

Plagiarism And Forgeries In Labels And Boxes

Years ago, when I started a worldwide Trademarks listing, I noticed almost immediately that different manufacturers were using the same trademarked names. *How could that be?* I wondered. Don't these people know about trademark laws? Apparently *not!* Plagiarism is rampant, and out and out forgeries, while mostly a thing of the past now, were also common at one time.

Of course, the more I got into it, the clearer it became that the trademark duplication wasn't as simple as it first appeared. In some cases, for example, a second company's use of another company's trademarks was due to a merging of the two companies, or the later company having purchased the trademark rights. Still, the trademark plagiarism and forging was certainly at the forefront of things. Just take a look at the following, which is posted on Swedish Match's web site:

“By far the most mimicked label was the original yellow label from Jönköpings Tändstickfabrik bearing the motto "Strike against the box only". With its 450 known (!) imitations, this is probably the most plagiarized brand.

Some foreign manufacturers directly deceived purchasers. Suddenly, matches from countries such as Japan and Germany were "Made in Sweden"! Some of them quite simply renamed their factories "Sweden". Of course, consumers were not quite so easy to deceive. They soon learned that some Swedish letters have dots or circles over them, and variants such as "Tanda endast mot ladans plan" (instead of the Swedish "Tända endast mot lådans plån") were only short-lived.

The name "Jönköping" also became so well known that people could easily distinguish it from Jinkiping, Gentkoping, Westkoping and other deliberate or accidental forgeries. And when the forgeries were particularly refined and well done, purchasers soon found new ways of telling the genuine labels from the fakes.

In the 1880's, Swedish innerboxes bore small marks caused by the machines. When machines were replaced and the pinpricks disappeared at the turn of the century, sales suddenly plummeted in some countries. It turned out that purchasers there had regarded these marks as a "declaration of authenticity" that proved that the matches really did come from Jönköping..." [<http://www.swedishmatchindustries.se/en/Products/Swedish-matches/Plagiarism/>]

So just who was (and *is*) doing all this? Well, from what I can see, it's mostly Asian manufacturers—Japan (historically), but especially Indonesia and India. And any successful brand or name is fair game. One Indian manufacturer, for example, came out with a “Mickey” brand (Mickey Mouse), and Disney's Mickey Mouse trademark doesn't become public domain until January 1, 2024. Similarly, the Nithya Match Works in India produced ‘Dumbo’ boxes c. 1990s. Another example: Manufacturers in the US, England, Malawi, Pakistan, and Finland all produced boxes under the brand “Leopard”.

Welcome to the wild and wooly world of Trademarks! It's crazy, confusing, and always changing...but it's always interesting!