

# Is that a **FAKE** I.D.?

By Garrett Peck

**“Now, son, you don’t want to drink beer. That’s for daddies, and kids with fake IDs,” Homer Simpson once told Bart on an episode of The Simpsons. But kids being kids, they have found ingenious ways around the law to buy alcohol.**

Since the drinking age was raised to 21 in 1984, establishments that sell alcohol must be diligent in ensuring that underage drinkers don’t slip through. But what is the best way to thwart fake IDs – with technology or training?

Fighting fraudulent IDs is a minor fight in the grand battle against underage drinking, but it is the most visible of all fights – and the one fraught with the highest penalties for a business caught serving alcohol to a minor. “The largest buyer of fake IDs are underage drinkers,” says David Myers, the former chief of alcohol enforcement in Florida and now a leading expert in fake ID detection. Youths are willing to spend up to \$1,000 for a professional grade fake ID. Fraudulent document producers moved overseas after 9/11, and now these documents are simply ordered over the Internet.

Myers notes that there are 700 valid versions of driver’s licenses in the U.S. It is impossible for any business to know them all, and even law enforcement has difficulty telling a

real from a fake ID. “Until they standardize IDs, it’s very difficult to hold venues responsible for every type of fake ID that comes walking in the door,” says Michael Watson, owner of Be Bar in Washington, D.C.

## Technology as Deterrence

Some businesses are turning to technology to protect themselves, though technology isn’t foolproof. Specialty calendars have been around for years, reminding servers of the legal drinking age. Checkout scanners prompt the clerk to check the buyer’s ID, though clerks sometimes put in their own date of birth. Electronic Age Verification (EAV) devices are being deployed at venues that attract large numbers of customers, such as nightclubs. The customer swipes their ID into the device, which tells the server if the cardholder is of age – or if the ID is fake. Even then, clerks don’t always look at the LED display, and the purchase can go through.

Intelli-Check is a popular EAV, one which starts at \$1,100. Senior VP of Marketing Todd Liebman notes that if a business gets caught in a sting, or they have a brand to protect, they will deploy an EAV. Otherwise, he says, most businesses still use the traditional eyeball method.

The Clarendon Ballroom in Arlington, VA uses the Intelli-Check E-Seek PDA. Owner Nick Langman has a universal policy of checking every customer, regardless of age, and says it only takes one second to scan. This serves as a major deterrent. “People know we’re pretty tough. We don’t get too many fake ones here.”



“You can tell from people’s demeanor if they’re old enough,” Langman continues. Some younger people borrow a friend or older relative’s ID to sneak in, but the staff diligently checks the pictures on the IDs. “You’d be surprised how many people just bolt when they’re caught,” leaving the fake or borrowed ID behind.

Manufactured by UVeritech, Fraud Fighter uses ultraviolet light to detect holographic images, which are difficult for

## Beyond Technology & Training

According to the Century Council, 65% of underage drinkers get their alcohol from family and friends. Senior VP Bill Georges notes, “For retailers, the only acceptable number is zero.” That’s why the Federal Trade Commission launched the “We Don’t Serve Teens” campaign in 2006 to convince adults not to provide alcohol to teens while stressing the retailer’s role in preventing such sales.

The Century Council sponsors a Cops in Shops program so retailers and law enforcement can work together to prevent

youth from buying alcohol. Undercover police can foil an underage purchase or fake ID, and can arrest an adult who has bought alcohol for a youth waiting outside a store. Georges says, “This program really does put law enforcement and retailers together.”

Anheuser-Busch has a similar program called “Prevent. Don’t Provide.” Carol Clark of the company’s Consumer Awareness & Education group states, “Preventing underage drinking is really about preventing teen access to alcohol. If they can’t get it, they can’t drink it.”

Brad Krevor of the Responsible Retailing Forum knows the difficult fight society faces in preventing youth access to alcohol: “One hundred percent of the alcohol that underage drinkers consume was bought by someone.”





counterfeiter-  
feiter to forge. "Forty out of fifty states now put ultraviolet markings on state-issued driver's licenses," notes director of sales Gene Taviani. The company's UV devices start at \$40. The company also offers ID verifiers that can display the correct age and date of birth. Units start at \$400 and run to \$1,500. Considering the cost of an infraction and fine, the device can pay for itself.

## Technology Pitfalls

Brad Krevor, president of the Responsible Retailing Forum, knows that technology has its pitfalls: "Every technology is subject to the same problem: will it be used?" Clerks sometimes have trouble doing the math, even when looking at an underage ID. Or they pass by inference: "If someone is giving me an ID, then they must be old enough," states Krevor.

David Lynch, a certified ABC manager, notes that EAVs are expensive, so smaller businesses usually don't deploy them. "Restaurants rely on visual checking of IDs," he comments. "Bartenders are supposed to be especially trained for checking for fake IDs."

Calvert Woodley, a Washington, DC wine store, looked into buying an EAV, but it proved prohibitively expensive. Instead, the store relies on a manual check of every customer appearing to be under 30. Partner Michael Sands says that front-end managers spend 95% of their time roaming between the cash registers, constantly vigilant.

Be Bar is considering installing an EAV at the door. On a recent trip to Disneyworld,

Watson noted that Disney used EAVs at venues serving alcohol. Still, Watson says that, "It's only as good as the person using it." Someone can still get through. "There's only so much you can do," says Watson.

## Training to Catch Behavior

Most businesses rely on employee training to stop underage drinkers. "The hospitality industry has a 200% annual turnover rate, so businesses have to keep on top of training employees," notes Trevor Estelle, director of sales and marketing for the TIPS program. Many businesses rely on independent training programs for servers.

TIPS trains servers to look for warning signs, such as nervous behavior. "There's no one set way to identify an underage drinker," says Estelle. "Our program is designed to ID the underage drinker, and how to intervene." TIPS offers eight training courses to address different venue environments. The On Premise Program is the most popular, a five-hour class taken in person.

Run by the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, ServSafe Alcohol teaches about server liability as well as handling difficult situations. The most frequent incidents aren't drunk driving, but minors with fake IDs, notes vice president Julia Kanouse. "We have a lot of corporate customers - national accounts that implement the program to all their servers across the company," she says. In 2006, ServSafe Alcohol certified about 50,000 people.

The BARS Program allows businesses to audit employees, particularly those using an EAV. "We send our people, between the ages of 21 and 25 into the store or restaurant conducting a mock purchase of alcohol. We

## A Bar in Profile

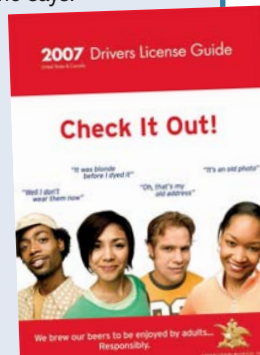
Mateen Khan makes his living as the director of guest relations at Washington, D.C.'s Be Bar. He is often found at the front door, the first line of defense against underage drinkers. "I get so many fake IDs, it's ridiculous," he says.

His bible is the booklet, **I.D. Checking**

**Guide**, which features photos of valid driver's licenses from all fifty states (Anheuser-Busch likewise publishes a Drivers License

Guide). Khan knows what to look for, noting that fake IDs are "very colorful." They often have a disclaimer on the back, such as "Not to be used for the purchase of alcohol."

Beyond checking the ID itself, Khan sizes up the customer's behavior. If he believes the ID is fake, he will ask them simple questions that underage drinkers often fail - like what's your name, what's your address - or his favorite: what's your sign? (Capricorn, Libra, etc.) He tells his staff that, if they sense an ID is fake, they should pass it to him and he will quiz the person. His boss, owner Michael Watson, notes the bar's policy: "We have no problem turning someone away at the door."



## Server Training Programs

### BARS Program

Sends in young alcohol purchasers to monitor if servers check IDs.

[www.barsprogram.com](http://www.barsprogram.com)

877-540-5500

### ServSafe Alcohol

Instructs servers in handling difficult situations.

[www.servsafe.com/Alcohol/](http://www.servsafe.com/Alcohol/)

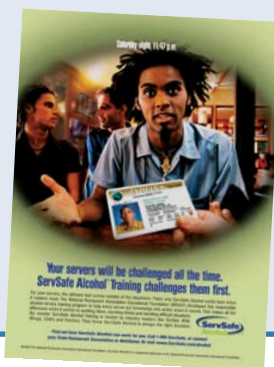
800-765-2122

### TIPS Program

Offers classroom training for servers to detect underage drinking behavior.

[www.gettips.com](http://www.gettips.com)

800-GET-TIPS



are monitoring if the store employee asks for ID, then swipes the ID before a beer purchase is completed," says president David Gaudet. "The outcome of our service is fewer violations, better-trained employees, and decreased expenses associated with alcohol sting failures."

Anheuser-Busch, the nation's largest brewer, has been especially proactive at pushing server content into the market. Carol Clark, senior group director for Consumer Awareness & Education, points out that A-B distributed 167,000 copies of the Drivers License Guide, 8 million wristbands, and 30,000 We I.D. cards in 2006. ■