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European Union and United States announce record-breaking counterfeits crackdown; do domain seizures actually train infringers?

- **Europol and ICE report record numbers for seizures of sites selling fake products**
- **Questions around whether this is a short-term solution to wider problem**
- **Infringers learn from domain name operations and adapt their methods accordingly**

This week, the EU's Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) both reported record-breaking numbers in regard to takedowns of domain names selling counterfeit products. Although the elimination of infringing websites provides immediate relief to the counterfeit problem, infringers have found an easy solution to this temporary obstacle.

A joint international initiative, Operation in Our Sites (IOS) was first launched in 2014 and has seen increasing successes over the years. In 2017, over 20,500 domain names were seized for enabling the trade of fake products, with this amount growing to 33,654 this year – representing 64% annual growth. In _____, Europol attributes this growth to a more comprehensive approach to counterfeit operations, with this initiative carried out by Europol's Intellectual Property Crime Coordinated Coalition (IPC3) alongside the US National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Centre and enforcement authorities from an additional 26 countries overseen by Interpol.

In comments to *WTR*, the IACC clarified the importance of such cooperation, commenting: "As a member of Europol's IPC3 Stakeholder Advisory Group, we see first-hand how collaboration pays dividends". The investigation resulted in the arrest of 12 suspects, as well as the blocking of hardware devices and "freezing of more than €1 million in several bank accounts, online platforms and a virtual currency farm used by the organised criminal groups".


Building on Europol's press release, ICE _____ over the past year more than 1 million copyright infringing website domain names have been shut down. The fake products sold on these sites include electrical components, automotive parts, and personal care items, among others. Homeland Security further pointed to growing success in the field of IP rights enforcement, stating an _____ in seizures of 8% from 2016 to 2017.

In comments to *WTR*, the UK's Anti-Counterfeiting Group (ACG) applauded both Europol and ICE for "proving themselves to be key partners in the fight against transnational organised counterfeiting". The organisation further argues that these operations help show that, despite being able to hide behind the

anonymity of sophisticated websites, these criminals are not safe. Furthermore, the INTA pointed to the ground gained since the first operations of this kind, which was launched by the US government in 2010 and shut down 82 sites. "The ability for cyber-criminals to hide behind the vastness of the internet and to route through different jurisdictions is a considerable issue," an INTA representative says. "Now in its ninth year, Operation IOS is a prime example on how coordinated efforts between governments across multiple jurisdictions can combat counterfeiting on a global scale."

While ICE and Europol have no doubt had a successful year in reducing the activity of counterfeiters, founder and CEO of _____, Robert Holmes, argues these wins aren't necessarily all they are cracked up to be. "Taking down websites or marketplace offerings is a temporary solution that trains cyber criminals to improve," he claims, saying that this method is only a short-term gain. "The truth is that every savvy counterfeiter has dozens, perhaps hundreds, of domains with copies of the same websites ready to be published when their most recent website has been taken down and the domain seized," he added.

To prove his point, Holmes provided a snapshot of an email sent by an individual who runs counterfeit sites (see image below). Since sellers have accumulated mailing lists, they are able to spread the word when a domain has been shut down. Holmes uses undercover email accounts and shows that advertisements are sent out following a seizure. Holmes _____ that websites are only a means to crime, and that domain name shutdowns do not eradicate the problem, they just teach counterfeiters to adapt to continue their illicit business.

Dear Friend,Website Domain Changed!!!  



_____ .com
to me ▾

Sat, Nov 10, 7:10 AM   

Hello dear ,

This is _____ from _____, just kindly notify you our original web site changed to www._____.org and www._____.com already!

Thanks for your purchase from our site last 4 years, new Football season and Xmas comes, if you still have remand for jerseys and other sports gears, please do let me know, we are looking forward to do more business with you! We also have updated lots of new sports gears on new page this year!

Now we offer **15% discount** and **one free jersey** for western union order each \$300, 2 free jerseys each \$500. also offer fast shipping for 15 jerseys!

Once you place order in our new site, please do let me know, I will add free gift into your order for our repeat customer!

Yours,

[Unsubscribe / Change Profile](#)
Powered by [YMLP](#)

On that face of it, then, cooperation among national agencies is crucial because it signifies a commitment to reducing the activity of infringers. However, the method of mass domain name takedowns may not be the most effective long-term strategy to strike at the heart of the counterfeit problem.



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TAGS
