

Anheuser-Busch InBev Protects Their Online Brands with Melbourne IT



Client: Anheuser-Busch InBev

Key facts:

- One of the world's Top 5 consumer products companies
- Over 200 beer brands
- Holds #1 or #2 position in 19 countries

Challenge: To protect their online reputation, AB InBev needed a constant view of what was happening with their brands on the Internet and in social media.

Solution: Implement a brand monitoring program that scans the web for certain brand-related content, images and keywords and includes frequent analysis of results with detailed recommendations.

Results: AB InBev can quickly respond and adapt to evolving consumer sentiment on the Internet and proactively protect their online reputation.

“Melbourne IT assists us greatly by monitoring what is happening on the Internet, analyzing that information and advising AB InBev on how to respond. This all helps us to efficiently take action to protect our brands.”

Philippe Vandeuren

*Legal Director, Global IP and Procurement
AB InBev*

Anheuser-Busch InBev (AB InBev) is one of the world's top five consumer products companies and its beers are enjoyed around the world. With leading brands such as Becks, Stella Artois and Budweiser, it manages a portfolio of well over 200 beer brands and holds the No. 1 or No. 2 market position in 19 countries.

With so many brands in so many markets, it is critical for AB InBev to understand how and where their brands are being used on the Internet. Armed with this understanding, AB InBev can ensure their online assets and, more importantly, their online reputation are protected.

For over five years, AB InBev has relied on Melbourne IT DBS to manage their online assets, which now includes a domain name portfolio of approximately 4,000 names. So when the company expanded their digital brand strategy to better protect their online reputation and navigate the rapid growth in social media, Melbourne IT was also there to help.

The importance of online reputation

Philippe Vandeuren is the Legal Director, Global IP and Procurement for the AB InBev Group. With a lean team spread around the globe, he relies on a strong partnership with Melbourne IT to help manage and protect the company's brands online.

Philippe has seen a lot of change and growing complexity in the online landscape over the last five years. “The use of our brands on the Internet and our online reputation is very important to AB InBev,” he explains. “The recent explosion of digital and social media makes it increasingly difficult to manage your online reputation. However, it has been important that we adapt our approach and learn to address both the opportunities and threats that this represents.”

The challenge of managing online reputation in the era of Facebook and consumer-generated content, became particularly apparent for AB InBev a few years ago. This is when the company first began formally monitoring their brands online.

One of their key brands was having some reputational issues. Negative sentiment was in danger of eroding their premium position. “We wanted to monitor online so that we could know what was being said and quickly take corrective action,” explained Philippe.

Working with AB InBev's IP and marketing team, Melbourne IT helped AB InBev put in place a brand monitoring program that scanned the Internet (including social media) for certain brand-related content, images and keywords. The information gathered from the monitoring was critical in helping to shape the direction of a broader strategic initiative to revamp the brand. It included frequent reporting and analysis of the monitoring results along with detailed recommendations.

Armed with online brand intelligence from Melbourne IT, AB InBev was able to quickly respond and adapt to evolving consumer sentiment on the Internet. This ranged from taking legal enforcement action where appropriate to using counter-PR and creative social media outreach.

“In order to implement our plans, we needed to have a constant view of what was happening online. At one point we were doing daily monitoring,” explained Philippe. “It was part of a broader, integrated

action plan that included a whole new marketing plan, new design, new brand extensions. And the plan proved very successful, with the brand emerging much stronger from the experience.”

After this experience, the team quickly saw the benefits that online brand monitoring can bring. “We started with a particular brand where there was a problem but we soon realized the importance of doing it across all our key brands and also our corporate brand,” explained Philippe. As a result, AB InBev established a broader online brand protection program with Melbourne IT.

Building a comprehensive online brand protection program

Working closely with Melbourne IT, AB InBev then further developed their online brand protection strategy based on the early learnings. This included their domain portfolio strategy as well as their brand monitoring program.

“Our monitoring strategy varies from brand to brand based on the level of risk and potential impact to the business. Likewise, our enforcement policy varies by brands and markets,” explained François Uyttenhove, Trademark & Domain Name Manager at AB InBev. “We don’t like our brands being associated with binge drinking, pornographic content, discriminatory sites, or any other type of slandering.”

A common problem with online monitoring is the volume of data that it can generate, especially with very popular brands and keywords. Melbourne IT’s brand monitoring and analysis service helps the AB InBev team avoid the problem of data-overload. By delivering monthly reporting and recommendations that are tailored to AB InBev’s unique risk profile, Melbourne IT helps ensure AB InBev can maximize their online monitoring and enforcement budget by focusing their efforts on the areas of greatest concern. For example, high-priority results are always flagged up along with recommendations for action.

François explains that “the monitoring reports are easy-to-use and allow us to take fast action. When we detect a problem, we turn to Melbourne IT for advice as they are the experts in domain name recovery and online enforcement. We expect them to provide a considered view and advice on all the options rather than sending a simple cease and desist action. In many cases, they can also assist us with enforcement action.”

““ The monitoring reports are easy-to-use and allow us to take fast action. When we detect a problem, we turn to Melbourne IT for advice as they are the experts in domain name recovery and online enforcement. ””

François Uyttenhove
Trademark & Domain Name Manager
AB InBev

Monitoring social media – the good and the bad

Social media is a particularly delicate area of Internet monitoring. Sentiment expressed online can range from highly negative to highly positive. This intelligence can be valuable to both the legal and marketing teams and can also be used to gain consumer and brand insight and stimulate innovation.

“There are a lot of opportunities to be gained from monitoring social media.” explains François. “In fact, we have successfully launched a brand extension in Canada in response to social media. We had introduced a brand extension in the US and on social media we were also picking consumer demand for this product in Canada. So our marketing team used social media to engage with consumers, encouraging them to create a community around the idea. And it was a big success.”

On the flip side, when there are problems detected on social media such as negative sentiment, trashing or trademark infringement, AB InBev relies on Melbourne IT to take corrective action and help mitigate brand damage. “Sometimes highly sensitive information about our brands is leaked in digital media and we turn to Melbourne IT to have such content removed as soon as possible,” explained François. “We have been very impressed by the fast action.”

A successful partnership

An integral part of AB InBev’s digital brand strategy is a strong working relationship with Melbourne IT.

“Melbourne IT assists us greatly by monitoring what is happening on the Internet, analyzing that information and advising AB InBev on how to respond. Another key benefit is having the right contacts in areas such as social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). This all helps us to efficiently take action to protect our brands,” added Philippe.

“Melbourne IT is able to discuss intelligent solutions to any problems that we encounter online,” concludes François. “And the most important thing is that they listen to our feedback which allows the partnership to continue to grow.”