How to Evaluate Brand Protection Providers in 2026

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Counterfeit goods cost the global economy over $500 billion annually, and online marketplaces have become the primary channel for distributing fakes. If you sell online, infringers are probably already copying your designs, misusing your trademarks, and eroding the reputation you've spent years building. The brand protection industry has responded with dozens of providers promising to fix this through automation and AI. But here's the problem most buyers don't realize until it's too late: choosing the wrong provider can be worse than having no protection at all.

$2T+
Annual counterfeit goods sold globally**Human-Verified**
Every takedown reviewed by a person**15-25% False Positive Rate**
Industry average for fully automated systems**Performance Partnership**
Costs covered by recovered assets

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By: Alex Zaika, Axencis

What does brand protection actually mean?

Brand protection covers the strategies and tools companies use to stop unauthorized parties from exploiting their intellectual property. That includes counterfeit products copying your designs, trademark infringement where others use your brand name or logo, copyright violations of your product images or marketing content, patent infringement of proprietary technology, and gray market goods sold outside authorized channels.

But knowing what brand protection covers doesn't tell you much about what separates a good provider from a bad one. Effective protection requires getting four things right at the same time:

- **Thorough detection** – identifying infringements across all relevant channels, not just the obvious violations.
- **Accurate validation** – distinguishing genuine threats from false positives that would damage legitimate business relationships.
- **Scalable operations** – maintaining quality whether you're processing 100 or 10,000 detections.
- **Effective enforcement** – removing confirmed infringements by selecting the right enforcement method for each specific case.

The quality gap between providers shows up most in validation and scalability. Many companies can detect infringements at scale *or* validate them accurately. Few can do both simultaneously while keeping quality consistent as volumes grow. That gap is where brands get burned.

Why does provider selection matter so much?

The provider you choose shapes your entire brand protection experience for years. A poor choice creates compounding problems that get harder to fix the longer they run.

Budget gets consumed removing the same recurring infringements that reappear within days, with no strategy to stop repeat offenders. Time gets wasted on false positive alerts. Legitimate resellers face wrongful enforcement, damaging relationships with authorized distributors and eroding customer trust. Your brand reputation suffers when enforcement chaos disrupts legitimate sales channels. And the whole time? Real infringers keep operating.

The right provider focuses enforcement on genuine threats, preserves distributor relationships, provides transparent decision-making, and delivers measurable counterfeit reductions. That’s a fundamentally different experience. Honestly, I’ve seen brands waste 12+ months with a provider before realizing the problem was the partner, not the market.

The cost of getting it wrong:
False positives don’t just waste time. They damage your credibility with marketplace platforms. When platforms see high rates of incorrect takedown requests, they deprioritize future submissions. That means legitimate enforcement actions take longer to process, giving real counterfeiters more time to operate.

What should you look for in a brand protection provider?

There are six capabilities that separate effective providers from ones that generate activity without results. Here’s what to evaluate.

1. Geographic coverage that matches your risk

Infringement patterns vary by region. A provider effective in North America may fail in Asian markets where different platforms dominate and enforcement procedures differ entirely.

Evaluate coverage based on where your threats actually exist. If 80% of counterfeits appear on AliExpress and Temu, a provider specializing in Amazon and eBay provides limited value. Ask for specifics: which marketplaces do they monitor, what languages do their analysts speak, and what enforcement relationships do they maintain in each region?

2. Transparent reporting

Many providers operate as black boxes. They scan, submit takedowns, and report numbers without showing which listings were flagged or why.

This creates problems you won’t see until it’s too late. Demand transparency. Can you see detected listings before enforcement? Do you receive explanations for classification decisions? Can you set rules governing automated actions? When listings aren’t removed, do you get clear explanations of the reasons and next steps, or just vague status updates?

The right provider treats you as a partner, not a customer who should blindly trust their process.

3. Range of enforcement methods and flexibility

Brand protection isn’t one-size-fits-all. A small-scale reseller requires different handling than an organized counterfeit operation. Different infringement scenarios need different responses.

Ask potential providers: What enforcement options do you offer beyond basic takedowns? Can you escalate to legal action when platform enforcement fails? How do you handle new platforms or threat types that emerge? Flexibility in enforcement methods means you're not locked into a rigid process that may not fit your evolving protection needs.

4. Provider specialization and track record

Brand protection expertise varies by industry. Luxury goods specialists understand authentication markers. Pharmaceutical experts know regulatory requirements. Media piracy differs entirely from physical product counterfeits.

Evaluate relevant experience through case studies and client references. How long have they been operating? Do they maintain multi-year client relationships, or is there high turnover? Can they show measurable results for brands similar to yours?

5. Data security and compliance standards

You'll share sensitive information: product designs, sales data, distribution agreements, authorized seller lists, business strategy. Minimum standards include encrypted transmission and storage, role-based access controls, regular third-party audits, and GDPR compliance.

Look for ISO 27001 or SOC 2 certification. Consider data residency requirements for your regions. Don't skip this step just because the sales pitch was impressive.

6. Manual review capabilities over pure automation

This is the most critical factor in 2026, and it deserves its own section. The industry's rush toward full automation is creating more problems than it solves.

Why is manual review the most critical factor in 2026?

AI excels at detection. It can scan thousands of sites for potential matches faster than any human team. But AI struggles with the judgment calls that determine whether enforcement protects your brand or damages it.

Industry data shows fully automated systems produce 15-25% false positive rates. For every four real infringements caught, one legitimate listing gets incorrectly flagged. A provider's AI might flag 1,000 potential infringements, but only 200 are actual violations. Automatically submitting all 1,000 means you've attempted to remove 800 legitimate listings.

The consequences? Damaged platform credibility. Seller conflicts with legitimate businesses. Potential wrongful takedown liability. Your authorized distributors wondering whether working with you is worth the headache.

Important:
False positive rates aren't just an accuracy problem. They're a relationship problem. Platforms that receive reports with high false positive rates deprioritize future submissions. Your legitimate enforcement slows down, giving actual counterfeiters more runway. One bad quarter of false positives can take months to recover from.

Here's what to demand from any provider you're evaluating. Ask specifically: What percentage of detections receive human review before enforcement? Who performs reviews – junior checklist-followers or experienced specialists? Do analysts review photos, pricing context, seller history, and listing details? If the answer to any of these is vague, that should tell you something.

Avoid providers claiming AI is “accurate enough” to skip human review. That claim reveals either ignorance about the problem or a decision to prioritize profit margins over protection quality.

Why does pure automation fail at brand protection?

Brand protection requires judgment calls that current AI simply can’t make reliably. Consider a common scenario: a listing sells your product at 30% below retail. Is it counterfeit? An authorized sale? Gray market liquidation? Used resale? Each one requires different handling.

Automated systems face an impossible choice. They either flag all below-retail listings (massive false positives) or ignore pricing entirely (missing real infringements). Human analysts evaluate seller history, product photos for authentication markers, listing descriptions, pricing patterns, and your distribution model context before making a call.

This complexity shows up in every enforcement decision:

- Is this image stolen or legitimately photographed after purchase?
- Is this seller an infringer or an authorized distributor not yet in your system?
- Is this a counterfeit or a competing legitimate product with similar features?

These aren’t edge cases. They’re everyday situations in anti-counterfeiting enforcement. Brands with multi-level distribution, regional pricing strategies, or legitimate packaging variations across markets face these judgment calls on every single detection. Automation doesn’t solve them. It just makes the wrong call faster.

Evaluation Criteria	Automated-Only Providers	Hybrid (Limited Review)	Human-Verified (Axencis)
False positive rate	15-25%	8-15%	<2%
Enforcement success rate	60-75%	75-85%	95%+
Review process	AI classification only	AI + spot-check sampling	Every detection reviewed by trained analyst
Reporting transparency	Aggregate numbers only	Summary with sample listings	Full listing-level detail with classification reasoning
Client control	Limited – trust the algorithm	Some rule customization	Review before enforcement or set detailed rules
Gray market handling	Poor – flags most as infringement	Inconsistent	Analyst distinguishes counterfeit vs. genuine by context
Platform credibility	Low – frequent rejections erode trust	Moderate	High – accurate claims prioritized by platforms
Seller relationship risk	High – legitimate sellers targeted regularly	Moderate	Minimal – legitimate sellers protected by review

The table tells a clear story. Automation trades accuracy for speed, and the downstream costs – damaged platform trust, seller disputes, missed gray market distinctions – add up fast. The cheapest provider on paper often becomes the most expensive once you account for false positive cleanup and relationship repair.

How does Axencis approach brand protection differently?

While competitors raced toward full automation to cut costs, Axencis invested in specialized analyst teams who understand industry specifics, marketplace dynamics, and infringement patterns.

Every enforcement decision involves human review by analysts trained in your specific industry and product category. When we identify potential infringement, an analyst examines listing details, reviews product images for authentication markers, considers seller history and ratings, evaluates pricing in market context, and compares findings to your distribution channels. Only confirmed threats proceed to enforcement.

The results speak for themselves:

False positive rate below 2%. Compared to 15-25% industry averages for automated systems. Clean, accurate detections mean minimal verification time on your end. You're not spending hours sorting through questionable flags or resolving disputes with legitimate sellers. The legwork is done right, so you can review and approve quickly.

Enforcement success rate exceeding 95%. Well-documented, clearly legitimate claims that platforms trust and prioritize. When enforcement is executed correctly the first time, you spend less time on resubmissions, appeals, or escalations.

We specialize in the complex scenarios that break automated systems:

- Multi-level distribution with authorized and unauthorized sellers on the same platforms
- Products with legitimate packaging variations across markets
- Industries with gray market activity requiring counterfeit vs. genuine distinction
- Brands with regional pricing strategies where price alone doesn't indicate infringement

Our team includes former law enforcement investigators, trademark attorneys, and product specialists with deep category expertise. We maintain direct platform relationships, and our high accuracy means marketplaces trust and prioritize our requests.

Unlike black-box providers, we're transparent about our methodology. Review all detections before enforcement if you want, or set detailed rules governing autonomous handling. You receive insight into *why* listings were targeted – not just takedown numbers.

Evaluating your current provider – or choosing your first one?

Request a consultation to see how Axencis approaches brand protection for your industry. We'll walk you through our detection methodology, show you sample reports, and explain exactly how human review applies to your specific product category and distribution model.

How should you make your final decision?

Choosing a brand protection provider is fundamentally a decision about trust. You're trusting them to represent your brand, make judgment calls that affect business relationships, and protect sensitive information about your operations.

Base your decision on demonstrated capability, not marketing promises. Insist on evidence: client references from your industry, sample reports showing actual detection and classification detail, and clear methodology explanations. Ask for false positive rates. If a provider can't or won't share that number, that's an answer in itself.

Prioritize providers who acknowledge automation's limitations and invest in human expertise. The ones claiming AI solves everything are either behind the curve or hoping you won't ask hard questions.

Your brand represents years of investment. Protect it with a provider that combines technological efficiency with human judgment for precision enforcement – without automation's collateral damage.

Key takeaways

- **False positives are the biggest risk in 2026** – Fully automated systems produce 15-25% false positive rates, damaging platform credibility and seller relationships with every incorrect flag.
- **Human review isn't optional** – Complex scenarios like gray market goods, regional pricing, and multi-level distribution require judgment that AI can't reliably make.
- **Transparency separates good providers from bad ones** – If you can't see detected listings, review classifications, or set enforcement rules, you're operating blind.
- **Geographic coverage must match your actual threat profile** – A provider dominating Amazon means nothing if your counterfeits appear on AliExpress and Temu.
- **Track record and specialization matter more than feature lists** – Ask for industry-specific references, false positive rates, and enforcement success rates before signing anything.
- **Platform credibility compounds over time** – Accurate enforcement builds trust with marketplaces, resulting in faster processing. Inaccurate enforcement erodes that trust for months.

Frequently asked questions

What's the most important factor when evaluating brand protection providers?

Manual review capability. Fully automated systems produce 15-25% false positive rates, which means one in four to five enforcement actions targets a legitimate seller. Providers that invest in trained human analysts reviewing every detection before enforcement maintain false positive rates below 2%, protecting your platform relationships and seller trust.

What's a false positive in brand protection?

A false positive occurs when a brand protection system incorrectly identifies a legitimate listing as an infringement. This could mean flagging an authorized reseller, misclassifying a competing legitimate product, or targeting a gray market listing that isn't actually counterfeit. False positives lead to wrongful takedown attempts that damage relationships with legitimate sellers and erode platform trust.

What false positive rate should I expect from a brand protection provider?

Fully automated systems typically produce 15-25% false positive rates. Hybrid providers using AI with limited human spot-checks range from 8-15%. Providers with full human review on every detection, like Axencis, maintain rates below 2%. When comparing providers, ask for their false positive rate directly. If they can’t share it, consider that a red flag.

How do I evaluate whether a provider’s geographic coverage matches my needs?

Start by mapping where your counterfeits actually appear. Check which marketplaces they monitor, what languages their team speaks, and what enforcement relationships they maintain in each region. If 80% of your counterfeits appear on platforms in Asia, a provider specializing in Western marketplaces won’t solve your problem regardless of how impressive their technology sounds.

Why do some brand protection providers have poor Trustpilot ratings?

Many providers with ratings between 1.5 and 2.0 stars receive complaints about AI-driven false positives targeting legitimate sellers, aggressive enforcement tactics without proper verification, and unresponsive support when wrongful takedowns occur. These issues stem from prioritizing automation speed over accuracy. Legitimate sellers who get wrongfully targeted tend to leave detailed negative reviews.

What’s the difference between a takedown and legal enforcement?

A takedown is a request to a marketplace platform to remove a specific listing. Legal enforcement involves formal legal action – cease and desist letters, court orders, customs seizures, or civil litigation against infringers. Effective providers offer both, escalating to legal enforcement when platform-level takedowns fail or when organized counterfeit operations require stronger deterrents.

How long does it take for a brand protection provider to show results?

Expect initial detection and enforcement activity within the first 2-4 weeks. Measurable reductions in counterfeit availability typically appear within 3-6 months. Sustained improvements in authorized channel performance and declining repeat offender rates usually emerge around the 6-12 month mark. Providers promising overnight results are overpromising.

What data security certifications should a brand protection provider have?

At minimum, look for ISO 27001 or SOC 2 Type II certification. These indicate regular third-party audits of security practices. You’ll be sharing sensitive product designs, distribution agreements, and authorized seller lists. Confirm that the provider uses encrypted transmission and storage, maintains role-based access controls, and complies with GDPR if you operate in European markets.

Can I switch brand protection providers if my current one isn’t working?

Yes, but plan for a transition period. Key considerations include transferring your historical enforcement data, re-establishing platform relationships under the new provider’s accounts, and maintaining enforcement continuity during the switch. A good new provider will handle the transition process and can typically begin active enforcement within 2-4 weeks of onboarding.

What questions should I ask during a brand protection provider demo?

Ask for their false positive rate with supporting data, not just a claim. Request references from clients in your industry. Ask to see a real sample report showing detection detail and classification reasoning. Find out who performs reviews – experienced analysts or junior staff following checklists. Ask what happens when a takedown fails. Ask how they handle gray market goods versus counterfeits. Vague answers to any of these questions should give you pause.

Sources

- OECD/EUIPO – Trade in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods: Mapping the Economic Impact
- Amazon Brand Protection Report 2024 – 15 million counterfeit goods seized
- Business Research Insights – Brand Protection Software Market Report (2024-2033)
- Straits Research – Global Brand Protection Market Size ($2.67B in 2024)
- Trustpilot – Red Points Reviews (1.5 stars, 49 reviews)
- Trustpilot – Brandshield Reviews (1.9 stars, 24 reviews)

Ready to evaluate brand protection providers the right way?

Most providers won’t share their false positive rates or show you real detection reports. Axencis will. Get a consultation that includes sample reports, classification methodology, and analyst credentials specific to your industry.

Schedule a Provider Evaluation Call

About the author

Alex Zaika is part of the team at Axencis, specializing in brand protection strategy and provider evaluation for enterprise brands. Alex’s analysis draws on direct experience helping organizations assess, select, and transition between brand protection solutions. For questions about evaluating providers for your brand, get in touch.

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