

Online Counterfeiters a Threat to All Brands

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In 2012 the sale of counterfeit goods is expected to make up nearly 10% of international trade, up from approximately 7% in 2010. Websites selling counterfeit consumer goods attract more than 87 million visitors annually, and the sale of counterfeit goods via the Internet is expected to reach \$135 billion annually in the next few years.

Combating such a global and amorphous threat is a daunting task for a Fortune 500 corporation, much less a midsize regional company. However, taking some small but proactive and carefully thought-out steps to increase the transaction cost of the counterfeit operations can have a measureable impact.

The single most important step is to proactively monitor key points of promotion for illicit counterfeit goods. By conducting regular keyword searches on all popular search engines using your brand name and common variations and misspellings along with trigger words such as "cheap," "discount," "free" and "wholesale," sources of knockoffs can be identified and takedown proceedings initiated. This step can

also uncover larger pieces of the distribution network for counterfeit goods in your industry, allowing you to find and target suppliers as well as retailers.

You should also become familiar with popular online marketplaces, not just in the United States but globally. Everyone knows about sites like eBay, Craigslist and Amazon, but have you searched for your products on taobao.com (a Chinese-language website similar to eBay) or mercadolibre.com (eBay's Latin American partner)? If you find something, do you know what their takedown policies are?

It cannot be emphasized enough that the monitoring you do, or hire someone to do, must be diligent and ongoing. Counterfeiters have proven to be resourceful and persistent, and brand owners must be even more resourceful and persistent in their efforts to combat this blight.

As the world continues to shrink, all brand owners, large and small, will need to bring resources to bear on combating those that attempt to free-ride on their brand's value.



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