

By Fares Bounassif. Send your news and opinions to editor@timeoutbeirut.com

Could your Pepsi be a fake?

Maybe not. But other day to day items could be. Counterfeit products are common in countries like ours, and we all know of imitation Louis Vuitton bags and their ilk.

Indeed, according to the Brand Protection Group (BPG), anything from cosmetics and sportswear to supermarket products might not be endorsed by the label on the sticker. Their goal is to 'raise awareness... about counterfeit activities' and 'protect customers from the hazards of counterfeit products and defend the integrity of members' brands.'

Currently working under the slogan 'the closest things to you might be fake', their billboards, TV ads and on-screen interviews (and stunts) have made so much noise lately you're bound

to have heard of them. So what is all the fuss about?

To simplify, you're paying for something that you're not getting. What's more, you're being cheated out of the security that a particular brand offers without even realising it.

BPG tries to avoid that: their focus and interest lies in ensuring that others do not exploit the efforts they have placed to define and establish their brand in the market, while protecting the consumer.

According to Nada Abi Saleh of Leo Burnett, the company behind all the campaigns since the start of the BPG, 'we launched "The Closest Things To You Might Be Fake" campaign on March 15, anti-counterfeit day, and we are certain it can be used for a while: it created

a lot of awareness – the call centre witnessed an 850% increase in March alone. We are very happy, and we hope it's only the beginning for creating awareness about counterfeiting.'

This latest campaign follows 'Facts and Figures' (2006/2007), and 'Ask for Your Right, Refuse Counterfeit Products' (2005), both successful in cementing BPG's presence in the market.

It helps to know that somebody out there is looking out for the consumer, even if their motivations are not entirely altruistic: it is comforting to know that there is an entity working meticulously to discourage and outright disband dubious items from our daily shopping lives.

I, for one, like to know precisely what I'm spending my money on.



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Talking point

Carpooling in Lebanon



Traffic congestion and petrol costs are a constant concern in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut. With public transportation not being a favourite among the locals, MEDCO's Lebanon Carpooling (car sharing) team has taken it upon themselves to create a community that combats the one-man-one-car philosophy another way.

As Layal Semaan, Head of Communications at MEDCO, explains, 'Lebanon Carpooling is not a money-making project, but is designed to improve traffic, help the environment, and reduce costs'.

They created a website that plans to build a community of carpoolers around it. Their upcoming projects and campaigns, although targeting everyone, begin with university students as their primary audience: with endorsements such as the AUB Rally Paper and activities at universities around the country, they are just getting started.

The system is easy: you get on their website, you follow their instructions to sign up, and you start looking for carpoolers that suit your routine trips. Once you've established contact, the rest just happens. You meet up, you drive together, and you share the costs – they even have an on-site calculator to simplify the process.

www.lebanoncarpooling.com