



Industry ad campaign targets 'patent trolls'

By Brendan Sasso - 08/29/13 10:34 AM ET

Four industry lobbying groups announced a print and radio ad campaign on Thursday urging Congress to crack down on "patent trolls."

The groups claim that patent trolls — firms that use bogus patent infringement claims to extort settlements out of businesses — are draining \$80 billion from the U.S. economy every year and destroying jobs.

The campaign from the Internet Association, National Restaurant Association, National Retail Federation and the Food Marketing Institute will run in states including Illinois, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio, Texas, Vermont and Virginia.

Michael Beckerman, the CEO of the Internet Association, which represents Google, Facebook and other Web companies, said the groups are targeting areas represented by congressional leaders and members of the Judiciary Committees.

He said that patent trolls started by going after large Internet companies, but that they are now threatening to sue restaurants, hospitals and even charities over alleged infringement. Many businesses agree to settle because the cost of fighting a suit in court would be so high.

"The patent trolls have been a victim of their own success," Beckerman said. "They just got so greedy that they couldn't just deal with the billions of dollars they were extorting out of certain companies, they had to go after the whole economy."

It is the first ad campaign for the Internet Association, which launched last year.

Matthew Shay, president and CEO of the National Retail Federation, argued in a statement that patent abuse "not only crowds our courts with unnecessary lawsuits but also hampers retailers' adoption of technology aimed at improving the customer experience."

Several lawmakers have introduced bills aimed at addressing patent abuse, and House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) is working on draft legislation with Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). The White House announced a set of executive actions in June aimed at limiting frivolous patent lawsuits.

Some lawmakers, however, have expressed concern that certain proposals could stifle legitimate patent infringement claims.

Beckerman said he is confident Congress will pass legislation on the issue.

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