3D Printing and the Risks to Your Supply Chain

Business Bulletin

The rise of 3D printing and its fast-expanding applications are remarkable, from recreational hobbyist fun to medical applications such as replacement muscles and organs. Simkiss & Block is seeing the topic arise increasingly frequently, especially among our industrial and manufacturing clients. While 3D printers have the potential to supplement multiple areas of these companies' supply chain processes, they are not without risk, including in the following areas:

- **Design and intellectual property infringement**
  A company or individual could acquire unlicensed versions of your company's design files and produce their own copies. Or, you could be subject to allegations that you infringed on another company's designs and produced unlicensed copies with a 3D printer.

- **Quality of the raw printing materials**
  Depending on the quality or type of raw printing materials, the product could be flawed and unsafe.

- **Brand reputation**
  If the 3D printer is calibrated incorrectly or if the raw printing material is of poor quality, your company may risk distributing defective materials and/or products, which could then damage your company's reputation.

- **Unclear supply chain network**
  3D printers used within your supply chain could make it difficult to discern the origin and quality of the materials and/or products, exposing you to regulatory risks.

- **Product liability**
  If a 3D-printed product that your company produced, installed or distributed failed, and caused an individual to sustain injuries, you may be held liable.

- **Fire damage caused by the heat generated from the machine**
  While the 3D printer completes its task, it could become very hot, creating a potential fire hazard.

With careful planning, 3D printing may be a very effective element of a company's supply chain. However, the technology is not a cure-all, and Simkiss & Block recommends that such applications be just one element of a comprehensive risk management plan that emphasizes flexibility and efficiency.

Simkiss & Block

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