

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

KAWADA CO., LTD.,)	
)	Case No. 25-cv-1986
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Judge
)	
THE INDIVIDUALS, CORPORATIONS,)	
LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANIES,)	
PARTNERSHIPS AND UNINCORPORATED)	
ASSOCIATIONS IDENTIFIED)	
ON SCHEDULE A HERETO,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff KAWADA CO., LTD. (“Plaintiff”), by undersigned counsel, hereby complains of the Partnerships, Unincorporated Associations and others identified in Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, “Defendants”), and for its Complaint hereby alleges as follows:

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. This Court has jurisdiction over the claims in this action that arise under the laws of the State of Illinois pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a), because the state law claims are so related to the federal claims that they form part of the same case or controversy and derive from a common nucleus of operative facts.

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 consumers in the United States, including Illinois, through at least the fully interactive commercial Internet stores operating under the Defendant Online Marketplace Accounts identified in Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, the “Defendant Internet Stores”). Specifically, Defendants are reaching out to do business with Illinois residents by operating one or more commercial, interactive Internet Stores through which Illinois residents can purchase products bearing counterfeit versions of Plaintiff’s trademarks. Each of the Defendants has targeted sales from Illinois residents by operating online stores that offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and, on information and belief, has sold products bearing 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.

INTRODUCTION

3. This action has been filed by Plaintiff to combat online counterfeiters who trade upon Plaintiff’s reputation and goodwill by selling and/or offering for sale products in connection with Plaintiff’s NANOBLOCK trademarks, which are covered by U.S. Trademark Registration No. 3,874,756 for the NANOBLOCK mark in connection with toy construction blocks; No. 5,759,950 for the NANOBLOCK CHARM mark in connection with covers, cases, straps and protective films for phones, earphones and headphones; No. 5,337,572 for the NANOBEADS mark in connection with beads for handicraft work and toys comprising fuse toy beads; and No. 4,929,767 for the NANOID mark in connection with toy construction blocks (the “NANOBLOCK marks”). The Registrations are valid, subsisting, and in full force and effect. True and correct copies of the federal trademark registration certificates are attached hereto as Exhibit 1.

4. The Defendants create numerous Defendant Internet Stores and design them to appear to be selling genuine Plaintiff's products, while selling inferior imitations of Plaintiff's products. The Defendant Internet Stores share unique identifiers, such as design elements and similarities of the counterfeit products offered for sale, establishing a logical relationship between them and suggesting that Defendants' illegal operations arise out of the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants attempt to avoid liability by going to great lengths to conceal both their identities and the full scope and interworking of their illegal counterfeiting operation. Plaintiff is forced to file this action to combat Defendants' counterfeiting of Plaintiff's registered trademarks, as well as to protect unknowing consumers from purchasing unauthorized NANOBLOCK 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.

5. This Court has personal jurisdiction over each Defendant, in that each Defendant conducts significant business in Illinois and in this Judicial District, and the acts and events giving rise to this lawsuit of which each Defendant stands accused were undertaken in Illinois and in this Judicial District. In addition, each Defendant has offered to sell and ship infringing products into this Judicial District.

THE PLAINTIFF

6. Plaintiff KAWADA CO., LTD. is a foreign company organized and existing under the laws of Japan located at 5-25, Okubo, 2-Chome, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 169-8558 Japan.

7. Founded in 1960, KAWADA CO., LTD. is the originator of NANOBLOCK products and develops, markets, sells and distributes NANOBLOCK products worldwide. The NANOBLOCK product is a world-class miniature building block toy that has earned high marks

not only in Japan, but around the world. Launched in 2008, the NANOBLOCK product has redefined block toys as decorative items that can be enjoyed by adults. During 2012, the NANOBLOCK product was nominated as Toy of the Year in the United States. KAWADA CO., LTD. is the official source of NANOBLOCK products:

<http://www.diablock.co.jp/kawada/en/item/>

8. Plaintiff KAWADA CO, LTD. is the registered owner of the NANOBLOCK trademarks (U.S. Trademark Registration No. 3,874,756 for the NANOBLOCK mark in connection with, inter alia, toy construction blocks; No. 5,759,950 for the NANOBLOCK CHARM mark in connection with, inter alia, covers, cases, straps and protective films for phones, earphones and headphones; No. 5,337,572 for the NANOBLOCKS mark in connection with, inter alia, beads for handicraft work and toys comprising fuse toy beads; and No. 4,929,767 for the NANOID mark in connection with, inter alia, toy construction blocks (the “NANOBLOCK marks”)). The above trademark registrations are valid, subsisting, and in full force and effect. True and correct copies of the federal trademark registration certificates for the NANOBLOCK marks are attached hereto as Exhibit 1.

9. KAWADA CO., LTD. has expended substantial time, money, and other resources in developing, advertising, and otherwise promoting the NANOBLOCK marks. As a result, products associated with the NANOBLOCK marks are recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being products sourced from KAWADA CO., LTD.

10. The NANOBLOCK marks are distinctive and identify the merchandise as goods from Plaintiff. The registrations for the NANOBLOCK marks constitute prima facie evidence of their validity and of Plaintiff's exclusive right to use the NANOBLOCK marks pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1057(b).

11. The NANOBLOCK marks qualify as famous marks, as that term is used in 15 U.S.C. §1125 (c)(1) and have been continuously used and never abandoned.

12. Plaintiff has expended substantial time, money, and other resources in developing, advertising, and otherwise promoting the NANOBLOCK marks. As a result, products bearing the NANOBLOCK marks are widely recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being products sourced from Plaintiff.

THE DEFENDANTS

13. Defendants are individuals and business entities who, upon information and belief, reside in the People's Republic of China or other foreign jurisdictions. Defendants conduct business throughout the United States, including within Illinois and in this Judicial District, through the operation of fully interactive commercial websites and online marketplaces operating under the Defendant Internet Stores. Each Defendant targets the United States, including Illinois, and has offered to sell and, on information and belief, has sold and continues

to sell counterfeit NANOBLOCK products to consumers within the United States, including Illinois and in this Judicial District.

THE DEFENDANTS' UNLAWFUL CONDUCT

14. The success of the NANOBLOCK brand has resulted in its counterfeiting. Plaintiff has identified numerous online marketplace accounts linked to fully interactive websites and marketplace listings on platforms such as Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba, including the Defendant Internet Stores, which were offering for sale, selling, and importing counterfeit NANOBLOCK products to consumers in this Judicial District and throughout the United States. Defendants have persisted in creating the Defendant Internet Stores. Internet websites like the Defendant Internet Stores are estimated to receive tens of millions of visits per year and to generate over \$135 billion in annual online sales. According to an intellectual property rights seizures statistics report issued by Homeland Security, the manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of goods seized by the U.S. government in fiscal year 2021 was over \$3.3 billion. According to a 2021 study on the impact of the sale of fraudulent goods entitled "The Counterfeit Silk Road - Impact of Counterfeit Consumer Products Smuggled into the United States" (the 2021 study), Internet websites like the Defendant Internet Stores are also estimated to contribute to over 653,000 lost jobs for legitimate businesses and broader economic damages such as lost wages in an amount over \$36 billion and a loss of federal and state tax revenue of over \$13.5 billion every year.

15. Upon information and belief, Defendants facilitate sales by designing the Defendant Internet Stores so that they appear to unknowing consumers to be authorized online retailers, outlet stores, or wholesalers selling genuine NANOBLOCK products. Many of the Defendant Internet Stores look sophisticated and accept payment in U.S. dollars via credit cards,

Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba. Defendant Internet Stores often include images and design elements that make it very difficult for consumers to distinguish such counterfeit sites from an authorized website. Defendants further perpetuate the illusion of legitimacy by offering “live 24/7” customer service and using indicia of authenticity and security that consumers have come to associate with authorized retailers, including the McAfee® Security, VeriSign®, Visa®, MasterCard®, Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba logos.

16. Plaintiff has not licensed or authorized Defendants to use the NANOBLOCK marks, and none of the Defendants are authorized retailers of genuine NANOBLOCK products.

17. Upon information and belief, Defendants also deceive unknowing consumers by using the NANOBLOCK marks without authorization within the content, text, and/or meta tags of their websites to attract various search engines crawling the Internet looking for websites relevant to consumer searches for NANOBLOCK products. Additionally, upon information and belief, Defendants use other unauthorized search engine optimization (SEO) tactics and social media spamming so that the Defendant Internet Store listings show up at or near the top of relevant search results and misdirect consumers searching for genuine NANOBLOCK products. Further, Defendants utilize similar illegitimate SEO tactics to propel new online marketplace account listings to the top of search results after others are shut down.

18. Defendants go to great lengths to conceal their identities and often use multiple fictitious names and addresses to register and operate their massive network of Defendant Internet Stores. For example, many of Defendants’ names and physical addresses used to register the Defendant Online Marketplace Accounts are incomplete, contain randomly typed letters, or fail to include cities or states. Other Defendant Online Marketplace Accounts use privacy services that conceal the owners’ identity and contact information. Upon information and belief, Defendants

regularly create new websites and online marketplace accounts on various platforms using the identities listed in Schedule A to the Complaint, as well as other unknown fictitious names and addresses. Such Defendant Internet Store registration patterns are one of many common tactics used by the Defendants to conceal their identities, the full scope and interworking of their massive counterfeiting operation, and to avoid being shut down.

19. Even though Defendants operate under multiple fictitious names, there are numerous similarities among the Defendant Internet Stores. For example, some of the Defendant websites have virtually identical layouts, even though different aliases were used to register the respective online marketplace accounts. In addition, the counterfeit NANOBLOCK products for sale in the Defendant Internet Stores bear similarities and indicia of being related to one another, suggesting that the counterfeit NANOBLOCK products were manufactured by and come from a common source and that, upon information and belief, Defendants are interrelated. The Defendant Internet Stores also include other notable common features, including use of the same online marketplace account registration patterns, unique shopping cart platforms, accepted payment methods, check-out methods, meta data, illegitimate SEO tactics, HTML user-defined variables, domain redirection, lack of contact information, identically or similarly priced items and volume sales discounts, similar hosting services, similar name servers, and the use of the same text and images.

20. In addition to operating under multiple fictitious names, Defendants in this case and defendants in other similar cases against online counterfeiters use a variety of other common tactics to evade enforcement efforts. For example, counterfeiters like Defendants will often register new online marketplace accounts under new aliases once they receive notice of a lawsuit. Counterfeiters also often move website hosting to rogue servers located outside the United States

once notice of a lawsuit is received. Rogue servers are notorious for ignoring take down demands sent by brand owners. Counterfeiters also typically ship products in small quantities via international mail to minimize detection by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The 2021 study indicated that the Internet has fueled explosive growth in the number of small packages of counterfeit goods shipped through the mail and express carriers. This growth closely correlates to the growth of the ecommerce industry which now makes up 16.2% of all retail transactions as reported by the Census Bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

21. Further, counterfeiters such as Defendants typically operate multiple credit card merchant accounts and Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba accounts behind layers of payment gateways so that they can continue operation in spite of Plaintiff's enforcement efforts. Upon information and belief, Defendants maintain off-shore bank accounts and regularly move funds from their Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba accounts to off-shore bank accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court. Indeed, analysis of Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba transaction logs from previous similar cases indicates that offshore counterfeiters regularly move funds from U.S.-based Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba accounts to China-based bank accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court.

22. Defendants, without any authorization or license from Plaintiffs, have knowingly and willfully used and continue to use the NANOBLOCK marks in connection with the advertisement, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products into the United States and Illinois over the Internet. Each Defendant Internet Store offers shipping to the United States, including Illinois and, on information and belief, each Defendant has offered to sell counterfeit NANOBLOCK products into the United States, including Illinois.

23. Defendants' use of the NANOBLOCK marks in connection with the advertising, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products, including the sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products into Illinois, is likely to cause and has caused confusion, mistake, and deception by and among consumers and is irreparably harming Plaintiffs.

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

24. Plaintiff repeats and incorporates by reference herein their allegations contained in paragraphs 1-23 of this Complaint.

25. This is a trademark infringement action against Defendants based on their unauthorized use in commerce of counterfeit imitations of the registered NANOBLOCK marks in connection with the sale, offering for sale, distribution, and/or advertising of infringing goods. NANOBLOCK marks are highly distinctive. Consumers have come to expect the highest quality from Plaintiffs' products provided under the NANOBLOCK marks.

26. Defendants have sold, offered to sell, marketed, distributed, and advertised, and are still selling, offering to sell, marketing, distributing, and advertising products in connection with the NANOBLOCK marks without Plaintiff's permission.

27. Plaintiff KAWADA CO., LTD. is the registered owner of the NANOBLOCK marks. The United States Registrations for the NANOBLOCK marks (Exhibit 1) are in full force and effect. Upon information and belief, Defendants have knowledge of Plaintiff's rights in the NANOBLOCK marks and are willfully infringing and intentionally using counterfeits of the NANOBLOCK marks. Defendants' willful, intentional, and unauthorized use of the NANOBLOCK marks is likely to cause and is causing confusion, mistake, and deception as to the origin and quality of the counterfeit goods among the general public.

28. Defendants' activities constitute willful trademark infringement and counterfeiting under 15 U.S.C. §§ 1114, 1117.

29. 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 NANOBLOCK products.

30. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law, and, if Defendants' actions are not enjoined, Plaintiff will continue to suffer irreparable harm to their reputation and the goodwill of its well-known NANOBLOCK marks.

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

31. Plaintiff repeats and incorporates by reference herein their allegations contained in paragraphs 1-30 of this Complaint.

32. Defendants' promotion, marketing, offering for sale, and sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK 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 NANOBLOCK products by Plaintiff.

33. By using the NANOBLOCK marks in connection with the sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products, Defendants create a false designation of origin and a misleading representation of fact as to the origin and sponsorship of the counterfeit NANOBLOCK products.

34. Defendants' false designation of origin and misrepresentation of fact as to the origin and/or sponsorship of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products to the general public is a willful violation of Section 43 of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1125.

35. 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 its brand.

COUNT III
VIOLATION OF ILLINOIS UNIFORM DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES ACT
(815 ILCS § 510/1, et seq.)

36. Plaintiff repeats and incorporates by reference herein their allegations contained in paragraphs 1-35 of this Complaint.

37. Defendants have engaged in acts violating Illinois law including, but not limited to, passing off their counterfeit NANOBLOCK products as those of Plaintiff, causing a likelihood of confusion and/or misunderstanding as to the source of their goods, causing a likelihood of confusion and/or misunderstanding as to an affiliation, connection, or association with genuine NANOBLOCK products, representing that their products have Plaintiff's approval when they do not, and engaging in other conduct which creates a likelihood of confusion or misunderstanding among the public.

38. The foregoing Defendants' acts constitute a willful violation of the Illinois Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act, 815 ILCS § 510/1, et seq.

39. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law, and Defendants' conduct has caused Plaintiff to suffer damage to their reputation and goodwill. Unless enjoined by the Court, Plaintiff will suffer future irreparable harm as a direct result of Defendants' unlawful activities.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against Defendants and each of them as follows:

1) That Defendants, their officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, 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 NANOBLOCK marks or any confusingly similar name or mark in any manner in connection with the distribution, marketing, advertising, offering for sale, or sale of any product that is not a genuine NANOBLOCK product or is not authorized by Plaintiff to be sold in connection with the NANOBLOCK marks;
- b. passing off, inducing, or enabling others to sell or pass off any products as genuine NANOBLOCK products or any other products produced by Plaintiff that are not Plaintiff's or are not produced under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff and approved by Plaintiff for sale under the NANOBLOCK marks;
- c. committing any acts calculated to cause consumers to believe that Defendants' counterfeit NANOBLOCK 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 NANOBLOCK marks and damaging Plaintiff's goodwill;
- e. 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 trademark of Plaintiff, including the NANOBLOCK marks, or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof; and

- f. using, linking to, transferring, selling, exercising control over, or otherwise owning the Online Marketplace Accounts or any other online marketplace account that is being used to sell or is the means by which Defendants could continue to sell counterfeit NANOBLOCK products.

2) That Defendants, within fourteen (14) days after service of judgment with notice of entry thereof upon them, be required to file with the Court and serve upon Plaintiff a written report under oath setting forth in detail the manner and form in which Defendants have complied with paragraph 1, a through f, above;

3) Entry of an Order that, upon Plaintiff's request, those in privity with Defendants and those with notice of the injunction, including any online marketplaces such as Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and any related Amazon, Aliexpress and Alibaba, social media platforms, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Internet search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo, web hosts for the Defendant Online Marketplace Accounts, and domain name registrars, shall:

- a. disable and cease providing services for any accounts through which Defendants engage in the sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products using the NANOBLOCK marks, including any accounts associated with the Defendants listed in Schedule A; and
- b. disable and cease displaying any advertisements used by or associated with Defendants in connection with the sale of counterfeit NANOBLOCK products using the NANOBLOCK marks.

4) 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 NANOBLOCK marks be increased by a sum not exceeding three times the amount thereof as provided by 15 U.S.C. § 1117;

5) In the alternative, that Plaintiff be awarded statutory damages pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1117(c) of not less than \$1,000 and not more than \$2,000,000 for each and every use of the NANOBLOCK marks;

6) That Plaintiff be awarded its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs; and

7) Award any and all other relief that this Court deems just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: February 26, 2025

By: s/Michael A. Hierl
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KAWADA CO., LTD.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned attorney hereby certifies that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Complaint was filed electronically with the Clerk of the Court and served on all counsel of record and interested parties via the CM/ECF system on February 26, 2025.

s/Michael A. Hierl