all website functions can be operated using a keyboard alone. Additionally, web pages should avoid content that could trigger seizures (such as flashing animations) and provide ample time for users to complete tasks such as filling out forms.
3. **Understandable** – The website's design and content must be clear and predictable. Users should be able to navigate the website intuitively, with consistent layouts and labels for interactive elements. Businesses should also offer error notifications and corrective suggestions to help users avoid mistakes when inputting information.
4. **Robust** – Websites must be compatible with a variety of assistive technologies and adaptable to evolving standards. This ensures that users with disabilities can access content using screen readers, speech-to-text software, and other tools without encountering technical obstacles.

The Business and Legal Imperative of ADA Compliance

Failing to adhere to ADA regulations can result in significant legal and financial consequences. Businesses may face costly lawsuits related to accessibility issues. In recent years, there has been an increase in litigation against companies with non-compliant websites, often resulting in expensive settlements and reputational damage.

Beyond legal requirements, ADA compliance is also a strategic business decision. The disabled community represents a substantial consumer base, and businesses that prioritize accessibility can expand their customer reach, improve brand reputation, and foster customer loyalty. Providing an inclusive experience demonstrates corporate social responsibility and can set a business apart in a competitive market.

The ADA was designed to ensure equal access to goods, services, and digital content for individuals with disabilities. As modern commerce continues to evolve, the jewelry industry must proactively adopt ADA-compliant practices in both physical and digital environments. Ensuring accessible storefronts, implementing WCAG-compliant websites, and fostering inclusive business policies will not only protect businesses from legal risks but also enhance customer engagement and satisfaction.

Key Takeaways

- **ADA Compliance for Physical Stores:** Jewelry retailers must ensure accessibility through clear communication, physical modifications (e.g., ramps, wider pathways, accessible counters), and reasonable accommodations (e.g., allowing service animals and alternative communication options).
- **Website and Digital Accessibility:** Businesses must follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to make online platforms accessible, ensuring content is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for users with disabilities.
- **Legal and Financial Risks:** Failure to comply with ADA standards can lead to costly lawsuits, reputational damage, and lost customers.
- **Business Benefits of Accessibility:** Prioritizing accessibility expands customer reach, fosters brand loyalty, and enhances corporate reputation, making it a smart business strategy beyond just legal compliance.



VIRTUAL
DIAMOND
BOUTIQUE

ARE YOUR EMAIL MARKETING PRACTICES UP TO DATE?

VIRTUAL DIAMOND BOUTIQUE

Email can sometimes seem like an outdated mode of communication: the stepping stone between putting letters in the mailbox and sending a text message. However, it's still one of the main links people have between each other—and one of a business's main marketing tools. Half of the world's population uses email, sending almost 400 billion emails per day.

Email is an essential communication tool. That's why so many businesses rely on email lists, email marketing campaigns, and newsletters. The rules of email marketing, however, are changing, and you must take steps to ensure your emails are getting through to their recipients.

New Email Security Standards

Your phone is probably inundated with spam and scam calls all day long. Many of us don't even answer our phones anymore because nine out of ten calls are robocalls or just silence on the other end. To prevent the same thing from happening to email, the big three email service providers (ESPs)—Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft—have agreed to a new set of security standards. These standards, each with their own authentication requirements, went into effect in April 2024, causing chaos among businesses that rely on email to keep in touch with their customers. While these new standards keep spam out of your inbox, they might also flag legitimate messages as spam if they don't comply with the new standards. Each ESP has its own authentication requirements.

Make Sure Your Messages Don't Look Like Spam

The original heading for this section was "Don't Trick People into Opening Messages," but you don't have to be intentionally deceptive to end up in the spam folder. Just as Black Hat SEO methods like keyword stuffing can cause your page to be de-ranked, there are email practices that do more harm than good. You'll have to avoid misleading or sensationalized subject lines. It should be clear who a message is from and what kind of content readers will find inside. The wrong type of personalization can make an email seem spammy. While "Dear [Name]" in the email itself is fine, "[Name], you must verify your account immediately," could be seen as misleading and even creepy when it's used as an easy way to get recipients to click through to your site. The same goes for personalization that uses far too granular data. Customers can start to feel like they're being spied on.

Make Unsubscribing Easy

This is a requirement of Google and Yahoo's new rules, but making it easy for recipients to stop receiving mail they don't want will help keep you out of spam folders for another reason. Bounce rates matter to deliverability, and if people are getting mail, they don't want but are too complicated to unsubscribe from, they will just continually delete messages until they start automatically going to spam. If this happens frequently enough, your email won't get through to anyone. Making unsubscribing easy keeps your list fresh and up to date, increasing your read and click-through rates by ensuring your email gets through to those who want it.

Set Up an Authentication Protocol

SPF (Sender Policy Framework) and DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance) are two authentication protocols that help prevent spoofing and phishing. SPF verifies that an email is coming from an authorized server (that is, your own, rather than the server of someone impersonating your business), while DMARC tells receiving servers what to do with messages from an unauthorized server. A third protocol, DKIM (DomainKeys Identified Mail), allows you to put a digital fingerprint on your outgoing mail, verifying each message's authenticity. A fourth protocol, ARC (Authenticated Received Chain), handles messages that don't pass DMARC.



Bounce Back from Bounced Email

If you've already run afoul of these new rules, you can get out of spam jail and back into inboxes by taking the advice above. Make sure your email doesn't look like spam, set up authentication protocols, and you should be back in business.

Key Takeaways

- Email continues to be a fundamental way people connect, with nearly half of the world's population using it and sending around 400 billion emails daily. For businesses, email remains a primary marketing channel through email lists, campaigns, and newsletters.
- Email Service Providers (ESPs) have introduced new security standards which effectively reduce spam, but also increase the risk of legitimate business emails being mistakenly marked as spam if they fail to comply with the updated requirements.
- To prevent emails from being flagged as spam, businesses should use clear and honest subject lines, accurately represent the sender and content, and avoid over-personalization that can appear intrusive. Misleading or sensationalized content can harm credibility and reduce the likelihood of emails reaching recipients' inboxes.
- Making the unsubscribe process straightforward is crucial for maintaining good email deliverability. The ability to easily unsubscribe helps keep email lists updated, reduces bounce rates, and ensures that emails are only sent to interested recipients, thereby enhancing open and click-through rates.
- Utilizing authentication protocols such as SPF (Sender Policy Framework), DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance), DKIM (DomainKeys Identified Mail), and ARC (Authenticated Received Chain) is essential for verifying the legitimacy of emails. These protocols help prevent spoofing and phishing, ensuring that emails are recognized as authentic by receiving servers and reducing the chances of them being filtered into spam folders.



FROM MINES TO MINDS: DIAMOND ADVANCING EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA— WITH AN AGS CONNECTION

DONNA JOLLY, RJ, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

Bryan Moeller, CGA, from R.F. Moeller Jeweler, and his team faced a dilemma: “We wanted to tell the natural diamond story, but we also wanted the creativity and freedom to tell it our way. We also wanted to do something meaningful with a portion of the profits.” This drive led R.F. Moeller to innovate by creating their own in-house brand, focusing on both diamond quality and community impact.

The brand they developed, Diamonds of Wonder, was built on a foundation of stringent standards and a philanthropic mission. Their diamonds must meet specific quality criteria: they are De Beers or Botswana-sourced diamonds of a certain grade, either AGS Ideal®, utilizing the AGS Ideal® Report by GIA, or GIA’s Very Good to Excellent. Moeller wanted these standards to ensure that each diamond in the collection represents the pinnacle of craftsmanship and brilliance.

Moeller’s vision extended beyond selling premium diamonds. He and his team aspired to contribute positively to the diamond community by supporting a charitable cause. In their search for a meaningful partnership, he spoke to Stuart Samuels, President of Premier Gem Corporation, who could not only help with the diamonds but also help R.F. Moeller give back to a community in need, by connecting them with Cheshe Dow, the co-founder of The Dow Academy and The Dow Academy Trust in Botswana. Previously, Dow served as an account executive with De Beers and had worked with the Premier Gem team.

Cheshe always desired to become an educator, a passion influenced by her parents, who were both educators. Two key factors motivated her transition from the corporate world to education.

The first factor was that in Botswana, the government provides ten years of education, after which students must pass a test after the ninth grade to continue their studies. Those who don’t pass are often left without further educational opportunities. Cheshe recognized the need for a system that supports these students beyond the conventional pathway.

Additionally, she saw a pressing need for educational facilities for the children of single mothers. In Botswana, over 80 percent of births are from single mothers. The Dow Academy addresses this need by offering classes for children as young as two years old, continuing up to 18 years old, to accommodate working mothers in need of childcare.

The Dow Academy opened two months ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what should have been a promising first year quickly turned into a lesson in overcoming challenges. With the pandemic forcing closures and restrictions, the Academy had to adapt quickly. Teachers recorded lessons on their phones, which were then edited and uploaded to YouTube. This ensured continuity in the children’s learning.

The pandemic’s impact extended to the school in the most unusual ways: the furniture was now unsuitable. The government’s distancing regulations rendered the school’s desks (tables designed for two students) unusable as they had to be a meter apart. With no funds for new furniture, they sawed the tables in half and used steel from bleachers to create additional legs.

With over 350 students and growing, The Dow Academy is a symbol of resilience.

Cheshe says that the diamond industry has had a profound and lasting impact on the people of Botswana, and referenced her mother as an example. “She was born in 1959 and remembers the first time she saw a cockroach. That’s significant because you have to have an excess of food to have a cockroach. That’s how the diamond industry changed things. My grandmother could barely read. Diamonds were discovered in our country in 1966, and my mother was of the first generation that benefited. Because of diamonds,



MARKETING AND SALES



she went to university in Botswana, Lesotho, and Scotland, and in turn that afforded her the opportunity to travel the world. The promise diamonds gave us is education for our children. And that is the singular most important promise. The diamond industry has made it possible for our community to have hospitals, schools, and infrastructure.”

R.F. Moeller donated \$10,000 to support The Dow Academy, and going forward, a portion of the proceeds from Diamonds of Wonder will support The Dow Academy, ensuring that the benefits of the diamond trade reach those in need.

R.F. Moeller Jeweler, with the help of Premier Gem Corporation, has created a high-quality diamond brand while forging a meaningful connection between their customers and a distant community. The Diamonds of Wonder initiative exemplifies how the jewelry industry can contribute to global development, bridging the gap between luxury and social responsibility.

“Cheshe’s story has truly resonated with our clients,” said Bryan. “We’ve been teaching our clients the importance of natural diamonds for the development of Southern African communities for years, but now we’ve partnered with an inspirational educator with a worthy cause to help connect the story to someone relatable. We’ve worked with single mothers and clients who perform mission work who say they need to own a Diamond of Wonder.”

Key Takeaways

- Diamonds of Wonder was established by R.F. Moeller Jeweler to creatively narrate the natural diamond story while maintaining high standards of diamond quality. The brand emphasizes both luxury and social responsibility, allowing the company to differentiate itself in the competitive jewelry market.
- R.F. Moeller Jeweler sought to make a meaningful impact through their Diamonds of Wonder collection. In collaboration with Premier Gem Corporation, they partnered with Cheshe Dow and The Dow Academy Trust in Botswana, aiming to provide educational opportunities for children, especially those from single-parent households.
- Diamonds of Wonder is a good example of how a brand can create meaningful change. A portion of its proceeds supports The Dow Academy, fostering long-term educational and community development in Botswana. The collaboration between R.F. Moeller Jewelers and Premier Gems, also demonstrates how AGS retailers and vendors can come together to make a global impact while aligning luxury with purpose.



MEN'S FINE JEWELRY KICKS INTO HIGH GEAR

KRISTIN TAYLOR YOUNG, DAILYMAIL.COM

Men's fine jewelry has often been viewed as an afterthought to women's, taking a backseat to the all-important engagement and wedding ring purchases as well as a plethora of adornments like earrings, cocktail rings, and watches. However, some in the industry vow to change all that, pointing to technological advances in the sector and its rapid projected sales growth.

Just look at the numbers. According to Prophecy Market Insights, which issued a report in July 2024, the global men's jewelry market is expected to grow from \$35.9 billion in 2024 to \$75.9 billion in 2034. That's a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.6%.¹ The U.S. men's market is anticipated to grow from \$5.5 billion in 2024 to \$10.7 billion by 2032, or a CAGR of 8.4% during the period, according to a Polaris Market Research report dated April 2024.²

Jewelry firms are responding to this forecasted growth of what some describe as an already untapped market by dedicating resources to developing new product, beefing up technological advances in online support to their custom businesses, and promoting fine jewelry trends that appeal to masculine sensibilities and tastes.

Traditionally, men's fine jewelry purchases have been relegated to watches and wedding rings, so many jewelry companies are choosing to focus on the latter. Barry Verragio, founder and head designer of the New York-based jewelry firm Verragio, and his son Kyle Verragio, a business development executive at the firm, have pinpointed carbon fiber as the next big trend in men's wedding bands after tungsten and titanium. After research and development for more than a year, the company is now bringing a new carbon fiber men's wedding band collection to market in the first quarter of 2025.

"There's certainly a big shift in how men perceive the category," said Kyle. "It's not a secondary purchase anymore. Carbon fiber has unique strengths. It's lighter weight. It's scratch-resistant and easy to size." Carbon fiber, which is often used in the aerospace industry, is a tiny thread that is woven and mixed with resin and, when solidified, creates a thin material that is stronger than steel or aluminum. Verragio's carbon fiber rings are set in 14-karat or 18-karat white, yellow, or rose gold, and platinum.

"Carbon fiber gives you this very unique look," said Barry. "It's black by nature, but there's a grain that develops, almost like bark. No two pieces will look alike. It's a very elegant, sophisticated, and unique look."

Others are piggybacking men's wedding ring sales onto engagement ring sales, as well as investing in website technology to boost sales.

Eric Laker, founder and chief executive officer of Utah-based Lashbrook Designs, said the industry should not just focus on projected growth, but the untapped market that's existed in the industry for years. "There isn't an issue with guys not caring about jewelry," he said. "That's a preconceived idea in our industry. There's demand just sitting there, and many don't do anything to fix it. My goal is to factor [men's wedding rings] into the engagement ring purchase, not chase them after the fact. It's all one experience."

Laker said he's devoted resources to training salespeople and teaching them how to cater to men's needs. Men tend to respond well to any interest shown to them, he emphasized. "The average ticket goes through the roof." Laker has also invested \$1 million in Lashbrook's website technology called the Lashbrook Builder. There, customers can choose the store locator to find the nearest retailer, customize or size, and help the end user choose from up to 1.2 trillion possible combinations of design, metals, and gemstones. Materials include black zirconium, carbon fiber, meteorite, hardwood, dinosaur bone, and shark teeth. Lashbrook promises that most rings will ship within 14 days.



Meanwhile, some companies have their attention trained on the tried-and-true inspirational elements of men's jewelry: motorcycles, American rock 'n' roll, and motifs such as skulls, lions, and daggers. Few do it better than Los Angeles-based King Baby and its founder and designer, Mitchell Binder, who got his start in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Westwood selling pieces from a cart in the early 2000s, which quickly caught the eye of Steven Tyler and Bruce Springsteen. A celebrity brand was born that now counts retail locations in Santa Monica, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Nashville, Tennessee; and New Hope, Pennsylvania.

"Marketing wasn't a big part of our plan in the beginning. We grew by word of mouth by people who didn't want what every Tom, Dick, and Harry had. Now we have a brand with very loyal fans."

Bogosian said King Baby has made inroads not only on captivating the hearts of Los Angeles rock 'n' roller or motorcycle enthusiasts but conservative guys and women, too.

King Baby has eschewed exploring alternative metals like tungsten or titanium to focus on its core styles: silver link bracelets, skull rings, cross and Star of David pendants, Indian motorcycle pendants, and a Tattoo Collection comprised of sparrows, anchors, and stars.

"We're staying focused on silver and gold," said Bogosian. "But there's a tea for every pot."

Key Takeaways

- Historically considered secondary to women's jewelry, the men's fine jewelry sector is gaining prominence. Jewelry firms are allocating more resources to develop new products, enhance online customization technologies, and market trends tailored to masculine tastes.
- Carbon fiber offers benefits in jewelry like lightweight, scratch resistance, and unique aesthetics, catering to modern men's preferences.
- Brands can reimagine the purchasing experience by combining men's wedding rings with engagement ring sales, and take a holistic approach that includes investing in advanced website technologies that allow extensive customization, thereby tapping into the existing demand and enhancing the overall customer experience.
- By focusing on unique designs and maintaining core styles, brands can appeal to both men and women buyers, expanding their market reach without diluting their brand identity.

¹ "Mens Jewelry Market Overview," Prophecy Market Insights, July 2024, https://www.prophecymarketinsights.com/market_insight/mens-jewelry-market-5527.

² "U.S. Men's Jewelry Market Share, Size, Trends, Industry Analysis Report, By Product (Necklace, Ring, Earrings, Bracelet, Other Products); By Type; By Category; By Distribution Channel; By Age; Segment Forecast, 2024 – 2032," Polaris Market Research, April 2024, <https://www.polarismarketresearch.com/industry-analysis/us-mens-jewelry-market>.



NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF THE JEWELRY BUSINESS WITH AI

FORD SAKS, PRIME CONCEPTS GROUP INC

Artificial Intelligence isn't just a fancy add-on for tech-savvy businesses—it's as essential as your accounting software or your best salesperson. AI is reshaping everything from customer service to supply chain management, from marketing strategies to financial forecasting. And in the jewelry industry?

It's transforming the game faster than you can say "lab-grown diamond."

But here's the catch: As AI gets smarter, it's getting harder to tell what's human-made and what's AI-generated. This blurring of lines presents both opportunities and risks, especially in an industry where trust and authenticity are paramount.

I've spent over three decades helping businesses innovate and grow, and for the past three years, I've been knee-deep in the world of AI. I've seen firsthand how it's transforming industries, especially the beloved jewelry sector. Let's dive in and discover how to make AI your new best friend in the jewelry business.

Embracing AI: A Balanced Approach

We all need to approach AI adoption with a strategy that balances innovation with the core values of the jewelry industry. Here are key considerations to help you navigate the AI landscape:

1. Prioritize Security and Ethics

As you implement AI solutions, keep these crucial points in mind:

- Ensure compliance with data protection regulations, especially when handling sensitive customer information.
- Be aware of potential biases in AI outputs and always verify AI-generated content, particularly for product descriptions or gemstone specifications.
- Maintain transparency about your use of AI in business processes.
- Maintain human oversight, especially in areas like customer service and custom design, where the human touch is a key differentiator.

2. Foster AI Literacy Across Your Organization

AI literacy is as crucial as computer literacy. Here's how to promote it:

- Develop a comprehensive AI training program for all employees, covering basic concepts, specific tools, and ethical considerations. My regular video training at Protrichresults.com/ai-training can help you stay current.

3. Leverage Large Language Models (LLMs) Effectively

LLMs are becoming increasingly powerful and accessible, so I suggest you also get them on your smartphone. They are all multimodal, meaning they can read, see, hear, and speak. Yes, it's a bit scary, too, but you don't want to be left behind.



Here are the main tools to consider:

- **ChatGPT** (chat.openai.com): Assist with writing product descriptions and answering customer queries.
- **Microsoft Copilot** (copilot.microsoft.com): An AI-powered assistant integrated with Microsoft 365 apps, enhancing productivity across various business tasks.
- **Claude** (anthropic.com): Known for strong reasoning capabilities and ethical approach.
- **Perplexity AI** (perplexity.ai): A powerful AI search engine for market research and trend analysis.
- **Gemini** (gemini.google.com): Excels at multimodal tasks, potentially valuable for jewelry visualization and design.

When using these tools, it's crucial to set up your defaults and privacy settings correctly:

- Protect sensitive information by ensuring strong privacy protections.
- Customize AI outputs for your specific needs, such as setting a default tone for customer communications.
- Manage data retention to maintain customer privacy and comply with regulations.
- Control information sharing and decide whether to participate in model improvement programs.
- Set up appropriate user permissions if multiple team members are using the AI tools.
- Remember to regularly review and update these settings as AI tools evolve and your business needs change.

4. Encourage Cross-Departmental Collaboration and Innovation

To maximize AI's potential:

- Create a diverse internal AI task force with representatives from different departments.
- Organize regular brainstorming sessions to generate ideas for AI applications.
- Implement a system for employees to submit AI-related ideas or challenges.
- Consider organizing AI hack-a-thons with meaningful rewards to drive innovation.

5. Implement Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

To ensure long-term success with AI:

- Set up regular check-ins to discuss AI wins and challenges across the organization.
- Create a feedback loop for employees to report issues or suggest improvements for AI tools.
- Stay informed about AI advancements in the jewelry industry and adjacent fields.

The Future of AI in Jewelry

The potential applications of AI in the jewelry industry are exciting and far-reaching:

- **Customer Service:** AI-powered chatbots can provide 24/7 customer support, handling routine inquiries and freeing up staff for more complex interactions.
- **Personalized Design:** AI will revolutionize custom jewelry design, suggesting designs based on customer preferences and past purchases.
- **Inventory Management:** Advanced AI systems can optimize inventory levels, predicting trends and seasonal demands with unprecedented accuracy.
- **Authentication:** AI will play a crucial role in gemstone and jewelry authentication, potentially reducing fraud and increasing consumer confidence.



Balancing Technology and Tradition

As we embrace these technologies, we must remember that the heart of the jewelry business is human connection. AI should enhance, not replace, the personal touch that makes our industry special. The goal isn't to become an AI company, but to use AI to become a better jewelry company.

By fostering AI literacy, encouraging innovation, maintaining a strong ethical framework, and leveraging powerful LLMs, you'll be well-positioned to thrive in the AI-enhanced business world.

The future of AI in the jewelry industry is bright, but it requires a thoughtful and strategic approach. Start exploring these tools today, always keeping in mind the unique blend of technology and human touch that sets our industry apart. Your journey into AI might just lead to your next big business breakthrough!

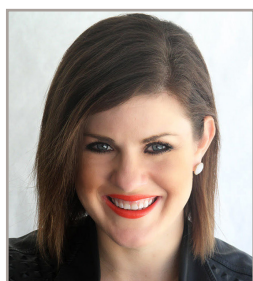
Remember, as you navigate this exciting frontier, to regularly reassess your AI strategies, stay curious about new developments, and always prioritize the trust and relationships that are the true gems of our industry. The businesses that successfully blend the precision of AI with the warmth of human expertise will be the ones that truly shine.

Key Takeaways

Artificial Intelligence is becoming as crucial as traditional tools like accounting software or sales teams. It is revolutionizing various aspects of the jewelry industry, including customer service, supply chain management, marketing, and financial forecasting, enabling businesses to stay competitive and innovative.

Implementing AI requires a strong focus on data protection, ethical use, and transparency. Jewelry businesses must ensure compliance with data regulations, mitigate biases in AI outputs, maintain human oversight in critical areas, and be transparent about their use of AI to build and preserve trust with customers.

To fully leverage AI, businesses must foster AI literacy across all employees through comprehensive training while also promoting cross-departmental collaboration and a culture of innovation. Diverse task forces, shared ideas, and continuous feedback loops help teams adapt and refine AI strategies for lasting success.



NEWSTALGIA: A FUN YOUTH MARKETING TREND THAT CAN HELP JEWELERS TARGET GEN Z & MILLENNIALS

DUVALL O'STEEN, LUXURY BRAND GROUP, AND JEN CULLEN WILLIAMS,
JEN CULLEN WILLIAMS COMMUNICATIONS

According to consumer digital research firm GWI, Gen Z is the most nostalgic generation, followed by millennials. Gen Z's love of nostalgia is currently driving a new marketing trend. "Newstalgia" is a blended desire for both familiarity and novelty. This affection for the past coexists with wanting the latest and greatest.

As noted by *Adweek*, "Campaigns that are old-school and stir Gen Z's emotions are the ones that often go viral." The Newstalgia vibe is about connecting authentically with younger consumers based on a brand's heritage and values.

This creates a perfect theme for jewelers. Times and trends may change, but a jeweler's role in helping people celebrate and commemorate meaningful life moments has never changed. So, how can jewelers capitalize on the Newstalgia trend to create loyal customers out of younger consumers?

SOCIAL MEDIA THROWBACK POSTS

Throwback posts such as #tbt (throwback Thursday) maintain popularity because they speak to history; more importantly, they romanticize the past. It's a little feel-good dopamine hit as we remember simpler times. Consider how the "memories" that pop up on iPhones or Facebook genuinely tug at your heartstrings. This same idea allows jewelry brands to connect with today's younger consumers by sharing emotionally evocative content that highlights your strengths—your heritage, your longevity in business, your community service over the years, and more.

Try posting vintage jewelry or retro-inspired jewelry designs and pairing them with old runway images or previous ad campaigns that evoke the era the jewelry is inspired by. Ask your followers to post their favorite '70s or '80s pieces—maybe from mom's jewelry box or ask which fashion trend your followers might wear with the piece you are featuring ('70s bell bottoms, '60s miniskirts, '80s big hair). Have your social media team put together a carousel, swiping from a large pair of gold hoops to a disco-inspired outfit, to one of your company's ads from the '70s, to an iconic fashion image from that time.

HERITAGE-THEMED SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS – DECADES OR CHALLENGES

Another way to tug at the heartstrings is to launch social media campaigns that revolve around a specific decade. A '90s Nostalgia campaign, for example, would feature jewelry designs inspired by that era, along with appropriate music, fashion, and cultural icons (the hit TV show "Friends" or Spice Girls' music). Host pop-up events that celebrate iconic eras in fashion and music, where customers can experience that time and purchase jewelry that pairs well with that era.

A "retro challenge" is a fun way to get your followers involved. Host a "vintage style challenge" where followers recreate iconic looks from certain eras or your previous ads with a specific hashtag. Consider offering gift cards as winners' prizes to get them into the store.

Also, consider flashback promotions. Run time-limited promotions or events that celebrate a past era, encouraging customers to purchase items that are reminiscent of that time. Be sure to use music and pop culture references in your reels and posts. The music will immediately evoke nostalgia. For collections with a '60s vibe, for example, create posts that nod to "Mad Men" or The Beatles.



NOSTALGIC STORYTELLING – CUSTOMER MEMORIES OR BRAND HISTORY POSTS

Jewelers have rich stories to tell, from engagements to transforming heirloom pieces. Encourage customers, especially Gen Z, to share their personal jewelry stories, linking styles to memories or trends they admire. Feature this user-generated content in social media to build communal nostalgia and emotion. Jewelers can also create content that takes followers on a journey through the brand's history, showing how your store, your staff, or your designs have evolved over time, while maintaining a throughline or a connection to the past.

LIMITED EDITION or EXCLUSIVE DROPS

Consider offering nostalgic drops of new collections inspired by specific decades or cultural moments. Make them limited-edition pieces or offer them for a limited time to create a sense of urgency and exclusivity.

Ultimately, embracing Newstalgia in your marketing gives jewelers a creative pathway to spark interest and build long-term loyalty with a generation that values both personal history and the pursuit of the new. It's all about crafting moments that feel timeless, yet fresh, and turning those moments into opportunities for connection.

Key Takeaways

- Gen Z leads in nostalgic tendencies, surpassing millennials. Their nostalgic inclinations fuel the “Newstalgia” trend, which combines a longing for the past with an eagerness for modern innovations.
- Newstalgia involves creating marketing campaigns that blend familiar, nostalgic elements with fresh, contemporary aspects. This approach fosters authentic connections based on a brand's heritage and values.
- Campaigns centered around specific decades (e.g., '70s, '80s, '90s) with corresponding music, fashion, and cultural references can create immersive nostalgic experiences. Interactive challenges, such as vintage-style recreations, encourage active participation. Organizing decade-specific events or social media challenges can increase engagement, foster community, and drive interest in jewelry pieces that complement iconic styles from those eras.
- Sharing customer stories related to jewelry, as well as the brand's historical journey, builds a communal sense of nostalgia. Introducing limited-edition collections inspired by specific decades or cultural moments enhances exclusivity and urgency.



PEARLS: A CLASSIC LUMINESCENCE DRAWS THE SPOTLIGHT ONCE AGAIN

ANDREA VENN, PH.D., CGA, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

Pearls initially only adorned royalty and nobility, but later became an enduring classic. This iridescent organic wonder of calcium carbonate has been desirable since people began eating shellfish and discovered the gems tucked inside. Indian, Chinese, Greek, and Roman societies of antiquity frequently saw pearls as tears of the gods, morning dew, or the result of lightning hitting the sea. The time of the Roman Empire was the first recorded peak of pearl trading for the West, with the conquest of Eastern countries bringing volumes of pearls to Rome.

Later, pearls were a significant reason that pirating was common between Spanish and British ships in the 16th century, as more and more ships contained pearls from the Americas. The Great Pearl Age of the English Renaissance continued through the 16th and 17th centuries, with pearls featured as a major indicator of power and wealth for men and women of royalty and the nobility.

Natural pearls had another wave of popularity from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. Dainty seed pearls were used to create popular wedding sets and act as accents for colored gemstones in Victorian jewelry pieces. Pearls became popular in the United States after the Civil War, especially freshwater pearls from the Mississippi River and the rivers that fed into it. At the turn of the 20th century, pearls were the top gemstones of society, with the newly created millionaires of the industrial sector buying extravagant pearl pieces for their wives.

Cultured pearls took the United States by storm after World War II, when soldiers brought home strands of cultured saltwater pearls for the women in their lives. They became an enduring classic of polished attire, and over time, they've made their mark at every level, from casual to haute couture. Harvesting natural pearls is slowly re-emerging, but most designers and manufacturers continue to use cultured pearls in their creations.

Baroque pearls, from the Portuguese *barocco*, have lent themselves well as large drop shapes to dangle from thrones, earrings, and necklaces. Unusually shaped pearls have also served as the bodies of creative figurines and commissioned art pieces. Baroque pearls are most likely to have the rainbow-hued orient that truly makes pearls mesmerizing. This is due to the uneven layers of nacre that collect to create their unusual shapes. Trending now and in the coming years, their free-flowing, organic shapes are a prominent feature in curved golden collar neckpieces, wavy cuffs, and textured or free-form earrings. Some designers are using brightly dyed baroque cultured pearl strands as statement pieces.

Men's jewelry is embracing cultured pearls, with statement pearl brooches making appearances on suit jackets for formal and professional attire. A unique pearl brooch on his lapel sets a man apart at weddings, speaking engagements, or other formal events, becoming a standout conversation piece often seen on the red carpet.

Strands of black or white saltwater cultured pearls have also entered men's collections, with sleek, uniform bracelets adding understated polish to casual and athletic looks. For a laid-back style, cultured pearl strands, bracelets, or stud earrings in black, gray, or multicolored overtones offer an artistic edge. A carved Tahitian pearl strand adds unexpected texture, effortlessly elevating any outfit—from a T-shirt to formal wear.

Cultured pearls with varying shades of the same hue can be combined to create an ombre look, adding dimension and interest. Cultured pearls of varying sizes, colors, and types are artfully combined to fashion a more creative yet luxurious aesthetic. From large bead-nucleated "fireball" freshwater pearls in natural pinks, peaches, and mauves to black pearl stations paired with black diamond beads, and dramatic layered ropes of white, black, and golden saltwater pearls—these designs redefine elegance.



Taking inspiration from the seed pearl frames of cameos and brooches in antique and vintage jewelry, designers are venturing into white and multicolored cultured pearl halos on engagement rings and playful cocktail rings with colored gemstones. These are for the gentle wearer, or one who would be willing to replace any cultured pearls that are damaged over time. As iridescent and striking as pearls are, they are only 2.5 to 3.0 on the Mohs hardness scale.

Enduring, creative, polished, and playful, cultured pearls can help you provide an option for every style and customer. Check with your trusted suppliers to furnish the fantastic, cultured pearl pieces your customers will adore in the coming year!

Key Takeaways

- Initially, pearls were exclusive to royalty and nobility, symbolizing power and wealth in ancient Indian, Chinese, Greek, and Roman societies. Often seen as divine, pearls were believed to be the tears of gods, morning dew, or the result of lightning striking the sea.
- Pearl trading in the West surged during the Roman Empire, as conquests brought large quantities to Rome. In the 16th century, the high demand for pearls from the Americas fueled piracy between Spanish and British ships. The 16th and 17th centuries—known as the Great Pearl Age—established pearls as powerful symbols of status among royalty and nobility.
- Natural pearls surged in popularity during the Victorian Era, especially in wedding jewelry, with Mississippi River freshwater pearls prized after the Civil War. By the early 1900s, newly wealthy industrialists favored pearls. After World War II, cultured pearls became a staple in both casual and high-fashion style.
- Unusually shaped baroque pearls are trending, featured in avant-garde jewelry pieces like curved collars, wavy cuffs, and free-form earrings. Designers are also experimenting with dyed cultured pearl strands for bold statements.
- Cultured pearls are increasingly incorporated into men's fashion, appearing in statement brooches, lapel pins, and sleek bracelets that complement both formal and casual looks. Engagement and cocktail rings now feature pearl halos and colorful gemstones.

Gemological Institute of America (n.d.) Pearl. Retrieved January 8, 2025, from <https://www.gia.edu/pearl>.

Strack, Elizabeth. (2006). Pearls. Ruhle-Diebener-Verag GMBH & Co. KG.



EMPLOYEES AS INVESTORS

ERIK HINDS, GIA

Employees are similar to investors; they invest their time, skills, and efforts with the expectation of receiving returns such as financial rewards, career growth, and stability. When they feel that their investment is not yielding adequate returns, they may disengage or choose to leave the company. Therefore, effective employee retention strategies are essential for long-term organizational success.

Understanding the Employee Lifecycle

Understanding the employee lifecycle and the specific engagement needs at each stage is crucial for retaining and motivating staff. Unfortunately, many employers tend to address issues too late. The employee lifecycle can be compared to the Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500), where engagement generally trends upward but can also experience dips similar to the stock market. Recognizing and addressing potential downturns can help employers retain their talent.

Stage 1: Active Engagement and Growth

The first stage, characterized by active engagement and growth, is when employees are enthusiastic, eager to learn, and fully committed to their roles. This stage is most common with new hires or those accepting a promotion. During this phase, it is vital for employers to:

- **Set Clear Expectations:** Define roles and performance metrics from the outset.
- **Conduct Regular Check-ins:** Schedule check-ins at three, six, and twelve months to revise goals and ensure alignment.
- **Implement Effective Onboarding:** Provide thorough training and mentorship programs to foster confidence and integration into the company culture.

Stage one is crucial as it sets up the expectations of open communication, which then plays a pivotal role in stages two and three.

Stage 2: Comfort and Stability

The second stage, marked by comfort and stability, sees employees feeling secure but potentially experiencing boredom or stagnation. To counteract this, employers should:

- **Create Career Development Plans:** Offer opportunities for skill enhancement, promotions, and lateral moves.
- **Recognize and Reward Contributions:** Provide regular financial incentives or promotions for increased responsibilities.
- **Conduct Engagement Surveys:** Periodic surveys can provide valuable insights into employee satisfaction and early signs of disengagement.

Understanding what employees are seeking will help ensure employers pick the right strategy specific to an employee's needs; there is no one-size-fits-all approach.



Stage 3: Declining Engagement

The third stage is characterized by declining engagement, where employees may feel increasingly disconnected and are at risk of leaving. At this point, promoting open communication is essential. Employers should:

- **Foster Honest Discussions:** Talk about career goals, job satisfaction, and any challenges employees may be facing.
- **Conduct Exit Interviews:** Interviews can help identify underlying issues and areas for improvement.
- **Offer Support:** If a transition is necessary, provide career coaching or job placement assistance to ensure a positive experience for both parties.

There is often a misconception that employers need to retain all of their employees. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Retaining disengaged employees can have a far greater impact than training a new hire or forgoing backfilling a position. In some cases where financial incentives have been the primary strategy for retention, employers can find themselves overcompensating employees for certain roles. Employers need to ask themselves if it is the person or the role that is critical. If it's the employee, then overcompensation may make sense, but if it is the role, the employer should look for alternative solutions, such as a promotion to a role with compensation equal to the responsibilities.

External Factors

Employers should also remain aware of external factors that can impact employee engagement. Monitoring economic conditions, such as inflation and job market trends, can help in adjusting strategies to maintain high levels of engagement.

Key Takeaways

- Employees invest their time, skills, and efforts into a company with expectations of receiving returns such as financial rewards, career growth, and stability. When these expectations aren't met, it can lead to disengagement or turnover.
- Retaining and motivating employees requires a deep understanding of the employee lifecycle, which includes different engagement needs at each stage— active engagement and growth; comfort and stability; and declining engagement. Employers must proactively recognize and address these three stages to maintain a motivated workforce, similar to how investors monitor market trends.
- It's a misconception that all employees must be retained. Retaining disengaged employees can be more detrimental than letting them go. Employers should evaluate whether it's the individual or the role that is critical and consider alternative solutions like promotions or role adjustments instead of overcompensating for every position.
- External factors such as economic conditions, inflation, and job market trends can significantly impact employee engagement. Employers need to stay informed about these external influences and adjust their retention strategies accordingly to maintain high levels of engagement and adapt to changing circumstances.



MAKING YOUR WEBSITE ADA COMPLIANT: WHY IT MATTERS AND HOW TO GET STARTED

DONNA JOLLY, RJ, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

In today's digital landscape, accessibility isn't optional, it's a necessity. An ADA-compliant (Americans with Disabilities Act) website ensures that all visitors, including those with disabilities, can navigate and interact with your site. Beyond being the right thing to do, ADA compliance can help you avoid potential legal risks and improve your SEO performance. Here's what you need to know and how to make your site more inclusive.

Why ADA Compliance Matters

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in four adults in the U.S. lives with a disability, representing a significant portion of potential customers. Ensuring your website is accessible helps you connect with this audience, providing them with an equal opportunity to explore your business.

In addition to reaching more customers, ADA compliance can protect your business from legal challenges. Lawsuits related to website accessibility are on the rise, with over 4,000 cases filed in federal courts in 2023 alone. Staying ahead of the curve can save your business from costly litigation and enhance your reputation as an inclusive brand.

Common Barriers to Accessibility

Before diving into solutions, it's essential to understand the barriers that can make websites inaccessible, such as:

- Missing alt text: Images without alternative text leave visually impaired users unable to understand their content.
- Poor color contrast: Low-contrast text can be hard for visually impaired users to read.
- Inaccessible navigation: Menus and links that can't be accessed via keyboard navigation can exclude users with mobility impairments.
- Lack of video captions: Videos without captions or transcripts can alienate hearing-impaired users.

It's helpful to know the principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). WCAG provides technical standards that help make websites accessible to people with disabilities. The principles include:

- Perceivable: Make it easy for the users to see and hear content
- Operable: Make it easy for users to interact with content
- Understandable: Make it easy for users to understand content
- Robust: Make content robust and durable

WCAG is the universally accepted benchmark for web accessibility. It's adopted by U.S. and international anti-discrimination and accessibility legislation.



Steps to Make Your Website ADA Compliant

1. Audit your site: Use tools like WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool) or Lighthouse to identify areas for improvement.
2. Incorporate accessible design.
3. Add accessibility features: Use plugins to help your site meet compliance standards.

Finding the Right ADA Compliance Plugin

There are many plugins available, but not all are created equal. To find a plugin that fits your needs, try searching for terms like “best ADA compliance WordPress plugins” or “web accessibility tools for small businesses.” Look for plugins that offer customization, real-time monitoring, and compatibility with your website platform.

Before deciding on a plugin, read reviews, consider how a plugin will affect usability, and think about the experience it will provide. Test your plugins before publishing the changes. It’s best to test it before and after the plugin is installed. Keep in mind that accessibility plugins cannot fix issues that require human judgment. For example, a plugin can identify images with missing alternative text (“alt text”), but it can’t determine whether the alt text is accurate. That’s why testing is important.

To create a long-term strategy for WCAG conformance, contact the Bureau of Internet Accessibility or get started with a free and confidential website analysis boia.org/products/free-wcag-2-0-aa-report.

Final Thoughts

Creating an ADA-compliant website isn’t just about avoiding legal risks—it’s about ensuring everyone can access and enjoy your business. By auditing your site, addressing common barriers, and using trusted tools, you can create a more inclusive online presence. Start today to make your website accessible to all, and let your customers know you value inclusivity.

Key Takeaways

- ADA-compliant websites improve user experience for all, expand access to the one in four U.S. adults with disabilities, and help protect businesses from legal risks.
- Accessibility barriers like missing alt text, low-contrast fonts, videos without captions or transcripts, and non-keyboard-friendly navigation exclude users with visual, auditory, and mobility impairments.
- WCAG guidelines—Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust—set the standard for making web content accessible to all.
- Audit your site with tools like WAVE or Lighthouse to identify accessibility issues.
- Using reliable plugins that offer customization, real-time monitoring, and compatibility with your website platform add accessibility features. Test accessibility both before and after implementing plugins and recognize that some issues require human judgment beyond automated tools.



Thank you to GIA for graciously providing the following for inclusion in the American Gem Society's annual recertification exam.

JAPAN'S FORGOTTEN JADE

NATHAN STOWE, GIA

Jade is prized for its exceptional toughness as well as its captivating beauty. Over the millennia, it has been used as a religious object, tool, weapon, work of art, and gem. While several ancient cultures made use of this stone throughout history, one important source of jade is often overlooked, the island nation of Japan.

The term “jade” is used to describe several different minerals that happen to share similar appearances and properties. The two most well-known types of jade are jadeite and nephrite. While they may share many physical characteristics, their chemical composition is quite different. It was only with the advent of modern testing and analysis that a definitive distinction between the minerals was made. Both types of jade have been used since ancient times, with the earliest known nephrite artifacts having appeared in China around 6200 BCE, while the earliest known jadeite artifacts originated in Japan around 5000 BCE. While both types of jade are rare, jadeite is comparatively less abundant. Part of the reason for jadeite's relative scarcity is due to its formation requiring unique geological conditions.

For its entire existence, Japan has experienced a significant amount of geological activity due to its location at the boundary of four tectonic plates. This resulted in the creation of many different mineral deposits including several that contained jade. While most of this jade lay trapped deep underground, some of the deposits were brought to the surface where the Eurasian and North American plates collide. The boundary between these plates runs across Japan's main island of Honshu from the northwest to the southeast dividing it roughly in half. Here, it separates the Japanese Alps from the Fossa Magna region. The fault connects the coastal cities of Itoigawa and Shizuoka and is thus called the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line or ISTL. It is in Itoigawa, on the western coast of Japan, where the earliest jadeite culture began.

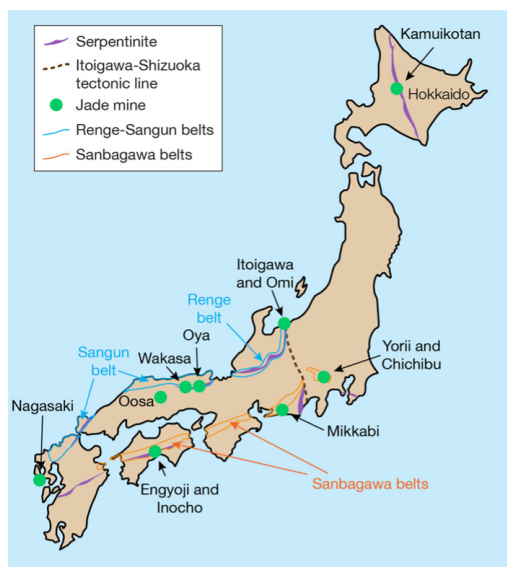


Figure 1: Jade Mine Locations in Japan. The only significant source of gem-quality material is the Itoigawa-Omi region in Niigata Prefecture. Modified after Fossa Magna Museum.



The first jade artifacts in Japan were simple tools, such as axes and hammers, that utilized jade's unique toughness. The earliest of these can be traced back to around 5000 BCE. Nearly a thousand years later, jade began to be used for personal adornment, taking the form of simple pendants. Over the next thousand years, jade workshops became more common as Itoigawa became a hub of jade production and trade. As technology improved, the design of pendants evolved to incorporate a hole bored through the tough jadeite.

Around 1000 BCE, during the final Jōmon period, curved beads called magatama began to be made from jade. Their shapes are thought to have been inspired by various animals. This design would morph over time to become the comma-shaped bead it is known as today. Jade magatama have been unearthed in multiple settlements throughout Japan and even as far away as the Korean peninsula. Since all the jade can be traced back to Itoigawa, it serves as proof of the extensive trade network that existed within and around Japan during the final Jōmon period.



Figure 2: Magatama carvings (25.51-63.88 ct) from Itoigawa-Omi. Courtesy of the Jade Ore Museum (Hisui Gensekikan).

Around the eighth century, there was a sudden decline in the use of jade throughout Japan. Experts still aren't wholly certain as to why, though they do have several theories such as the rise of Buddhism, shifts in fashion trends, and fear of invasion. Regardless of the reason, jade essentially vanished from Japanese culture by the 800s and was left forgotten for over 1,000 years. During this time, the jade artifacts that were unearthed in Japan were assumed to have originated in China. It wasn't until much later that scientists realized that the Japanese artifacts were in fact jadeite, unlike the deposits in China, which were nephrite. This revelation led to a renewed interest in finding the source of Japanese jade.

The rediscovery of jade in Japan is primarily credited to the actions of three men. The first is Gyofu Soma, a writer and poet native to Itoigawa. He was familiar with local legends about Nunakawa, a princess from the region who possessed many beautiful pieces of jade. Soma believed that the tales of jade were not merely myth but were perhaps based on an ancient jade culture in the region. Eizo Ito, another resident of Itoigawa, heard about Soma's theories and began to investigate the local rivers. In August of 1938, he found a green stone and sent it to Yoshinori Kawano, a researcher at Tohoku Imperial University. Kawano analyzed the specimen and verified that it was indeed jadeite. He then led a geological survey of the region in 1939, discovering multiple jadeite boulders in the Kotaki River. This discovery eventually led the Kotaki River, Omi River, and several other nearby rivers to be designated as national natural monuments. Due to its rediscovered cultural significance, jade was selected as the national stone of Japan in 2016.

Key Takeaways

- Japan is home to one of the oldest jadeite cultures, originating in the Itoigawa region around 5000 BCE. This makes Itoigawa one of the earliest known centers for jadeite artifact production.
- The term "jade" encompasses several minerals, primarily jadeite and nephrite. While both share similar physical properties, they have different chemical compositions. Jadeite is rarer due to the unique geological conditions required for its formation.



- Japan's position at the convergence of four tectonic plates has led to significant geological activity, resulting in diverse mineral deposits, including jade. The Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line (ISTL) on Honshu Island is a notable area where jade deposits are accessible.
- Initially used for tools like axes and hammers around 5000 BCE, jade later became important for personal adornments such as pendants and magatama beads during the Jōmon period (~1000 BCE). The widespread distribution of jade magatama across Japan and the Korean Peninsula indicates extensive ancient trade networks.
- Jade's significance in Japan declined around the 8th century, leading to its near disappearance from cultural practices for over a millennium. It was rediscovered in the late 1930s through the efforts of local scholars and researchers, notably Gyofu Soma and Eizo Ito. This rediscovery led to the designation of jade as Japan's national stone in 2016, highlighting its renewed cultural importance.



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LABORATORY-GROWN DIAMONDS: AN UPDATE ON IDENTIFICATION AND PRODUCTS EVALUATED AT GIA

SALLY EATON-MAGAÑA, GIA

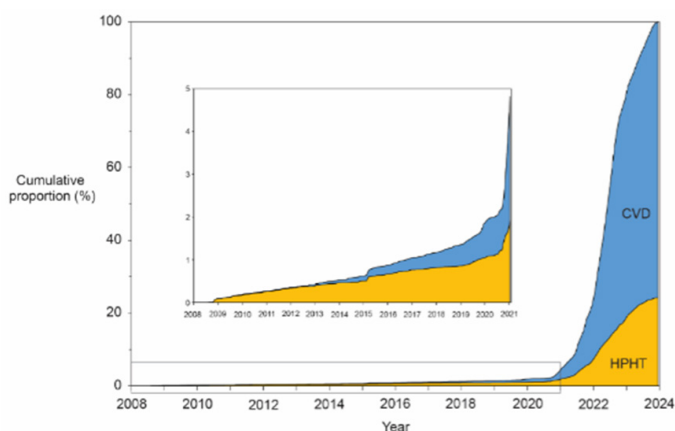
The past two decades have seen a rapid evolution of laboratory-grown diamonds with a significant increase in their quantity, size, and quality. However, there have been relatively few technological changes in laboratory-grown diamonds during the last five years, indicating that developments have largely stabilized for now.

The ubiquitous presence of colorless to near-colorless laboratory-grown diamonds now poses a challenge for gemologists and appraisers in distinguishing these gems from natural diamonds as they share many gemological and physical properties. Consequently, gemologists have needed to invest in analytical testing equipment or rely on gemological laboratories for accurate identification.

A 2021 report by Bain & Company estimated that 6 million to 7 million carats of gem-quality laboratory-grown diamonds were produced globally in 2020. China led with approximately 3 million carats, which were mostly grown using the high-pressure, high-temperature (HPHT) method, with a good percentage of these as small melee goods. Chinese production was followed by India with about 1.5 million carats, which were manufactured using chemical vapor deposition (CVD), and then the United States at about 1 million carats (as CVD). CVD products now dominate the supply of laboratory-grown diamonds submitted for grading reports, with the majority of these also undergoing post-growth HPHT treatment to remove their color.

CVD diamond growth is a gas-phase chemical process that bears almost no resemblance to natural diamond formation. This technique involves a reactor in which hydrogen and hydrocarbon (typically methane) feed gases are activated by microwaves to form a plasma. This mixture of radicals and atomic hydrogen migrates to the cooler diamond seed, which acts as a blueprint for adding carbon atoms. Hydrogen, accounting for 90 to 99 percent of the gas mixture, suppresses the growth of graphite or non-diamond carbon, which would hinder high-quality diamond formation.

The HPHT method mimics some of the essential conditions of natural diamond growth, such as comparable pressure and a slightly higher growth temperature. With this method, a solid carbon source, typically graphite powder, is subjected to pressures of 5 to 6 GPa (equivalent to a depth of 150 to 190 km within the earth) and temperatures of 1,300 to 1,600 degrees Celsius. As with CVD, a



The cumulative increase in laboratory-grown diamond submissions, 2008-2023. Most of the submissions have been in the last few years, marked by a dramatic rise in CVD-grown diamonds. For the years 2008-2021 (inset), the vast majority of submitted stones were HPHT-grown.



diamond seed is needed to function as a blueprint for the added carbon atoms.

Because there are significant differences between HPHT and CVD growth methods, as well as various types of post-growth treatment, there is no cost-effective or rapid screening tool that can definitively identify all laboratory-grown diamonds. Instead, the majority of screening tools available in the consumer market provide a “pass” or “refer” result for colorless to near-colorless diamonds, with “pass” generally indicating the test sample is natural. Diamonds that produce a “refer” result may be natural, laboratory-grown diamonds, or simulants. These gems require further testing for conclusive identification, which involves a combination of gemological techniques or examination by a laboratory. Depending on the method of testing, some screening devices may not be able to refer simulants, incorrectly passing them as natural. Users must understand a screening instrument’s scope and limitations (e.g., color range, size, and simulants).



Laboratory-grown CVD rough diamond (left), laboratory-grown HPHT rough diamond (middle), and natural rough diamond (right). Composite image. This CVD diamond rough crystal weighs 6.37 ct and was grown at GIA’s laboratory in New Jersey. Photo by Robert Weldon/GIA.

The rapid evolution of HPHT and CVD diamond growth has been largely driven by manufacturers’ efforts to develop innovative new products for both engineering applications and gem purposes. As manufacturers refine their growth methods, they can better tailor these products to satisfy consumers’ tastes and create niche products.

Key Takeaways

- HPHT- and CVD-grown diamond size, quantity, and color grades have rapidly improved over the past few decades.
- The prevalence of colorless to near-colorless laboratory-grown diamonds makes it difficult for gemologists and appraisers to distinguish them from natural diamonds based on gemological and physical properties alone. Accurate identification often requires advanced analytical testing or reliance on specialized gemological laboratories.
- In 2020, global production of gem-quality laboratory-grown diamonds was estimated at 6 to 7 million carats, with China leading production primarily using the high-pressure, high-temperature (HPHT) method. India and the United States followed, mainly utilizing the chemical vapor deposition (CVD) method. CVD-grown diamonds now dominate the supply submitted for grading reports, often undergoing post-growth HPHT treatment to enhance color.
- There is no single, cost-effective, and rapid screening method that can definitively identify all laboratory-grown diamonds due to the varied growth methods and post-growth treatments. Most consumer-grade screening devices can only provide a “pass” or “refer” result, necessitating further testing for conclusive identification. Users must be aware of the specific capabilities and limitations of their screening equipment.



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NICKEL DIFFUSION IN SPINEL

MICHAEL JOLLANDS, GIA

Gemstones are often heat treated in some way to modify their color. In many cases, this involves simply heating the stone at a high temperature (about 800 to 1,800 degrees Celsius), which causes some redistribution of elements inside the crystal, which can then affect the stone's appearance. In other cases, some chemical elements can be added into the crystal from the outside.

A well-known example in the gem trade is beryllium diffusion treatment of sapphire and ruby (corundum), in which the element beryllium is added into corundum by surrounding the crystal with a source of beryllium, such as beryl, then heating to high temperatures such as 1,600 to 1,800 degrees Celsius, for some time (hours to weeks). The beryllium then enters the crystal and moves by solid-state diffusion. This process is random, analogous to how perfume sprayed in one corner of a room will gradually spread out across the rest, but with the room representing the crystal and the perfume representing the beryllium. Other diffusion treatments of corundum, including titanium and chromium, have also been described.

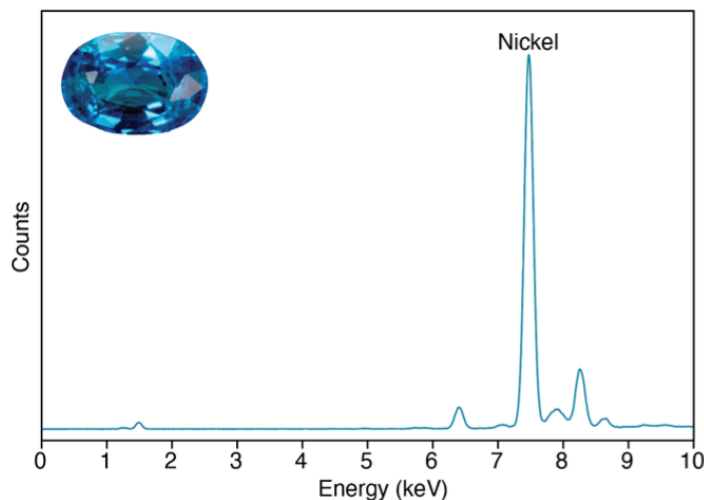
This article concerns nickel diffusion treatment of spinel, a new treatment that was inadvertently discovered by GIA research when trying to further study the well-known cobalt diffusion treatment for spinels. A parcel of spinel crystals, thought to be cobalt-diffused, was obtained by GIA Bangkok's field gemology department and sent to GIA New York for analysis. Chemical and spectroscopic analysis showed that about half of the crystals in the parcel were not cobalt-diffused at all but rather had been diffused with nickel.



Nickel diffused spinels, about 0.7 to 1 ct.



Nickel diffused spinel generally has a lighter blue than cobalt spinel, either diffused or natural. The extreme heat required to diffuse nickel into spinel often leaves behind clear evidence of treatment in the form of visually modified inclusions, and a crystal structure that becomes distorted, which can be easily identified by its characteristic peaks in luminescence spectroscopy, which is another technique widely used in gemology laboratories. Color zonation may be obvious, and the visible absorption spectra have peaks that are characteristic of nickel spinel, and notably different from the spectra of cobalt spinel. The high concentrations of nickel can be easily identified using X-ray fluorescence and laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry, both of which are able to rapidly and accurately measure the chemical compositions of stones.

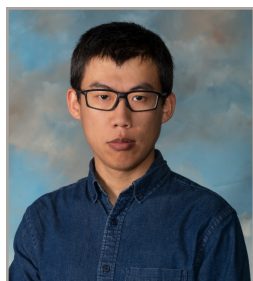


An X-ray fluorescence spectrum of a nickel diffused spinel (inset image). The main peak (marked) shows the presence of nickel. Other peaks in the spectrum represent elements such as magnesium and aluminum.

Proactive research into all possible treatments is extremely important across gemology. Importantly, in this case, the diffusion treatment appears to have been identified by GIA research prior to any nickel-diffused stones passing through our laboratories.

Key Takeaways

- Nickel diffusion is a newly identified treatment for spinel gemstones, discovered inadvertently by GIA (Gemological Institute of America) during research focused on cobalt diffusion. Approximately half of the analyzed spinel crystals were found to be nickel-diffused instead of cobalt-diffused.
- Similar to other diffusion treatments, nickel is introduced into spinel crystals through solid-state diffusion. This involves surrounding the spinel with a nickel source and applying high temperatures (typically between 800 to 1,800 degrees Celsius) for extended periods, allowing nickel ions to redistribute within the crystal lattice.
- Nickel-diffused spinels generally exhibit a lighter blue color compared to both natural and cobalt-diffused spinels. The high temperatures used in the diffusion process can cause visible inclusions and distortions in the crystal structure, which serve as indicators of treatment.



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SPECIAL COLORS AND OPTICAL EFFECTS OF OREGON SUNSTONE

SHIYUN JIN, GIA

Oregon sunstone is a unique feldspar gemstone that displays a wide range of colors and optical effects due to the presence of metallic copper inclusions of various sizes and shapes. Most striking are the distinct green and red colors caused by copper particles, sometimes with strong red to green pleochroism. Metallic copper particles, which are good electrical conductors, interact with light in complicated ways. The free electrons will oscillate inside the copper particles under the influence of the incident light, which absorbs the electromagnetic energy and transforms it into heat. The copper particles can also scatter light away from a straight path, which means the apparent color may change with the type of illumination, depending on whether the transmitted or scattered light is observed (Figure 1).

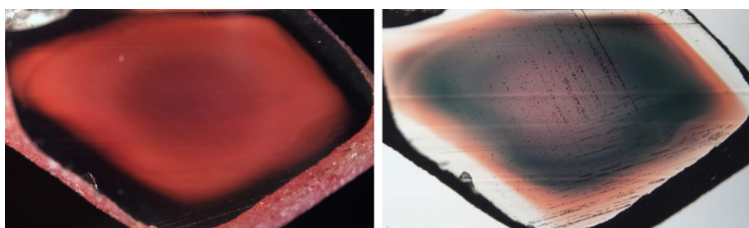


Figure 1 A copper-diffused feldspar from China under dark-field (left) and bright-field (right) illumination. The deep red color on the left is the color of light scattered by the copper nanoparticles, which is why blue/green light is preferably transmitted in the same region on the right. The red zone in transmission lighting (right) does not have any noticeable scattering effect under dark-field lighting (left), indicating this red color is created solely by absorption.

The absorption and scattering spectra of a spheroidal (a stretched or squashed sphere) copper particles in feldspar can be computed by solving Maxwell's equation using the dielectric constants of copper and feldspar. The color of light transmitted through a feldspar crystal containing a certain amount of copper particles of a given size and shape can be thus computed as well (Figure 2). The predicted colors agree well with the observed colors in natural and treated copper-bearing feldspars, suggesting that spheroid is a good approximation of the copper particles in feldspars. The computation shows that small particles (diameter $\phi < 80$ nm) mainly absorb blue and green light and allow red light to pass through. Slightly larger particles ($80 \text{ nm} < \phi < 120 \text{ nm}$) can scatter red and orange light away to allow more green light to pass through. Compared to light polarization aligned with the shorter dimension of the particle, both the absorption and scattering peak shift towards longer wavelengths when the polarization is aligned along the longer dimension. Natural Oregon sunstones often show much stronger pleochroism compared to copper-diffused stones, indicating larger aspect ratios of the particles from slower natural processes.

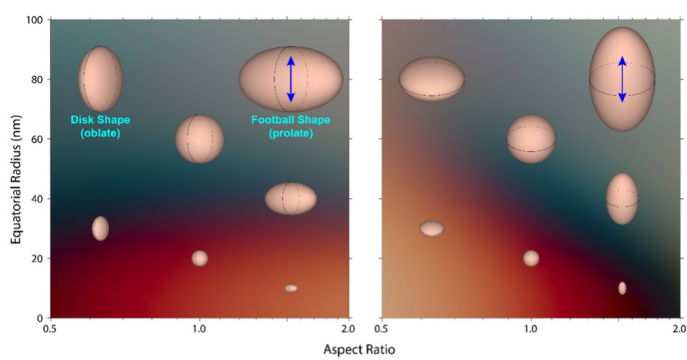


Figure 2 Computed color map plotted against spheroidal copper particle shape (x-axis) and size (y-axis), with polarization parallel (left) and perpendicular (right) to the equatorial plane of the particle. The polarization of light relative to the particle shape is marked by the blue double arrows. Small particle dimensions ($R < 40$ nm), as measured along the polarization direction of light, create red color by absorption of blue/green light, whereas larger dimensions ($R > 40$) create bluish-green color by scattering red light away.

Color zoning in Oregon sunstone is caused by variations in the size and shape of the copper particles, which are determined by complicated diffusion and exsolution processes during cooling of the host basaltic lava. The core of a “watermelon”-colored Oregon sunstone, where the copper concentration is the highest, always contains larger micron-scaled copper platelets that create a schiller effect (Figure 3). The particle sizes decrease toward the surface as the copper concentrations drop. The larger copper platelets block light of different wavelengths equally, thus do not have any observable color effect in transmission light. Therefore, small copper nanoparticles (diameter $\phi < 80$ nm) are the reason for the red-colored core. Due to faster cooling rates, the copper particles in diffusion-treated feldspars are not large enough to create a schiller effect, and the colorless zone near the surface is much narrower (Figure 1) compared to natural untreated Oregon sunstones (Figure 3).

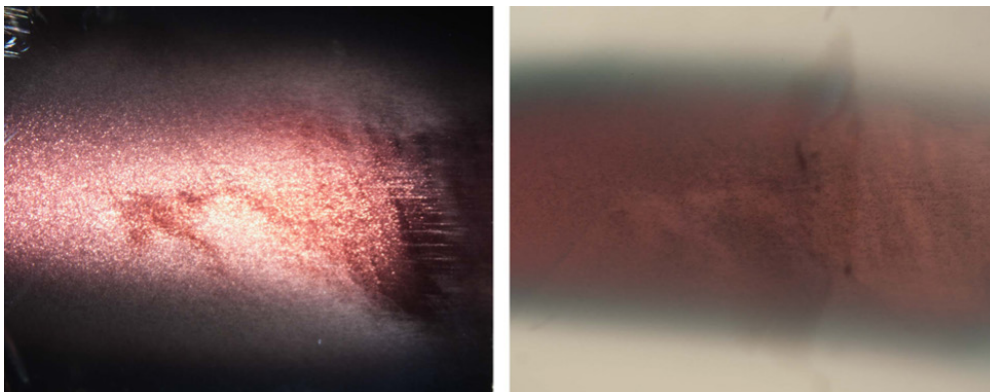


Figure 3 A “watermelon”-colored Oregon sunstone under reflective (left) and transmission (right) lighting. The core with higher copper concentration contains larger copper platelets that create a schiller effect by reflecting light back. There are also small nanoparticles that absorb blue/green light and create red color in transmission light. The smaller copper particles towards the edge preferably scatter red light away and create a green zone in transmitted light.



Key Takeaways

- Oregon sunstone's wide range of colors, particularly green and red, originate from metallic copper inclusions within the feldspar. These copper particles absorb and scatter specific wavelengths of light, leading to distinct color effects.
- The size and shape of copper particles play a crucial role in determining the gemstone's color. Small particles (under 80 nm) primarily absorb blue and green light, allowing red to pass through, while slightly larger particles (80-120 nm) scatter red and orange light, resulting in more green light transmission.
- Oregon sunstone exhibits strong pleochroism, meaning it displays different colors when viewed from different angles. This effect arises from the alignment of elongated copper particles, which interact with light polarization based on their orientation.
- The variation in copper particle size and shape during the cooling and solidification of basaltic lava leads to color zoning within the sunstone. The core typically contains larger copper platelets that create a schiller effect and red coloration, while the outer areas have smaller particles that produce green zones.
- Natural Oregon sunstones often show stronger pleochroism and more pronounced color zoning due to slower cooling rates, which allow copper particles to develop larger aspect ratios. In contrast, diffusion-treated sunstones have smaller copper particles and narrower colorless zones, resulting in less intense optical effects.



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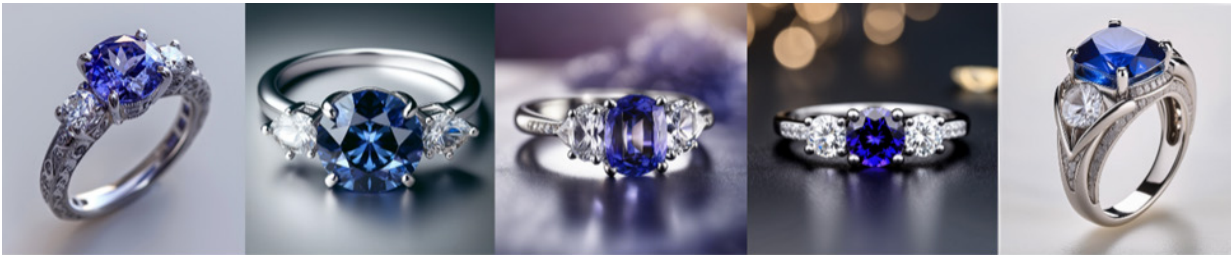
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GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL FOR JEWELRY DESIGN

MICHAEL D. MAGEE, GIA

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into jewelry design represents a significant evolution in the field, merging traditional craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology. This article explores the transformative potential and challenges of generative AI in jewelry design, focusing on its application, ethical concerns, and the future of the craft.

Generative AI utilizes advanced machine learning algorithms to produce original, highly detailed designs from simple text or image prompts. Through a comparative analysis of five major AI platforms—Midjourney, DALL·E, Stable Diffusion, Leonardo.AI, and Adobe Firefly—the research explores how each system interprets and generates jewelry designs from text and image prompts, examining their capabilities, limitations, and impacts on creative workflows.



Images generated from left to right by Midjourney, DALL·E, Stable Diffusion, Leonardo.AI, and Adobe Firefly, each from the same prompt, "platinum three-stone ring, tanzanite center gem, diamond side gems, photorealistic."

Generative AI enables rapid ideation and the creation of multiple design iterations within minutes, offering unparalleled efficiency. These tools also incorporate features like inpainting, outpainting, and upscaling, which enhance user control over visual output. However, these AI-generated designs often contain technical inaccuracies and may not be manufacturable, highlighting the continued importance of human expertise in translating AI concepts into finished goods. The research finds that while each platform has distinct strengths, Midjourney and Leonardo.AI shows particular aptitude for jewelry-specific terminology and design elements, while Adobe Firefly, despite limited jewelry training data, offers unique advantages in copyright compliance.



Images from Midjourney 5.2, before and after upscaling.



JEWELRY DESIGN & MANUFACTURING



Ethical and legal implications are central to the discussion. Questions of authorship, originality, and copyright emerge as AI-generated art blurs traditional boundaries of creativity. Current U.S. copyright laws exclude AI-generated works unless substantial human modification is evident. There have been ongoing intellectual property disputes and varying regulatory responses, including Adobe's proactive approach of using licensed datasets for training its Firefly model.

Some promising workflows include "sketch to render," where designers begin with human-created sketches and use AI to enhance them, potentially establishing clearer copyright protection while streamlining the design process.

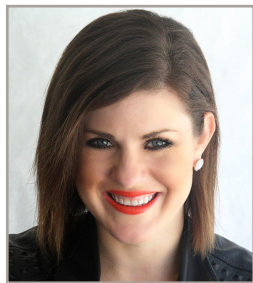


Digital sketch (left) and a Dzine.ai "rendering" (right) using the original image with an added text prompt.

Future developments in AI, such as text-to-video, 2D-to-3D creation via depth maps, and text-to-3D model generation, are expected to further revolutionize the industry. These advancements may eventually streamline workflows, enabling designers to move directly from concept to production-ready models. It is important to understand ethical practices and transparency in the use of generative AI. Education and awareness within the jewelry design community to mitigate risks and promote responsible adoption is something to advocate for.

Designers can best utilize AI by focusing on two key areas: the ability to translate AI-generated images into manufacturable models, and the capacity to personalize designs for specific clients or brands. Increased transparency in AI tools and training data is recommended, while acknowledging that many legal and regulatory questions remain unresolved.

Generative AI has already begun reshaping jewelry design by offering powerful tools for creativity and efficiency. While it is not a substitute for human designers, it serves as a catalyst for innovation, enabling new forms of expression and expanding the possibilities of the craft. Designers who integrate AI thoughtfully can benefit from its capabilities while preserving the artistry and heritage of their work.



INTIMATE EVENTS PRODUCE GREATER RESULTS FOR JEWELRY RETAILERS

**DUVALL O'STEEN, LUXURY BRAND GROUP, AND JEN CULLEN WILLIAMS,
JEN CULLEN WILLIAMS COMMUNICATIONS**

Large-scale events like holiday parties and product launches have become harder to justify, often demanding more resources while delivering lower turnout or sales. Retailers have reported better success recently with smaller-scale events with thoughtfully curated guest lists that ensure the invited customers will want to come. When traditional events stop performing, it's time to get creative and rethink what truly draws customers in. Intimate events can be successful because modern consumers are longing for sincere connections and memorable experiences.

Here are examples of more intimate experiences that may produce greater results for jewelers.

CURATED POWER LUNCHES

Host a power lunch for a small group of women in executive roles across diverse industries—consider an all-female medical professionals' event or one tailored to HR leaders or entrepreneurs. Tailor guest lists around shared roles or industries to spark easy conversation. Consider a luncheon for executive assistants near National Administrative Professionals Day, where execs pre-select jewelry gifts or set spending budgets for gifts—making shopping easier for the assistants and ensuring sales during the event.

A private dining experience makes guests feel valued, and seating them with other distinguished women fosters organic connections. To entice busy professionals, think creatively: invite a local celebrity chef or book a table at the newest hot spot in town. These women often host business dinners, so introducing them to the latest restaurants or chefs is genuinely useful.

You can also host in-store events with relevant perks, like a fashion stylist sharing travel packing tips or a spa day with manicures by a local salon. For medical professionals, on-site massage therapy is a thoughtful touch.

Power lunches can also support causes. If your store partners with a charity, invite donors or board members to a lunch focused on planning upcoming events. It builds community presence and deepens connections with cause-driven clients.

Prominent women in the community often become natural brand ambassadors—when they wear your jewelry, others will notice and ask.

MOTHER-DAUGHTER EVENTS

Mother-Daughter themed gatherings shouldn't be limited to Mother's Day. "Mommy and Me"-style classes such as bracelet-making, art, or activities like astrology or birth chart readings can create fun in-store experiences that strengthen the relationships your staff has with the women in your local community. Consider adding a charity component with any family-themed charity in your area. Piercing events or zapping parties where permanent bracelets are affixed are still fun and generate instant sales.

Whiz kid-type events that encourage academic excellence could also be fun—invite mothers to bring in daughters who get to select a piece of jewelry as a reward for their straight-A report cards or for winning their local debate or sports championship. Not only does this guarantee a sale, but it also creates a relationship with a younger consumer. Have a photographer or someone from your staff available to take Mother-Daughter photos, which can be shared on social media or printed and framed.



HOW-TO or SHOW-AND-TELL EVENTS

Invite customers for one-on-one or small group demonstrations. “Edu-tainment” keeps them engaged and sends them home with new knowledge. Partner with a local florist for floral art classes where guests make arrangements to take home. Or host a gardening session where customers bring in struggling houseplants or photos for expert advice. Offer a floral pendant as an on-theme raffle prize.

You could also invite clients to bring in watches for demos by your watch brand rep, showing how to change batteries, adjust time zones, or use other functions. Bring in an appraiser for on-site estate jewelry or watch appraisals.

These events can be scheduled in small groups or as private sessions, creating memorable experiences and authentic social media moments. Have a staff member capture before, during, and after photos.

GAME NIGHTS

Host regular poker nights with top clients to build friendships. Smaller games like Bunco, Bridge, Canasta, or Dominoes can also be fun. Offer winners store credit or donations to their favorite charity. For word game lovers, try a “Wordle Whiz” night with Scrabble, Balderdash, or 20 Questions. Crown the winner and collaborate with a local partner for prizes. Encourage clients to show proof of a two-try NYT Wordle or “Genius” level in Spelling Bee to win small prizes like a jewelry pouch or gift card. For extra fun, let each hour’s winner stay on as reigning champ.

Smaller events mean less work for staff, fewer no-shows, and more meaningful interactions. With creativity and attention to guests’ lifestyles, you can host memorable experiences that foster connection—and loyalty.

Key Takeaways

- Smaller, targeted events are more effective than large-scale gatherings. Jewelers are seeing better results with curated guest lists and intimate, meaningful experiences compared to traditional events like holiday parties or product launches.
- Curated power lunches help build deeper relationships with influential clients. Hosting themed luncheons for professionals or community leaders fosters connection, builds brand visibility, and can even tie in charitable partnerships to support causes.
- Mother-daughter events create multigenerational engagement. Interactive activities like bracelet-making, piercing parties, or academic reward events not only generate immediate sales but also cultivate relationships with younger consumers.
- Educational and interactive events increase customer engagement. “How-to” or “show-and-tell” sessions—like floral design classes or watch tutorials—provide value to customers while creating social media-worthy moments and deeper brand connections.
- Game nights offer a fun, low-effort way to connect with top clients. Casual games, friendly competition, and themed prizes help create a relaxed atmosphere, encourage return visits, and promote customer loyalty.



JEWELRY DESIGN & MANUFACTURING



Key Takeaways

- Generative AI is revolutionizing jewelry design by combining traditional craftsmanship with advanced machine learning algorithms. This allows designers to create original and highly detailed designs efficiently, expanding the creative possibilities within the field.
- Generative AI enables rapid ideation and the creation of multiple design iterations within minutes. Features like inpainting, outpainting, and upscaling provide designers with greater control over the visual output. AI-generated designs may still contain technical inaccuracies, necessitating human expertise to ensure manufacturability.
- The use of AI in jewelry design raises significant ethical and legal questions regarding authorship, originality, and copyright. Current U.S. copyright laws do not recognize AI-generated works unless there is substantial human modification.
- Anticipated advancements in AI, such as text-to-video, 2D-to-3D creation via depth maps, and text-to-3D model generation, are expected to further transform the jewelry design industry.
- Ethical practices, transparency, and education within the design community are important to mitigate risks and promote responsible adoption of AI technologies, ensuring that the artistry and heritage of jewelry design are preserved.



A CASE STUDY IN APPRAISING VINTAGE JEWELRY

MICHAEL WEST, CGA, R.F. MOELLER JEWELER

Embarking on the path to becoming a jewelry appraiser often involves a winding journey of diverse experiences and continuous learning. As professional appraisers, we are asked to appraise a wide variety of items with depth and breadth of quality, style, and both current and period pieces. One category of jewelry that piques appraisers' interest is vintage and period jewelry items. While these items can be very exciting and rewarding, there are some assignments that require additional time and research. To relay the process, I will detail one recent assignment.

I met with a client one afternoon about valuation appraisal work on what turned out to be some extraordinary vintage items. She wanted to document the details for future generations and also needed a valuation appraisal to obtain insurance coverage. Every appraisal requires a defined user and should also clarify which third parties may rely on it. In this case, the user is the client who brought in the items, and the authorized third parties are her insurance representatives. The appraisal must also include a clearly stated purpose that meets the client's needs. Here, that purpose was to document, identify, and describe the items, and to provide a professional opinion of replacement value for insurance purposes. Finally, a professional appraisal must include an effective date to which all opinions apply—in this case, the current date of the assignment.

One item appeared to be a platinum and diamond vintage Art Deco-style bracelet. The first steps were to identify and authenticate the bracelet through inspection of the details. The diamond cuts and the details of the production of the bracelet gave an indication of being vintage and not a later replica. During the inspection, I noticed that there was no marking indicating who had made the bracelet, but there were three different assay marks. These assay marks are stamps on the piece of jewelry indicating the purity level of metals. They are added by the government assay office, and each has a meaning. The three markings on this bracelet were a penguin and an eagle on the clasp and a dog's head on the links of the bracelet. Like modern metal karat markings, the penguin and the dog head are indicators of platinum purity, and the eagle identified the clasp as 18-karat white gold. These French marks provided a country of origin and helped limit the date of production.

Next was weighing the item, measuring, grading, and counting the diamonds, figuring carat weight totals, and writing the descriptions. These are the details that flesh out the identity of the item and provide many of the value factors of the item vital to the report. The written report is the most visible product and evidence of our work. Carefully considering, addressing, and reporting these details in an organized manner adds credibility to the report.

Many appraisers accumulate these details and use them to determine the costs of the diamonds and gemstones, apply an average markup, and establish retail prices to remake an exact modern duplicate of the item. With an authentic vintage item, a modern reproduction is not a suitable replacement in the event of a loss. This assignment requires market research in comparable sales and offerings.

Research of comparable pieces included those offered for sale at auction and retail, along with items sold relatively recently. Comparable items were items of similar kind and quality and in relatively like-new condition. In this case, nearly 20 items were located which were comparable enough to provide useful information, but of course nothing exactly matched. My opinion of the replacement amount for this item was based on the most typical amount for comparable items, adjusted for the exact details of the item I described and was appraising. The opinion of value is not the average of comparable item values and often differs from them, not an exact value of any of them, and specific to the unique item being appraised.



APPRAISING



The level of production and organization of the report are critical to convey the details of the appraisal assignment. Proper documentation that details the scope of work, the purpose of the appraisal, the user, and potential third parties who may rely on the appraisal, along with appraisal method, effective date, and value conclusions, are all parts of a professional valuation appraisal.

Key Takeaways

- Vintage and period jewelry items captivate appraisers due to their distinct characteristics and historical significance. However, appraising these items involves research, specific details, and complexities that differ from modern pieces, making expertise in this area both exciting and demanding.
- Each appraisal must clearly define its purpose and identify the primary user and any authorized third parties (e.g., insurance companies). Detailed documentation ensures that the appraisal meets the client's needs, whether for future generations, insurance coverage, or other purposes.
- Appraisers meticulously inspect items to authenticate them, using indicators such as diamond cuts, production details, and assay marks. These marks can help determine the item's origin, production date, and purity of metals, which are critical for accurate valuation.
- Valuing vintage items involves extensive market research, including the analysis of similar items sold at auctions and retail. Appraisers gather data on comparable pieces to determine a realistic replacement value, adjusting for the unique attributes of the item being appraised rather than relying on average values.



A TIMELY SELF-AUDIT

JOEL HASSLER, CGA, VON HASLE JEWELERS

Recently, I had a conversation with a fellow Certified Gemologist Appraiser (CGA) regarding an old appraisal I was asked to “update” for the client. As we’ve discussed in past articles, one appraiser cannot “update” another appraiser’s work. Since an appraisal is an opinion of value, how could I possibly update their opinion? In this case, the other CGA and I disagreed with the previous clarity grade on the diamond, so not only would a value conclusion be different, but the grading also was different.

I further commented that even though the original appraiser was a CGA as well, the report was very deficient when it came to adhering to the American Gem Society (AGS) minimum appraisal standards. If my grading and value were called into question, it wouldn’t be hard for the client to draw their own conclusions when they compared the original single-page report and my 14-page document that detailed my process and conclusions.

My CGA acquaintance said, “Well, this looks like a very good description. What doesn’t meet the standards?” I explained that while the description itself was generally solid, the deficiencies were in the supporting documentation—but more precisely in the lack of supporting documentation where it was required. This is a common mistake made when a report is prepared by someone without appraisal training. They often have good descriptions but fail to produce a reliable report with the important information required in the appraisal world at large.

I explained an exercise I’ve recommended to CGA students over the past few years: conducting a self-audit or review of their appraisal reports against AGS minimum appraisal standards. Here’s how it works:

1. Print the “American Gem Society Minimum Appraisal and Report Guidelines.”
2. Print a current appraisal report that you have completed.
3. Beginning with the lettered bullet points under the section titled “Professional Practices,” then “Reports” and “Appraisal and Report Values,” read each statement, and see if your report or appraisal process meets that standard. If it does, cross off the letter. If it doesn’t, circle the letter for later.
4. Once you’ve gone through all the sections, letter by letter, go back through and start correcting each of the points that you circled where there was a deficiency.

These corrections might need to be made in your appraisal preparation software, incorporated into your cover letter, or by making a change to your base systems such as take-in, storage, and more.

We often become complacent in our ways, and while not intentional, the quality of our work may have slipped. Maybe a new point of sale system, new appraisal software program, new location, or something else has changed since you earned your CGA, and a detail slipped through the cracks. This simple exercise is a great way to get back on track and ensure you’re delivering on the education and consumer protection parts of the AGS mission.



Key Takeaways

- An appraisal represents a unique opinion of value. One appraiser cannot modify another's valuation or grading, as each appraisal is inherently subjective and based on the appraiser's expertise and judgment.
- Compliance with the American Gem Society (AGS) Minimum Appraisal and Report Guidelines is essential. Deficiencies in adhering to these standards, especially in supporting documentation, can undermine the credibility and reliability of an appraisal report.
- Individuals with formal appraisal training may provide good descriptions but often fail to produce comprehensive and reliable reports. The lack of necessary supporting documentation is a frequent shortfall that compromises the report's integrity.
- Conducting a self-audit using the AGS guidelines is a recommended practice. Changes in systems, software, or business processes can lead to overlooked details, and a structured self-audit ensures that appraisers consistently meet educational and consumer protection standards set by the AGS. This involves systematically reviewing appraisal reports against specific standards to identify and rectify any deficiencies, ensuring continuous improvement and compliance.



KEY INTAKE QUESTIONS THAT CAN STREAMLINE THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

ANDREA VENN, PH.D., CGA, JEA, AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

This refresher on key information to gather during the take-in stage of the appraisal process is a chance to review and refine your procedures and includes brief definitions, appraisal questions, and explanations to share with staff who handle the take-in process for assignments on your behalf. Included is a list of questions for clients to ask their insurance companies to clarify coverage requirements and the type of appraisal documents that they need. The goal is to streamline the appraisal process and minimize the need for follow-up.

Before discussing appraisal services, it is important to establish who the actual client is and identify the correct person to speak with, especially when dealing with legal or estate situations. Is this individual the personal representative of the estate? Should you be speaking with the attorney in addition to the client? It is important to make sure all the details of the assignment are properly and clearly communicated.

Appraisal services should have their own contract or service agreement that clearly details the scope of work of the assignment, interested parties, and any additional details to help protect the client and the appraiser. A “conflict of interest” statement can also help you ensure you are not prohibited from performing the appraisal. If you sold, exchanged, gave, or acted as an agent for the client concerning the item or items involved, you would not be considered a disinterested and qualified appraiser for a document they could use in a tax return.

Is the appraisal needed for insurance replacement, estate, resale, donation, or other purposes? The purpose of the appraisal needs to be clearly stated in the appraisal, and it affects the types of values researched to complete the assignment. In most cases, if the appraisal is for anything other than determining a replacement value for securing insurance coverage, it's best to have the appraiser speak directly with the client before entering into any agreement or performing any services on the item.

Below are brief definitions of appraisal types that can help intake staff understand the purpose of the client's appraisal:

- **Insurance appraisals:** Require values to establish coverage to replace an item. This can include replacement with a new item, a pre-owned item in like or similar condition, or a payout value.
- **Estate appraisals:** Establish values for the purpose of distribution and estate taxes.
- **Resale appraisals:** Determine the value or values an item could potentially sell for in one or more markets at that time.
- **Donation appraisals:** Serve to document a value for a donation to approved charitable organizations for tax purposes.

For insurance appraisals, it can be beneficial for clients to ask their insurance company the following questions. If possible, questions like these could be listed on your website, and they could be sent to clients who set up an appointment for appraisal services.

1. What are the insurance company's requirements for coverage?
 - Some security measures may be required or reduce the cost of coverage.



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2. What type of coverage do they offer for jewelry as part of the client's homeowner's or renter's insurance policy?
3. Does the client have or need a separate jewelry rider policy to have enough coverage for their jewelry items?
 - It's important to consider that any claims related to their jewelry could affect their homeowner's or renter's insurance policy terms.
4. Will the policy cover repairs, replacement, cash equivalent value, or a combination of these options?
5. In the case of replacement, would the policy coverage ensure that the item is replaced with the same brand and jewelry piece if available?
6. If the item is no longer available, would the replacement be an item of "like" quality and condition, "similar" quality and condition, or a custom reproduction?
 - "Like" is a more exact match than what is required for "similar" items.

This is important if the piece is vintage or pre-owned. There can be a significant difference between the value of a "like" or "similar" used-condition item and a value based on a custom reproduction.

7. For earrings, does the policy cover replacing or remaking a single earring, or replacing the pair?
 - If the client is sentimentally attached to the remaining earring, it can be more expensive to purchase a single matching earring or make an exact match than it would be to purchase a new pair of earrings.

Once the client collects this information from their insurance company, it can be directly referenced in the appraisal assignment and report. It will ensure that the appraiser researches the correct type of values and makes the appraisal process more efficient.

If other staff members are completing the appraisal take-in process, provide the following information requirements and any additional information that you would like to collect for appraisal take-in to reduce the need to contact the client after they leave. The staff should also inform the client that the appraiser might contact them for additional information during the appraisal process.

Confirm the client's name, full address, phone number, and email address, and how they would like their name and contact information to be recorded on the document. This includes any formal titles, suffixes, or post-nominals, which can be quite important for separating family members with inherited names.

Determine whether the client can provide any original purchase documentation, associated lab reports, or previous appraisals. These documents often provide exact weights for set gemstones, brand or manufacturer information, original purchase prices, or potential provenance. This information can substantially affect the values of the items in the appraisal.

Clarify if the client needs or wants to add gemstone identification testing or plotting services. If not included in the standard parameters of the appraisal, these can be valuable additions for larger or more unusual gemstones and jewelry items.

If the appraiser is taking in an advanced assignment, the following questions could prove relevant and necessary to create the report:

1. Will the client need the appraisal for a legal court case? If so, what is the relevant court and the pertinent requirements for the specific case?
 - City, county, state, and federal cases often have different requirements for appraisal or other valuation documents. It is important to address the requirements of the relevant court and case type. Any fees for potential court appearances need to be established separately from the appraisal report price.
2. If the client wants value options for a resale appraisal, what is their potential timeline and the extent of options they would like to explore?
 - Values can vary widely depending on where an item is sold. There is also the consideration of how quickly the client would like to sell an item and any fees associated with certain venues, like auction houses, if that is an appropriate market.

These questions provide a strong starting point for gathering the information needed at the outset of the appraisal process. They help ensure clarity between you and the client on the type of appraisal and scope of work that best fits their intended purpose.



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Key Takeaways

- Collecting detailed client information, including contact details, will help ensure accuracy. Requesting supporting documents—such as purchase receipts, lab reports, or previous appraisals—will improve valuation accuracy and efficiency.
- Clarifying the appraisal's purpose—whether for insurance, estate planning, resale, donation, or legal matters—will shape the scope of work and research approach. For legal appraisals, identifying the court jurisdiction and noting key deadlines will be essential.
- Have clients inquire about the insurance company's coverage requirements, policy types, and whether a separate jewelry rider is needed for adequate coverage. It is important for them to be informed about what the policy covers (repairs, replacement, cash equivalent) and the extent of coverage for items like replacing a single earring or replacing the pair to ensure comprehensive protection.



MARKETING YOUR APPRAISAL SERVICES

JOEL HASSLER, CGA, VON HASLE JEWELERS

As a Certified Gemologist® Appraiser (CGA), you have put significant time and energy into earning that title. Currently, there are only 265 CGAs in the country. That is something to brag about! Be careful not to embellish it, though. You should maintain a current curriculum vitae (CV) that includes relevant training, jewelry and appraisal-specific, that adds to your professionalism as an appraiser. This can include classes at Converge, Conclave, or other industry events, AGS PRO, your annual recertification exam as a CGA, and other appraisal-related training or experiences. Including your coursework on model railroad track layout, while interesting, is not relevant to your work as a jewelry appraiser.

Jewelers often consider appraisal services an unavoidable or unappealing task that takes time away from other aspects of their business. With a different point of view and purposeful planning, appraisals can be a great vehicle for increasing revenue, not just from the income generated by the appraisal report, but with ancillary services like polishing and refinishing. During pre-appraisal inspections, a trained examiner can evaluate the piece and determine if it needs repairs or additional work. Having an associate who can assist with these steps can maximize the use of your time. The new AGS Jewelry Evaluation Advisor™ program can bring a new or part-time staff member up to speed on the process. If the jewelry does not need repairs, there could be additional revenue streams from polishing and refinishing services.

The professional appraisal services offered by a CGA, and not just a jeweler who has been writing appraisals, can raise your store's reputation. No appraisal education program assumes time on the job is equivalent to proper training, and the IRS does not accept that as part of their definition of a qualified appraiser. When the client is present, do not allow them to rush you or control the process. The more attention you pay to them and their pieces, and making the process as seamless as possible, allows you to justify the fees you charge. They will absolutely be able to find a less-qualified jeweler to do a single-page rush appraisal that lacks detail and substance. The more detailed the report, the more detailed the replacement will be, and the better protected your customer will be.

The simplest and most inexpensive ways to increase your appraisal revenue are to add in-store signage and make it part of your repair take-in procedure as an add-on service. Increased communication with existing customers is the least expensive method, and it will generate the best results. Why? They already trust you, and a newly cleaned and repaired piece is ideal for a new or updated appraisal.

When using traditional marketing methods to reach the public, the key is to emphasize why they should choose you over someone else. People seeking appraisals already understand the necessity of the service—they do not need to be convinced it is important. In many cases, jewelry appraisals are a need, not a luxury. Whether it is for scheduled insurance coverage or settling an estate, an appraisal is often a required step.

In addition to broad marketing efforts, targeted outreach to professionals such as insurance agents, estate planning attorneys, and family law attorneys can be highly effective. Be sure the message highlights your expertise, experience, and any specialized training relevant to their clients' needs. Focus on how professional appraisal services can protect their clients' interests—while also enhancing the trust and reputation those professionals have with the people they serve.

With this more targeted approach, have a sample or demo appraisal available to show clients. Consider offering a complimentary or discounted appraisal to someone at the firm so they can see the entire process and better explain to their clients what you offer and what to expect when they visit.



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Increasing your marketing message to prospective clients has the added benefit of bringing people who already like jewelry into your store. It can often give an insight into the quality of the pieces sold by your competitors.

Direct, intentionally planned, and relevant marketing messages about your professional appraisal services, consistently and in sync with your overall marketing message, can show an almost exponential increase in revenue.

Key Takeaways

- Emphasize the exclusivity of being a CGA, as there are limited professionals with this designation in the country. Maintain a current CV that showcases relevant training and certifications specific to jewelry and appraisal, such as courses from Converge, Conclave, or other industry events.
- Position appraisal services not just as a necessary task but as an opportunity to uncover additional work, such as repairs or refinishing. Implement pre-appraisal inspections to identify and address any issues, potentially increasing overall revenue, and utilize programs like the AGS Jewelry Evaluation Advisor™ to train staff, enabling efficient handling of appraisals and maximizing time and resources.
- Offer professional appraisal services performed by a CGA to differentiate your store from those relying solely on experienced jewelers without formal appraisal training. Provide detailed and thorough appraisal reports to justify your fees and protect your customers' interests, with a seamless and attentive appraisal process to build trust and demonstrate your expertise.
- Utilize low-cost strategies to enhance visibility and convenience of appraisal services. To drive additional revenue with minimal investment, add in-store signage promoting appraisal services, incorporate the services as add-ons, and mention them to existing customers after cleaning or repairs.
- Emphasize necessity and your expertise when marketing your professional appraisal services. Reach out to insurance agents, estate planning attorneys, family law attorneys, and other professionals whose clients can benefit from your services.



THE BENEFITS OF PERSONAL INSPECTIONS AND COMPREHENSIVE REPORTING

JOEL HASSLER, CGA, VON HASLE JEWELERS

“To see, or not to see...”

One of the most common questions I’m asked, both by my guests and by other appraisers and jewelers, concerns inspections or seeing the piece of jewelry before doing an appraisal, particularly when it comes to updating a previous appraisal.

There are many different reasons one would need an appraisal. We will focus on documents used to secure insurance, which are most of the appraisals done by AGS retailers.

Neither the “AGS Minimum Appraisal and Report Guidelines” nor the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) require a physical examination or inspection of the item. The AGS standards are silent on the topic; however, USPAP Advisory Opinion 2 states that:

“An inspection is not required by USPAP, but one is often conducted. While an inspection is not required, appraisal reports for real and personal property must contain a signed certification that clearly states whether the appraiser has or has not personally inspected the subject property.”

If you don’t already include a full certification statement, such as described in USPAP, you should state somewhere in your report whether you personally inspected the items listed.

Some of the clear benefits of personally inspecting the jewelry are:

- Confirming that the item exists
- Assessing the current condition of the jewelry, which may differ from previous appraisals
- Potentially improving the description of the quality characteristics of the piece

I have already seen some insurance companies decline to insure items that were not personally inspected by the appraiser. A common type of insurance fraud is adding something to an insurance policy after a loss or damage occurrence and then filing a claim at a later date.

Technology is a factor, and it’s both good and bad. We continue to see an increase in the technologies to virtually inspect and verify the existence and condition of items. However, we’re also seeing some amazing things with AI that look quite real and could cause confusion and misrepresentation of items, whether it is editing warranty cards, enhancing photographs and videos, or even “creating” new pieces out of thin air. There’s no substitute for a proper, hands-on thorough inspection of jewelry pieces.

The level of “inspection” is also not always clear. How detailed is your description of the item? How many of the value characteristics are in your report? One of the most common elements missing, but required by the AGS minimum standards, is the cut quality. The standards state:

“Avoid authoring or giving a report on any gem whose value is dependent upon identification of the cutting quality without indicating cutting quality in the report.”



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The cut of a diamond (larger diamonds in particular) has an enormous effect on the value of the diamond, so a one-carat diamond should be assessed on more than carat weight, color, and clarity.

So, while not required, the most professional and certainly “best practice” when doing an appraisal is to always personally inspect the items and provide sufficient information to accurately value and identify them.

Key Takeaways

- Neither the “AGS Minimum Appraisal and Report Guidelines” nor the USPAP require a physical examination of jewelry for appraisals. However, personally inspecting the item offers significant advantages, such as confirming its existence, assessing its current condition, and enhancing the accuracy of its description.
- Appraisal reports must include a signed certification indicating whether the appraiser has personally inspected the jewelry. This compliance with USPAP Advisory Opinion 2 ensures transparency and adherence to professional standards, even if a physical inspection isn’t performed.
- Conducting a hands-on evaluation can reveal discrepancies from previous appraisals, provide a more detailed description of the item’s quality characteristics, and potentially increase the accuracy and credibility of the appraisal.
- While technological advancements like virtual inspections and AI tools facilitate the appraisal process, they also pose risks such as the potential for misrepresentation or fraud. Enhanced tools can edit or create misleading information, emphasizing the irreplaceable value of thorough, in-person inspections.
- Detailed descriptions in appraisal reports are crucial, especially regarding characteristics like the cut quality of diamonds, which significantly impact their value. Adhering to AGS standards by including all relevant value characteristics beyond just carat weight, color, and clarity ensures a more accurate and professional appraisal.

