

**Leah Evert-Burks:** This is Leah Evert-Burks with the Center for Anti-Counterfeiting and Product Protection @ Michigan State University and *this is Brand Protection Stories* - stories about the practice of brand protection by those who live it. In *Brand Protection Stories* we talk to those in the brand protection community about particular cases in their careers. Through some *stranger than fiction* real life scenarios we learn about the practice of brand protection and the challenges faced by brand-owners worldwide.

**Rod Kinghorn:** I think many people in the business that are doing counterfeit enforcement today still have to answer the same question--well, how big is our problem? You know, why should we be concerned? What's it going to hurt? And so, that was a kind of an objective. One of the objectives was to try to get a better idea of how much auto parts, how many auto parts or what was the value of auto parts that were in the marketplace that were causing economic and other damages to the consumer.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Rod Kinghorn graduated from Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice in 1974 with a Bachelors of Science degree. After a long career in the auto industry, he retired in 2012 as the General Director of Global Security at General Motors. During his career with GM, Rod was responsible for a wide variety of security related activities including fire protection & prevention, plant safety, worker's compensation, employee business travel & company vehicle operations. But a majority of his assignments since 1984 were in the field of investigations where he used an integrated business process to direct investigations that included: internal and external frauds, thefts, major policy violations, allegations of criminal activity, loss of proprietary information, forensic analysis of information systems, counterfeit automotive parts, health care fraud, workplace violence threats, and undercover drug operations all in support of GM's Global Operations. Rod has received many honors & accolades as a Spartan. In 2004, he was honored as a recipient of one of the first Alumni service awards presented by the MSU School of Criminal Justice. Additionally, he was an inaugural member of the A-CAPP Industry Advisory Board. Following his retirement from GM, Rod worked for A-CAPP helping develop the Professional Certificate Courses in Brand Protection among other key programs, retiring from this second career in 2018 - but not before being inducted into the MSU, School of Criminal Justice Wall of Fame.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Welcome, Rod. I'm looking forward to talking with you today.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well thank you very much, Leah. I appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So to begin, it goes almost without saying that the state of Michigan is synonymous with the auto industry. Though the industry has changed quite a bit, new companies have emerged, models now offer electric hybrid self-driving, the auto industry is ever evolving. But Rod for those of us who are not Michiganders or didn't grow up in the proximity to the Motor City, I could probably guess, but if you can explain a term that will be using today and that term is partsman. What role in the auto industry and supply and value chain does a partsman play?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, that was the name of an investigation. That was the name the FBI gave the investigation that we cooperate with and when I, I say we, I mean the auto industry in Michigan. So that included at that time, GM, Ford, and Chrysler cooperated

on this investigation and the, you know, the FBI uses codenames a lot for these investigations and then this one they called it Operation Partsman.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** All right. Yeah, there's always an operation something with the FBI. So Operations Partsman involved what were known as the big three. At the time, the big three auto manufacturers.

**Rod Kinghorn:** That's correct. There was something that, you know, generally speaking, the FBI doesn't do investigations for one company. So in this particular case, they were doing an investigation for the auto industry, and thus the cooperation between the three companies.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** And the partsman plays into the fact that what was being counterfeited were, what they call after-market products, replacement parts, things that are sold after a vehicle goes off the lot. Is that correct?

**Rod Kinghorn:** That's correct. So it's, it's a customer driven kind of market. It's not the auto companies provide part of the product. If you want to go, if you want to use their replacement parts, but you're not obligated to do that. There are several different legitimate chains or marketing cycles or pads that are legitimate for providing that aftermarket parts. Now, there are--in just in the auto industry alone--in addition to providing parts to the dealership, they also have other supply chain partners or distributors and other marketing has for getting aftermarket parts to the customer. So one would be mass merchandisers. A mass merchandiser is the big retailers. The big chain retailers where you go through and you say, "oh, there's some GM or Chrysler, or Ford products. I wonder where they came from?" Well, most of the time they came from the OEM or the original equipment manufacturer. And so, in addition to that they have what they call warehouse--or they did at the time of this investigation--they had warehouse distributors, wholesale distributors. So these are, these are groups that are not--their independent business people--and they've been given a license to distribute genuine OEM product, and they get special pricing to do that. It's a separate marketing strategy if you will. At that time they had separate packaging, separate pricing. And one of the things that they don't, that that group didn't get was sheet metal, glass, those kind of items from the OEM companies.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** The raw materials and the like.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, it was mostly related to the type of product, so they're selling product that's, that's fast moving, frequently replaced, things like spark plugs,

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Control modules, wiring harnesses, transmission kits, filters. And so they would get bought via pricing discounts from the OEM to to distribute that product.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** The discipline of brand protection is derived out of trademark law--since counterfeiting is a violation of trademark rights -- its important to remember that these are laws set up regionally throughout the world to protect the consumer. Yes, trademarks are assets of companies, but they tell the consumer the source of the goods and provide the assurance of origin. But, brand protection isn't only the responsibility of the legal profession, it's multi-disciplinary by nature, *and* necessity. People find

themselves in this field from such diverse career paths as security, supply chain, law enforcement, marketing, IT, finance and yes legal, as well as many more.”

**Leah Evert-Burks:** I see. So, so to set the stage for Operation Partsman, this took place in the mid 1980s into the 1990s. And it was a different type of market for automobiles, you know, we all know that cars are complicated pieces of machinery. If we think about it today, you know, given all the electrical systems, the smart components, the guidance systems, self-monitoring capabilities, those didn't exist. So in the 80s early 90s, a lot of people would work on their own vehicles. They do the repairs. It's not as easy today, you, you can't just lift the hood and replace many components or jack up your car in your driveway and do repairs, should they break down. But in the 1980s, people were working on their cars and as you said, with these parts they were replacing oil filters, belts, AC components, brake pads, spark plugs and to support that there was that wholesale distributor, that you just talked about--the retail locations, the neighborhood, neighborhood auto repair shops. It was a big aftermarket business. In that climate, did this then attract counterfeiters seeing an opportunity there for auto parts?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, I am not positive that I could, I could tell you that the fact that people were working on their vehicles was a driver for them to use counterfeit product, the distributors some of the distributors or the folks that were selling the replacement parts.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** But, the market was there. Right?

**Rod Kinghorn:** There was a market there, but the during that period of time, the electronic control modules were also coming into being and they ended up, and that was, you know, the first--well, probably began a little bit before that--but that was the introduction of the computer electronic systems that you're seeing more and more of in cars today and why it's more difficult to work on your own vehicle. So if you're working on a vehicle in the mid 1980s, the car may actually had been built in the early 1980s, because if you still had warranty it made more sense for you to go to the dealership to get it replaced, because they would be covered free, you know, covered free of charge in most cases or with a small copay. Where once it was out of warranty, then you would, then you may look to repair it yourself or if you, if you'd like to be a do-it-yourselfer and do your own oil changes, all those kinds of things, you could do that.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** And if a consumer was doing their own repairs or taking it to a neighborhood shop, if a mechanic or again they themselves are doing the replacement are replacing spark plugs or transmission fluid, there's little or there's low detection capability for them to be able to determine whether or not a product is genuine.

**Rod Kinghorn:** That's accurate. They have no chance basically.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right. So, that also opens up a window for the counterfeiters to not be detected.

**Rod Kinghorn:** It does but to get it into that market, you know, you don't have the online purchasing you have today so you could buy a, you know, counterfeit online today that that process wasn't available in that period of time so you're going to go to the local auto supplier, the chain, and it's, it's the retail outlet that, or the wholesale outlet, that has the incentive for introducing the counterfeit into the system. The consumer really, they think

they're getting genuine most the time, so it's, it's all about profit to those folks that are selling to the do-it-yourselfer or, in many cases, they're selling it to repair shops. So somebody who's working on your car that's not a dealership might be getting it from lot of the wholesalers, or in those days, it was very common if you were in the auto parts business, meaning you are repairing or you were buying, selling whatever it was, it was very common for people who had product to put out faxes every morning to these customers or these businesses and say, "here's what we have available today, and here's the pricing." So, those auto shops and some of the wholesale distributors would purchase that product unseen generally, but there was because it was price driven, and then they did with it, they did a number of things with it depending on what it was. They might resell it, they might send it to a repair shop, they might sell it to somebody who comes in the door, you know, just to say, "I'm looking for such and such." "Okay, we have that."

**Leah Evert-Burks:** 2021 is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lanham Act. As those in the community know, the Lanham Act is a federal trademark statute, enacted in 1946, which provides for a national system of trademark registration and protects the owner of a federally registered mark against the use of similar marks if any confusion might result. It is our brand protection saber in the U.S. and with this saber we salute this significant milestone.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So to put another time frame reference in this story, in 1984, Congress passed the Trademark Counterfeiting Act. This act amended the Lanham Act to add criminal penalties to trademark infringement, resulting in counterfeiting. Prior to that time, the FBI did not have jurisdiction to enforce trademarks. There was really no criminal teeth to investigations or prosecution. And then when this law passed, the FBI was the primary agency that did enforcements. Later on, Secret Service joined in, Customs, but not state or local authorities until later on. And many times--and I think brands still face this--law enforcement may consider counterfeiting a business issue. But with your case, with Operation Partsman, that was shortly after the passage of the Trademark Counterfeiting Act. It was one of the first cases in which FBI stepped in, and they stepped in a very aggressive way. They established some pretty elaborate sting operations. Can you walk us through what that look like?

**Rod Kinghorn:** You're absolutely right. So prior to 1984, I started doing counterfeit cases in 1982. So what we had available to us at that time were all civil actions, and so we would go out and make purchases from places that we suspected or selling counterfeit and if we got enough evidence to get a federal judge to issue a ex parte seizure order, then we would come back to those businesses then basically raid the business with the US Marshals would serve the paperwork, we'd go in with our attorneys, we take whatever the order allowed us to take, and then there would be civil action after that. So, it was pretty much, everything was done pretty much by the brand owner in that particular period of time. However, I will say that I know that the person that I was working for at the time, was having conversations with federal law enforcement, about, you know, what do you think we can do with this and ended up testifying before Congress before they passed the Trademark Act of 1984 along with other representatives from this. But the emphasis on his testimony related to the safety and the quality of the products that we were seeing in the counterfeit market. And so once that act was passed, there were additional conversations and we ended up creating a business, and the business kind of mirrored one of the wholesale distributors because the wholesale distributors kind of touched other, a lot, of points in the auto

industry. And so, even that dealership from time to time--if they needed product--would buy it from the wholesale distributor.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** I see.

**Rod Kinghorn:** So in addition, they're buying, these wholesale distributors, some of them, they're very, there's a lot of very legitimate people doing that work, and they would buy this product, it's available on the open market, resell it, I mean there's nothing wrong with doing that, even if they bought genuine. They could buy genuine, legitimately buy genuine, and resell the genuine. Just as part of their business model.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So with the FBI, you decide, or the big three decided, that a way to infiltrate this criminal activity was to establish your own auto business, auto parts business.

**Rod Kinghorn:** That's correct. And, you know, a couple of objectives were--and I think many people in the business that are doing counterfeit enforcement today still have to answer the same question--well, how big is our problem? You know, why should we be concerned? What's it going to hurt? And so, that was a kind of an objective. One of the objectives was to try to get a better idea of how much auto parts, how many auto parts or what was the value of auto parts that were in the marketplace that were causing economic and other damages to the consumer. So, that was part of it. And so what was the value? And so, in order to get some kind of an idea. It was like, let's put this business together and see if we can make contacts with all these different players that are in the market. So, you set up the business, you make it look legitimate, so you have parts in there, you have racks, you have fork trucks so you can load and you know, ship and receive. You have to create a financial profile for the business. So if they were going to go out and try to do business with another business, a B-to-B, kind of thing, then that is a typical situation would be, you would validate the ability of them to do business, Well, there had to be that in the records, in the public records, so they could look and see "well here's, here's how much business they're doing. Maybe we should try it, you know." The other thing you had to do--because some of the contacts were personal--they would come visit the business more than once. You had to make it look like product is going in and out.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right, to look legitimate.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yeah, and then you had to educate the agents on the business, and so that was an ongoing process because you couldn't tell them everything they needed to know until they ran into the issue, and then they'd say, "what does this mean? how do we get to this?"

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right. Every industry has it's lingo and it's language, so you had to really train them to speak automotive talk.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Right. And we had to make ourselves available on an ongoing basis to support their activity. So, every time that they would make a contact, they're checking: "what do you think? Is this possible? This is what they're telling us. Do you think, you know, should we make a purchase or should we meet them somewhere? How?" So, they're networking because the more networking they did, the more faxes they got every morning saying what was available in the market. So, they would go to industry

conventions, industry association conventions, and one of the things that was very key was them getting introduced to other people in the business. And so they could build their profile within the industry, and in order to do that, one of the legitimate WDs acted as their kind of point man to say, "Hey guys, here's the group in Detroit that's buying parts. They're in a new business. You got to see what they can do."

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So they provided the introductions, again, to lend legitimacy to the operation.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yeah, to give them credibility and establish that trust that you need to start doing the business.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So, how long was that sting operation in operation?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, I say it was from 1987 and 1992, but that includes, you know, beginning to end of prosecutions, and so some people would say that maybe the sting operation was completed when they did the raids which was in 1990 over a three-day period, but we had some other things to clean up after that, so it was still kind of functioning.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** And this was not just one state, correct?

**Rod Kinghorn:** No, it was across many states. Maybe as many as 15 or so.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** 15 states?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Right.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So you're coordinating with numerous FBI authorities, but if you're crossing state lines you're also partnering with the Assistant US Attorneys for those states.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yeah and most of that was done in the FBI and US Attorney area. So they coordinated with all of the offices, and then when they told us, "here is what we want to do. Here is our plan," then we matched up with them personnel wise across the country because we needed representatives from the big three to go in with them, so they could identify counterfeit, identify the brand violation.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right, so when they did those raids, you had to be available to authenticate the goods, say these are legitimate, or they're counterfeit products.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Right. Had to be able to do that and then make arrangements to haul material out, sometimes it was truckloads, sometimes it was shoeboxes, and store the material in a secure location until the US Attorneys released it based on the judge's order.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Quite the coordination effort across industry and with law enforcement authorities.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Counterfeiting can be lucrative but in many jurisdictions prosecution results only in low penalties, therefore it attracts a wide spectrum of criminals from out-

of-garage sellers to sophisticated networks funding terrorism. And what *is* counterfeited? Just about everything.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Something that you were talking about--of course in talking about automobiles, it's not hard to convey the notion that counterfeit components replacement parts can have some safety issues with them. We know in brand protection and in the study of counterfeiting that many times what a counterfeiter is doing--first of all, they're using the brands trademark, which makes it a violation of trademark rights and brings it into the Lanham Act, but they're also trying to physically mimic the look of the product, so when you're looking at automobile parts, say filters or the encasements of filters, what types of materials were you seeing counterfeiters use to look like automobile parts?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, in the early days of doing the investigations, because as you discover what they're doing and they have to improve, so they get better after you found the first two or three times. We testified for so it always educates them. And so, some of the first oil filters we saw were actually empty asparagus cans filled with rags that were painted to look like genuine products, and then put in a box to make it look like it was a genuine product.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So vegetable cans.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yes.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Wow.

**Rod Kinghorn:** So there wasn't much of a filter to be honest with you.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Yeah. So, also they were trying to mimic you know fluids that go into your car transmission fluid, antifreeze. All of those are complex chemical formulas to make them do what they are intended to do. Did you come across any of those types of items that had been counterfeited?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yes, a couple examples on the counterfeit antifreeze. When we did the test on that, it ate through aluminum in 24 hours, so that would be like your radiator. It'd eat through your radiator. We had transmission fluids that would solidify at zero degrees Fahrenheit, so there in Denver today, it might have gone solid and stopped the car or the vehicle that it was in.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Absolutely. I've also heard of things such as brake pads, being cardboard, compressed cardboard. Again, it looks like it may be a brake pad, but in fact it's just a flimsy piece of material.

**Rod Kinghorn:** That's true. And again those, they got better at counterfeiting them after we took the early, really bad ones off market, but still there was quality issues with brake pads for quite some time.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So, brands hear about their products being counterfeited in a variety of ways. How did some of these parts come to your attention?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Well, usually, it was, it could be, there's a number of ways. So, if you started having failures on a particular problem at a particular area of the country--could

be electronic control modules or it could be a number of different things--or it was picked up on, and you get a lot of complaints from one or two dealers that might be something you want to take a look at it in that area. And you want to get the part itself and take a look and see what you can trace back on that because you know you don't have a package anymore. You only have the part. The package is gone. Sometimes it's just somebody who says, "I don't see how they're selling the product that cheaply." That's a competitor that says, "I don't understand." So I'm going to give you an example. Florida sells a lot of air conditioning compressors and down in Fort Lauderdale area many years ago, we identified a person that was selling counterfeit air conditioning compressors, and so when we visited him to tell him about his errors, he says, "I don't understand what the big deal is." He says, "What's the difference? A Chevrolet is a Chevrolet is a Chevrolet." So okay, well, if that doesn't make any difference, why do you put our label on it? "Well, because it sells better." Well, that's the deal. And what he was doing was he was taking defective used, air conditioning compressors, cleaning them up, repainting them, and putting a new label on, and it didn't work.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Just putting a brand label on it that had some appeal and people trusted, so they were purchasing them based on that trademark.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Right.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Yeah. So, I also know that for many brands they don't know that their product is being necessarily counterfeited until some times late stages where they're being sued in a lawsuit, and then they examine the products, and it's revealed that they did not manufacture this product. Did that happen to you in the auto industry?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yes, that happened with another one of the fluids--transmission fluids that were counterfeited in California and sold on the east coast to a school district and their school buses all stopped in the wintertime when the transmission fluid seized at zero degrees Fahrenheit. And so General Motors was named in the lawsuit because of the name on the cans that they bought the transmission fluid, and so when we did the analysis on the transmission fluid, that's when we determined it wasn't ours. And that's when we started the investigation of "okay, where did you buy this? Because it's not ours."

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Yeah. And this was school buses, so this could have stranded children in sub-zero temperature.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yeah, probably did.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** So again, safety concerns when it comes to anything related to an automobile. So, with Operation Partsman, this case has been talked about because it really was one of the first in which FBI went to such great extents to ferret out the counterfeits and the counterfeiters involving again the big three auto companies which which don't typically work with each other, their competitors, so to find them cooperating was probably a first in the industry. But as you said, when you were using that example of the AC counterfeiter, they were finding their trademark slapped on repair parts as much as GM was. But even though this case was back in the 80s and early 90s, I know Rod you're being a little modest with this, but this case still goes down as one of the largest non-drug seizures in FBI history.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Yeah. At the time, they told us it was the largest, at the time, non-drug seizure, over \$50 million worth of product was seized in those three days.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Yeah. So, again you know, laying the groundwork, this really was one of the first in quotes, “brand protection enforcement actions,” and one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you and walk through this story is because of your background. I mean you were within various security functions at GM, the listeners have heard your impressive bio, but as a security issue, counter counterfeiting is a security issue. It's a safety issue that requires someone with your skills to be able to coordinate with federal agents and to be able to cooperate with them, to answer their questions, to be on call, to teach them how to talk auto, so it was really one of the first cases that led the way into the discipline of brand protection.

**Rod Kinghorn:** It did but let me, let me tell you that the positions I held, especially in the investigation area, I learned more about the business doing that than many people do if they stay in the same position in the same department for years and years and years because every time that I went to a new facility or a new business part of General Motors to do some kind of an investigation. The first thing I had to find out was: how do you run the business here and what is normal? Because I'm going to look for what isn't normal. And so, you really have to do things that the primary objective of our organization from security was to protect the business and you can only do that if you understand the business.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right. You can't come from it from a, you know, a very narrow angle, you have to understand the intricacies of your business.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Absolutely, to be the most effective.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right. So, one last question for you, Rod. In thinking about Operation Partsman, if you could select one word that captures that case, what would it be?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Enlightened.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Personal enlightenment? Industry enlightenment? Consumer?

**Rod Kinghorn:** Enlightenment on how organized the counterfeiters were, how many opportunities the business was giving--unknowingly in most cases--the business was giving the counterfeiters by allowing product to become available, packaging to become available, labels to become available. A number of other things the way, you know, let's not scrap this. We can sell it for 10 cents. Okay, well we're going to come back to you and material return and you're going to pay \$1 for it. They aren't just out there, even in those days, they weren't just haphazardly thinking, “well, let's just counterfeit this today.” No, they were organized, and they sold and bought from each other, and they had their own network. Inside was a sub network within the auto parts business and that included legitimate product, but sellers have a legitimate product who said, “Okay, well I could sell this. My profit margin would go up if I could buy these cheaper and mix the genuine with the counterfeit.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Right.

**Rod Kinghorn:** And so you see, we see a lot of things like that that help you identify problems within your own business model.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Yeah, I think it's important to remember for people that counterfeiters are business people also, so they're looking for the profit, they're looking for the margins. So you've got to keep that in mind, that they are business people. So, before we go Rod, I do want to give you a special shout out. Rod, you were one of the original partners of the A-CAPP Center, along with Johnson & Johnson in 2009 and met with the Director of the School of Criminal Justice back I think in 2007 and talked to them about that industry needed an academic partner to help with learning about brand protection to provide research, academic intelligence, to address the rising risks that we're becoming known. So, I just want to thank you for helping establish the A-CAPP Center, bringing this discipline to the forefront, that now you know companies are recognizing that they need this discipline in house to protect their brands. So again, from the A-CAPP Center and you know, from everyone across the industry, thank you for doing the hard work.

**Rod Kinghorn:** Thank you very much for the kind comments. I enjoyed all of it.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Thank you.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Rod Kinghorn is an icon in the brand protection community, and particularly special in our auto-world here in Michigan. Operation Partsman became a blueprint for future investigations, on how to infiltrate organizations that participate in counterfeiting to support their criminal operations. It resulted in an impressive 50 million dollars in seizure value, over a period of 3 days across 15 states, after years of investigation including a sting operation. Those involved, whether law enforcement, attorneys general or in-house @ GM, Ford and Chrysler took, 10s of 1,000s of harmful and unsafe auto parts off the market - so that cars could operate safely and properly, allowing children to get to and from school, and ensuring that the 4 thousand pound hunks of metal we drive daily could actually stop when they need to.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** The A-CAPP Center Industry Advisory Board consists of **brand-**owning companies interested in forming long-term, substantive, and mutually beneficial partnerships. The Board provides advice, and supports the development and application of strategic goals and specific objectives as its fundamental role, which helps fulfill the A-CAPP Center's vision to be a trusted resource for industry.”

**Leah Evert-Burks:** This episode is made possible through the support of Digimarc. Now is the time to reclaim lost revenue, protect your consumers' safety and your brand's reputation. Brand protection from Digimarc provides a crucial and comprehensive—layer to support anticounterfeiting strategies and ensure product integrity. Digimarc is the only data carrier technology that can be covertly applied to online images, digital documents, individual items, and primary, secondary, and tertiary packaging. Digimarc has decades of experience working with governments to deter counterfeiting and detect tampering on banknotes, driver licenses and other government-issued documents. Find out more about how to protect your brand by visiting [digimarc.com/protection](https://digimarc.com/protection)  
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**Leah Evert-Burks:** In the next episode, we talk to tobacco industry executive Hernan Albamonte. Tune in to hear the story about the largest U.S. seizure of tobacco products, *and* his plea on “why we should care” about the illicit cigarette market and the criminals avoiding the paying of export taxes.

**Leah Evert-Burks:** Thanks for joining us today for this edition of *Brand Protection Stories*, produced by the Center for Anti-Counterfeiting and Product Protection (or A-CAPP) @ Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI. Please visit us @ [a-capp.msu.edu](http://a-capp.msu.edu). A-CAPP is a non-profit organization founded in 2009. It is the first and only academic body focusing upon the complex global issues of anti-counterfeiting and product protection of all products, across all industries, in all markets. In addition to this series, we offer certificate courses in brand protection, applied education and academic courses, executive education, student internships, live summits and virtual events, ground-breaking research, and publish the quarterly digital industry journal, *The Brand Protection Professional*. This is Leah Evert-Burks with A-CAPP. Until our next session, keep protecting your brands, and the world’s consumers. Keep it real.