

“No mercy for product pirates!”

Richard Grohe, Deputy CEO of Hansgrohe AG (Schiltach/Black Forest), on the problem of product piracy

“Illegal copying of quality products occurs far too often – and it is a dubious honor. Products manufactured by Hansgrohe AG – fittings, showerheads, even complete shower and wellness systems – are also being copied illegally and marketed under our name. In doing so, the pirates not only imitate the design of the product; they go so far as to recreate likenesses of our product packaging, our logos and typefaces in an attempt to exploit the high reputation and positive image of the Hansgrohe brand.”

“What looks like a bargain can often turn into an expensive exercise for consumers”

“The pleasure we get from taking a shower also depends on things like having a showerhead that does not leak and spray errant jets of water around the bathroom, and the general reliability of the product. And yet, cheap showerheads are often manufactured using inferior materials. Sometimes the types of synthetic material turn out to be incompatible, or the manufacturing tolerances of individual parts are too great to make for a good fit, or the materials are simply not strong enough. The result is bound to place a damper on a happy morning spirit: the refreshing changes in water temperature from cold to hot do have the potential to deform some types of synthetic materials, and this can lead to the showerhead developing leaks, the switching mechanism for the different types of sprays may fail, and areas where the seals fail are prone to harboring germs and bacteria. Or a material flaw may cause the sensitive connecting thread to break when adjusting the hand shower on its holder. Or there is the irritation of having errant jets because the connection between the shower hose and the showerhead is not a good fit due to a faulty mold. Many showerheads from the Far East also produce unpleasant surprises when attempting to remove calcium deposits from the showerhead surface: the silicon nipples can shear off or burst, because the manufacturers in China often don't have the necessary know-how for working with silicon.”

“Counterfeit products may cause injury and entail other health risks”

“The makers of copies of our shower fittings hope to be competitive on the basis of low cost. Accordingly, their investment in the quality of the products and the manufacturing process is negligible. Usually, they are not interested in ensuring that no harmful substances used during production are released or leached out at a later stage. With cheap copies, it is entirely possible that they contain residues of corrosive chromic acid on the inside or even on the outside, which can then come in contact with the skin during showering. It can also happen that cheap copies used in bathrooms and kitchens allow diffusing substances such as lead to become a health risk when the water is used for drinking, for rinsing foodstuffs or for brushing teeth.

In the shower, the galvanized surface itself – which is intended as a protective layer – may cause problems: this galvanized layer is often found to be too thin, or it can contain inclusions and impurities. Frequent changes in temperature during showers can trigger undesirable chemical processes which result in peeling surfaces that can form sharp edges. These inadequate protective layers on pirated showerheads are also much more vulnerable to domestic cleaning agents than those on the ‘real McCoy’ branded product.

“We invest in the quality of our original products”

“Our quality showerheads are the result of a great deal of know-how and experience. We go to great lengths to guarantee the safety of our products, their longevity, their conformance with health and environmental standards, and to optimize them in terms of their form and functionality – basically, it is an investment in terms of time and expense that copyists, who generally operate without the support of a research and development division, simply do not want to make and cannot afford.

Not only do the Hansgrohe product developers choose high-quality materials and high-tech synthetics that are carefully matched to ensure their compatibility; they also use computer simulations to test showerheads for breaking resistance and other key characteristics. Extensive practical testing of prototypes eventually results in mature and durable products. And finally, there is our mass manufacturing process which has ISO Quality Management certification and so is proven to be capable of producing products of a consistently high standard. Test certificates issued by independent institutes attest to the quality and safety of our products. Our products also bear the approval symbols to indicate that they conform to the relevant standards and legal provisions.

We take the view that the daily shower contributes to the quality of our lives. It makes you fit for the day in the morning, and in the evening after work or sport, it soothes and relaxes you. This is why in our product development, the focus is on the people who use the product. We want their daily shower to be a positive experience all round, every single time. For this reason alone, we simply would not even consider engaging in a price war with low-cost vendors and product pirates. To us, making high-quality showers represents a true work of art.”

“Theft of intellectual property hurts the economy and causes job losses”

“Hansgrohe AG invests between two and three million euros annually in protecting the company’s products and ideas, and in combating theft of industrial property rights and the production of cheap copies. We currently estimate the economic damage resulting from product piracy to amount to three percent of our net sales. To put it another way, this means that the creation of new jobs at Hansgrohe – and we are talking a sizeable number here, around 100 jobs – is being prevented as a result of these pirated products. This is another reason why we started our own campaign in fighting for quality and originality.”

“Combating product piracy is worthwhile”

“Apart from the commercial damage they sustain, businesses whose products are copied also suffer damage to their reputation, which is impossible to quantify. Loss of reputation is the result of the deficiencies in terms of quality, safety and functionality described earlier, which consumers mistakenly attribute to the original, branded product. This is why the company founded by my grandfather Hans Grohe in 1901 will prosecute every single breach of copyright and, if necessary, we will use all legal remedies at our disposal – from confiscation right through to the destruction of pirated products (see photograph). Let there be no mercy for product pirates! And we are succeeding: Hansgrohe AG has already managed to sue manufacturers and distributors of pirated copies, and not only in Europe. In China, too, the courts have ruled in our favor in legal proceedings against manufacturers of pirated products. Some 120 court cases are currently pending in the ‘Middle Kingdom’; 83 have already been decided in our favor. We owe this not only to our customers, but also to our partners in the wholesale and retail trade with sanitation products, because they also suffer the effects of cheap copies just as we manufacturers of branded products do.”

About Hansgrohe – the original from the Black Forest

During its 108-year history, the company Hansgrohe (www.hansgrohe.com), headquartered in Schiltach in the Black Forest, has acquired a reputation in the sanitation sector as one of the innovative leaders in technology and design. With its fittings, showers and shower systems, Hansgrohe creates the original products that make the bathroom more functional, more comfortable and more beautiful. It is no coincidence that they can be found in prominent prestige projects such as on the giant cruiser “Queen Mary II”, in Terminal 5 of Heathrow Airport in London, in the German Reichstag and at the Chancellor's office in Berlin, in the Yoo luxury apartments in New York or at the Hotel Carlton in St. Moritz. In 2008, the company generated sales of about EUR 668 million with its Axor, Hansgrohe, Pharo and Pontos brands (2007: EUR 661 million). The Hansgrohe Group currently has a global workforce of about 3,200 employees, with about two-thirds of them working in Germany. The company, which takes tough action against product piracy and intellectual property theft, manufactures its products in six German plants, in France, the Netherlands, in the U.S. and in China.



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Design leader in the sanitary industry

In the current ranking of the International Forum Design (iF) of the world's best enterprises in the field of design, Hansgrohe AG is in 17th position among 1,499 companies. With a score of 520 points, the Schiltach-based bathroom mixers and shower specialist even outperforms such enterprises as Adidas, Nokia and Audi and leads the design hit list in the sanitary industry. www.hansgrohe.com/design

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