

Artificial Christmas?

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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There's a guy I went to school with who has had a few brushes with the law. He's a great guy but he hangs around with a shady crowd. Everyone knows that if you're looking for some illegal substances, he's got a trunk full of goods, so he can set you up. While we don't feel good about it, a few of my buddies and I have sampled some of his merchandise.

While you may be thinking I'm talking about narcotics, he deals in something far more addictive – knock-off jerseys for \$25 each.

He's got every jersey you can imagine: Greg Jennings in green; Clay Matthews in white; Charles Woodson in throwback blue with the Powerball number; A.J. Hawk in yellow; B.J. Raji in camouflage; even Aaron Rodgers in a red quarterback practice jersey. And that's just the current Packers.

Our "pusher" has old school Nitschke, Hornung and Starr jerseys. He also has every NFL, NBA and MLB team jersey. A gentleman never reveals his source, but rumor has it our dealer found a website that sells either counterfeit or pirated jerseys out of China.

Our jersey broker, however, may soon be out of business.

In a joint investigation, federal authorities from various agencies recently seized the domain names of 150 websites accused of selling counterfeit or pirated merchandise. Dubbed "Operation: In Our Sites," the sting was orchestrated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center, the Department of Justice and the FBI Washington Field Office.

Officials announced the seizures last week on Cyber Monday, the online retailers' equivalent of Black Friday. The websites sold everything from DVDs, video games, designer purses and sunglasses, golf clubs, shoes and, of course, professional sports jerseys. When online shoppers now try to visit one of these sites, they will be greeted by a banner informing them that the federal government seized the website and that copyright infringement is a federal crime.

Among the domain names seized were cheapnflshop.com, discount-uggboots-sale.com, jerseygreatdeal.com, louisvuitton-bags-forcheap.com, officialpumashop.com, reeboksite.com and wholesalecheapdvd.com. Since the operation was launched in June of 2010, the IPR Center has seized 350 domain names.

Hopefully our dealer only sold to usual customers because federal law enforcement agents went undercover for the sting operation. The agents purchased products from online retailers suspected of selling counterfeit goods. Like our guy's rumored supplier, the agents' purchases were typically shipped directly into the United States from other countries.

The agents then contacted the holders of the trademarks for the products they purchased to confirm that the goods were counterfeit or otherwise illegal. If so, investigators obtained seizure orders from federal magistrate judges for the domain names.

ICE Director John Morton said, "More and more Americans are doing their holiday shopping online, and they may not realize that purchasing counterfeit goods results in American jobs lost, American business profits stolen and American consumers receiving substandard products." He elaborated by saying, "The ramifications can be even greater because the illicit profits made from these types of illegal ventures often fuel other kinds of organized crime."

When Morton puts it like that, buying a jersey for dirt cheap doesn't sound like such a good deal.

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