

Using SMS to Identify Fake Medications

An innovate project has been set up which is aiming to end the problem of counterfeit drugs that blight many communities in parts of Africa. The MPedigree system has been developed in Ghana and allows customers to instantly verify for free whether their prescription drugs are genuine.

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.

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.

Introducing new products into the system is very economical, so MPedigree has widespread appeal to other consumables, such as bottled water and infant milk formula, which are at high risk of counterfeiting.

IET Chief Executive, Robin McGill, said, “Innovation is about recognising relevant market needs and opportunities and generating bright ideas to make these a reality. This radical project demonstrates just how technology can enhance people’s lives and really make a difference. Counterfeiters engage in illicit activities thereby depriving governments of revenue to invest in social projects.”

The project has also been entered into the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) 2008 Innovation Awards.

Carson Bradbury, of Cre8Ventures, sponsors of the Start Up award, said, “Working with start-ups makes you appreciate their extraordinary level of commitment and drive. The IET awards are a perfect way to recognise the achievements and innovations they bring to life.”

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