

The AUTHENTICATION

The official magazine of the Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA) **Times**

**FAKE PHARMA PRODUCTS
NEED A STRONGER
KNOCKOUT PUNCH**



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The AUTHENTICATION Times

The official magazine of the Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA)

Editor's Corner



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 56th edition of The Authentication Times. This issue comes at a critical juncture for India's pharmaceutical sector — a sector that not only serves as the "Pharmacy of the World" but also shoulders the responsibility of safeguarding millions of lives every day.

Our cover story, **"Fake Pharma Products Need a Stronger Knockout Punch"**, dives deep into one of the gravest challenges of our times: counterfeit medicines. The ASPA-CRISIL State of Counterfeiting in India 2022 report highlights that pharmaceuticals remain among the top five most counterfeited sectors, with fake drugs eroding patient trust, compromising treatment outcomes, and endangering public health. Recent investigations and industry voices covered in national media further echo the need for "more muscle" in this fight.

In this edition, we highlight how multi-layered authentication solutions — spanning overt, covert, digital, and phygital technologies — are redefining pharma security. From tamper-evident packaging, holograms, and forensic inks to non-clonable codes, serialization, QR-based verification, RFID, and blockchain-led traceability, the future lies in layered protection. Yet, technology alone cannot win this battle. Stronger regulatory frameworks, public-private partnerships, and patient awareness are equally vital to outpace counterfeiters.

ASPA continues to advance its core pillars of awareness, innovation, research, and advocacy, enabling industries to adopt world-class authentication practices. With India's pharma industry poised for global leadership, ensuring authenticity is not merely an industry concern — it is a public health imperative.

We thank you, our readers and members, for your continued support and commitment to a counterfeit-free future. Together, let us strengthen the ecosystem, safeguard trust, and deliver genuine medicines for every patient.

Happy reading!!

Yours Sincerely,

Puneet Maithani
Editor,
The Authentication Times

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About the Authentication Times

The Authentication Times is the official magazine published by Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA). The publication offers in-depth analysis, news, research, article, and expert opinion on the latest developments on Anti-counterfeiting, Brand Protection, Serialization and Traceability in and out of India. The editorial team welcomes news, contributions, and comments.

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Are Indian Drug Makers Doing Enough? The Fight Against Fake Medicines Needs More Muscle

Counterfeit and ‘not of standard quality’ drugs are more than a regulatory headache -- they erode patient trust, compromise treatment outcomes, and can even endanger lives.

Are India’s leading drug makers doing enough to fight counterfeit medicines? Month after month, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation releases its list of ‘not of standard quality’ drugs. And month after month, pharma giants whose brand names appear on it are quick to distance themselves – terming the flagged products as counterfeit or disowning them altogether.

Now, the regulatory body’s own alerts include comments from manufacturers stating that the failed products did not originate from them. In fact, in 2023, the Centre made QR codes mandatory for 300 pharmaceutical brands allowing consumers to verify the authenticity of medicines. Despite the move, counterfeit drugs continue to circulate – partly due to limited public awareness and the absence of a robust system to sensitise consumers.

When News18 reached out, only a handful of companies shared details of the steps they are taking to trace and curb fake brands. Others chose not to respond despite reminders. This raises a sharp question: are drug makers truly committed to tackling counterfeits,



or is silence simply a safer route – one that shields them from reputational damage and regulatory scrutiny while the problem festers in the market?

Source: Hindustan Times

Drugs flagged in quality checks

Over the past year, several widely used medicines sold under popular brand names have figured in the ‘not of standard quality’



(NSQ) alerts issued by Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), which is India’s apex drug regulator.

Cipla’s Tamsulosin Hydrochloride and Dutasteride tablets (Urimax D, May 2025) and Tofacitinib (Tofajak, November 2024) were flagged, as was Glenmark’s Telma 40 (March and May 2025). Alkem’s Ondem (January 2025), Pan D (October 2024) and Taxim, as well as Sun Pharma’s Rosuvas (October 2024), Pantocid (August 2024) also appeared on the list.

Among multinationals, GSK’s Augmentin 625 Duo and dermatology creams Betnovate-N and Betnovate-C were named in November 2024. Pharmaceutical companies typically inform regulators that the listed batches were not manufactured by them and, therefore, are in the category of spurious or counterfeit drugs.

Source: Hindustan Times



But, what’s next?

Several drug makers have outlined the steps they are taking to address the issue.

A GSK spokesperson told News18 that its most recognised product, “Augmentin 625 Duo and dermatology products Betnovate-N and Betnovate-C”, have been targeted by the counterfeit market.

The company said “detection and prevention are two different topics which require different technical solutions”. It utilises overt and covert anti-counterfeit features on its packaging – both Augmentin 625 Duo and Betnovate-N and Betnovate-C incorporate these features.

“In line with legislation that requires capturing the details of the product, we overprint QR codes on these products for easier detection,” GSK said.

To stop the proliferation of counterfeit drugs, the spokesperson said: “We believe enforcement must be strengthened. In addition, there is low adoption of scanning at the retail and consumer level, weak integration of the tracking system across the supply chain, along with the presence of informal or unregulated distribution channels. Until compliance is universal and verification is routine at every stage – from manufacturing

to the point of sale – counterfeiters will exploit such loopholes.”

GSK said it is actively working with different Indian law enforcement agencies, including CDSCO (DCGI), state FDAs (Food and Drug Administration), and the police. In fact, it said, it is constantly surveying and investigating valuable targets under a global anti-counterfeiting programme.

“We regularly send notifications to relevant FDA offices when we receive consumer complaints of counterfeit goods,” the company added.

Another drugmaker, Alkem, whose popular brands Pan D and Taxim-O have also been targeted, described counterfeit medicines as a persistent public health risk.

“We are consistently enhancing our security measures, adopting innovative packaging technologies to prevent counterfeiting. Today, Alkem’s key brands, including Pan, Clavam, A to Z and Taxim-O, incorporate unique security features in addition to QR codes to verify product authenticity,” the company said.

Alkem said it regularly engages with industry bodies, healthcare professionals, and government authorities to address the problem of counterfeiting and drive awareness

about the security measures taken by the company on its product packs.

“We believe counterfeit drugs is a national issue and all stakeholders involved should tackle it collaboratively to ensure that patients receive approved and genuine medicines developed by authentic manufacturers,” it said.

Similarly, Mankind Pharma’s CEO Sheetal Arora called counterfeit drugs a “direct threat to patient safety” and public trust in branded medicines.



“Counterfeit and spurious drugs are a grave concern, given the recent spate of incidents reported in the media, as they directly threaten patient safety and trust,” Arora said.

Mankind Pharma implements safeguards, including QR codes, holograms, security labels and tamper-proof packaging across our top-selling products.

“These measures enable consumers to instantly verify authenticity and access essential product details. We also change packaging periodically to make duplication more challenging,” Arora added.

Despite these safeguards, counterfeit products can still infiltrate the supply chain. “This is why we have adopted multiple preventive measures and continuously monitor our supply chain processes. Alongside enforcement, we work closely with chemists, distributors and consumers through public awareness

initiatives to help them identify genuine medicines.”

The company has designed a way to create awareness around fake medicines. “In August, we will roll out our public awareness campaign #AsliDawaKhushalZindagi and launch a podcast on our social media platform Docflix. This is our way of sensitising the public and combating counterfeit medicines through organic advocacy, stakeholder collaborations and sustained awareness campaigns,” the CEO said.

The company recognises that curbing this menace requires stronger policy-level support, including joint task forces, stricter implementation of good distribution practices and investments in secure, distinctive and hard-to-replicate packaging.

However, Cipla, Abbott and Sun Pharma – the top three pharmaceutical companies in the chronic segment drugs – did not respond to queries about the safeguards they have in place to protect patients from fake versions of their brands.

Glenmark, maker of one of the most popular high blood pressure drug Telma, told News18: “We won’t be able to take it further.”

In short...

Counterfeit and NSQ drugs are more than a regulatory headache – they erode patient trust, compromise treatment outcomes, and can even endanger lives.

While some companies have introduced technological fixes, the scale of the problem goes beyond packaging and security features. Weak enforcement, gaps in drug distribution, and limited awareness among consumers allow fakes to persist.

India needs a stronger, coordinated strategy where regulators, law enforcement, pharma companies and healthcare providers act in concert. Without this, the monthly NSQ alerts risk becoming a ritual – doing little to protect patients in reality.

Source: News 18

Researchers develop new sensor to ‘detect counterfeit medicine’



The University of Brighton has created a portable drug verification device that could enhance drug safety across the globe, it has announced.

Researchers at the University of Brighton have developed a new device to “detect counterfeit medicines” quickly, accurately and affordably.

The university said that the FakeMedSensor, a handheld electrochemical sensor device, is designed to “make drug verification faster, more reliable and affordable”.

The device uses “electrochemical sensing” to detect “the presence and amount of active pharmaceutical ingredients without needing complex processes”, it added.

While the prototype is still in its pilot phase, the University of Brighton said that the results in laboratory trials have been “strong.”

The next stage for the FakeMedSensor involves broader testing and refinement to meet regulatory and industry standards, with the team behind the device hoping to have it on

the commercial market “within the next year”, it added.

“Fake or poor-quality drugs can enter the system at any stage – from production to point of sale,” said PhD researcher Dr Rico Shergill, who developed the device alongside University of Brighton professor of clinical and bioanalytical chemistry Professor Bhavik Patel.

“We wanted a low-cost portable device that could be used anywhere to detect issues in real time,” he added.

“Serious threat to global health”

And Patel warned that some populations are at higher risk of consuming fake medicines than others. “Falsified and substandard medication presents a serious threat to global health – one that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations,” he said.

He added that the team’s work aims to deliver “a practical solution that provides wide-scale surveillance of medicines throughout all phases of the supply chain”.

Source : <https://www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk/>

Fake Pharma Products Need a Stronger Knockout Punch



The counterfeit drug crisis is no longer a silent threat — it is a public health emergency that demands urgent, coordinated, and tech-driven action.

According to the ASPA-CRISIL State of Counterfeiting in India 2022 report, pharmaceuticals continue to remain among the top five most counterfeited sectors in India, with counterfeit medicines estimated to cost the industry thousands of crores annually while endangering millions of patients' lives. Beyond the financial losses, the most tragic consequence is eroded trust in life-saving drugs — a risk India, as the “Pharmacy of the World,” cannot afford.

The Alarming Reality

- Counterfeit drugs are infiltrating both urban and rural markets, from lifestyle medicines to critical treatments.

- WHO estimates that nearly 1 in 10 medical products in low- and middle-income countries is substandard or falsified.
- In India, seizures of fake drugs have spiked in recent years, with enforcement agencies busting rackets producing spurious antibiotics, painkillers, and even cancer drugs.

Industry Concerns: “More Muscle Needed”

As covered recently in News18, leading Indian drug manufacturers openly acknowledged that the fight against counterfeit medicines “needs more muscle.” While companies have made strides in deploying overt features (like holograms, security inks, QR codes) and covert markers (for verification by enforcement agencies), the scale and sophistication of counterfeiters continues to grow.



Several pharma leaders stressed the importance of multi-layered authentication technologies, combined with stronger regulatory support and consumer awareness, to truly outpace the counterfeit ecosystem.

The Knockout Punch: Anti-Counterfeiting Solutions

Pharma’s defense against counterfeiting lies in a layered, technology-driven ecosystem. ASPA members and global leaders are pioneering solutions that integrate physical, digital, and phygital authentication.

Key tools include:

- **Overt Features:** Holograms, color-shifting inks, tamper-evident labels, and unique security designs visible to consumers.
- **Covert Features:** Invisible security inks, forensic taggants, and microtext for expert verification.
- **Digital Track & Trace:** Serialization, QR codes, RFID, NFC, and blockchain-led traceability systems for supply chain transparency.
- **Phygital Solutions:** Non-clonable codes and digital verification platforms enabling consumers to authenticate products instantly.

The Way Forward

The path to defeating counterfeit medicines lies in a multi-pronged approach that combines policy, technology, and awareness. Stronger implementation authentication features such as holograms, tamper-evident labels, color-shifting inks, invisible forensic markers, non-clonable codes, QR-based digital verification, RFID, NFC, and blockchain-led traceability must be adopted more widely to create multiple layers of protection. Equally important is consumer awareness, ensuring that patients are empowered to verify their medicines. A simple scan or visible security feature should reassure them of authenticity. This fight also demands robust public-private partnerships, bringing together government agencies, enforcement bodies, pharma companies, and authentication solution providers to stay ahead of counterfeiters. Finally, India must adopt a zero-tolerance policy, treating counterfeiting in life-saving medicines not merely as an economic crime but as a grave public health and national security threat.

Counterfeiters are agile and opportunistic, but the pharmaceutical industry cannot afford to play catch-up. The challenge requires a stronger knockout punch — a fusion of advanced authentication solutions, regulatory enforcement, and consumer empowerment. For India to safeguard its reputation as the “Pharmacy of the World”, the war against fake medicines must not only continue — it must intensify.

Forensic Battle Against Counterfeit Medicines

India is now increasingly threatened by the growing menace of counterfeit medicines. Counterfeit medicines are fake drugs that look just like the real ones but might not work—or worse, they could harm the health. Fake medicines often contain no real ingredients, wrong substances, or harmful chemicals, yet are packaged with labels, logos and seals to look authentic. In India, where medicines are used by millions every day, counterfeit drugs have quietly become a serious threat, even reaching trusted shops and hospitals. These illicit drugs find their way into legitimate supply chains. As counterfeiters grow more sophisticated, spotting and stopping these drugs is increasingly critical.

Counterfeiters target multiple parts of a drug's presentation. They even exploit the names of reputed pharmaceutical companies to circulate fake medicines in the market, deceiving both regulators and consumers. Counterfeit tablets or capsules often mimic the colour, shape, and size of real drugs but may lack active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) or contain harmful substitutes. They differ in texture, weight, and dissolution. Common signs include incorrect fonts, misspellings, poor logos, fake QR codes or holograms that don't link to verification databases, and low-quality packaging. Batch numbers and expiry dates are often printed with non-standard inks, and tamper-evident seals are typically forged, lacking proper pressure sensitivity or adhesive bonding of genuine products. Counterfeiters use fake licences and illegal manufacturers to dodge regulation.

India is tackling counterfeit drugs with a multi-layered strategy combining forensic science and regulation. Key steps include QR code-based serialization for full drug traceability and upgrading state and central forensic laboratories into pharma forensics units with tools like Raman spectroscopy, infrared analysis, and AI databases. Experts use visual and digital autopsies to examine packaging and contents, while digital forensics from phones and computers uncover networks. Fingerprint analysis links suspects to crime scenes, and psychological profiling aids in understanding perpetrators. This integrated approach helps to detect, trace, and dismantle fake drug operations to safeguard public health.



Dr Keshav Kumar, IPS (Retd)

The Parliamentary Standing Committee's fifth report (2024–25) flags widespread spurious drugs and a abysmally low 5.9% resolution rate. Of 2.3 lakh samples tested (2015–2019), 593 were spurious and 9,266 substandard, yet only 35 convictions occurred. In April 2025, 196 drug samples were declared Not of Standard Quality (NSQ)—60 by central labs and 136 by state labs. Similar concerns were raised in March 2025 and December 2024, when 135 NSQ drugs were flagged.

Key counterfeit medicine hubs in India include Delhi-NCR, Baddi, Kolkata, Patna, Mumbai, and parts of UP and Hyderabad. These areas are exploited for their pharma activity, weak oversight, and transport access, aiding fake drug production and distribution.

There is currently no centralized national database to track counterfeit medicine cases, which allows repeat offenders to secure bail relatively quickly after serving only a short period in police or judicial custody. Although violators are subjected to provisions under the Drug and Cosmetics Act, enforcement remains a challenge. BNSS Act Section 111, is a very new enabling provision wherein action can be taken to be an Organised Crime and the habitual offenders can be proceeded against with. Only two charge-sheeted case in the past ten years can attract the provisions of this Act.

Almost every Counterfeiting case is a case of Cheating and Forgery which remain outside the purview of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. A synergy between DC Act and BNSS Act has the potential to be a game changer. In addition to providing Authentication solutions, there is also a need to forensically investigate

those indulging in Counterfeiting and taking criminal action against the counterfeiters to stem the counterfeiting.

Forensic Interface like Expert Guidance on Forensic Authentication Techniques, Offering insights on emerging forensic methods (ink analysis, document examination, biometrics) to enhance authentication processes.

Development of Anti-Counterfeiting Protocols, Help create evidence-based, legally sound anti-counterfeiting protocols rooted in investigative experience, Validation of Authentication Technologies for evaluating the forensic robustness of new authentication solutions or technologies, Bridging Investigations with Industry, Needs

Share intelligence on how criminals bypass existing authentication systems, enabling stakeholders to build more resilient products.

Support in Standardization and Certification

Aid in setting forensic benchmarks for authentication systems used in high-risk sectors like pharma, defence, and judiciary, could be some of the areas where Forensics can play a major role.

In November 2024, the Supreme Court issued a notice on a petition by the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance seeking clear guidelines for prosecuting counterfeit drug offenses. In March 2025, the Delhi High Court ruled in favour of Johnson & Johnson, imposing a ₹3.34 crore penalty on Medserve for selling counterfeit medical devices, emphasizing the serious threat to public health.



Madhubanti Das



ANTF and DCA Telangana have led multiple successful raids, seizing counterfeit, expired, and unlicensed drugs, and arresting key offenders. These actions, supported by Pharma Task Force and State Drug Officers, disrupted major fake medicine networks.

Forensic science plays a pivotal role in the investigation of conventional crimes. It can effectively be used in the investigation of counterfeit drug investigations by analyzing packaging, chemical composition, and trace evidence to authenticate products. Law enforcement collaborates closely with pharmaceutical companies and drug regulators to share intelligence, test samples, and track supply chains. Forensic tools such as spectroscopy, barcoding, and DNA tagging can help identify fakes and secure convictions. A UK product called Selectadna which is a synthetic DNA can be used for tagging original products and counterfeiting can be prevented.

Strengthening this approach requires policy reforms mandating forensic audits, creating

centralized testing hubs, and enabling real-time data sharing between agencies and industry. A robust forensic interface is critical to protect public health and ensure pharmaceutical integrity.

Forensic Psychological based investigation techniques like Criminal Profiling, Crime Scene Profiling, Polygraph, Layered Voice Analysis, Suspect Detection System, Eye Detect, iMotion, Brainfingerprinting and Narco-analysis can bring out the clinching evidences and fortify the conspiracy and motive of the accused. The aforesaid techniques have never been used in the present form of investigation by the Drugs Department. Its high time that such tests should be used for the unearthing the larger conspiracy.

Tackling counterfeit drugs is a critical public health issue, demanding stronger forensic tools, digital traceability, and coordinated national action to safeguard lives and the pharma industry's integrity.

Fight Against Counterfeit Medicines | Mankind Pharma | #AsliDawaKhushalZindagi



Counterfeit medicines remain one of the gravest threats to public health and patient safety, yet the subject is often under-discussed in mainstream conversations. Taking a bold and proactive step to change this narrative, Mankind Pharma has launched the first-ever dedicated podcast on counterfeit medicines through its knowledge-sharing platform Docflix.

The podcast was released under the campaign hashtag #AsliDawaKhushalZindagi. It seeks to draw the much-needed spotlight on a problem that silently affects millions of lives, while encouraging stakeholders to come together in the fight against fake and substandard drugs.

Hosted by Mr. Manoj Kochar, President of the Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA), the session featured valuable perspectives from key experts including Mr. A.K. Pradhan and Dr. K. Bangarurajan, Former Joint Drugs Controller (India), CDSCO. Together, they explored the many dimensions of this issue — ranging from prevalent regulations and supply chain vulnerabilities to the role of advanced authentication technologies, consumer awareness, and cross-industry collaboration.

What makes this initiative particularly significant is the way it bridges the gap between regulatory agencies, industry leaders, and solution providers. It underscores the importance of building a secure pharmaceutical ecosystem where every medicine reaching the patient is genuine, safe, and effective.

ASPA Presents Paper on Anti-Counterfeiting at ASIA Security Conference 2025



Focus on Consumer Awareness, Sectoral Impact, and Strategic Industry Collaboration

The Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA) presented a comprehensive paper titled "ASPA – The Global Voice of Anti-Counterfeiting Solutions" during the ASIA Security Conference & Exhibition | Anti-Counterfeiting, Illicit Trade & Brand Protection, held on July 24, 2025, in New Delhi.

The presentation was made by Mr. Puneet Maithani, Director – Industry Affairs, ASPA, and highlighted the Association's strategic roadmap, global engagement, brand owner collaboration, consumer awareness and efforts to combat counterfeiting through a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach. ASPA, representing a network of 92 member companies, offers diverse physical, digital, and phygital authentication solutions and continues to strengthen its international presence—marked notably by the launch of its Middle East Chapter in 2024.

Key Insights from ASPA-CRISIL Report and Research Initiative

A key highlight of the paper was the presentation of findings from the ASPA-CRISIL "State of Counterfeiting in India – 2022" report, which mapped the prevalence and impact of counterfeiting across Pharmaceuticals, FMCG, Consumer Durables, Agro-products, Apparel, and Automotive sectors. The paper emphasized how each sector faces unique threats—from counterfeit medicines affecting public health to fake auto parts compromising safety, and counterfeit seeds and fertilizers undermining agriculture. The infiltration of fakes across these domains has far-reaching consequences for consumers, industry, and national economy.

ASPA also formally announced its renewed partnership with CRISIL to develop the 2025 edition of the report, which will include a comparative analysis with 2022 data—allowing stakeholders to track emerging trends and measure progress in the fight against illicit trade.

In the dynamic realm of innovation and collaboration, ASPA (Authentication Solution Provider Association) has embarked on groundbreaking collaborations, aligning with renowned organisers to fortify the industry and deliver immense value to ASPA members. Let's delve into these exciting ventures:

- **Elite Plus Summit 2025:** ASPA is an Association Partner for the upcoming 12th Speciality Films & Flexible Packaging Global Business Summit & Exhibition – 2025 (3rd and 4th September) , Mumbai
- **Propak India 2025:** Supporting Association for ProPak India 2025, scheduled from 3rd – 5th September 2025 at the India Expo Centre, Greater Noida, Delhi NCR. ProPak India is one of the country's leading platforms for showcasing cutting-edge packaging materials and processing technologies, bringing together industry leaders, innovators, and stakeholders.
- **ASIASec2025:** Anti-Counterfeiting, Illicit Trade & Brand Protection (7th October 2025), Singapore : ASPA is supporting the event as a Supporting Association. This high-level conference brings together brand owners, enforcement agencies, technology providers, policymakers, and IP experts to address the evolving challenges of illicit trade and counterfeiting across India and the Asia region.
- **FLEXO SUMMIT ASIA 2025** scheduled for 26 & 27 November 2025 at JECC Novotel Jaipur. This event is preceding the Bharat Pack and Bharat Food Expo 2025. ASPA is the Supporting Association for these events.
- **Bharat PacExpo 2025:** The Packaging & Supply Chain event Bharat PacExpo, is scheduled from 28 - 30 November at the Jaipur Exhibition & Convention Centre

(JECC). ASPA is participating as a Supporting Association.

- **IntraPac India 2025:** IntraPac India, the latest addition to IPAMA's long-standing legacy, will be held from 10-13 December 2025 at the India Expo Centre, Greater Noida, NCR Delhi. The event will showcase a comprehensive range of packaging solutions, machinery, and allied products including plastic, metal, glass, and paper packaging as well as filling, capping, filling & sealing, biodegradable packaging, protective packaging, automation and robotics, tube packaging, mono cartons, traceability & tracking, logistics, film, moulding, and many more. ASPA is supporting as a Supporting Association.

These collaborations exemplify ASPA's proactive approach to fostering innovation, promoting security, and championing cutting-edge solutions across sectors such as Food and Beverage, Beauty and Cosmetics, Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals, Packaging, Brand Security, Security Services, Logistics, and technology. ASPA continues to be a driving force, navigating the industry toward a future of enhanced security and technological excellence.

Stay tuned for more exciting developments as ASPA continues to shape the landscape of authentication and traceability solutions.

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(OVDs)



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Holographic Hot
Stamping Foils



Holographic
Sealing Wads



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(QR Code & RFID)



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UV-embossed
3D Speciality
Labels



Holographic
Folding Cartons



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and many more...

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