

## De Beers to Launch New Origin Program



**RAPAPORT...** De Beers is introducing a new program called “Code of Origin” that enables retail jewelers to sell the miner’s diamonds and tap into its branding. The initiative is part of a wider effort to raise the company’s profile among consumers.

The program, which is in the development stage and will be scaled up over the next year, is structured to give designers and retailers greater access to the De Beers name, company executives said Wednesday in an interview with *Rapaport News* at the JCK Luxury show.

Code of Origin is not a brand or a statement of quality, they stressed — aiming to distinguish it from Forevermark and De Beers Jewelers. Rather, it’s an initiative to put the De Beers name on all its diamonds and enable consumers to connect with its sense of mission, explained Stephen Lussier, the company’s vice president of consumer markets.

The company will work with sightholders to inscribe a unique code on the polished diamond that identifies it as a De Beers stone. It will also provide material to explain the values that De Beers expresses through its environmental and social programs. “How jewelers build on that is up to them,” Lussier said. “But it allows retailers to tell our story.”

In the initial stages, De Beers will focus on stones of 0.30 carats and larger while it gains

a better understanding of how to expand into smaller stones like melee, according to Lussier. It is working with select sightholders on the program during the pilot phase.

## **A sense of mission**

The plan is part of an overhaul of De Beers' branding that will put its name front and center in its messaging. The company recently renamed Forevermark as 'De Beers Forevermark' and has consolidated all marketing across its various brands into one unit.

The centralized branding and marketing will aim to connect consumers to De Beers' sense of mission, added chief brand officer David Prager. He cited research that found consumers didn't care about traceability or country and mine of origin as much as they do about what a brand or product stands for.

"Traceability on its own misses the point; it has to be part of a story, and that's what we're creating with our various initiatives," Prager said. "Consumers buy brands that reflect their values, but they will only connect with that sense of mission if we tell our story in an emotional way."

Much of that purpose centers around De Beers' Building Forever program, launched in November, which has set 12 environmental and social goals to achieve by 2030.

## **Okavango Eternal**

As part of that strategy, De Beers has announced a five-year partnership with National Geographic that aims to sustain Botswana's Okavango Delta, which has come under threat in recent years. The effects of climate change, deforestation, and commercial agriculture are putting the delta's water source at risk, the company explained.

The program, called 'Okavango Eternal,' will help protect Africa's endangered species, ensure water and food security for more than one million people, and develop livelihood opportunities for 10,000 individuals, De Beers said.

National Geographic will develop content about the program across its various platforms, tagged with De Beers branding. It will also produce a Botswana-based film about the Okavango Basin to raise awareness about the issues facing the ecosystem.

Through National Geographic, De Beers is hoping consumers will associate its brand with the environmental and social work the company and the diamond industry are doing, Lussier stressed.

"The focus is around raising our profile and awareness about our social purpose," he added. And it can best achieve that through a centralized De Beers branding effort, rather than separate campaigns among its various brands and business units.

## Holiday marketing

The move is a new stage in the company's evolution from being an industry custodian, responsible for category diamond-industry marketing, to being a brand-driven entity. That shift began with the rollout of the Forevermark retail program in 2008.

The latest transition will come together in De Beers' fourth-quarter marketing campaign, which is currently under development and will be rolled out in early November. The campaign will aim to generate demand for De Beers, whether it be for Forevermark, De Beers Jewelers, or Code of Origin, showcasing the positive impact its diamonds have, Lussier stressed.

"It will mark the first time since the late '90s that we will run a campaign that does not drive our separate individual brands," Prager noted. "We're now driving a desire for all our offerings by creating desire for De Beers."

*Correction, August 26, 2021: The Code of Origin program will focus on 0.30-carat diamonds and larger, and not as stated in an earlier version of this article.*

*Image: Elephants in the Okavango Delta, Botswana, early in the morning. (Chris Boyes/National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project)*