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Gary Bellchambers made millions selling fake golf clubs on eBay

Bellchambers was head of a global network of criminals within the expatriate community in Pattaya, Thailand. Gary Bellchambers was seen as a successful international businessman who lived in luxurious houses, belonged to all the best golf clubs and enjoyed the finer things in life.

Back at home in Rainham, Essex, he lived in an ex-council house and drove around in an old Ford Escort, in an effort to avoid the scrutiny of the authorities.

In reality he was the head of a global network of criminals who duped thousands of eBay customers into buying millions of pounds' of fake golf clubs in the largest fraud uncovered by the online auction site.

To those he recruited to work for him he was known as The Man.

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Investigators believe that he made millions of pounds from the scam, which they are still trying to trace. So far they have found at least ten houses in Thailand that he rents out or sells, a part share in a £1.5 million yacht, a floating restaurant in Australia that he owns and shares in more than 20 British and international companies, including many blue chip companies.

Bellchambers, 46, was the head of the operation that sold golf clubs, as well as clothing, accessories and passes for an airline lounge, "on a scale that, it is believed, has never been seen before", Snaresbrook Crown Court in East London was told.

Investigators found nearly every top brand — including TaylorMade, Odyssey and Callaway — being copied. The clubs were made in several factories in

China, at less than £3 each, and sold on eBay as the genuine article for up to £100.

Bellchambers recruited family and friends to help in the deception and authorities have found that he had people working for him all over the world.

Adam Davis, for the prosecution, said: "Over the course of about four years, between mid-2003 and early-2008, these defendants and their co-conspirators have been responsible for the sale and distribution of hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of pounds' worth of counterfeit goods both here in the UK and abroad — primarily through the well known auction website eBay.

"This is a conspiracy of a truly global nature. Conspirators are thought to have been based in the UK, Thailand, Australia, Germany, Singapore, USA, Hong Kong, China — and goods have been distributed from, or to, all those countries and more."

In the British Isles conspirators were found in Wales, the Republic of Ireland, Aberdeen, Dorset and Birmingham.

Bellchambers had people in charge of package and posting and others employed to answer complaints and send out refunds. He made sure that all the money was paid via his accounts in Thailand, so he could keep track of the millions coming in.

Whenever eBay received a complaint or became suspicious of his activities, fake invoices were produced by the account holders to allay their worries, or new accounts were opened.

Topoperation, which authorities believe had been running for at least five years, came crashing down when a middle-aged woman wrote a letter of complaint about two golf clubs that she had bought. The letter slipped through the well-oiled system and went unanswered. She complained to Trading Standards officers and Operation Augusta began.

Officers uncovered complaints including golf balls bought for a tournament in Spain that exploded after being hit a few times and one customer discovering a tropical spider's nest in the cavity of a club.

Bellchambers, who has already admitted conspiring to sell or distribute golf clubs, clothing and accessories, bearing signs identical to, or likely to be mistaken for, registered trademarks, today saw several of his gang convicted.

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Bill Adams, senior Trading Standards Officer for Havering, told *The Times*: “The key to his organisation was that he ran it as a legitimate business because the last thing he wanted was a complaint that would undermine the whole structure, but that is what happened.

“He had been living in Thailand since about 2000 and was living the high-life. He was very heavily involved in the ex-pat community and belonged to all the best golf clubs. We believe he has connections to hundreds of accounts that are selling these clubs.

“We think the money went to Thailand into various bank accounts. Millions have gone through his UK accounts and we are still investigating how much and where it has gone.

“What we have discovered is the tip of the iceberg, there could be hundreds more accounts around the world, scores of people working for him, that we will never know about.

“He is a cool and calculating figure who has shown no emotion from day one. People referred to him as The Man and he liked being the boss figure. There is an air of menace about him.”

Even though he will be in jail it is believed that Bellchambers could still be making money. Mr Adams added: “The golf clubs are still being sold and we can't rule out money being filtered back to him somehow. It is too much of a money earner for it to die, it's too big to stop.”

Roy Cottee, 65, and his wife Kay, 46, Bellchambers's sister Sharon Williams, 48, and Helen Wilson, 29, were convicted of conspiracy to sell or distribute goods bearing signs likely to be mistaken for a registered trademark after an 11-week trial at Snaresbrook Crown Court.

Bellchambers, his British-based bookkeeper Keith Thomas, 49, and Chris Moughton, 56, described as a "prolific distributor of clubs", admitted their roles before the trial and will be sentenced on January 25 along with the Cottes, Williams and Wilson.

The jury was discharged from reaching a verdict against welder Mark Kent, 46, after deliberating for 22 hours yesterday. The Crown has a week to decide whether Kent should face a trial.