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Mr. Manoj Kochar was appointed as the President of Authentication Solution Providers' Association in 2012 and since then he has been instrumental in broadening the scope of the Association to include a variety of authentication technologies. Additionally, he is the Board member of the globally recognized International Hologram Manufacturers Association (IHMA) which promotes and regulates holographic and allied anti-counterfeiting and brand protection solutions.

EMPOWER CONSUMER WITH LATEST GENERATION AUTHENTICATION SOLUTION'S

CONSUMER PROTECTION IN INDIA

In India, 24th December is celebrated as "National Consumer Rights Day", since the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was enacted on this day. The Consumer Protection Act is based on United Nations guidelines with the objective of providing better protection of consumers' interests. The Act envisages the promotion and protection of the following rights of consumers:

Right to Safety: This means right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services, which are hazardous to life and property. The purchased goods and services availed of should not only meet the consumers' immediate needs, but also fulfil long term interests. Before purchasing, consumers should insist on the quality of the products as also the guarantee of the products and services. They should preferably purchase quality marked products such as ISI, AGMARK, etc.

Right to be informed: The right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods and services, as the case may be, to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices.

Right to Choose: The right to be assured of access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices.

Right to be Heard: The right to be heard and assured that consumer interest will receive due consideration as appropriate.

Right to Seek Redressal: The right to seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers.

Right to Consumer Education: The right to consumer education about basic information related to the product.

THE MISSING LINK

In India, lack of consumer awareness is a major problem. In most of the cases, consumer are not aware of their right - they do not take the bill, do not check the primary details of product such as expiry date, manufacturing date etc. However, with the Government's continuous efforts and promotions, urban consumers are educated and now check these details.

Still, there is a missing link, as most of the consumer can only check the quality of goods and products with the marking of ISI/AGMARK. However, with the advancement in digital

technology it is very easier for unscrupulous and unethical manufacturer to produce fake ISI/AGMARK products. This is also the case in most of the products which are outside the certification scheme of BIS. This leads to fooling consumer as he is unable to differentiate between a genuine and a fake product.

To eradicate this problem, there needs to be a strategy as follows;

- The brand owners and the government, wherever appropriate, should consider adoption of ISO:12931 - Performance criteria for authentication solutions used to combat counterfeiting of material goods.
- Depending on the learnings from this standard, they need to adopt an authentication solution incorporating secure and difficult to simulate printing features and optical technologies such as a hologram. Depending on the product needs, this authentication solution may be integrated with track and trace solutions such QR code, bar-code and serialisation.
- The Government and Brand owners should communicate to the consumers about the authentication features on their product and the means to verify those features.
- At the consumer end, the consumer can check the details of this product by physical verification such as visual checking and cross verification of product details via website and SMS verification.

By adopting authentication solutions a brand owner and authorities can empower their consumers to identify a genuine product. This will increase the consumer's confidence in the product quality and leads to product loyalty, and the direct benefit of this is enhancement of brand value. The government also gains in terms of higher revenue by realization of taxes and duties that a genuine product manufacturer pays, but the counterfeit producer never does.

A successful business is the one that responds to the voice of the consumer. In today's world of free information the brand that connects with the consumer will increase its responsiveness and therefore its chances of success and longevity. The strategy of empowering consumers is a sure shot way to increase manufacturing efficiencies and making India truly a global manufacturing hub and realize our dream of 'Make in India'.