

09/27/2015

Phone Apps Help to Stop Counterfeiters in Kenya

Counterfeit goods, or false versions of products, may cost the government of Kenya as much as \$1 billion each year. The fake goods also hurt business owners who find it hard to keep customers. But information technology is being used to try to stop the problem.

Jemima Mwafigu is a 34-year-old businesswoman who sells products like perfume and cologne. But in the first year of running her business, she found it hard to keep customers because of counterfeit goods.

Ms. Mwafigu says her business has improved since she began using a smartphone application called **Barcode Scanner**. The app is used to **authenticate** products. It checks to make sure the products are not counterfeit.

"With this application I'm able to **scan** the bar codes of each perfume and instantly I get the manufacture date, the [expiration] date and I'm able to know the authenticity," she says. "That way, I have confidence in selling to my customers."

In 2010, Kenya created the Anti-Counterfeit Agency, or ACA, to fight against illegal trade. The ACA has successfully asked government officials for stronger punishments for counterfeiters.

Agnes Karingu is the agency's acting deputy director for research and awareness. She says the ACA is trying to stay one step ahead of those making fake goods.

"We are also looking into IT solutions where we can be able to use SMS programs, bar codes and information sharing," she says. "The end users of the products can actually be able to get the authentication information, and this information comes back to ACA and intellectual property rights holders."

The agency is testing another program called Allvirtuous. The application is another way to find out if a product is real or not by scanning its barcode. The barcode information is sent to a database. Then a result is sent back to the app.

The International Chamber of Commerce is a global business organization. It says the value of counterfeit goods produced around the world is expected to be more than \$1.7 trillion this year.

For business owners in Kenya like Ms. Mwafigu, the new apps will help them know if their products are the real thing.

I'm Jonathan Evans.

VOA's Lenny Ruvaga reported this story from Nairobi. Jonathan Evans adapted it for Learning English. Mario Ritter was the editor.