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## **Business counts the cost as gangs rip out their computers**

### **Crime**

#### **By Stuart Graham**

SYNDICATES are stealing millions of rands worth of computers from top SA companies. Superintendent Lungelo Dlamini, a Johannesburg police spokesman, says theft of computers from businesses and schools has become a major problem. He says that, in most of the cases, the same modus operandi is being used. The areas worst affected are the West Rand, Johannesburg, the East Rand, Pretoria and the North Rand. To date, 46 people have been arrested for stealing computers from businesses.

In the most recent cases, gangs of armed robbers held up security guards and night staff last week at timeshare company RCI's headquarters in Sunninghill and stockbroker SG Securities' offices in Parktown.

RCI lost more than R1.3-million worth of equipment and SG Securities lost 70 computers. However, the real cost to both firms has been inconvenience to customers and a loss of business. "By Tuesday we at least got our warrants and equity trading up, but we have lost lots of business because we could not do multiple orders," says David Shapiro, managing director of SG Securities. The robbers took only computer hard drives and no screens or printers. They also left behind SG's servers, but stole an INet-Bridge server, which has caused some inconvenience. Business at SG should be back to normal soon. RCI says it is impossible to calculate the actual loss in revenue to the organisation, because the company's hi-tech call centre manages more than 8 000 inquiries a day. August is one of RCI's busiest months. Ivor Clucas, RCI SA's managing director, appealed to the club's 200 000 members to be patient while systems are restored. "High-need clients with immediate travel plans will be serviced as a priority - and we expect to be operating as normal within a week," Clucas says. "The fact that more than 70 computer hard-drives were stolen means we can expect an impact on administration efficiency for the remainder of this week." Clucas says, however, that no data or servers were affected, which means member information is safe.

Caroline da Silva, an executive at the SA Insurance Association, says computer theft has become a huge problem. No statistics are available. The association has established a task team to determine how large computer losses are, who the victims are and what the general modus operandi of the robbers is. Da Silva says it is believed most computers are being shipped offshore by criminal syndicates.