

The following is an excerpt from a presentation made at AEC + 12 Gems and Jewellery Presidents' Summit in Shanghai in November by Anne Carroll Marshall, (BA, FGA, DGA, FGAHK, AGA Regional Head (Asia) of Gem-A.

Are Diamonds Forever?

I am hearing that question increasingly often now. It touches on the question of whether synthetic diamonds could take over from natural diamonds in the jewellery sector, but it is more than that. It's a question that goes beyond gemmology, to sociology. To a question of whether the industry that we are sending our students out to work in actually remains relevant to its clients today.

My generation grew up with that De Beers slogan A diamond is forever. But we are not the main consumers of jewellery now. Millennials and Generation Z are today's and tomorrow's clients and they are totally – really, totally different from their parents and grandparents. And that is the major issue facing the jewellery industry now and the reason so many people are beginning to ask if diamonds - that icon of the jewellery industry - really are forever.

Millennials and coming up fast, Generation Z, are children of the Internet, of globalisation. They still click on gorgeous jewellery images and save them to their Pinterest or Instagram accounts. But do they buy? Maybe not. They may forgo the engagement ring and go on the trip of a lifetime instead. If they buy jewellery it must be very special to them, it needs to touch their soul. They want full answers to the "What is it question"?

Millennials practically mastered computers before they were out of their cribs and Generation Z are even more advanced! So they go to U-Tube, Instagram, Pinterest for inspiration and when they buy, they go online again and research their product thoroughly before they walk into a shop. Baie Baidu, Wikipedia, Blue Nile, - they will check them all out. So, if they ask a sales assistant for information and the sales assistant can't give it - perhaps even knows less than the customer - they will walk out of that shop and never go back.

Millennials and Gen. Z are strongly aware of their own wants and needs but ethical concerns are increasingly

important to them. They ask retailers about blood diamonds and fair trade. In America, 72% of millennials are willing to pay more for ethically sourced and manufactured products.

In the past most buyers didn't expect to understand the product and quite often the person making the sale didn't either. So now, when buyers do look for authenticity of product and design and want a story that they feel has meaning for them personally. Knowledge becomes a vital component of every piece of jewellery made and sold.

So we are not so far removed from where we were back at the beginning of the 20th century. But there have been so many developments since then. Now education really needs to extend right along the pipeline.

The whole industry is of course increasingly aware of this need and De Beers, The Diamond Producers Association - most of the big players, are not only advocating education within their companies, but also offering some basic education themselves. But we are going to have to do it properly. Both trade and education bodies are going to need to invest resources into developing courses that combine the latest technology, and research to cover all the key essentials and skill-sets within the industry today.

At a seminar on Vocational Education in the jewellery field at the Hong Kong show in March last year, one of the speakers pointed out that although there were now many providers in the field of gem education, not one of them covered all the



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aspects of the trade. He was right.

We gemmologists come from many different disciplines and use our skills in many different parts of the trade. Not every graduate wants to specialise in gem testing, or in developing new instruments or protocols to catch the fakers. So, as well as teaching the core basics of gemmology, we need to be able to offer targeted training in the various aspects that are critical to the industry today such as; geology, mining, supply chain, cutting, physics, technology, advanced instruments, synthetics, treatments, ethics, history, valuation, marketing and so much more.

Clearly no one provider can have sufficient expertise in all of these areas. But the expertise is out there. Gem-A is in a privileged position here, due to our strong network of accredited training centres globally. It makes sense therefore to move towards a modular approach, such as most universities use now and to work in collaboration with appropriate and accredited partners so that this vast wealth of knowledge can be harnessed. In doing so we can create a whole web of offerings that will meet the educational needs of the industry.

What should the teaching look like? We can take a lesson from the diamond

itself. Thousands of years ago ruby was the king of gems. While diamonds were very precious, they weren't really considered that beautiful before jewellers learned how to facet them to release their true fire. Diamond's evolution to collector's item to king of gems came from combining the cutter's practical experience with the physicist's and mathematician's theory. In the same way, gemmological education needs to combine solid theoretical knowledge with a strong emphasis on practical, hands-on experience, relevant to the needs of the particular student to provide a holistic approach to learning.

Technology offers tremendous scope to engage and reach out to increasingly wider groups. It appeals to the mind-set of today's students. It can be harnessed to improve not only online and distance learning, but also to complement and supplement more traditional classroom teaching.

Millennials no longer believe that an engagement ring means "And they lived happily ever after" - end of story. They recognise that "Forever" like a real gem diamond, is rare. The gift of a love diamond isn't the end, but a beginning. Gem education is the same.

Getting a Diploma in Gemmology or Diamond is just the beginning. Every gemmologist needs to keep up to date with the rapid changes and developments within the industry. It is up to us to make sure that their gem education can also be on going and accessible.

Gem-A introduced Gem Education to help the trade survive the introduction of synthetics. In 2019 our clients may prefer a handbag to an earring. Can gem education, solid product knowledge and a new attitude of the industry to the consumer help to make sure we that diamonds really are forever - my answer is a resounding "Yes". Our clients want the whole story from us - the wonder and the science. And that is what gem education is all about. Providing the perfect foundation for the story our millennial clients want to hear.