

## News: SMS Helps Counterfeit Drugs Problem

Submitted by [Mike Grenville](#) on Tue, 10 Jun 2008 12:50

Consumers in Ghana can now instantly verify for free whether their prescription drugs are genuine.

Developed in Ghana, [MPedigree](#) allows customers to avoid purchasing counterfeit medication, while passively and anonymously providing key intelligence to law enforcement agencies regarding the location of fake drugs anytime an authentication repeatedly fails.

The project that is aiming to end the problem of counterfeit drugs that blight many communities in parts of Africa, has been entered into the Institution of [Engineering and Technology \(IET\) 2008 Innovation Awards](#).

Manufacturers involved in the scheme print a unique code on the packaging of each product. At the point of purchase, customers send the code by text message (free of charge) to an automated register, and the product is instantly identified as either genuine or fake.

### **Combatting Conterfeit Holograms**

Initially, the system will be focused on local manufacturers in the Ghana area but it is hoped that it can be rolled out to include multi-national firms in the future. The service is economical as the cost of the discounted SMS is cheaper than other methods of product authentication. Generally, drugs are authenticated by hologram, but due to the growing sophistication of cheap IT equipment, holograms are increasingly being replicated by counterfeit operators.

According to the WHO, the growing global counterfeit drug market is estimated to reach US\$75 billion in just two years. MPedigree plans to scale up operations by authenticating key at-risk drugs in Ghana: anti-malarials, pediatric drugs and health products. New products can be easily introduced into the system and other consumables, such as bottled water and infant milk formula, which are at high risk of counterfeiting are expected to be added.

### **Malaria Treatment Immunity**

Scientists have linked fake anti-malarials to immunity development in malaria parasites, rendering drugs ineffective prior to their planned drug lifetime. Over one million global malaria deaths yearly and 65% of Ghanaian hospital cases linked to malaria. "If we can control the disease via early treatment and prudent self-medication with genuine drugs, the use of treated mosquito nets and tidy environmental upkeep, we stand to effectively double the amount of time doctors have available to cure other diseases in Ghana" said Ashifi Gogo from MPedigree.

The system is similar to the scratch card method for pre-pay top-up. Users reveal a single-use code on drugs and text message it for free to a provisioned mobile shortcode identical on all mobile networks.

MPedigree also offers drug dosage adherence schemes with automated text reminders – fully covering the risk of disease resistant malaria parasite strains due to counterfeits and sub-dosage administration.

## **IET Awards**

Now in their fourth year, the [IET 2008 Innovation Awards](#) highlights the importance of innovation by celebrating its application across a range of engineering disciplines from across the world. The closing date for the awards is the 25 July 2008.

The award categories are: Asset Management, Built Environment, Electronics, Emerging Technologies, Information Technology, Power and Energy, Product Design, Project Team, Measurement in Action, Security, Software in Design, Start-ups, Sustainability, Telecommunications and Transport.