



ONLINE MARKETPLACES AND THE FAKES THAT CAN FOOL YOU

Online shopping for the holidays is convenient and fun... until you get ripped off. What steps can buyers and sellers take to ensure fake and counterfeit products don't end up on their doorstep?

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Every year, the holiday season triggers a multi-billion-dollar blitz of online shopping that can lead to rip-offs – especially when frantic, last-minute shoppers click the “Buy Now” button in a rush to finish their shopping. What many consumers don't realize is that online marketplaces are fraught with fraud, as highly efficient fake review mills and global product counterfeiting rings continue to tempt customers.

At HP, we deal with this reality every day. Customers often think they are buying Original HP ink or toner only to find out that what they really purchased in their haste was an imitation print cartridge in a box that somewhat resembled ours — or worse, a counterfeit cartridge posing as an Original HP.

According to the Better Business Bureau, [one in four people](#) has bought a product online that turned out to be counterfeit. It's a [\\$3 billion problem](#) in the printing business, but that's just a tiny slice of a counterfeiting and piracy crisis that costs the U.S. economy [\\$600 billion annually](#), according to Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property.

To date, [U.S. online marketplaces](#) have struggled to keep pace with their foreign rivals when it comes to catching counterfeit product listings. That means the task is left largely up to brands like HP to support our reseller partners, customers and even online marketplaces themselves to combat this issue.

For example, to help identify counterfeit sellers, HP trawls millions of online product listing pages across online marketplaces of all sizes every day. By examining uses of the company's copyrighted imagery, trademarks and other unique identifiers we are quickly able to identify sellers who are deceiving customers. We then report misuses to the online marketplaces, who remove the listings.

We work closely with law enforcement agencies around the world to stop counterfeiting at the source — we cooperated on [600 raids](#) last year. We also advise shoppers and resellers to exercise caution when shopping for anything online and to keep these commonsense practices in mind when scanning printing supply listings:

- ✓ Remember: if it sounds too good to be true, it's probably is. A product selling for half off the price posted on the brand's official site is most likely a scam. Anyone can copy a label or logo into a listing and slap a crazy price on it. Don't be fooled.
- ✓ Only patronize reputable sites. Though larger sites might struggle with counterfeit listings, they're certainly certainly safer to shop there than at a fly-by-night site that attracts you with eye-catching low prices. Companies like HP often have a limited number of authorized partners that sell their products. Know who those partners are and buy exclusively from them.

- ✓ Look beyond the price tag. Counterfeiters often use photos and descriptions of real items to sell you fake products. If you happen to buy in bulk, they could also be mixing fake products in with real ones, which is a problem that's particularly common among resellers. Don't just look at price and click "buy." Take a moment to look for red flags. Some of the more common ones include bad grammar, misspellings, sentence fragments and missing contact information.
- ✓ Be skeptical of product reviews from buyers. Fakery is rampant, so read the negative reviews first, and beware of products that have no or few reviews. That's a sign the company isn't well-established. One place consumers—and resellers—can turn is [Fakespot](#), a site that uses artificial intelligence to analyze shopper-provided product links for fake reviews.
- ✓ Pay attention to packaging. When you receive an item you've bought online, inspect it to make sure it's authentic. Look at the details. Do the materials seem cheap and flimsy? Items sold without packaging are often suspect, as is generic packaging because brands like HP typically print their logo on both the packaging and the product. Compare logos to those on the company's website to see if they match. If you spot a potential problem, [report it](#), even if you're unsure it's counterfeit.
- ✓ Work with the brand to fight fakes. Check the brand's official site to see if it has published any guidance on spotting counterfeits. HP is one of many brands that makes a concerted effort to [educate resellers and customers about counterfeits](#).

For resellers who want to protect their reputations, and for shoppers who want to avoid getting scammed, the fight against fakes doesn't end after the last holiday gift is wrapped. It's a year-round effort that takes time, diligence, and a little bit of common sense. It's all about trust and sticking with the brands and online marketplaces that earn it.