



# IPRC CONNECTIONS

*Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center*

**DECEMBER 2017**

## **More than 50,000 internet domain names seized in online counterfeit crackdown**



The National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center) coordinated a joint initiative between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Europol, INTERPOL and members of industry in a crackdown on individuals using the internet to distribute counterfeit goods and other copyright-protected material that threaten the health and safety of consumers. Investigators seized more than 50,000 domain names and removed more than 320,000 e-commerce/social media links over the past year as part of Operation In Our Sites/Project Transatlantic VIII. In one case, ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) arrested two Mexican nationals for

allegedly operating a counterfeit airbag business out of their residence in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Both were charged with conspiring to traffic in counterfeit goods and two counts of trafficking in counterfeit goods. The two Mexican nationals facilitated the listing and selling of counterfeit airbag modules and airbag covers through their online website *airbagsplace.com*, and conducted in person sales of the counterfeit goods. The website domain name was seized and the merchant account used to facilitate the illegal activity was shut down. If convicted, both individuals face a statutory maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$2 million.

## **IPR Center symposium brings e-commerce issues to the forefront**

The IPR Center's recent symposium entitled "*Solving the E-Commerce Puzzle*" attracted more than 150 representatives from industry, law enforcement and government to exchange intelligence and develop new strategies in the fight against IP crimes that support transnational criminal organizations and threaten the health and safety of American consumers.

"We are committed to targeting and investigating individuals trafficking counterfeit goods that threaten the health and safety of the American public and support criminal organizations," said acting IPR Center Director Nick Annan. "The creation of collaborative innovative strategies between industry and law enforcement will ensure that counterfeiters have nowhere to hide." The day-long symposium featured a keynote address by White House IP Enforcement Coordinator Vishal Amin, along with remarks from ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Acting Executive Associate Director Derek Benner.



(Seated left to right: FBI Deputy Assistant Director J.C. Hacker; CBP Office of Trade Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner Cynthia Whittenburg; ICE HSI Acting Executive Associate Director Derek Benner; IP Enforcement Coordinator Vishal Amin; IPR Center Acting Director Nick Annan)

## **IPR Center's Operation Engine Newity receives top honors at Chamber event**



The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> annual IP Champions event to showcase intellectual property's economic and cultural impact. The IP Champions Gala attracted multiple industries to celebrate those who generate jobs, encourage innovation and creativity, ensure safety, and promote access to new creations. Operation Engine Newity, managed by ICE, FBI, and CBP, was named the "IP Champion for Excellence in Enforcement." The operation targets counterfeit auto parts that threaten consumer health and safety. Investigations have led to the seizure of counterfeit airbag, steering, braking, and seat belt components. Legendary Billy Gibbons, best known as the guitarist and lead vocalist of the rock band ZZ Top, was the headliner for the event. Here, he is featured with ICE HSI (San Diego) Special Agent Gabriela Llenas, IPR Center Deputy Director William Ross and ICE HSI Special Agent Jon Ruttencutter.

## **CBP schedules 2017 CBP East Coast Trade Symposium**

IPR Center Acting Director Nick Annan will participate as a panelist on the Intelligent Enforcement general session panel at CBP's East Coast Trade Symposium in Atlanta, Ga. The panel will feature a discussion on achieving effective enforcement and trade facilitation. CBP expects approximately 1,000 private sector and government participants from throughout the eastern U.S., along with representatives from other U.S. government agencies. The IPR Center's Outreach and Training Section will support the symposium with a display of counterfeit items in the exhibit hall. The exhibit will be staffed by IPR Center representatives and personnel from the Atlanta office of the ICE HSI special agent in charge.

## **Two veteran agents arrive, one departs IPR Center**

The IPR Center's Commercial Fraud Unit has welcomed ICE HSI Special Agent/National Program Manager Bobbie Smith as the newest member of the unit. Special Agent Smith's 12 year career with ICE HSI includes assignments with the Trade Enforcement Coordination Center in Los Angeles, Calif., and in Atlanta, Ga. She has conducted numerous ICE HSI investigations including trade fraud, trafficking in counterfeit goods, visa fraud and alien smuggling. Prior to becoming a special agent, Smith spent 12 years as an import specialist with CBP in Cleveland, Ohio and in Charleston, S.C. Smith will be managing ICE HSI's tobacco smuggling and in-bond programs.

Special Agent Derek Bassler has joined the National Cyber-Forensics & Training Alliance (NCFTA) in Pittsburgh, Pa., the same city where he began his federal career in 2007 as an ICE immigration enforcement agent. In 2009, he transitioned to ICE HSI to work in the Criminal Alien Program, followed by assignments with a child exploitation/human trafficking group before his transfer to the smuggling/financial group where he focused on narcotics investigations. Bassler now serves as a program manager and liaison to the NCFTA, where he helps process leads coming into the IPR Center. He also works with industry representatives in the fight against counterfeits and illicit goods.

IPR Center National Program Manager Victor Vartanian will retire next month, ending a 30-year government service career that began in 1988 with the U.S. Information Agency in Washington, D.C. He joined the U.S. Customs Service's Office of Finance in 1992 before joining the Office of Investigations in October 1997 in Miami, Fla. After multiple assignments overseas, he continued his government service with the IPR Center where he held a number of positions, including undercover operations manager in the IP Unit, and as national program manager in the Outreach and Training Section, responsible for organizing and conducting regional IP enforcement training events for foreign law enforcement officials.

## **Battling counterfeit sports apparel is a team effort**

The IPR Center's Operation Team Player program will be represented at the National Football League's Super Bowl XLII winter coordination meetings with federal, state, and local law enforcement officials. Operation Team Player is an IPR Center-led initiative that targets the sale and trafficking of counterfeit sports merchandise and apparel, a multi-million dollar criminal industry. The trafficking of these items is a lucrative business for criminals and becomes more profitable in markets involving successful and popular teams. The culmination of the sports season, all-star games and the playoffs are events that especially stimulate the sale of counterfeit items in local communities around the country.



The IPR Center encourages companies and private industry organizations to help fight (IP) theft and trade law violations by displaying the "Report IP Theft" button on websites that will link users with a form to detail their allegations. For more information on how to obtain this tool, please visit our website: <https://www.iprcenter.gov>.

*For more information on these stories, or to submit information for stories in future editions of IPRC Connections, please contact Chuck Jackson, [charles.e.jackson@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:charles.e.jackson@ice.dhs.gov), or (703) 603-3941.*