

SERIALIZATION

The Greenback Guarantee

Ed Fowler of FBrothers & Company, Inc. wants to use genuine dollar bills for brand protection purposes. In a newly granted patent, he proposes the use of one dollar bills encapsulated in a transparent carrier to serve as a guarantee of authenticity for high value branded goods such as watches, shoes, bags and clothing.

In a very readable and entertaining patent (US 7,628,317B B2 issued on Dec 8, 2009), Mr Fowler reasons that there is little need to print a tag containing overt and covert security features of bank note standards when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has already achieved this with low denomination currency notes. Furthermore, the low denomination bills commonly in circulation also come with unique serial numbers useful for track and trace purposes.

Crucially, the attempted counterfeiting of US currency entails severe criminal penalties beyond what could be expected for simply copying a regular hang tag.

Using the Bill's Serial Number

The two main ideas incorporated in the patent is that security tags can be created by taking a dollar bill (or other paper currency note) and enclosing it in a transparent carrier. Preferably this would be a double sided clear tag which would allow both sides of the note to be inspected. It could also take the form of a smaller cylinder (see photo) which contains the note folded in such a way that the serial number is clearly visible). The tag should be sealed in such a way that the note cannot be extracted and securely attached to the item it is intended to authenticate.

The patent anticipates that the presence of a genuine currency note in the tag does not, in itself, guarantee the authenticity of the product as the pro-

ducer of the knock of goods could be also using genuine notes.

Therefore, the next feature of the patent is to make use of the unique serial number printed on the note. This number can be used to confirm and verify the authenticity of the legitimate product. This is achieved by the manufacturer of the product entering the serial number into a database. The patent mentions that this database could be set up and maintained by individual manufacturers or there could be a central service bureau that performs this service for more than one manufacturer. In either case, the manufacturer(s) would need to keep the database refreshed with new serial

numbers and delete ones that had been sold. In this way, the database permanently reflects the inventory of unsold, authentic goods.

In-Store Checking Station

The final idea embodied in the patent is the conceptual design of a 'consumer station' which may be a terminal in a retail store located at the point of sale. The station should have access to the database via the internet to check if the serial number is recorded. At the point of sale, consumers can validate the authenticity of their purchase by 'texting' the serial number of the U.S. dollar bill, via a cell phone, to the data center. Once the text message is sent, a validation message will be systematically delivered to the consumer's cell phone

indicating the Product Number, SKU, UPC, and any other key product verifiers that are stored within the central database.

The patent also envisages that this could also be achieved via a PocketPC, PDA, cell phone or other such communication device.

This new anti-counterfeiting system is being marketed under the name ValidateMyTag™.

Regarding their proposed business model, Fowler disclosed to Authentication News that "We aim to position ValidateMyTag as a brand protection service to luxury companies." The service includes the following:

- Database Warehousing: Hosted database(s) containing the serial numbers of employed US bills along with specific product information of the attached merchandise.
- Short Message Service (SMS) Gateway: Handling and processing SMS validation text message entire lifespan of the merchandise.
- Website Validation Search Engine: Hosted website for allowing consumers to validate purchases via the web.
- Tags: This also includes cus-



An example of a sealed transparent vial to show the dollar bill's serial number



tomization of tags with luxury brand logo and/or specific trademark print.

Fowler said that, "for a company like Coach for example, we estimate that the system would be delivered at about \$10,000 per month".

Contact: www.validatemytag.com.