Executive Summary

Links of London is a sought-after jewelry brand making exquisite pieces that can be uniquely customized and personalized. The company was founded in 1990 based on a custom request for a pair of fish cufflinks. Since then, Links of London has grown into an international retailer with a highly successful e-commerce business and a network of retail stores in the USA, UK, Canada, Europe and Asia. Links of London has a long-standing relationship with London-based digital marketing agency I Spy Marketing, who helps them build their brand and drive sales through a combination of paid search advertising, Natural Search Optimization and social media activities.

Success brought imitators, however, including e-commerce sites selling fake Links of London jewelry. These counterfeiters were advertising their fake wares on search engines, siphoning away traffic meant for Links of London and driving up pay per click (PPC) campaign costs.

“As Links of London grew into a global luxury retailer, shutting down counterfeit websites was key to growing e-commerce revenue as well as protecting the quality and reputation of our brand,” said Links of London Head of Online, Caroline Rolfe. “Taking effective action against counterfeiters would not have been possible without the MarkMonitor® brand protection technology and expertise.”
“This first of its kind collaboration between brand protection experts and digital marketing experts in clearing the path of advertisers who were selling counterfeits led to significant positive impacts in online advertising.”

— Caroline Rolfe, Links of London Head of Online

To combat this problem, Links of London created a groundbreaking collaboration with brand protection experts, MarkMonitor®, and long-time digital marketing agency, I Spy Marketing, to develop an effective online brand protection strategy that would not only safeguard the Links of London brand from counterfeiters, but also counteract their effect on search marketing. The strategy reduced the number of search ads placed by counterfeiters and, along with smart campaign management and analysis, contributed to an impressive 41% reduction in cost per click (CPC) for search advertising.

Challenge

Counterfeiters are adept at copying best practices in online marketing, mimicking top brands’ digital marketing strategies by building PPC campaigns that exploit both company brand names and popular product search terms. As a result, well-known brands can end up competing with counterfeiters for traffic and potential customers.

As Links of London grew into a top luxury brand, it became an increasingly appealing target for counterfeiters and cybersquatters who took advantage of its highly-recognized brand name to lure potential customers to rogue sites. Links of London experienced counterfeiters bidding on and leveraging their branded search terms which drew traffic away from the official Links of London websites, increased the cost of their branded search terms and impacted overall e-commerce success metrics. And, of course, counterfeiters’ sites neither projected the proper brand image nor provided the equivalent customer experience that trusting consumers find at the genuine Links of London site.

Links of London was also targeted by cybersquatters who abuse the domain name system by including trademarks within domain names. Realizing the opportunity presented by this well-recognized brand, these miscreants exploited its appeal to attract traffic and monetize their sites.

“As our e-commerce business continued to grow, I realized that counterfeiters were a major impediment to our continued growth. We had no dedicated resources in-house to professionally assess the extent of the counterfeiter issue and determine how to address it systematically,” noted Rolfe. “We decided to contact MarkMonitor to address the problem comprehensively and with an expert perspective.”
“As a result of eliminating counterfeit websites and PPC ad campaigns, our digital marketing agency I Spy has been able to increase traffic to our website by 50% without increasing ad spend. The ROI that we have generated due to our online brand protection strategy is compelling, causing a straightforward business justification for our Board.”

— Caroline Rolfe, Links of London Head of Online

Solution

Links of London, along with their digital marketing agency I Spy Marketing, chose MarkMonitor® to help them develop a brand protection strategy to combat these online brandjackers. This collaboration allowed the team to identify counterfeiters using PPC advertising and cybersquatters who were taking advantage of the brand to line their own pockets.

MarkMonitor developed a brand protection strategy for Links of London, quickly identifying sites taking advantage of the brand and instituting appropriate enforcement measures to curb the abuse. Because the advertisers selling counterfeits were in violation of search engine policies, MarkMonitor was able to report them to the search engines and confirm that the offending ads were removed. To defeat cybersquatters, MarkMonitor sent automated notifications to the relevant parties and facilitated the use of the Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy (UDRP) in the case of high risk and high traffic sites. The UDRP process allowed Links of London to gain control of the domains and redirect the stolen traffic to the official Links of London websites.

Removing these illicit competitors reduced the CPC of branded keywords and increased traffic. This enabled I Spy Marketing to focus on what it does best—expanding the impact of the Links of London brand.

“We are always looking for ways to increase the ROI of our clients’ campaigns. This was the first time we collaborated with MarkMonitor and incorporated a brand protection strategy for our Links of London PPC ad campaign initiatives. The result is a substantial win for Links of London,” said Nishma Robb, Partner, I Spy Marketing.

Results

MarkMonitor developed a multi-pronged enforcement strategy targeting both counterfeiters and cybersquatters to counteract the brandjackers and recoup Links of London rightful traffic and associated revenue. The MarkMonitor team identified 239 counterfeit e-commerce websites that were purchasing branded keywords and reported them to the search engines, which removed the ads for violating search engine policies. These sites generated almost a million visits annually—traffic that should have been reaching the Links of London official website.

MarkMonitor® also identified more than 750 cybersquatted sites which were
siphoning traffic from Links of London, sending notifications about offending domains to relevant parties and recommended further enforcement measures where warranted. As a result, Links of London took the next logical step and initiated a UDRP against a cybersquatter with sites generating high volumes of traffic. Links of London was awarded 65 domains that were owned and operated by a single individual and redirected them to the official Links of London site along with a significant volume of hijacked traffic.

I Spy Marketing used strong PPC campaign management and analytics to optimize Links of London’s online marketing campaigns, creating a tremendous positive impact. From April 2010 to March 2011, I Spy Marketing lowered the CPC on the branded search term for Links of London by 41%. As a result, I Spy Marketing was able to increase Links of London website traffic by 50% without increasing ad spending. In addition to lowering CPC costs, Links of London has significantly improved new customer cost per acquisition and increased e-commerce sales.

As a luxury brand, Links of London will continue to be a target for brandjackers who hope to capture some of its luster—as well as traffic and revenue. The continued collaboration of the brand protection experts at MarkMonitor and the online marketing professionals at I Spy Marketing will ensure that brandjackers are thwarted, so Links of London can focus on delighting its customers and expanding its business.

About MarkMonitor

As the global leader in online brand protection, MarkMonitor, a Thomson Reuters Intellectual Property & Science business, provides advanced technology and expertise that protects the revenues and reputations of the world’s leading brands. In the digital world, brands face new risks due to the web’s anonymity, global reach and shifting consumption patterns for digital content, goods and services. Customers choose MarkMonitor for its unique combination of industry-leading expertise, advanced technology and extensive industry relationships to preserve their marketing investments, revenues and customer trust.