back-bar inspection

Trends, tips, and useful information . . .

The "back-bar inspection" portion of our newsletter is designed to provide law enforcement personnel and our stakeholders with up-to-date information on alcohol-related crime trends, enforcement tips, and additional information that may be useful in enhancing ABC investigations. Although this section is specifically written for the purpose of increasing officer awareness and reducing alcohol-related crimes, it will also enlighten all readers as to what is new in terms of our response to irresponsible alcoholic beverage sales, service, and consumption.

Concluding our three-part series on identification basics, this article will address several built-in features used by the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to thwart attempts at counterfeiting state issued drivers' licenses and identification cards. In order to prevent public dissemination of the location of all anti-counterfeiting devices built into these documents, this article will not identify the exact location of all features, but will discuss several easily recognizable features in general terms. Should law enforcement personnel wish to have specific information regarding the additional safeguards, please contact Operation ABC directly for this information.

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The DMV employs microprint in various locations on State issued drivers' licenses and identification cards to reduce the likelihood that these documents are easily reproduced. The microprint is extremely difficult to see without the aid of magnification devices. Under a 5x magnifying device, “California DMV” can be seen in blue print in the upper left and right corners of all current DMV identification documents. The print associated with valid documents is very clean, crisp and uniform in size. Because of font size, counterfeiters have great difficulty duplicating this feature and often times the print on fictitious identification is not uniform in size, may overlap and the color can bleed together. Radiating outward, from the center of the State seal, are several red rings that can be observed under a 10x magnifying device. Closer examination of these rings will cause officers to observe additional use of microprint with “State of California” repeated throughout the length of each ring. Again, due to font size, counterfeiters experience difficulty in their duplication efforts and counterfeit font will not appear to be consistent in size and may overlap and bleed together.

The upper one-third of California identification documents is overlapped with holographic images. The images alternate between the State of California Seal and the DMV logo. Images can be easily seen if the document is rotated slightly under a light source. An additional safety feature is built into the lower one-third of current DMV documents and can be seen only with the aid of an ultraviolet or black-light. In reduced light, when exposed to ultraviolet light, the California State Flag becomes visible running across the front of the document, equally spaced, in three locations. This feature is extremely costly to reproduce and not typically used by local counterfeiters.

Many retailers worry about the possibility of inadvertently selling an alcoholic beverage to an underage individual. During STAR training presentations, instructors spend a great deal of time discussing useful methods of detecting altered and counterfeit identification cards as an aid to retailers in properly ascertaining the age of potential patrons. As pointed out in the LAPD's Standardized Training for Alcohol Retailers (STAR) training, a retailer's best defense is a good offense, Ask! Prior to any alcoholic beverage sale involving a person who looks to be under 30 years of age, the seller should verbally inquire into the purchaser's age. By simply asking, “How old are you?” The seller has significantly reduced the likelihood that they will inadvertently put an alcoholic beverage into the hands of an underage individual.

To enhance retailer protection against a possible citation from law enforcement personnel, by asking an individual's age, the retailer virtually guarantees that they will not receive a citation during a minor decoy operation. ABC regulations require any person used as a police decoy during a minor decoy operation ***to answer truthfully any question about his or her age*** (ABC Rule 141(4). Therefore, a simple verbal inquiry into a person's age prior to any alcoholic beverage sale will eliminate a retailer's vulnerability during police minor decoy operations.

As an additional means of protection against minor sale violations, the STAR training format warns retailers not to become complacent by strictly relying on the ABC Rule 141 guidelines. It is recommended that retailers do not ask youthful patrons if they are 21 years old. Although this will thwart any law enforcement minor decoy operation, it will offer little protection against minors not connected to a police initiated compliance check attempting to purchase alcoholic beverages at retail establishments. The asking of a person's age requires a numerical response. After obtaining a numerical response, the seller should ask to see valid identification as a means of establishing a check-and-balance system of determining the true age of the purchaser. Should the purchaser indicate that they are 21 years old, he or she must show valid identification that corresponds with the stated age. It is at this point that retailers can use the information contained within this three-part series and their STAR training tips to help verify the legitimacy of the evidence of age documentation.

The information disseminated during STAR presentations and provided in this series is by no means designed to make our stakeholders experts on drivers' license identification. However, by using this article as a method of gaining additional insight into the various anti-counterfeiting identification safety features built into California identification and age requirements pertaining to alcoholic beverage sales, both the retail and law enforcement communities will be better able to perform their duties. Additionally, the amount of alcoholic beverages available to underage individuals and the associated alcohol-related crime will be greatly reduced.