

Faking it at Bangkok's Museum of Counterfeit Goods

An exhibit at a city law firm shows just how far crooks will go to manufacture fake products, and highlights the dangers the industry creates

By [Greg Jorgensen](#) 8 July, 2011



"Its purpose is to educate the public about intellectual property infringement" says James Evans, a T&G consultant of the Counterfeit Museum.

Bangkok's reputation as one of the world's premiere marketplaces for counterfeit goods is certainly deserved, as a quick walk down many a street can attest.

For Joe McSomchai, this is harmless consumerism at its finest. Will Disney -- a company that made over US\$38 billion in 2010 -- really miss the \$50 they'd charge Joe for a Mickey Mouse doll that cost \$4 to make?

Should he feel guilty that he can pick up a pair of "Oakely" sunglasses for a fraction of the cost he'd pay in retail?



A display in the Museum of Counterfeit Goods showcases some of the many fake brand T-shirts sold in Bangkok markets.

Probably not. But if Joe McSomchai knew the full extent of the counterfeiting industry, he might change his mind.

For anyone interested in the issues that surround the counterfeit industry, a visit to Bangkok's very own [Museum of Counterfeit Goods](#) is in order.

Located at the offices of law firm Tilleke & Gibbins (T&G) on Rama III Road, it's an eye-opening display that shows just how much is counterfeited, how far crooks will go to manufacture fake products, and the very real dangers that the industry creates.

The museum, established in 1989 and modeled after a similar facility in Hong Kong, was created to act as an educational tool.

"Its purpose is to educate the public about intellectual property (IP) infringement and to create an awareness of the extent and consequences of counterfeiting," says James Evans, a T&G consultant.

Cutting corners and exploiting cheap labor



A pile of fake mobile phone covers.

The simple truth is that what you see on Patpong or Sukhumvit Road is just the tip of the iceberg. No one will notice or care that a single Mickey Mouse doll was bought as a gift, and it's true that the same person buying a fake Vuitton bag is probably not going to buy a real one, negating the argument that the manufacturer loses a sale.

But there's more to Thailand's illegal counterfeit industry than CDs, sunglasses and purses.

"Because counterfeits are sold on the black market there are no health and safety checks, no audited supply chains to ensure fair working conditions, and no taxes paid to the government to improve the welfare of the country," says Evans.

"Corners are cut in production and the cheapest labor possible is used, which often means child labor or exploitation of illegal immigrants."

Health and safety issues



Everything from fake perfume to auto parts is on display in the Bangkok Museum of Counterfeit Goods.

Walking into the T&G museum almost feels like an upscale version of Patpong Road. Fake Lacoste and Playboy T-shirts line the wall, and there are display cases filled with phone covers, shoes, key chains, lamps and more.

“Meh,” I thought to myself, “this ain’t so bad.”

But then I stumbled onto a case displaying fake Viagra and other medicines and suddenly got it.

Buying fake jeans is one thing, but how would people feel if they knew that their mother had possibly been given fake cancer medication? Or that the airplane carrying their sister home for the holidays may have a fake part in its landing gear?

Modern counterfeiters are masters of low-quality mimicry. With modern counterfeiting technology, this means that they can make low-quality copies of everything from iPhones to Coca-Cola to condoms.

Evans notes that some of the most commonly counterfeited items include automobile brake pads and oil filters, phone batteries and food items such as baby formula. Even real shampoo bottles are refilled with fake shampoo.

Most of the time people don’t know until it’s too late, and there are new cases every day where a consumer has been injured by low-quality counterfeits.

“Counterfeiting also acts as a disincentive to innovation, and one of the hallmarks of a developed nation is a thriving innovative economy. If IP owners cannot trust that their inventions, designs or brand value is secure, the market is stuck imitating instead of innovating, and development is significantly stifled,” says Evans.

No easy solutions



Many of the fake brand name shoes on that market are so realistic only an expert could tell the difference.

As T&G acts on behalf of many large international brands to protect IP in Thailand, most of the 3,500 or so products in its museum -- which are displayed next to their genuine counterparts -- were provided by clients for public display.

The law firm also works with the Thai police and customs to help verify seized products, and runs seminars providing up-to-date information on brand protection issues, including training on how to differentiate between genuine and counterfeit goods.

Of course, the obvious question is why the police don't simply shut down stalls selling counterfeit goods when they see them -- which would be roughly every few minutes.

The answer is fairly obvious for anyone who understands how Thailand works. On May 7, 2009, a police operation to confiscate counterfeit goods on Patpong erupted into a violent protest complete with beatings, smashed windows and gunfire from both sides.

A more politically correct answer is given by Evans: "A surprising amount is being done by the government to combat counterfeiting, but the problem is so big that they are only scratching the surface.

"Of course, corruption is a problem, but so is the allocation of resources to a crime which ranks lower in importance than fraud, corruption, child labor, human trafficking, drugs and arms deals. However, police are starting to realize that counterfeiting often involves or feeds all of these other crimes."

The Tilleke & Gibbins Museum of Counterfeit Goods is open Monday - Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., but appointments are required at least 24-hours in advance. Contact Suthatip Anantapornsuk at +66 (0)2 653-5555 or suthatip.a@tillekeandgibbins.com to set up an appointment.

Read more: [Faking it at Bangkok's Museum of Counterfeit Goods | CNNGo.com](#)

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