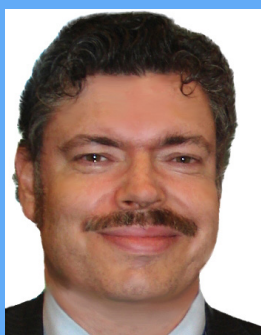


Fake trademark renewal invoices on the rise

As trademark scams grow increasingly sophisticated, rights holders must remain alert to deceptive practices that exploit official systems and renewal procedures. In this article, Petter Rindforth of Fenix Legal examines recent developments in Sweden and across Europe, highlighting how fraudulent communications are evolving and what businesses can do to protect themselves.



Petter Rindforth

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“New Swedish praxis: your national Swedish trademark registration will expire if you do not pay the fee to move it to the EU registry.”

No, that is definitely not true. However, several Swedish companies received a similar email notification in February-March 2026, claiming to be news from the Swedish Intellectual Property Office (PRV), sent in the name of PRV Director General Ms Anna Jardfelt.

PRV acted quickly and published a warning note on social media (LinkedIn): “We would like to draw our customers’ attention to the fact that there are fake emails circulating claiming to be from PRV, sent in the name of Director General Anna Jardfelt [...]. Do not make any payment and do not reply to the email. Be aware of similar attempts at fraud. This email does not come from PRV. The incident is considered serious and will be reported to the police.”

Businesses across Europe are being urged to stay vigilant as a growing wave of fraudulent trademark renewal invoices targets unsuspecting companies. The scam, which has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years, exploits confusion around intellectual property administration and renewal deadlines.

Typically, companies that have registered trademarks receive official-looking letters or invoices claiming that a renewal fee is due. These documents often include accurate

details such as registration numbers and company names, making them appear legitimate. The sender’s name may also resemble a real authority, such as “The European Patent and Trademark Office,” “The European Publication of Patent and Trademark,” or “World Intellectual Property Community Trademark Register.” However, the payment requests are sent by private entities with no connection to official trademark offices.





Over the years, it has become clear that the deception lies not only in the content or name but also in the design. The invoices frequently resemble mandatory government fees, using formal language, logos, and formatting that mimic official communications. In many cases, recipients are led to believe that failure to pay could result in the loss of trademark protection.

Authorities have taken action against several operators behind these schemes, with courts ruling that such practices can constitute both fraudulent conduct and misleading marketing. In more severe cases, large-scale operations involving mass distribution of deceptive invoices have led to criminal convictions for fraud.

On June 23, 2016, the Uppsala District Court in Sweden (Case B 3290-15) convicted seven individuals – four of whom received prison sentences – in a large-scale fraud case involving deceptive “invoice-like” letters sent to companies and individuals across Europe. The scheme targeted trademark holders by impersonating the EUIPO (formerly OHIM), requesting payment for supposed trademark renewals.

The perpetrators obtained publicly available information about trademarks – such as names, addresses, registration numbers, and dates – from the EUIPO database. They used this data to create convincing fake invoices, which were sent in large volumes to recipients abroad. Many victims, ranging from small businesses to large corporations such as Danske Bank, believed the invoices were legitimate and paid them. In total, nearly 400 victims were identified, and the fraud generated millions of SEK. Authorities estimated that if all invoices had been paid, the total profit could have exceeded SEK 27.00 million.

The investigation began in October 2014,

when police in Uppsala became suspicious of individuals posting large quantities of letters. Nearly 1,000 fake invoices were found in their vehicle, leading to a broader inquiry that uncovered a complex network involving multiple participants. Some individuals acted as organizers, while others functioned as intermediaries or “money mules,” allowing their bank accounts to be used for transferring funds.

A total of 22 people were charged with crimes including aggravated fraud, forgery, and money laundering. However, the majority – 15 individuals – were acquitted. The court found that while the invoices were misleading and designed to resemble official communications, the prosecution failed to prove in many cases that recipients had actually been deceived into making payments. This was partly because no victims testified in court, making it difficult to establish the element of deception required for fraud convictions.

Despite these limitations, several defendants were convicted of attempted aggravated fraud. The court rejected the argument that the letters were merely voluntary offers, instead ruling that they contained false information intended to mislead recipients into paying. Two central figures, initially suspected as masterminds, were acquitted on most charges but convicted on some counts of attempted fraud.

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The case is considered one of the largest of its kind in Sweden and possibly the first prosecution involving large-scale fraud targeting the EUIPO. It also highlighted the ongoing issue of misleading invoices exploiting publicly available intellectual property data.

Today, these fake traditional letters have more or less disappeared. Instead, there has been a rise in fake emails, often timed around summer holidays, when recipients receiving urgent renewal reminders may not be able to reach their bosses and instead – just in case – pay the “renewal publication fee.”

The Swedish criminal case prompted action by several national patent offices, as well as the EUIPO, to create warning notices and recommendations to applicants in order to avoid being targeted by fake payment requests.

Europol, in collaboration with the EUIPO, has recently introduced a new procedure manual – “Procedure manual on handling misleading payment requests for intellectual property system users: Act smart against scammers!” – designed to protect intellectual property rights applicants and owners from fraudulent entities seeking to deceive them with misleading payment requests. The manual provides recommendations on how to recognize a misleading email, such as: a displayed name that differs from the return address; information about a change of bank accounts; poorly written body copy and message content; infected attachments or suspicious links; and language that creates a sense of urgency.

According to Europol’s analysis, approximately 2% of IPR applicants and owners – an estimated 8,000 victims – may be targeted by these kinds of fake emails, which can generate a yearly net turnover of up to EUR 16.00 million for a single actor.

So, what can you do to avoid being misled by fake emails that look identical to communications from WIPO, EUIPO, or your local national patent and trademark office?

Svensk Handel (Swedish Commerce), the business and employers’ association serving the trade and commerce sector, maintains a continuously updated warning list of companies sending fraudulent invoices. Two recently added warnings related to IP are “Johansson & Partners” and “OMPS Trademark Publication,” both attempting to present themselves as connected to the Swedish PTO.

However, the safest approach is to always inform your local IP attorney and never pay invoices directly to the sender.



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RÉSUMÉ

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