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India breeding ground for counterfeiting :Siddhartha Sengupta

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Counterfeiting is credited to be one of the fastest growing industries in modern India. Only, this isn't a growth graph that we are to be proud of. A practise that is theoretically defined as the act of replicating a renowned product without the brand owner's authorization, this illegitimate copy is often inferior in quality. Generally, counterfeit goods are sold under a trademark that is identical to or substantially indistinguishable from the brand owner's trademarkÂ for the same goods.

India being a price-sensitive market, serves as a breeding ground for counterfeiting. The criminal network behind this activity thrives on the Indian consumer's ignorance, appetite for branded goods and their innate nature to bargain. While counterfeiting does induce heavy losses on legitimate businesses, it's the end consumer that stands to lose. To make up for the vast deficit that the government faces due to illegal duplication of goods, it imposes an additional tax burden on the citizens. Further, the tax-payer's money is drained on resources and organizations that are formed to curb such practises. Not to forget the major hit that employment takes due to the loss of jobs in manufacturing units.

As per a study conducted by Business Action to Stop Counterfeiting and Piracy (BASCAP), the global value of counterfeit and pirated goods is currently estimated at US$650 billion and is likely to double by 2015. But counterfeiting isn't an issue that solely hits our economic situations. It takes a turn for the worse when fake pharmaceutical goods and medicines hit the market and directly risk the health of our population. India, being the world's largest supplier of generic drugs, has become an epicentre for counterfeit and fake drugs. Consumption of these counterfeit versions is resulting in innumerable complications and health hazards. What was once confined to exotic and costly pills has now proliferated to cough syrups, vitamin supplements, painkillers and the like. BASCAP's research in 2009 indicated 15% of Indian population admitting to purchasing counterfeited medicines. This frightening statistic has not only beckoned FICCI to stand up and take action, but even individual brands that are waking up to protect the trust and reputation they've built over the years.

The first step towards Anti-counterfeiting involves the companies paying special attention to brand security and authentication when designing new products. This can be done by ensuring product and packaging differentiation. Such steps empower the consumer to identify the difference between fake and original products.

Modern day technology has enabled companies to incorporate protection methods without altering their logo or brand image and look. These methods can also be easily integrated into an existing product design in a cost-efficient manner.

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Companies such as Merck India have devised technology which includes overt and covert options. Overt solutions use special pigments that change colour enabling the consumer to see visual effects without the use of any verification device and distinguish between real and fake products. Whereas Covert solutions are usually created for brand owners to identify their original product and are recognizable only through technical means. The efficacy of anti-counterfeiting solutions lies in their simplicity. These products enable the consumer to identify original products by unique and visible colour shifts, thereby encouraging brands to bring in security measures without having to rebuild their packaging design. These color-changing pigments cause a visual effect that aids consumers in distinguishing between a real and a fake product, without the use of any verification device.

Taking these measures one step further Merck developed SecuralicÂ® that offers security features at differing levels. These levels range from interference effects (visible to the human eye) to complex color changing effects that are complemented by invisible and/or forensic security features.

In order to eliminate any type of misuse, Merck KGaA has established procedures to ensure the exclusive distribution of these security pigment solutions only to certified customers.

These products offer solutions that promise success in a variety of applications such as fine paper, cardboard, foil, ceramic, textiles, glass or plastic. The printed security effects and features can be embedded underneath, within or above the printed ink surface. A unique variety of diverse color effects can also be used in a number of plastic applications. SecuralicÂ® security concepts can - depending on the level of security required - be individually adapted within the framework of the entire Merck KGaA product portfolio.

CandurinÂ® Mineral Pearl Effect Colours is another development by Merck that is easy to apply in coating systems and is widely used for the application in tablets and capsules. These pigments have excellent light and thermal stability, and can be easily incorporated into a wide range of formulations - even those already containing other colorants. Thereby helping pharmaceutical manufacturers in brand recognition and differentiation.

Thus in today's day, anti counterfeiting solutions can play a vital role to counteract the growing problem for brand owners by guarding their end products and protect their profits, their brands, their customers, and the financial health of their businesses.

There is no need to be a victim of piracy, when you could be a part of the solution!