

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION**

NSI INTERNATIONAL, INC.,

Plaintiff,

v.

THE PARTNERSHIPS and
UNINCORPORATED ASSOCIATIONS
IDENTIFIED ON SCHEDULE “A”,

Defendants.

Case No. 24-cv-10914

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff NSI International, Inc. (“NSI” or “Plaintiff”) hereby brings the present action against the Partnerships and Unincorporated Associations identified on Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, “Defendants”) and alleges as follows:

I. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This Court has original subject matter jurisdiction over the claims in this action pursuant to the provisions of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1051, *et seq.*, 28 U.S.C. § 1338(a)-(b) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

2. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391, and this Court may properly exercise personal jurisdiction over Defendants since each of the Defendants directly targets business activities toward consumers in the United States, including Illinois, through at least the fully interactive e-commerce stores¹ operating under the seller aliases identified in Schedule A attached hereto (the “Seller Aliases”). Specifically, Defendants have targeted sales to Illinois residents by setting up and operating e-commerce stores that target United States

¹ The e-commerce store URLs are listed on Schedule A hereto under the Online Marketplaces.

consumers using one or more Seller Aliases, offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts and, on information and belief, have sold products using infringing and counterfeit versions of Plaintiff's federally registered trademarks to residents of Illinois. Each of the Defendants is committing tortious acts in Illinois, is engaging in interstate commerce, and has wrongfully caused Plaintiff substantial injury in the State of Illinois.

II. INTRODUCTION

3. This action has been filed by Plaintiff to combat e-commerce store operators who trade upon Plaintiff's reputation and goodwill by offering for sale and/or selling unauthorized and unlicensed products using infringing and counterfeit versions of Plaintiff's federally registered trademarks (the "Counterfeit Products"). Defendants create e-commerce stores operating under one or more Seller Aliases that are advertising, offering for sale, and selling Counterfeit Products to unknowing consumers. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases share unique identifiers, establishing a logical relationship between them and that Defendants' counterfeiting operation arises out of the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants attempt to avoid and mitigate liability by operating under one or more Seller Aliases to conceal both their identities and the full scope and interworking of their counterfeiting operation. Plaintiff is forced to file this action to combat Defendants' counterfeiting of its registered trademarks, as well as to protect unknowing consumers from purchasing Counterfeit Products over the Internet. Plaintiff has been and continues to be irreparably damaged through consumer confusion, dilution, and tarnishment of its valuable trademarks as a result of Defendants' actions and seeks injunctive and monetary relief.

III. THE PARTIES

Plaintiff

4. Plaintiff NSI International, Inc. is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of business at 121 W 27th St, NY, NY 10001.


5. Plaintiff is a global marketer and manufacturer of creative toy and consumer products. Plaintiff has been creating some of the most popular and innovative toys for many years and Plaintiff's products can be found in thousands of retail locations in more than 30 countries around the globe, including major retailers such as Target, Walmart, and Amazon.com.

6. Consumers recognize Plaintiff as a source of toys and consumer products (collectively, the "NSI Products"). Some of the most popular NSI Products include the WUBBLE bubble ball, the LASER X laser tag game, the PROJEX projecting arcade game, SPYBOTS robots, #BONELESS skateboards, and SMITHSONIAN® Science Kits.

7. The WUBBLE bubble ball, introduced to the market in 2014, is a soft and lightweight bubble toy that looks like a bubble, but plays like a ball. In its debut year, the WUBBLE bubble ball was an instant hit, it was awarded the "Mr. Dad Seal of Approval" by Armin Brott of Mr. Dad, was awarded the 2014 Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Best Toy Award, received the National Parenting Center Seal of Approval, and was selected by Target as a 2014 Top Toy for the Holiday Season. Since then, the WUBBLE bubble ball has won several other industry awards, including the "FamilyFun Toy of the Year" and the "Scholastic Gold Star Toy." In 2018, WUBBLE bubble ball videos posted on YouTube collectively garnered over one billion views and one million likes from over 30 countries. To date, over 80 million WUBBLE bubble balls have been sold worldwide.

8. In 2016, Plaintiff introduced LASER X, an at-home laser tag experience, allowing consumers to play laser tag at home, in the backyard, day or night. LASER X blasters are interactive laser tag blasters that feature sound effects and light-up features. As of 2023, Plaintiff has sold 25 million LASER X blasters.

9. Plaintiff has registered many of its trademarks with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. NSI Products typically include at least one of Plaintiff’s registered trademarks. Plaintiff uses its trademarks in connection with the marketing of its NSI Products, including the following marks which are collectively referred to as the “NSI Trademarks.”

| REGISTRATION NO. | TRADEMARK |
|------------------|--|
| 4,728,740 | WUBBLE |
| 7,414,040 | PUFFALUMPS |
| 6,109,747 | PROJEX |
| 6,919,620 | SPYBOTS |
| 7,355,936 | #BONELESS |
| 5,528,810 |  |

10. The above U.S. registrations for the NSI Trademarks are valid, subsisting, in full force and effect, and some are incontestable pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1065. The NSI Trademarks have been used exclusively and continuously by Plaintiff for many years and have never been abandoned. The registrations for the NSI Trademarks constitute *prima facie* evidence of their validity and of Plaintiff’s exclusive right to use the NSI Trademarks pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1057(b). Incontestable status under 15 U.S.C. § 1065 provides that the registrations for the NSI Trademarks are conclusive evidence of the validity of the NSI Trademarks and of the registrations of the NSI Trademarks, of the ownership of the NSI Trademarks, and of Plaintiff’s exclusive right to use the NSI Trademarks in commerce. 15 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b), 1065. True and correct copies of

the United States Registration Certificates for the above-listed NSI Trademarks are attached hereto as **Exhibit 1**.

11. The NSI Trademarks are distinctive when applied to NSI Products, signifying to the purchaser that the products come from Plaintiff and are manufactured to Plaintiff's quality standards. Whether Plaintiff manufactures the products itself or contracts with others to do so, Plaintiff has ensured that products bearing the NSI Trademarks are manufactured to the highest quality standards.

12. The NSI Trademarks are famous marks, as that term is used in 15 U.S.C. § 1125(c)(1). The innovative marketing and product designs of the NSI Products have enabled the NSI brand to achieve widespread recognition and fame. The widespread fame, outstanding reputation, and significant goodwill associated with the NSI brand have made the NSI Trademarks valuable assets of Plaintiff.

13. Plaintiff has expended substantial time, money, and other resources in advertising and promoting the NSI Trademarks. Since 2014, Plaintiff has spent over \$15 million in advertising, promoting, and marketing featuring the NSI Trademarks in the United States and around the world. NSI Products have also been the subject of extensive unsolicited publicity resulting from their high-quality, innovative designs. As a result, products bearing the NSI Trademarks are widely recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being high-quality products sourced from Plaintiff. NSI Products have become among the most popular of their kind in the U.S. and the world. The NSI Trademarks have achieved tremendous fame and recognition which has only added to the inherent distinctiveness of the marks. As such, the goodwill associated with the NSI Trademarks is of incalculable and inestimable value to Plaintiff.

14. NSI Products are distributed and sold to consumers through retailers throughout the United States, including through authorized retailers in Illinois, through authorized online retailers, and through the websites such as wubbleball.com, getlaserx.com, projexgame.com. Sales of NSI Products via the wubbleball.com, getlaserx.com, and projexgame.com websites are significant, and feature proprietary content, images, and designs exclusive to Plaintiff.

The Defendants

15. Defendants are individuals and business entities of unknown makeup who own and/or operate one or more of the e-commerce stores under at least the Seller Aliases identified on Schedule A and/or other seller aliases not yet known to Plaintiff. On information and belief, Defendants reside and/or operate in the People's Republic of China or other foreign jurisdictions with lax trademark enforcement systems, or redistribute products from the same or similar sources in those locations. Defendants have the capacity to be sued pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 17(b).

16. On information and belief, Defendants, either individually or jointly, operate one or more e-commerce stores under the Seller Aliases listed in Schedule A attached hereto. Tactics used by Defendants to conceal their identities and the full scope of their operation make it virtually impossible for Plaintiff to discover Defendants' true identities and the exact interworking of their network. If Defendants provide additional credible information regarding their identities, Plaintiff will take appropriate steps to amend the Complaint.

IV. DEFENDANTS' UNLAWFUL CONDUCT

17. The success of the NSI brand has resulted in significant counterfeiting of the NSI Trademarks. Consequently, Plaintiff has a worldwide anti-counterfeiting program and regularly investigates suspicious e-commerce stores identified in proactive Internet sweeps and reported by

consumers. In recent years, Plaintiff has identified many fully interactive, e-commerce stores offering Counterfeit Products on online marketplace platforms such as Amazon, eBay, AliExpress, Alibaba, Walmart, Wish.com, Etsy, DHgate, Temu, and TikTok, including the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases. The Seller Aliases target consumers in this Judicial District and throughout the United States. According to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) report, in 2021, CBP made over 27,000 seizures of goods with intellectual property rights (IPR) violations totaling over \$3.3 billion, an increase of \$2.0 billion from 2020. *Intellectual Property Rights Seizure Statistics, Fiscal Year 2021*, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (**Exhibit 2**). Of the 27,000 in total IPR seizures, over 24,000 came through international mail and express courier services (as opposed to containers), most of which originated from China and Hong Kong. *Id.*

18. Third party service providers like those used by Defendants do not adequately subject new sellers to verification and confirmation of their identities, allowing counterfeiters to “routinely use false or inaccurate names and addresses when registering with these e-commerce platforms.” **Exhibit 3**, Daniel C.K. Chow, *Alibaba, Amazon, and Counterfeiting in the Age of the Internet*, 40 NW. J. INT’L L. & BUS. 157, 186 (2020); *see also* report on “Combating Trafficking in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods” prepared by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (Jan. 24, 2020), attached as **Exhibit 4** and finding that on “at least some e-commerce platforms, little identifying information is necessary for a counterfeiter to begin selling” and recommending that “[s]ignificantly enhanced vetting of third-party sellers” is necessary. Counterfeiters hedge against the risk of being caught and having their websites taken down from an e-commerce platform by preemptively establishing multiple virtual store-fronts. **Exhibit 4** at p. 22. Since platforms generally do not require a seller on a third-party marketplace

to identify the underlying business entity, counterfeiters can have many different profiles that can appear unrelated even though they are commonly owned and operated. **Exhibit 4** at p. 39. Further, “E-commerce platforms create bureaucratic or technical hurdles in helping brand owners to locate or identify sources of counterfeits and counterfeiters.” **Exhibit 3** at 186-187.

19. Defendants have targeted sales to Illinois residents by setting up and operating e-commerce stores that target United States consumers using one or more Seller Aliases, offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts and, on information and belief, have sold Counterfeit Products to residents of Illinois.

20. Defendants concurrently employ and benefit from substantially similar advertising and marketing strategies. For example, Defendants facilitate sales by designing the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases so that they appear to unknowing consumers to be authorized online retailers, outlet stores, or wholesalers. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases look sophisticated and accept payment in U.S. dollars and/or funds from U.S. bank accounts via credit cards, Alipay, Amazon Pay, and/or PayPal. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases often include content and images that make it very difficult for consumers to distinguish such stores from an authorized retailer. Plaintiff has not licensed or authorized Defendants to use any of the NSI Trademarks, and none of the Defendants are authorized retailers of NSI Products.

21. Many Defendants also deceive unknowing consumers by using the NSI Trademarks without authorization within the content, text, and/or meta tags of their e-commerce stores to attract various search engines crawling the Internet looking for websites relevant to consumer searches for NSI Products. Other e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases omit using

the NSI Trademarks in the item title to evade enforcement efforts while using strategic item titles and descriptions that will trigger their listings when consumers are searching for NSI Products.

22. E-commerce store operators like Defendants commonly engage in fraudulent conduct when registering the Seller Aliases by providing false, misleading, and/or incomplete information to e-commerce platforms to prevent discovery of their true identities and the scope of their e-commerce operation.

23. E-commerce store operators like Defendants regularly register or acquire new seller aliases for the purpose of offering for sale and selling Counterfeit Products. Such seller alias registration patterns are one of many common tactics used by e-commerce store operators like Defendants to conceal their identities and the full scope and interworking of their counterfeiting operation, and to avoid being shut down.

24. Even though Defendants operate under multiple fictitious aliases, the e-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases often share unique identifiers, such as templates with common design elements that intentionally omit any contact information or other information for identifying Defendants or other seller aliases they operate or use. E-commerce stores operating under the Seller Aliases include other notable common features, such as use of the same registration patterns, accepted payment methods, check-out methods, keywords, advertising tactics, similarities in price and quantities, the same incorrect grammar and misspellings, and/or the use of the same text and images. Additionally, Counterfeit Products for sale by the Seller Aliases bear similar irregularities and indicia of being counterfeit to one another, suggesting that the Counterfeit Products were manufactured by and come from a common source and that Defendants are interrelated.

25. E-commerce store operators like Defendants are in constant communication with each other and regularly participate in QQ.com chat rooms and through websites such as sellerdefense.cn and kuajingvs.com regarding tactics for operating multiple accounts, evading detection, pending litigation, and potential new lawsuits.

26. Counterfeiters such as Defendants typically operate under multiple seller aliases and payment accounts so that they can continue operation in spite of Plaintiff's enforcement. E-commerce store operators like Defendants maintain off-shore bank accounts and regularly move funds from their financial accounts to off-shore accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court to avoid payment of any monetary judgment awarded to Plaintiff. Indeed, analysis of financial account transaction logs from previous similar cases indicates that off-shore counterfeiters regularly move funds from U.S.-based financial accounts to off-shore accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court.

27. Defendants are working to knowingly and willfully import, distribute, offer for sale, and sell Counterfeit Products in the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants, without any authorization or license from Plaintiff, have knowingly and willfully used and continue to use the NSI Trademarks in connection with the advertisement, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products into the United States and Illinois over the Internet.

28. Defendants' unauthorized use of the NSI Trademarks in connection with the advertising, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products, including the sale of Counterfeit Products into the United States, including Illinois, is likely to cause and has caused confusion, mistake, and deception by and among consumers and is irreparably harming Plaintiff.

COUNT I
TRADEMARK INFRINGEMENT AND COUNTERFEITING (15 U.S.C. § 1114)

29. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in the preceding paragraphs.

30. This is a trademark infringement action against Defendants based on their unauthorized use in commerce of counterfeit imitations of the federally registered NSI Trademarks in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution, and/or advertising of infringing goods. The NSI Trademarks are highly distinctive marks. Consumers have come to expect the highest quality from NSI Products offered, sold, or marketed under the NSI Trademarks.

31. Defendants have sold, offered to sell, marketed, distributed, and advertised, and are still selling, offering to sell, marketing, distributing, and advertising products using counterfeit reproductions of the NSI Trademarks without Plaintiff's permission.

32. Plaintiff is the exclusive owner of the NSI Trademarks. Plaintiff's United States Registrations for the NSI Trademarks (**Exhibit 1**) are in full force and effect. On information and belief, Defendants have knowledge of Plaintiff's rights in the NSI Trademarks and are willfully infringing and intentionally using counterfeit versions of the NSI Trademarks. Defendants' willful, intentional, and unauthorized use of the NSI Trademarks is likely to cause and is causing confusion, mistake, and deception as to the origin and quality of the Counterfeit Products among the general public.

33. Defendants' activities constitute willful trademark infringement and counterfeiting under Section 32 of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1114.

34. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law and, if Defendants' actions are not enjoined, Plaintiff will continue to suffer irreparable harm to its reputation and the goodwill of the NSI Trademarks.

35. The injuries and damages sustained by Plaintiff have been directly and proximately caused by Defendants' wrongful reproduction, use, advertisement, promotion, offering to sell, and sale of Counterfeit Products.

**COUNT II
FALSE DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN (15 U.S.C. § 1125(a))**

36. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in the preceding paragraphs.

37. Defendants' promotion, marketing, offering for sale, and sale of Counterfeit Products has created and is creating a likelihood of confusion, mistake, and deception among the general public as to the affiliation, connection, or association with Plaintiff or the origin, sponsorship, or approval of Defendants' Counterfeit Products by Plaintiff.

38. By using the NSI Trademarks in connection with the Counterfeit Products, Defendants create a false designation of origin and a misleading representation of fact as to the origin and sponsorship of the Counterfeit Products.

39. Defendants' false designation of origin and misrepresentation of fact as to the origin and/or sponsorship of the Counterfeit Products to the general public involves the use of counterfeit marks and is a willful violation of Section 43 of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1125.

40. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law and, if Defendants' actions are not enjoined, Plaintiff will continue to suffer irreparable harm to its reputation and the goodwill of the NSI brand.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against Defendants as follows:

- 1) That Defendants, their affiliates, officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, confederates, and all persons acting for, with, by, through, under, or in active concert with them be temporarily, preliminarily, and permanently enjoined and restrained from:

- a. using the NSI Trademarks or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof in any manner in connection with the distribution, marketing, advertising, offering for sale, or sale of any product that is not a genuine NSI Product or is not authorized by Plaintiff to be sold in connection with the NSI Trademarks;
 - b. passing off, inducing, or enabling others to sell or pass off any product as a genuine NSI Product or any other product produced by Plaintiff, that is not Plaintiff's or not produced under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff and approved by Plaintiff for sale under the NSI Trademarks;
 - c. committing any acts calculated to cause consumers to believe that Defendants' Counterfeit Products are those sold under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff, or are sponsored by, approved by, or otherwise connected with Plaintiff;
 - d. further infringing the NSI Trademarks and damaging Plaintiff's goodwill; and
 - e. manufacturing, shipping, delivering, holding for sale, transferring, or otherwise moving, storing, distributing, returning, or otherwise disposing of, in any manner, products or inventory not manufactured by or for Plaintiff, nor authorized by Plaintiff to be sold or offered for sale, and which bear any of Plaintiff's trademarks, including the NSI Trademarks, or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof;
- 2) Entry of an Order that, upon Plaintiff's request, those with notice of the injunction, including, without limitation, any online marketplace platforms such as eBay, AliExpress, Alibaba, Amazon, Walmart, Wish.com, Etsy, Temu, DHgate, and TikTok (collectively, the "Third Party Providers") shall disable and cease displaying any advertisements used by or associated with

Defendants in connection with the sale of counterfeit and infringing goods using the NSI Trademarks;

- 3) That Defendants account for and pay to Plaintiff all profits realized by Defendants by reason of Defendants' unlawful acts herein alleged, and that the amount of damages for infringement of the NSI Trademarks be increased by a sum not exceeding three times the amount thereof as provided by 15 U.S.C. § 1117;
- 4) In the alternative, that Plaintiff be awarded statutory damages for willful trademark counterfeiting pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1117(c)(2) of \$2,000,000 for each and every use of the NSI Trademarks;
- 5) That Plaintiff be awarded its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs; and
- 6) Award any and all other relief that this Court deems just and proper.

Dated this 23rd day of October 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Justin R. Gaudio

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