

A web of deceit?

The Internet can make a brand more visible and memorable to customers, but this doesn't come without risks. Brands must be constantly monitored if they are to be safeguarded against on-line infringement. But how many companies have the capabilities to watch their IP in-house? **Philippa Edward**, commercial manager, explains how TMDS's new on-line watch services can help



BILDAGENTUR FRANZ WALDHAEUSL / ALAMY

In the past decade, the Internet has had a profound effect on the way in which companies present their products to the world. Managed effectively as a key component of corporate strategy, the web can yield tangible business advantages that improve brand awareness and profitability in the global marketplace. However, this increased exposure does not come without risks. Today, as never before, IP rights holders are increasingly falling victim to hostile tactics from unscrupulous businesses and individuals, which seek to profit from product piracy, and other forms of on-line brand abuse. Companies need to move fast if they are to ensure that their brands are protected, but how can an IP department ensure it keeps constant control of its rights on the Internet?

On-line watching services

There is nothing to stop an organisation registering a domain name or including a brand on its website if it does not own the trademark, and 60% of domain registries have no dispute resolution process in place, putting the emphasis firmly on the rights holder when it comes to protection

strategies. Internet watching services can alleviate the burden by providing on-line supervision that evolves alongside improvements in web technology and changes in customer habits. TMDS, part of the CPA Group has been providing Internet watch services for over two years. To reflect the changing face of the Internet, it has recently added two new services to its portfolio: auction watch and web content watch.

Why watch an auction?

The auction house, eBay, now has over 150 million registered users worldwide – a figure equivalent to seven times the population of Australia. This figure – all the more impressive when you consider that eBay is only celebrating its 10th birthday this year – goes some way to illustrate the huge following that such websites have built up in the last few years. Auction houses can allow brands to benefit from increased sales figures and recognition in the marketplace. However, they also provide a lucrative avenue for counterfeiters that must be continually checked against unlicensed reproduction.

TMDS's auction watch – the first service of its kind in Europe – allows companies to watch how frequently vendors offer their goods on sites such as eBay and Yahoo!. Watch reports include details of product, auction and vendor in case further action needs to be taken, but also allow clients to gauge how well their brands are selling in the arena as well.

Comprehensive coverage

Most watch services simply monitor the registration of domain names, but TMDS's new web content watch provides on-line supervision for a specified word, name or phrase, ensuring more comprehensive protection of your IP Rights (IPR).

To ensure that a brand or slogan is not included in the body of a website or in the metatags, IP departments could use a search engine to visit all the identified websites shown in search results – but this would be a waste of valuable time and money. TMDS's web content watch collates all this information, monitoring more closely the potential infringements against, and the success rates of, valuable IP assets. It supplies Whois information and tracks the number of visitors to each site, so that clients can see which are most visited, in order to prioritise any infringement action. And customised reporting (searching within the remit of sunglasses, shoes or perfumes, for example), plus a trademark rating and report classification, also ensure you are not inundated with irrelevant material.

For more information about TMDS's watching services, please contact Philippa Edward at pedward@cpaglobal.com