

From the Gold Coast to the Golden State: A Trademark Battle Over Cozy Boots

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A long legal battle over the right to use the “UGG” mark may result in the end of a company’s right to the word “UGG” in connection with sheepskin shoes and accessories outside of Oceania. The brand “UGG Since 1974” has agreed to only use the wording “Since 1974” when selling their products outside of Australia and New Zealand after being locked in a legal battle with Deckers Outdoor Corporation, which owns the U.S. brand “UGG Australia” for boots.

As the name suggests, UGG Since 1974 is an Australian-based company that has been selling ugg-style boots since 1974. In Australia, “ugg” refers to a type of sheepskin and leather boot, so coined for their “ugly” appearance. However, they became popular in the 1960s and 1970s when they emerged as the favorite footwear of the surfing community. The style eventually traveled from the Gold Coast of Australia to the Golden State of California. Brian Smith, an Australian surfer, was the first to trademark the term “UGG” in connection with sheepskin boots in the U.S., and eventually sold his U.S. business along with the trademark rights gained to Deckers Outdoor Corporation in 1995.

The “UGG Since 1974” brand predates the adoption of the U.S. mark, at least in Australia and New Zealand. However, given the generic connotation of the mark in Australia, the UGG Since 1974 entity did not seek trademark filing protection in Australia

until 2010, and never filed applications for registration in other countries beyond Oceania, despite shipping their products internationally. Meanwhile, the American UGG brand now owns trademark registrations for UGG-related marks in 130 countries.

Although the two competing UGG brands have been engaged in a legal battle for many years now, Deckers Outdoor Corporation filed a new lawsuit in April 2024 against Wolverine Group Pty Ltd before the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois Eastern Division for trademark infringement and infringement of their design patents based on the identical names and similar logos, and similar style boots of the two entities.



Deckers Outdoor’s UGG boot source: www.ugg.com	Since 1974 Ugg boot source: www.uggsince1974.com.au

The Australia owner of UGG Since 1974 announced in this TikTok video on January 13, 2025 that they are done fighting the lawsuit and have agreed to change all branding of their products that are shipped outside of Australia and New Zealand. The new branding will feature the mark “SINCE 1974” only and have no reference to “UGG” on their

packaging. The company also has the following disclaimer on their website: “UGG Since 1974™ has no affiliation with UGG®. Our boots are made in Australia, from 100% genuine sheepskin. For customers shopping outside Australia and New Zealand, your products will be labelled Since 74™ given trademark issues.” It appears that the Australian brand has changed some, but not all of their social media outlets to also reflect this brand change to SINCE 1974.

However, despite the Since 1974 owner’s announcement on TikTok, Deckers Outdoor filed a Second Amended Complaint on February 13, 2025, with some amendments to address the attention the “UGG” trademark is receiving on social media, including from the above mentioned TikTok video. It will be interesting to see how the rest of the dispute unfolds.

The dispute highlights the importance of filing for foreign trademark protection where businesses plan to ship their products internationally as well as the benefits of creating an international strategy for trademarks. While marks may be considered generic or refused in certain jurisdictions, including in an entity’s domicile or home base, these refusals may not extend to all jurisdictions and foreign rights should be considered carefully.