



In the face of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the jewellery industry's communal sense of responsibility is of paramount importance

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I write these words from my home in Milan, to which the movement of my family is now restricted, according to new government regulations meant to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Fortunately, we are all in good health.

Messages of encouragement and good wishes have been flowing in from many of you, and they are much appreciated. The spirit of community and mutual support have always been a feature of the jewellery industry, and these are qualities that are especially valued in times like these.

There is no denying that the COVID-19 coronavirus is impacting our industry and our members. Northern Italy, which represents the heart of the national sector and the jewellery design brain trust of the world, is in virtual shut down, as is China, our second largest market. International travel, which for many of us is the life blood of our business, has been curtailed or suspended, trade shows across the globe have been postponed or canceled, and factories, buying offices, wholesalers and retailers are in standby mode.

At this stage it is very difficult to predict how long this state of virtual suspension will continue. What is certain, however, is that it is temporary. Economies need to function, and human ingenuity will always find ways to adapt to changing conditions.

But it is important to begin considering what needs to be done so that we are able to traverse the current crisis intact as possible, both as an industry and as an association, such as CIBJO.

Inevitably, the first priority must be dealing with the health crisis, and to the greatest degree possible protecting the wellbeing of our families, employees and their dependents.

Courageous decisions have already been taken, by trade shows and conference organizers for example, who selected to spare the prospective participants in their events the dilemma of whether to attend or not. A great deal remains unknown about the real risk posed by the COVID-19 coronavirus, but in the meantime, it is preferable to err on the side of safety.

At the same time, within the framework of the restrictions being imposed to prevent the spread of the virus, we must begin using the tools at our disposal to allow the motor of our business to continue turning. Fortunately, more than during any other period in human history, we have a wealth of instruments in our toolkit.

Travel and face-to-face interactions are preferable, but in their absence teleconferencing, video-chatting, Facebook, Whatsapp and Skype are all viable alternatives. Many employees can work from home and remain productive. Managers can monitor business long distance, and products can be displayed and transactions completed online. The technology is available, and many are already using it.

But there is a caveat. Many of the technology-based solutions for managing a business remotely come with a cost that will be less easily carried by small and medium-sized enterprises. Especially at a time like this, there should be an industry-wide sense of awareness that colleagues who are more vulnerable to the suspension of regular trading norms should be provided a fair opportunity to catch up and compete.

The stakes are extremely high. We deal in luxury products, but our chain of supply supports communities and sometimes entire countries in some of the world's most developmentally challenged areas. It is incumbent upon us to put our heads together and chart a way forward for the industry through the uncertainty that the COVID-19 coronavirus has created. It is during times like this that the communal spirit of our industry and the mettle of our members will be truly tried and tested.

In meantime, I send my best wishes to all of you from the determined and life-loving city of Milan. Let us face the challenges that confront us together, optimistic about the future.

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