

Re-energizing Southwire's brand protection strategy with Web Monitoring

Southwire Company is North America's leading producer of building wire and utility cable. Since 2001, the company has also been the proud owner of perhaps the best known brand in electrical wiring: Romex®. Invented in 1922 by General Cable in Rome, New York, the brand name has, over the years, been used to describe any non-metallic building wire.

With the rise of the Internet, this use of the trademark by third parties created a significant brand protection challenge for Southwire, according to Southwire Corporate Attorney Allyson Krause. "The Internet has changed the impact on our brands completely, especially with our Romex brand," she says, pointing to the many home improvement blogs and help desks on the Web. "Wading through the references to ROMEX found in some of these websites to determine which are true references to our product and which are improper uses of the term is a gargantuan task."

COSTLY LESSON

Monitoring brand use on the Web is also an essential task, as Southwire learned in 2007. That's when the company's re-application for registration of the Romex trademark was initially rejected by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). "The USPTO originally took the position that the brand was not distinctive of Southwire Company's products only and that it had become generic," Krause says. "We had a long road to prove that, despite the significant number of references to ROMEX on the Internet, Southwire has maintained the brand in continuous use and it has achieved distinctiveness in the market place as a Southwire product. Ultimately, we were successful. But it took a lot of time, effort, and money."

Krause says it was a tough lesson in the importance of watching the use of Southwire's trademarks on the World Wide Web.

CALLING THE EXPERTS

Determined to avoid such problems in the future, Krause called Thomson CompuMark for help monitoring the Web.

"We knew there was no way we could do it ourselves. It's just too overwhelming a task," she says, noting that she authorized a trial of Thomson CompuMark's Web Monitoring service. With Web Monitoring, Thomson CompuMark polices the Web for brand infringement, misuse and abuse, alerting you to unauthorized, generic, inappropriate, or fraudulent uses of your trademark or company name.

With more than a year of experience with Web Monitoring, Krause says she is convinced of its effectiveness.

"Until we started with Web Monitoring, we were completely unaware of just how often our ROMEX trademark was being used both properly, with reference to Southwire Company, and improperly," she says, adding that many of the "hits" uncovered by Web Monitoring are deep within a website or in PDF files on the sites, such as in scanned copies of brochures.

"If we were doing the searching ourselves, it would be nearly impossible to find most of those uses without a full-time person committed to doing just that," she says.

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RELEVANT RESULTS

Krause says a major advantage of the Web Monitoring service is the quality and relevance of the results it delivers.

"Virtually all the results we receive are within our industry, which is great," she says. "We don't have to waste time sifting through results that aren't relevant." Krause notes that she can delegate review of the Web Monitoring online report to her assistant. "She can easily determine how the mark is being used in each case and decide what type of letter to send. That's a huge time saver for me—there's no way I could spend my time doing that."

The Web Monitoring report also makes it easy to identify website owners, helping determine how to respond. "If the website is owned by one of our customers, we will contact them in a different way than if they are not," she says. "We simply pull the list from our Web Monitoring report and send it to our distributor and retail groups to identify customers."

SOLID EVIDENCE

While Krause concedes that completely eliminating improper uses of the Romex brand may be impossible, that's not really the point.

"Our overarching goal is to create a record that demonstrates we have done our utmost to protect our trademark," she says. "Web Monitoring has made building that record easy."

Convinced of the value of Web Monitoring, Krause has now added another of Southwire's trademark brands, SIMpull®, to help protect it as Southwire builds its brand recognition.

"Cancellation of a trademark registration can be an expensive proposition," she says. "Our brands are very valuable and protecting them proactively is a wise investment. Web Monitoring is a key element in our brand protection strategy."

To learn more about Thomson CompuMark's Web Monitoring service, please call us today at (800) 692-8833.

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