

COVID-19 and online precautions for brand owners

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by Donvay Wegierski, Director

As the world heeds the call to stay at home and flatten the curve our online activity has increased. With it, we have seen an increase in cybercrime, phishing and general criminal activity luring people to donate to fake causes, to click on phishing links and buy fake or counterfeit goods.

There has also been a particularly sharp rise in counterfeit pharmaceuticals and protective gear. Worldwide shortages of protective gear has seen a proliferation of fake products. One such example are "N95" masks (being a US certification) available online and subsequently pulled from India, Pakistan and numerous other countries.

Understandably fake or inadequate products place lives at risk therefore the origin and credibility of the website from which products are purchased should be treated with caution. In an effort for brand owners to combat trade mark infringement and counterfeit product the following measures could be considered:

- Google Alerts or anti-counterfeiting services which flag the unauthorised use of brand names;
- Trade mark watching services can be implemented or increased;
- Consider anti-counterfeiting partnerships with likeminded business;
- Educate and inform customers online by including listings of legitimate retailers, posting photographs of genuine product and encouraging reporting of fake or unauthorised product; and
- Continue to maintain and protect brands locally and abroad – register and maintain trade marks and domain names, in South Africa and other countries.



Donvay Wegierski

Director

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