

## COVER STORY

# GJEPC's IIJS Virtual Sparks A Digital Revolution

"If you build it, they will come," goes the famous line from the classic movie *Field of Dreams* (1989). But unlike a baseball stadium, simply developing a state-of-the-art virtual trade show platform was no guarantee that visitors would arrive. The Council realised this game-changing insight early on and made education one of the three key pillars of its virtual show strategy; the two others being meticulous planning and execution. And the visitors came – in their thousands. What's more, exhibitors are already reaping the benefits of their decision to join this virtual platform. The ensuing digital revolution is the product of a well-concerted countrywide joint effort led by the GJEPC, which showed remarkable agility in pivoting to a tech-driven strategy when the chips were down.

It all started with a pandemic. As life turned topsy-turvy due to the spread of the deadly Covid disease in March this year, the GJEPC wasted no time in brainstorming on the possibilities of continuing to do business as the world locked up and stayed socially distanced.

When the world slowly started gathering its wits, the GJEPC's first strategy was to work towards giving this highly leveraged industry a breather in terms of a relaxation of government regulations. Having achieved



IIJS Virtual Exhibitor Dewal Jewels, Bikaner

this objective, the Council then moved on to protecting the back end by providing financial aid to thousands of contract workers.

GJEPC Chairman Colin Shah said, "As world markets like China and the US began opening up and adapting to the new normal, the Council worked with the State and Central Governments to begin exports again. Gems and jewellery was one of the first industries in Maharashtra to be given permission to reopen with 10% staff.

"The digital revolution brought

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**IIJS Virtual Exhibitor Sanghi Jewellers Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad**

on by IIJS Virtual isn't just a product of circumstance. IIJS Virtual was born out of the pressing need to bring momentum and a positive sentiment to the industry. I'm proud to be leading the GJEPC during what I hope will be one of the most productive and exciting phases for our industry."

### The Genesis of IIJS Virtual

At first, holding a physical IIJS show was the top priority -- Plan A, if you will. But as the weeks passed by and it became clear that a physical show would be impossible (the Bombay Exhibition Centre, which hosts the IIJS, had been transformed into a quarantine facility in April), as was Plan B of holding the show in an alternative location, the Council then turned to Plan C - to take IIJS virtual.

Once the decision to hold IIJS Virtual had been finalised, a core team at the GJEPC, under the leadership of GJEPC Chairman Colin Shah, National Exhibitions Convener Shailesh Sangani, and Executive Director Sabyasachi Ray, laid the groundwork by visiting numerous virtual exhibitions of industries such as IT, Handicraft, Healthcare, Machinery, Apparel as well as Jewellery among others.

The team began exploring the world of digital possibilities and zeroed in on the agency best suited for delivering a virtual platform which was appropriate

for the gem and jewellery

GJEPC worked on building a 'transactional platform' and began with a Buyer-Seller Meet (BSM) for one of the most challenging of products -- diamonds.

**Sabyasachi Ray**  
GJEPC Executive Director

industry, especially recreating the physical IIJS experience in terms of being able to verify visitor credentials, displaying inventory, sharing documents, providing meeting rooms, making schedules, wish lists, etc. The IIJS Virtual architecture was built to incorporate these multiple complex elements all concealed under a simple, user-friendly interface.

Sabyasachi Ray informed, "Our research indicated that while there were several virtual jewellery shows happening around the world at the time, there were hardly any transactions being carried out on those online meeting platforms primarily meant for sharing thoughts and opinions. GJEPC worked on building a

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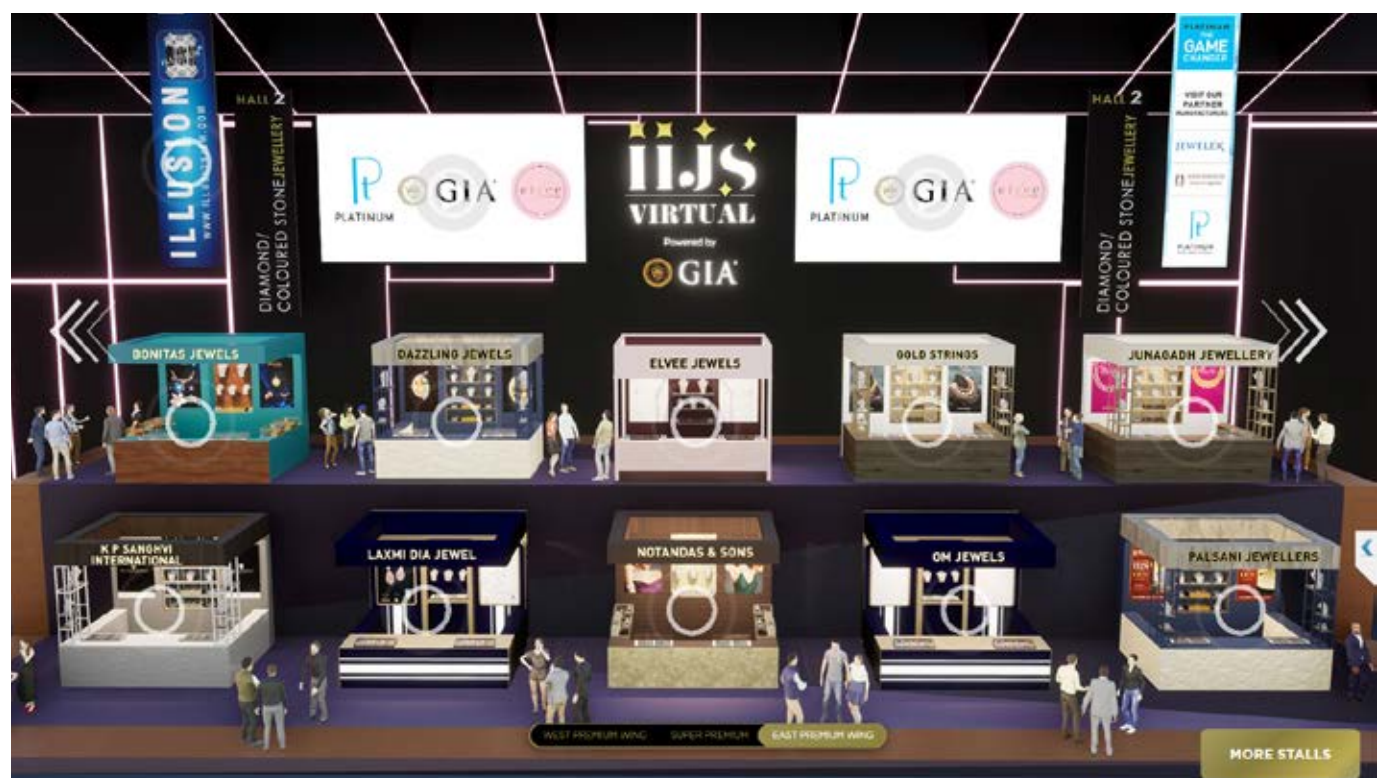
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'transactional platform' and began with a Buyer-Seller Meet (BSM) for one of the most challenging of products -- diamonds.

"This BSM platform was indigenously built and included cutting-edge video technology available only to a few others in the world. The first BSM for diamonds got a tremendous response, and even registered a single transaction worth \$300,000. This gave GJEPC the confidence to move forward, and we set forth to build an open-ended format where thousands could transact business simultaneously."

### The Architecture of IIJS Virtual

An intelligent system was developed with the ability to ramp up bandwidth and server capacity based on user traffic for ensuring a lag-free video experience, as all buying and



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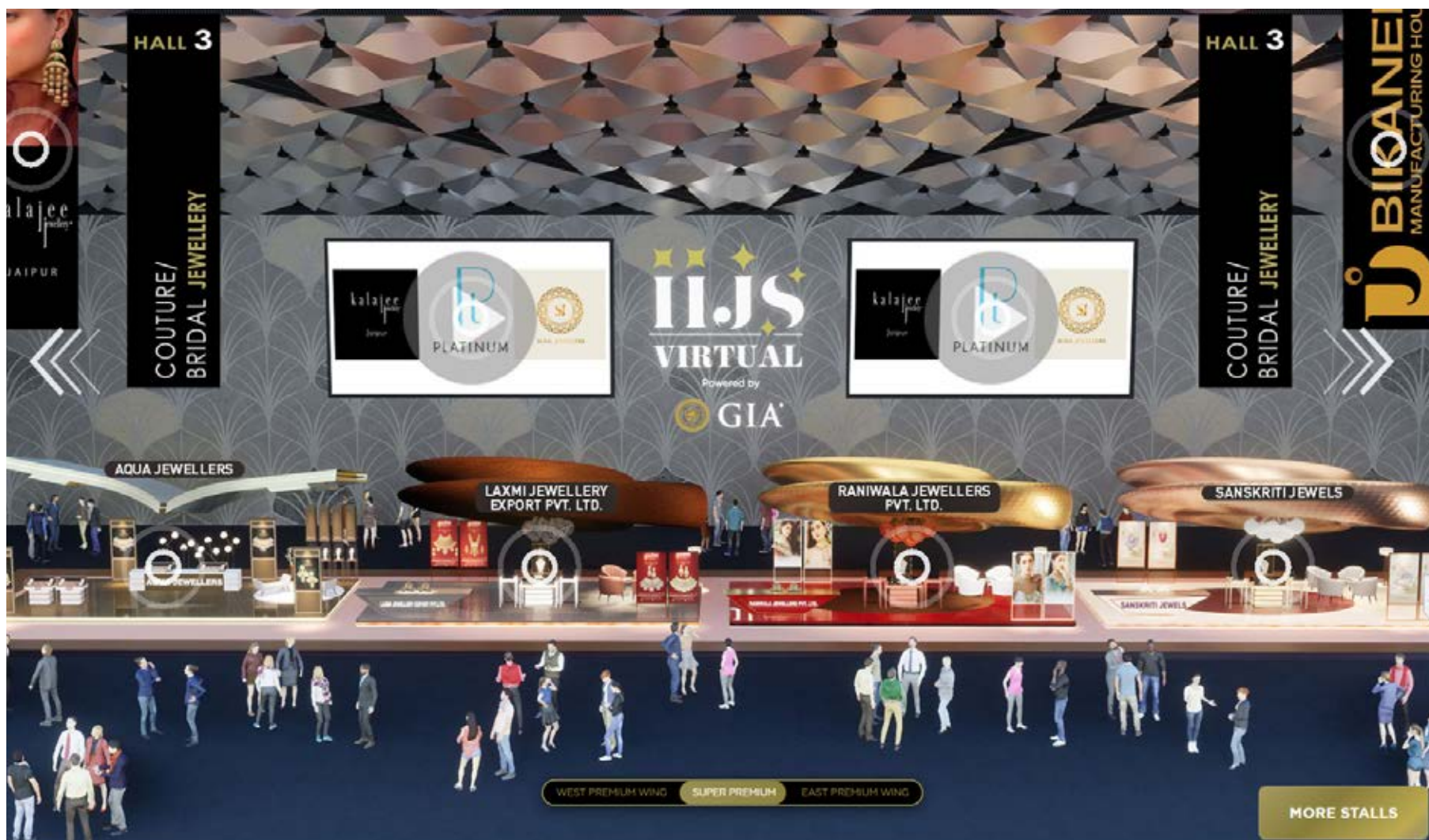
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## COVER STORY



selling would take place through high definition video calling and a smooth user experience was a top priority. The GJEPC hired the best IT professionals to scrutinise the system and analyse the technology used to develop the platform.

Sangani noted, "The biggest challenges in developing IIJS Virtual were finding the right partner, building the architecture based on our

bandwidth speed tests, monitoring exhibitor profile completion, and so on. Live demos, mock buying sessions, and trial runs were conducted to iron out any minor hiccups. Similar sessions were conducted to educate visitors on how to use the platform.

"We mapped the expectations of visitors and exhibitors. And the singular objective guiding the design of the Virtual show was to deliver a platform greater than the physical show experience," Ray said.

Having built the platform, the next challenge was how to ensure that a jewellery retailer in the remotest region of India could use it. Ray added, "We realised that we would have to train buyers how to conduct business on IIJS Virtual and serviced 8,000 visitors by assigning 60 people, each handling around 150 people on WhatsApp. In just 40 days, we conducted 40 road shows, tying up with different associations

for training sessions. We created modules and training videos and gradually the ramping up happened across India."

For visitor registration, the GJEPC turned to its ready, authenticated database of 40,000 IIJS visitors. To build the visitors' confidence in the IIJS Virtual platform, the GJEPC teams kept in touch with them through constant follow-ups via WhatsApp calls, emailers, social media and conducted tutorial meetings on Zoom. Local association heads were roped in to propagate the show to their members and similar online promotions were done for international visitors.

Around a week prior to the show, the IIJS Virtual platform was thrown open to visitors on 5th October. The Preview gave exhibitors an opportunity to study the visitors' requirements and be well-prepared with suitable inventory and to schedule meetings for the upcoming show.

Maintaining constant communication with exhibitors and visitors and educating them about the IIJS Virtual platform is a crucial aspect of the show's apparent and instant success.

"Meeting face-to-face at physical shows and expositions is very important and must happen at least once or twice a year, but virtual shows are going to be the future, purely because of the ease in doing business from the comfort of our own offices and homes," Sangani added.

Maintaining constant communication with exhibitors and visitors and educating them about the IIJS Virtual platform is a crucial aspect of the show's apparent and instant success.

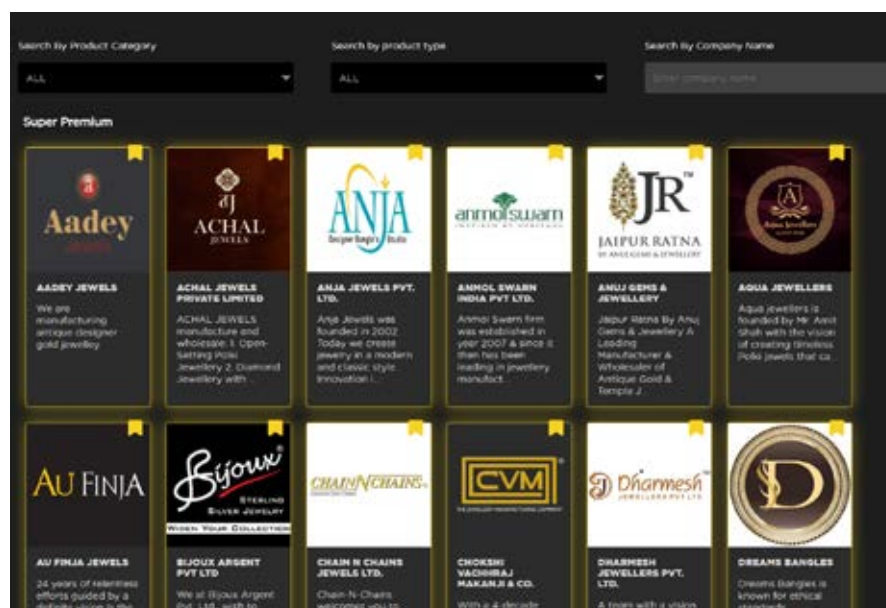
The herculean efforts put in by the GJEPC has led to the digital transformation of the Indian gem and jewellery industry. And the ready acceptance by exhibitors and visitors alike in embracing the new digital future shows the industry's willingness to adapt to new ways of doing business and collectively face the challenges head on and emerge successful.

Planning, execution and education are the three key cornerstones of the show's success

**Shailesh Sangani**  
GJEPC National Exhibitions Convener

unique requirements, and ensuring ease of navigation for the visitor. Planning, execution and education are the three key cornerstones of the show's success."

As the platform development progressed, the Council deployed its pan-India human resources towards tasks like educating 335 exhibitors on how to use the platform, uploading pictures, and even hand-held them through technical checks of video equipment and computer systems, internet





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# Gold Exhibitors Demand An IIJS Virtual Show Every Quarter!

**C**hange is always difficult to accept initially – and for a luxury segment like jewellery, which necessitates the “touch & feel” factor before buying, it made exhibitors apprehensive about the success of the show.

But health and safety protocols, slack in business, got many exhibitors on board for the IIJS Virtual. Many joined as they reposed faith in GJEPC's flagship show, which is a brand in itself.



Varakrupa Jewellers

The pandemic had suspended the industry in a moribund state, and everyone was keen to revitalise their business.

It's been two days into the show and the chorus is only rising – most exhibitors in the Traditional Gold segment have requested for four Virtual Shows in a year!

The semi-reluctant participants have overnight turned into die-hard loyalists of the Virtual format.

**Vineet Vasa, Partner, Lotus Jewellery Creation, Rajkot,** revealed that the Virtual show gave ‘more-than-expected results’. “We are glad to have got a good response and the super premium stall booking gave us an added advantage.” The company has received a number of queries for meetings and product viewing, of which 60% are its regular customers and 40% are new buyers. Hailing the visitor data that the



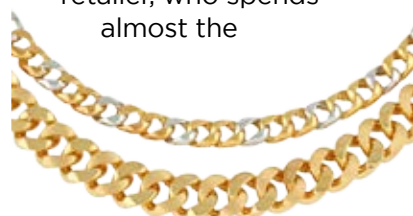
Lotus Jewellery Creation

Council's system captures daily for each exhibitor, Vasa notes, “During the physical shows, getting in touch with new buyers who leave behind their visiting cards in our booth is very difficult. In the Virtual set up, we have staff that contact them there and then and engage them for follow ups.”

The younger generation of family jewellery businesses are more techno savvy, explains Vasa, and they are not shy to connect with new vendors at the show.

The company has unveiled nine collections from Indo-Italian laser filigree work and CNC diamond-cutting beads to prêt collections like reversible jewellery, couple bands, jewellery for men, kids and more.

Is it difficult to convince buyers about the quality, finish and designs on camera? Vasa responds, “Not at all. The retailer, who spends almost the



Cuban Chains by Royal Chains.

entire day checking and selling jewellery, has a sharp eye for details. He or she can judge the quality in a second. He doesn't need more than 3D visual or a good photograph of the piece to make an informed decision.”

“The future of Virtual trade shows is bright,” predicts Vasa.

An overwhelmed **Varun Shah, Proprietor, Aadey Jewels, Ahmedabad,** reveals that it has been raining orders for them. “It's not possible to fulfil so many commitments for us,” he says, adding, “We have requests from almost 130 visitors!”

“The Virtual format is cost-effective and we can pay equal attention to all buyers – old and new alike.” Aadey specialises in 22-karat bridal jadtar jewellery and Shah notes that there is demand for lightweight and heavy sets. “I would request GJEPC to hold another Virtual show in January again – in fact, such shows should be held every quarter!”

**Anand Shah,** India's most recognised gold jewellery artist, reveals that business on the Virtual platform has been good. “Volumes are low, but retailers are buying new gold bridal sets with mother-of-pearl and glass. Sets weighing between 80 gm



Varakrupa Jewellers



and 125 gm are in demand. I'm happy that the IIJS Virtual show has set the buying season in motion. We have been getting queries from new buyers as well, but I'd rather cater to my regular clients for now. I would recommend a mix of Virtual and Physical shows.”

Lexus Set by Royal Chains

**Varakrupa Jewellers from Bangalore** has been participating in IIJS since the last three years. Banking on the brand IIJS, Varun P N, the owner

of Varakrupa said that they have lined up several meetings through the five-day show from buyers across India and Dubai. “The capturing of the visitor data by GJEPC is a significant feature of IIJS Virtual and it definitely helps medium-size manufacturing companies like us to expand our network.”

**Prakash Dhanak, Proprietor, Vijay Exports,** has been getting queries from regular clients, but he is happy that the slack season has come to an end. “We are seeing demand for lightweight jewellery infused with pastel shades of semi-precious gems from the millennials. We are hopeful of tapping more buyers during the show.”

**Manish Jain of Royal Chains, Mumbai,** says that IIJS Virtual was a much-required event, especially since the physical trade show could not be held due to the pandemic. We have been getting above-average response, and we are happy with the orders and queries. Cuban gold chains from 50gm to 100gm are in demand and Lexus Italian handmade sets between 50gm and 60gm are doing well for us.”



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## SPOTLIGHT

# ‘GJEPC made us realise that Coloured Gemstones can be sold digitally!’

IIJS Virtual has been an eye-opener for many in the coloured gemstone sector. Manufacturers believed that coloured gemstones need to be seen and touched prior to being bought. But IIJS Virtual has proved many wrong, and they are now accepting what they have not experienced till date.

Speaking about his experience at IIJS Virtual 2020 **Ankit Khandelwal from Shree Nath Gems**, said, “Coloured gemstones can be sold digitally. I think this would be the new normal. We did not know people would actually buy coloured gemstones online. This is one thing that GJEPC has taught us through IIJS Virtual.”

“Indian buyers are looking for ruby, emerald, sapphire, etc, but in different shapes and cuts - not the regular stuff.”

Khandelwal said, “Visitors are not looking to buy on their first visit, but they are checking out new suppliers. They are looking for new stuff. May be, they will not buy on the first day, but perhaps on the last day, or after the show gets over, We may convert them into our customers. As of now, I have 2 or 3 meetings per day. It’s great to get in touch with new customers.”

“The online experience is a new thing for both exhibitors and buyers. Visitors are adding products in their wish list and they are enquiring about it. I had three meetings on the first day, and buyers are evincing interest.”



Shree Nath Gems

And are they asking for certified stones?

“Certification is only needed for high-end stones. Indian

customers use regular gemstones starting from Rs. 100 per carat to Rs. 2000 per carat. It is the trust factor that comes into play in this range.”

Talking about whether the Virtual platform will work for the coloured gemstone sector, **Vaibhav Jain from Gems Park**, a retailer and wholesalers of emeralds, said, “It a new experience, so commenting on it would be premature. But given the conditions we are facing right now, this is the best GJEPC could do. I do not think there is any problem with the virtual shows. There is a huge scope to introduce innovative technology to showcase products “realistically”. This could be the future.”

Developing the platform for IIJS Virtual and adding the required features to make it more realistic is wonderful. GJEPC’s team has done an amazing job. The tutorials and videos provided by



Gems Park

GJEPC were very helpful. And specially the onsite team guided us at every step. If there was any problem, the team was quick to address it.”



Shree Nath Gems



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# Colour Me Beautiful!

Nidhi Garodia, the head designer and partner of Sanskriti, has come a long way. Winner of erstwhile Solitaire Design Awards, Nidhi started her journey into the designing world with a bang!

After marriage, Karan and Nidhi Garodia decided to steer clear of the regular diamond jewellery business and decided to infuse a rainbow of colours in their collections.

What stood in the brand's favour was the unexpected combination of colours Nidhi opts for in her creations. "When we entered the market a decade ago, Indian jewellery was all about diamonds and jadau, and plain gold segments. As much as I adore these jewellery categories, I felt the play of colours was missing; also, most gems used in the collections were calibrated or employed as centre stones," recalls Nidhi. "We are a nation who loves colour and I decided that coloured gemstones would be the heroes of my pieces. I can humbly say that coloured gemstones in a variety of combinations, especially in the couture category, were not so popular then. In one sense, I was one of the few who popularised it in the Indian market."

Frosty, pastel colours are set cheek-by-jowl with vibrant orange and blues in her jewellery. For IIJS Virtual, Nidhi unveils yet another collection of beguiling beauties.





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## BRAND WATCH

# Traditional Twist

Ancient jewellery crafts find a pride of place in the grand bridal suites unveiled in Bariki Jewellery. These tailormade trousseau treasures and party wear pendant necklaces, earrings and bangles are delightfully decorated with filigree, granulation and textures, and dotted with precious gemstones.



# Dramatic Silhouettes

A rainbow of colours adorn the captivating jewellery line by Tara Fine Jewels. A heady mix of corals, tanzanites, pearls, diamonds and more add a fashionable spin to the pretty collections. The collection of luxurious earrings, high-end necklaces and statement cuffs are nothing short of enchanting.



# Heritage Fare

The bridal collection crafted in 22-karat gold by Vasupati Jewellers is augmented by layers of gemstones, pearls and polkis. The line-up of slim and bib-like chokers look resplendent draped in delicious pastel shaded enamels. These are absolute bridal essentials to go for!




## BRAND WATCH



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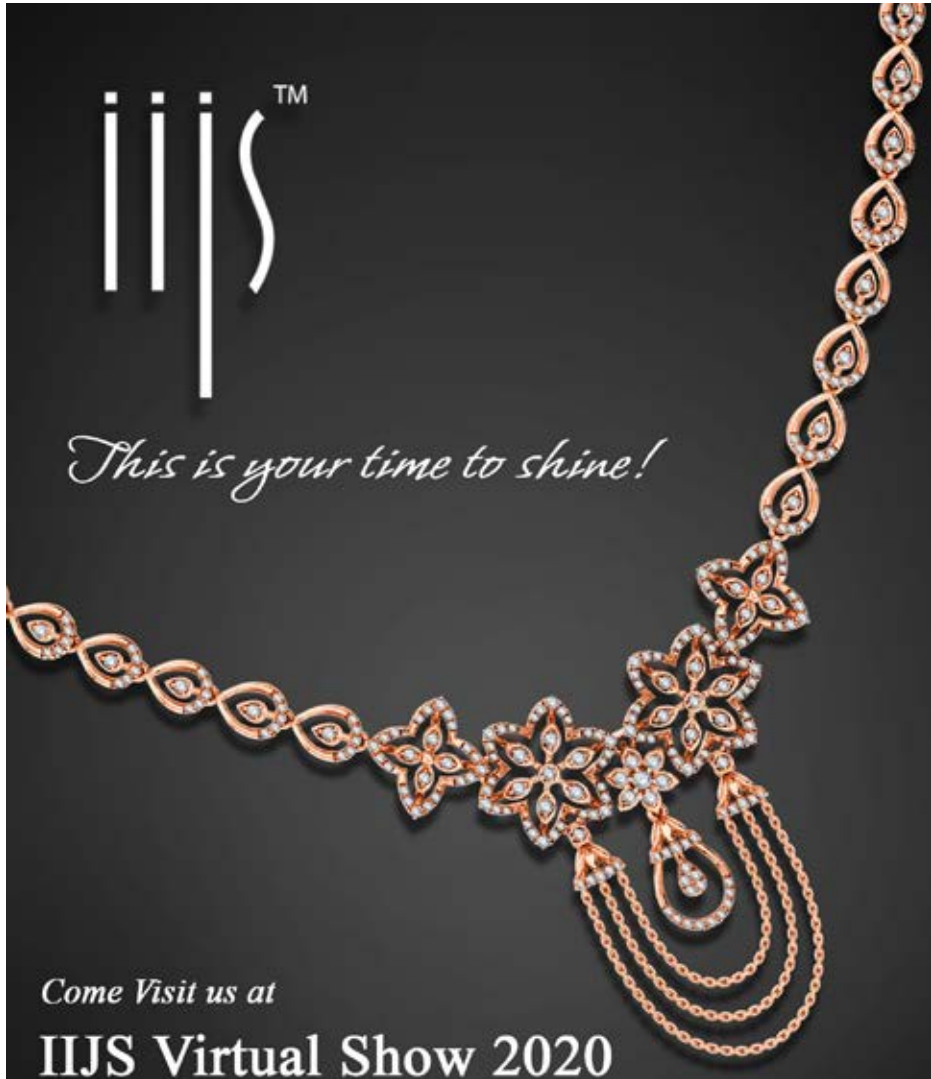
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## HIGHLIGHTS

# Gemstone Sales Hugely Being Driven by Astrology

That Indians love colour is an understatement. Coloured gemstones have been part of our bridal and couture wear. But sales of gemstones in our country are also driven by astrology, and people believe that these beautiful bounties of nature have a role to play in safeguarding the wearer from misfortunes and ill health among others. Worn as talismans or charms, rings or lockets, gemstones, especially in the times of Covid-19 are in demand.



**Vaibhav Dhadda**, owner and designer, Jaipur Jewels

We have been dealing in precious and semi-precious gemstones – and that is our primary business. Barring the usual big 3 gemstones, the younger generation is preferring tourmalines, aquamarines, tsavorites and more. Cameos are a big rage and we have a tie-up with a German company to mass produce them, and cater to orders punctually -- the USA, Germany and France are our main export markets. Fine quality cameos are hard to come by, and we have a range of inspirations from flora and fauna to fun elements like the compass, anchors, etc, for millennials.

Due to the pandemic, gemstone sales are being driven due to astrological reasons. In the domestic market, sale of yellow sapphires has suddenly zoomed, especially the unheated ones between 4 and 7 carats. Among

other gems that most Indian consumers are opting for are emeralds, cat's eye, and all the navratna stones. People need a spiritual 'cushion' to feel protected, and hence the rise in sales of gemstones. Since I also design jewellery and I do take bespoke orders. I am soon coming up with an interesting collection encrusted with gemstones. I am already seeing a lot of revenge buying happening and I am bullish about Q4. We will end the year on a good note.

### Digital is the way to go

Ever since I took over the reins of the company seven years ago, I sorely felt that that industry should transition from physical to digital mode. And I am thrilled that the GJEPC took the first step towards that direction. IJS Virtual has many pluses: one, we have already been



visited by 100 visitors, and some of them are big leads from retail chain stores across the country. We are actively following up with them and am confident that we may strike some good deals. Two, the world is e-selling small-ticket loose gemstones for a long time.

Why can't we fine gemstone dealers enter that segment? This not only inculcates a culture of transparency in terms of certifications, hallmarking and more, the payments, too, are quick via RTGS. GJEPC's step in going virtual is an applaud-worthy act!



**Mamta Punjabi** Lal Gems, Mumbai

Markets have been affected by the pandemic and lockdown, and most people are scared of leaving their houses and visiting stores. But I believe nothing lasts forever and am hoping markets will buck up a little more and little sooner now. Sales of gemstones have increased, especially for astrological purposes (touchwood!) and beads and tumblers are moving well. The pandemic has been

psychologically scarring people – fear of catching the dreaded virus, social distancing and losing loved ones. Work is moving slowly and most colour gemstone dealers are facing problems because of lack of karigars. We are hoping that with strict safety measures in place, we should be able to get them back to work. I am a part of this industry and I will participate in any event that GJEPC holds. It's the trust

that we, Lal Gems, have in the Council and their conduct. I am not expecting too much out of this virtual show as it's the first time for us and even the visitors, but certainly it's a huge learning curve for all of us. Whatever business we get, it will be a bonus for us."



## HIGHLIGHTS



### Prateek Kala, Kala Gems, Jaipur

Gemstones varying from pink tourmalines to aquamarines are the colours of the season! across the globe, according to Prateek Kala of Kala Gems, Jaipur. But the movement is slow to moderate. Virtual shows will be the next best option to tap new clients.



Everything is in moderate demand from pink tourmalines to aquamarines; however, emeralds are the evergreen gems. IIJS is an extremely popular show and its Virtual platform will help us reach a far bigger audience, as travel restrictions



are only partially lifted. Loose gemstones are selling on many other e-commerce platforms, so why not on IIJS Virtual? Sure, it will require building the trust and confidence of buyers, especially the new ones, but with the right product and prices, sales can be achieved. IIJS Virtual is a great initiative by GJEPC. A lot of international

clients rely on sourcing gemstones from the Indian market, but find it hard to connect with the right suppliers. This platform can be a solution to meet a wide range of suppliers in just a few clicks.





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